

**Misreading Skepticism in the Long Eighteenth Century:
Studies in the Rhetoric of Assent**

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks must be to the University of Michigan for the opportunity and privilege to pursue the life of the mind. I am deeply grateful for the tremendous and constant support provided by faculty and staff of the UM English Department. I am indebted to the Rackham School of Graduate Studies for two timely dissertation fellowships and to the U-M LSA International Institute for the opportunity to pursue archival research in Scotland. I thank the members of my dissertation committee: Sean Silver for providing a constant model of passionate, creative scholarship; Gregg Crane for first dislodging me from a neo-Kantian, Skeptical perspective; Silke Maria-Weineck for cheering on the polemic; and my wonderful chair, Marjorie Levinson, for supporting and encouraging me at every stage of the dissertation process and for bearing with me as the project evolved over time. I would like to thank my dear friends Samuel Heidepriem, Emily Waples, Logan Scherer, Kristin Fraser Geisler, Ryan Hampstead, Joe Chapman, Anthony Losapio, Sarah Mass, Alice Tsay, Lizzy Mathie, and Amrita Dhar for their love and support through the years in Ann Arbor. Special thanks to my dear friends Kathyne Bevilacqua, John Paul Hampstead, and Julia Hansen, who read and commented on drafts in the final stages. I thank Tilottama Rajan and Orrin Wang for assisting with my reading of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and for guiding me through the publication process at *Romantic Circles Praxis* (thanks also to Jeffrey Moro for his editorial work). Chapter Five benefited greatly from an early workshop with the Eighteenth-Century Studies Group (ECSG), and I am especially indebted to David Porter for the artful, penetrating questions he raised during that meeting about the lasting appeal of neo-Kantian Romanticism. Many thanks to Walter Cohen and my fellow travelers at Marjorie and Walter's dinner seminar for feedback on my Hume chapter and for injecting fresh critical energy and joy into my final year as a graduate student. I am grateful for more casual conversation and advice along the way with Marc Mazur, Michael Nicholson, Danny Hack, Adela Pinch, Lucy Hartley, Clem Hawkes, Tim Fulford, Julia Carson, Theresa Kelley, Maureen McLane, Noah Heringman, Tim Campbell, Stefan Uhlig, Yasmin Solomonescu, Marshall Brown, Zoe Beenstock, Sean Barry, Taylor Schey, and Devin Griffiths, and many others. I thank

my mother Debbie, my father Macky, my brother Will and his wife Natalie, my sister Sarah, and all my extended family for their love and support during the dissertation process and, indeed, well before. Above all, I thank my brilliant and loving wife, Anna, who carried me over the finish line.

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ABSTRACT

“Misreading Skepticism in the Long Eighteenth Century: Studies in the Rhetoric of Assent” revisits the intellectual historical conditions that contributed to the widespread internalization of skepticism as an error-reduction strategy during the Enlightenment. To do so, it abandons a longstanding emphasis the special philosophical tradition of epistemological skepticism associated with the Scottish philosopher David Hume and pursues an alternative intellectual history of Enlightenment skepticism centered on the Anglophone tradition of “constructive skepticism” that informed not only Hume’s skeptical habits but those of other influential Anglophone Enlightenment thinkers more often set in opposition to Hume. “Misreading Skepticism” draws on this tradition of constructive skepticism to generate a much different picture of the character of Enlightenment skepticism than the one extrapolated from radical Humean skepticism: one that is not anxious but assured, not theoretical but pragmatic, not preoccupied with the threat of “radical uncertainty” but resolved to attaining “moral certainty” sufficient to justify belief and action *despite* irreducible uncertainty. Readings of the philosophy of John Locke, Thomas Reid, David Hume, Samuel Johnson, and Dugald Stewart recover the broader Enlightenment project of practical rationality that encouraged the widespread internalization and instrumentalization of constructive skepticism. Readings of eighteenth-century rhetorical and legal treatises trace how this constructive skeptical ethos was disseminated beyond epistemology and embraced within a generalized theory of assent. “Misreading Skepticism” approaches this broader “misreading” in the modern intellectual history of skepticism through the special lens of Romantic literary studies, where scholars have traditionally framed the rise of British Romanticism as a response to a supposed epistemological “crisis” posed by Humean skepticism. “Misreading Skepticism” argues that, to understand the Romantic literary reaction to Enlightenment skepticism, we need to approach the intellectual history of British Romanticism not through Humean skepticism but through constructive skepticism. Readings of Romantic works by William Godwin, William Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, and other authors demonstrate how these Romantic writers use literary form to

interrogate the confident embrace of constructive skepticism within the Enlightenment as a means for managing uncertainty, often by dramatizing or thematizing elements of subjectivity and error that skepticism fails to detect or discipline. Drawing insight from the constructive skeptical tradition as well as Romantic literary critiques of that tradition, “Misreading Skepticism” develops a revisionary account of skepticism that attends to the rhetorical and social dimensions that complicate any epistemological account of skepticism.

INTRODUCTION

Misreading Skepticism in the Long Eighteenth Century

Johnson's Kick

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it — "I refute it thus."

-John Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)¹

Let me begin with a question about this famous anecdote from Boswell: Is Johnson's argument skeptical? The answer depends on a more general, perennial question about how to define skepticism, and the anecdote itself recommends the two most common approaches to defining skepticism, though these approaches have conflicting implications for interpreting the kick. From one perspective, if we focus on Berkeley's idealism, we might define skepticism more narrowly as a special kind of content: either a special set of arguments organized around specific problematics or a special philosophical system or tradition that preserves, comments on, and elaborates these special problematics. We might think of this as a strong, exclusive, or special definition of skepticism. From another perspective, if we focus on Johnson's kick itself, we may define skepticism more loosely as a special form or mode of argument: skepticism as a loosely formal, highly mobile method of critique, or simply a kind of critical spirit, attitude, or disposition. We might think of this as a weak, inclusive, and more general definition of skepticism, better captured at the grammatical level by the adjective *skeptical* than the nominative *skepticism*.² At its limit, this weak definition registers the merest shade of negative

¹ Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, I:334.

²The inclusive bent of the adjectival form relative to the nominal form *skepticism* becomes evident if we rephrase the opening question. The question "Is Johnson's argument skepticism?" feels either slightly less viable or, alternatively, more like a provocation. The nominative suggests taking up a stronger, more exclusive definition for consideration, i.e. a Skepticism. Upon sensing this exclusivity in the question, one might be more inclined to request a proper definition or clarification first before giving an answer. By contrast, "Is Johnson's argument skeptical?" seems to license a more liberal consideration. Thinking along this inclusive line might recommend a new exclusive

resistance: a shadow of a doubt, so to speak.³ It accommodates “hot” (more denunciatory and polemic) affects of doubt as well as “cold” (that is, more procedural, rational, disinterested) ones. This weak definition likewise accommodates unspecified forms of resistance as well as specified ones: one need not know why someone is skeptical to perceive they are so, much less trust any reason someone provides for his or her skepticism.⁴

These two views of skepticism, while distinct, are typically understood to be aligned, if not to overlap. Indeed, it is possible to think of the philosophical tradition of skepticism as a set of codified or ritualized skeptical performances, aimed at special problematics such as knowledge about the external world. As such, this rough distinction between content and form, or strong and weak definitions of skepticism, must finally be more heuristic than definitive. But Johnson’s kick demonstrates how these two interpretations can be placed at odds — especially within the modern history of skepticism, which tends to privilege a narrower or more specialized definition of skepticism at the expense of a weaker or more accommodating definition of skepticism. Many, for instance, would be inclined to interpret Johnson’s argument as anti-skeptical because they identify skepticism with the special modern tradition of epistemological skepticism initiated by Descartes, carried forward by Berkeley and Locke, and epitomized by Hume. Reversing this line of thought, we might say that if Johnson’s argument appears anti-skeptical at all, then this would imply the currency of a strong, exclusive, special definition of skepticism that emerges out of this modern epistemological tradition. For ease, I will call this special, exclusive, epistemological definition Skepticism. And I will call a strong sense of the currency of Skepticism or a firm commitment to this definition of Skepticism above others a Skeptical perspective.

Johnson himself would have likely interpreted his argument to be anti-Skeptical, though he would have understood his grounds for rejecting Berkeley’s skepticism to be more theological

definition, in the same way an extensive definition might recommend an intensive one, but an exclusive definition does not initially restrict or determine it.

³Consider Lorraine Daston’s remark that “[t]his state of withheld or suspended belief...known as skepticism, and it comes in varying strengths, from mild demur to radical doubt” (“Scientific Error” 22).

⁴I adopt this binary following Richard H. Popkin’s claim that, in the eighteenth-century, skepticism would have been viewed as “a set of arguments and/or as an attitude” (283). Literary critics often pursue a much more capacious, mobile account of skepticism. Interrogating the nature of Percy Shelley’s skepticism, for instance, Spencer Hall generates this catalogue of possible interpretations: “Is skepticism in fact a ‘theme,’ an actual subject or topic, or is it rather a turn or thought and feeling, a way of seeing, interpreting, and expressing reality?” (71). While accepting this wider range of possible significations, here I follow Popkin (and others) by adopting a heuristic binary.

and moral than epistemological (we might note that Boswell and Johnson are leaving church).⁵ More precisely, Johnson would have not have perceived the distance distinction between “moral” and “epistemological” that the tradition of Skepticism has long since ingrained. From a pre-Skeptical perspective, “moral” has a more technical, neutral, and epistemological sense of “moral knowledge” or opinion. As Johnson notes in *The Elements of Philosophy*, moral knowledge designates “physical truths which related to created Natures,” “all political and historical Truths,” and all propositions which are “contingent” in that “their Non-existence implies no Absurdity” (Johnson *Elements* 75). In any case, Johnson clearly has little reverence for Skepticism. In kicking the stone, Johnson understands himself to be attacking the very seriousness and legitimacy of the Skeptical tradition.

Yet it seems evident that, even as Johnson’s argument is anti-Skeptical in content, Johnson’s argument is also skeptical in the weaker, more inclusive, formal sense I have outlined above. In other words, Johnson seems to achieve his anti-Skeptical content with a skeptical performance. What is Johnson’s kick if not a skeptical experiment meant to take up and test — so as to critique and “refute” — Berkeley’s claim regarding the immateriality of matter? Therefore, if Johnson’s refutation of Berkeley illustrates his disdain for Skepticism, it also reveals Johnson’s investment in a form of methodological skepticism, not to mention his distinct appreciation for how this methodological skepticism might be mobilized to attack and even ridicule a narrower tradition of Skepticism. Indeed, this methodological skepticism is specifically recommended by Johnson’s theory of moral knowledge and the principle of sufficient reason that undergirds it. One can be “said to have a moral Certainty” about moral knowledge when there “remains no sufficient Reason to doubt of the Truth of it” (75).

From a certain Skeptical perspective, however, Johnson’s hostility towards Skepticism tends to eclipse his more basic commitment to a formal, methodological, or procedural skepticism. From a certain Skeptical perspective, to be a skeptic is to witness, preserve, and clarify the special significance of Skepticism. This is evidently not Johnson’s intent. Therefore, from a certain Skeptical perspective, Johnson’s skeptical responses to Skepticism have routinely been interpreted as reactionary and dogmatic, as illegitimate rather than legitimate forms of skepticism. Johnson’s kick is more often interpreted as an anti-Skeptical joke rather than a

⁵ In the entry for 31 October 1784, Johnson lists eleven “causes” of skepticism, including “study not for truth but vanity” and “indifference about opinions” (Johnson *Annals* 414). Two notably have to do with false evidentiary procedures.

skeptical argument, even by his many anti-Skeptical sympathizers.⁶ And Johnson's moral skepticism has been routinely placed *outside* rather than inside the history of modern skepticism – or even modern intellectual history altogether – as defined by Skepticism. This history – by excluding Johnson — distorts the broader internalization of skepticism that defines the modern critical ethos; by pursuing a history that includes Johnson, we can illuminate and correct for that distortion.

Carlyle Reading Johnson

For an early, representative example of the anti-Skeptical reading of Johnson, consider the following passage from Thomas Carlyle's 1832 review of Boswell's biography:

[Johnson's] culture is wholly English; that not of a Thinker but of a 'Scholar:' he sees and knows nothing but England; he is the John Bull of Spiritual Europe: let him live, love him, as he was and could not but be! Pitiably it is, no doubt, that a Samuel Johnson must confute Hume's irreligious Philosophy by some 'story from a Clergyman of the Bishoprick of Durham;' should see nothing in the great Frederick but 'Voltaire's lackey;' in Voltaire himself but a man *acerrimi ingenii, paucarum literarum*; in Rousseau but one worthy to be hanged; and in the universal, long-prepared, inevitable Tendency of European thought but a green-sick milkmaid's crotchet of, for variety's sake, 'milking the bull.' Our good, dear John!" (Carlyle 155)

To unpack Carlyle's reading of Johnson's reaction to Hume, we might first observe that Carlyle understands Hume's "irreligious Philosophy" to represent something more than a special philosophical system. Carlyle takes Hume's Skeptical arguments to have epitomized or even effected a more general and even universal Skeptical disposition, what Carlyle calls the "universal, long-prepared, inevitable Tendency of European thought" (155). To use my terms from above, we might say that Carlyle sees Hume's Skepticism as a form as well as content. It goes without saying that Carlyle has a Skeptical perspective, not to mention a distinctively progressive one, and that Carlyle sees himself as partaking in the spirit of Skepticism; unlike

⁶ Of course, a number of scholars have treated Johnson's skepticism. Here I will be concerned primarily with historical, neo-Kantian interpretations of Johnson's anti-skeptical reaction to Hume. And, on this front, as Martin Maner has recently argued, some "might object to the use of the term 'skepticism' in characterizing Johnson's thought because they associate the term with an inverted dogmatism that denies the possibility of genuine knowledge" (35). But, Maner asserts, Johnson's "manner of sifting historical and biographical testimony shows everywhere the influence of constructive skepticism" (35). Nicholas Hudson treats Johnson's Whiggish conservatism as largely skeptical in *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England*. Jack Lynch has made a case for Johnson as a "skeptic of a sort" (Lynch 2). For an earlier treatment of Johnson's relation to skepticism, see Robert G. Walker, "Johnson in the 'Age of Evidences' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44.1 (1980): 27-41.

Johnson, he has absorbed Hume's Skeptical insights. The surest sign of Carlyle's Skeptical perspective is Carlyle's tendency to naturalize or idealize this "Tendency of thought" — in other words, Carlyle's overwhelming sense that Skepticism *is* universal, long-prepared, and inevitable in this manner.

From Carlyle's perspective, the surest way to tell if someone has a Skeptical perspective is to observe his or her reaction to Hume. To qualify as a Skeptic, one must finally be able to see something significant and representative in Hume's Skepticism. Johnson's response to Hume therefore may be skeptical in some sense, but it is also obviously not Skeptical because Johnson "see[s] nothing" in Hume's Skepticism where hindsight has clarified that Johnson should have seen something universal, long-prepared, and inevitable. Instead of embracing Hume's Skepticism as significant and representative, Johnson dismisses it as idiosyncratic and idle. This is the force of Johnson's colorful charge that Hume "milk[s] the bull" for variety's sake. From Johnson's perspective, the idiosyncratic and idle aspect of Hume's philosophy is what makes Hume's skepticism illegitimate rather than legitimate, excessive rather than essential.

Carlyle clearly appreciates Johnson's reasoning even as he rejects its application to Hume because Carlyle effectively turns the same charge of idiosyncrasy against Johnson to clarify the illegitimacy of Johnson's response. Carlyle's Skeptical perspective is so strong that Johnson almost seems, quite improbably, to be protesting Hume out of sheer envy and spite. In some respect, Johnson's resistance looks like little more than bald jealousy to Carlyle. He delegitimizes Johnson's charge by tracing his idiom back to its literal and undignified origin. Carlyle describes "milking the bull" as a "green-sick milkmaid's crotchet" — in other words, the homespun conceit of a jealous farm girl. Carlyle thus doubles down on Johnson's logic: Johnson's accusation against Hume is itself idiosyncratic and illegitimate, not to mention unseemly. This is one reason why Johnson's inability to grasp Hume is more "pitiable" than anything, especially given Johnson's otherwise formidable stature. For Carlyle, it is pitiable that "a Samuel Johnson" would have been so unmanned by Hume (to risk putting too fine a point on the distinctly gendered character of Carlyle's critique). Johnson's "green-sick" response suggests that even Johnson secretly knows as much.⁷

⁷Incidentally, Carlyle gives Johnson a much more sympathetic, even laudatory, treatment in "The Hero as Man of Letters" (1840) so this depiction is more stylized than serious, but it also masterfully executes the trope I want to observe.

Carlyle does not take Johnson's hostility to be solely personal in nature. Much in the same way that Carlyle sees Hume's Skepticism as representative of an enlightened Skeptical disposition, Carlyle sees Johnson's resistance as characteristic of an earlier, unenlightened disposition. Johnson's error is cultural and intellectual as well as personal. Johnson comes off as hopelessly ill-equipped to answer or even comprehend Hume; it is as if Johnson had not been sufficiently trained to see anything significant in Hume's Skepticism. Johnson's arguments against Hume are not simply compromised by envy; they are feeble enough in their own right to be pitiable. His appeal to the authority of a county clergyman, for instance, reads as a painfully provincial and dogmatic reply to Hume's sophisticated intellectual machinery. It reflects the impoverished evidentiary and argumentative procedures of a more credulous and dogmatic age. This is why Johnson is a "Scholar" rather than a "Thinker." Johnson's neo-classical erudition comes off as fundamentally slavish and unoriginal when measured against Carlyle's Romantic appreciation for creativity and originality. All in all, Carlyle takes Johnson's vision to be constricted by a narrow Englishness, woefully impoverished when measured against the more cosmopolitan, Continental, Skeptical perspective ushered in by Hume and his enlightened allies. Johnson sees nothing significant or representative in Hume's Skepticism because finally he "sees and knows nothing but England" (155). Johnson, as well as his English sensibility, appears almost cartoonish from within Carlyle's Skeptical perspective: Johnson is the "John Bull of Spiritual Europe," a metonymic relation reinforced in Carlyle's final exasperated cry, "our good, dear John!"

Carlyle's Reading of Johnson is Neo-Kantian

Carlyle's reading of Johnson against Hume, so to speak, amounts to an early articulation of what would eventually become a potent and influential intellectual history of modernity constructed around the rise of epistemological Skepticism. Despite Hume's special prominence, this intellectual history is best understood as "neo-Kantian" because its characteristic features can be traced more or less directly to Kant. Kant, by his own account, is the first philosopher to see anything significant in Hume's Skepticism. But Kant is also the first philosopher to propose using the reception of Hume's Skepticism to divide up history in the manner Carlyle does. Therefore, I will use "neo-Kantian intellectual history" as a shorthand to refer to this influential intellectual-historical tradition that emerges out of Kant's negotiation with Hume according to

which Kant's "discovery" of epistemology is taken to be the foundational moment of modern thought. That Copernican turn, so called, shifted attention from metaphysics on the one hand and empiricist philosophy on the other (both considered instances of first philosophy, or practices of knowledge-making) to epistemology, to the study of the conditions that make experience and knowledge possible.

Neo-Kantian intellectual history is, among other things, unapologetically progressive in character. After Kant, there are those who, like Carlyle, see something significant in Hume's Skeptical philosophy and those who once saw nothing in Hume. Neo-Kantian intellectual history is invested in observing and explaining the significant distance between these two intellectual dispositions. Consider Kant's picture of Hume's reception in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783, hereafter *Prolegomena*), which is notably not a diptych but a triptych: not simply Kant and Hume but Kant, Hume, *and* Hume's Scottish commonsense contemporaries — Thomas Reid and James Beattie, among others — whom Kant introduces only to ridicule for being too blinkered by an older unphilosophical way of thinking to take Hume's Skepticism seriously, to recognize the seriousness of its threat. Carlyle is in some sense reproducing this Kantian trope with Johnson: Carlyle not only triangulates himself against Hume and Johnson; he also naturalizes his particular orientation towards Hume by effectively presenting Johnson's as unfortunate and, as we will see, even potentially unintelligible.

Johnson, Johnson's Scottish commonsense allies Reid and Beattie, and even the entire eighteenth-century Anglophone intellectual tradition out of which these thinkers emerge have all tended to suffer a similar fate within a neo-Kantian intellectual history of modernity. Their hostility to Hume relegates them to a prior, premodern era. Their brand of anti-Skeptical skepticism reads as reactionary instead of reasonable, rhetorical instead of philosophical. But, we might ask, if one were interested in telling a story about this "universal, long-prepared, inevitable Tendency of European thought," as Carlyle apparently was, wouldn't Johnson's investment in a methodological skepticism *despite* or even *because of* his anti-Skepticism be a site of potential interest? Wouldn't that investment constitute compelling evidence of the extensive internalization of skepticism that Carlyle takes to define modern thought? Wouldn't Johnson's investment in methodological skepticism suggest that this skeptical disposition is lodged even deeper than Carlyle imagines: deep enough, as it were, to still be compatible with an explicit anti-Skeptical position at the level of propositional content? From this perspective, it is difficult

to see how Johnson's commonsense skepticism would not fall within this broader tendency of thought or what one gains by defining skepticism in a way that does not acknowledge Johnson's skepticism as either legitimate or interesting. This perspective recommends pushing back against this neo-Kantian picture of things and reimagining the modern intellectual history of skepticism in a way that places Johnson's commonsense skepticism squarely within it.

Indeed, these questions about Carlyle's Skeptical perspective might be asked of the Skeptical perspective of modern philosophy more broadly. The appreciation for the special status of epistemology has long encouraged privileging Hume's "radical epistemological skepticism" not only as a singularly modern version of skepticism but as the definitive articulation of "philosophical" skepticism.⁸ With few exceptions, modern approaches to skepticism have amounted to one long commentary on the special significance of Hume's Skepticism. This preoccupation with Skepticism has encouraged a general indifference towards other forms of "ordinary incredulity," which are taken to be more procedural than properly philosophical and more preoccupied than clear-eyed and radically "uncommitted," as epistemological skepticism claims to be.⁹ But, more interestingly, this neo-Kantian preoccupation with Skepticism has encouraged a distinct hostility and dismissiveness towards "commonsense skepticism," which we might characterize by an explicit rejection of radical epistemological Skepticism and its very seriousness as a philosophical tradition. As the philosophers Joseph Agassi and John Wettersten have observed, modern philosophy has consistently struggled to theorize commonsense skepticism, largely because it has struggled to appreciate that "it is the insatiable version of skepticism and only this version, which common sense (correctly) expunges" as "objectionable" because this insatiability is "devoid of all sense of proportion" (429). As such, modern philosophers of skepticism have struggled to understand "in what sense...skepticism is contrary to common sense, and in what sense not at all" (428).

⁸ In his influential anti-Skeptical study, *Unnatural Doubts* (1996) Michael Williams observes that epistemological skepticism has become the "paradigm of a sceptical problem" (1) and speculates that "the materials for constructing the problem were always at hand, buried in the most basic and universal epistemological ideas, but unnoticed until a philosopher came along with sufficient clarity of mind to see their true significance" (1). Williams traces the major case for the historical novelty of Descartes' epistemological skepticism to M.F. Burnyeat's "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *The Philosophical Review*, 41.1 (1982).

⁹ In his entry for "Skepticism" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Peter Klein insists that in order to grasp what makes philosophical skepticism "so intriguing," we must distinguish between "ordinary incredulity" in which "the grounds for the doubt can, in principle, be removed" (np) and "philosophical skepticism," which "attempts to render doubtful every member of some class of propositions" (np).

This preoccupation with Skepticism is arguably why one would be inclined to see Johnson's kick as anti-Skeptical rather than skeptical in some fundamental sense. A neo-Kantian, Skeptical perspective recommends reading Johnson's kick as more rhetorical than philosophical, more witty joke than argument. One aim of this dissertation is to encourage a view of Johnson's kick that is more skeptical than anti-Skeptical, if not "Skeptical" in some archetypal sense: to reimagine Johnson's kick at the center of a modern rhetoric of skepticism.¹⁰ In short, I want to encourage a firm "yes" to my initial question, "Is Johnson's argument skeptical?" My claim is that neo-Kantian intellectual history crucially misrepresents the character of modern skepticism. In short, neo-Kantian intellectual history has pursued its philosophical picture of Skepticism at the expense of a more illuminating account of what skepticism is or how it functions. Johnson's kick not only attunes us to the internalized character of modern skepticism — which, as Lorraine Daston notes, is "so reflexive an intellectual stance for moderns that some effort is required to appreciate its strangeness" (22) — or its distinctly rhetorical character. Johnson's kick captures skepticism's *instrumental* and *conservative* character: how skepticism appeals to a norm of reasonableness to drive out a perceived deviation from that norm as excess and idiosyncrasy. Indeed, this conservative appeal to idiosyncrasy is the only thing that can be said to unite Carlyle and Johnson's skeptical orientations. It is this conservative character of skepticism in general and its own brand of Skepticism that neo-Kantian intellectual history has never adequately appreciated.¹¹

Introducing Neo-Kantian Romanticism

¹⁰I develop this reading of Johnson's kick at length in Chapter 2. For other notable readings of Johnson's kick, see Ian Hacking, "Rocks," in *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999: 186-206 and Helen Deutsch and Mary Terrall, "Introduction," *Vital Matters: Eighteenth-Century Views of Conception, Life, and Death*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012: 3-12.

¹¹George Santayana captures this conservative character of skepticism in his introduction to *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923):

Here is one more system of philosophy. If the reader is tempted to smile, I can assure him that I smile with him, and that my system...differs widely in spirit and pretensions from what usually goes by that name. In the first place, *my system is not mine, nor new*. I am merely attempting to express for the reader the principles to which he appeals when he smiles" (v).

Here Santayana focuses on the commonsense skeptical "smile" which targets the Skeptic's idiosyncrasy ("not mine, nor new") with its reflective and conservative appeal to animal faith. We might think of Johnson's kick itself as a clarification of the "principles to which [the skeptic] appeals when he smiles" (v). This conservative character is the reason that Johnson's kick must read as a joke before an argument: why it must read as more dismissive of Skepticism than engaged with it.

In this dissertation, I explore the outsized influence that neo-Kantian intellectual history has had within twentieth-century approaches to British Romanticism, tracking and correcting the distortions I believe this influence has introduced into critical accounts of the British Romantic literature: not least, a compromising preoccupation with Humean skepticism. From at least the mid-twentieth century on, specialists in the field have been inclined to read Romanticism through neo-Kantian intellectual history — indeed, for many of the same reasons that we observed Carlyle was inclined to read his intellectual-historical moment through a more strictly Kantian *Universal History*.¹² Just as Carlyle embraced a neo-Kantian *Universal History* for the way the rise of Humean skepticism outlined a clear “break” into modern thought from an earlier premodern era, so too Romantic literary critics have been inclined to embrace neo-Kantian intellectual history for the way it clarifies the rise of Romanticism as a specific and specifically modern intellectual formation.

From a neo-Kantian perspective, Humean epistemological skepticism is generally taken to set the basic intellectual and philosophical contours of Romanticism. As Taylor Schey has recently observed, in contemporary Romantic criticism Hume’s skepticism is “customarily figured as a dark shadow or ‘threat’ that most Romantic writers avoid, repress, or attempt to overcome” (Schey 180). Moreover, a special appreciation for the significance of Humean epistemological skepticism recommends “constru[ing] the consequences of Enlightenment skepticisms” narrowly and exclusively in terms of “crisis and privation” (180). This sense of crisis is read either directly from the most radically skeptical passages of Hume’s philosophy or from Kant’s later amplification of this radical register. As Schey notes, scholars of Romanticism tend to adopt this neo-Kantian framework “[r]egardless of critical persuasion” (180): that is, critics tend to accept the claim that Romantics were responding either directly or indirectly to the “crisis” of Humean skepticism, even as they disagree widely about the nature or significance of that Romantic response.¹³ This philosophical-historical interpretation of Hume — the tendency to see his philosophy as a primary coordinate in modern intellectual history — plays an important

¹²I discuss Carlyle’s embrace of Kantian *Universal History* earlier in the introduction. Carlyle refers to Humean skepticism as “universal, long-prepared, inevitable Tendency of European thought” (155) and, in an essay on Samuel Johnson, laments Johnson’s inability to “see” anything of value in Hume’s skepticism, an inability that for Carlyle puts Johnson on the wrong side of history and relegates him to earlier, dogmatic intellectual epoch.

¹³Indeed, Schey’s catalogue of responses — “avoid, repress, or attempt to overcome” — is deceptively compact. The last several decades of Anglophone Romantic criticism have been devoted to characterizing the nature of this Romantic response, and each of these answers has been pursued by a generation of scholars.

role in literary critical narratives of the rise of Romanticism, especially as they clarify the rise and significance of literature as an autonomous field. Hume-as-radical-skeptic fits into a shared account in modern literary criticism, a foundational narrative that sits well below even the obvious rifts of the late twentieth century between mid-century neo-Kantian Romanticism and the post-structuralist movements formulated, in large part, in reaction to it. My aim here will be to draw out and contest this foundational narrative.

Despite my narrow disciplinary focus on literary studies, I ultimately intend to comment on the nature and significance of neo-Kantian intellectual history more broadly, not only as it informs and illuminates this foundational narrative but as it has shaped the broader landscape of modern Western thought. My reasons for limiting the scope of this inquiry to Romantic literary criticism are practical and personal — related to my field of expertise — and therefore to some extent arbitrary. But there are at least two strong considerations that recommend using Romantic literary criticism as a special lens for viewing this broader neo-Kantian formation. The first is the enthusiasm and rigor with which mid-twentieth century Romantic literary critics first embraced neo-Kantian intellectual history as an interpretative lens. As we will see, a loosely neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism effectively unified Romantic literary criticism at the mid-twentieth century around a stable definition of Romanticism as a “neo-Kantian” response to Hume. The concerted mid-twentieth century effort at articulating a neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism resulted in a number of powerful literary histories of Romanticism that continue to have currency within the field and beyond, and that arguably amount to the most sophisticated, creative articulations of neo-Kantian intellectual history altogether. Notable among these mid-century efforts — and most central to my study — are Earl Wasserman’s influential neo-Kantian literary history (outlined, most thoroughly, in *The Subtler Language*, 1959) and M.H. Abrams’s later *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971).

The second consideration that recommends this focus on neo-Kantian Romanticism is the curious way that the drift of neo-Kantian interpretations of Romanticism from their beginnings in the mid-twentieth century to the present moment mirrors a broader drift of neo-Kantian intellectual history from its firm beginnings in Kant to its current Humean elaborations. It is as if contemporary Romantic literary critics were so attuned to a neo-Kantian mode of interpretation — so trained up in its interpretative and hermeneutic style by long, frequent, and enthusiastic encounters with this mode at the mid-twentieth century and, later, by the masterly execution of

this mode in the major neo-Kantian literary histories of Romanticism — that it discovered and distilled neo-Kantian intellectual history’s essential logic of break. Here the relevant site of interest is the post-structuralist effort to initiate a break with neo-Kantian Romanticism that, I hope to show, is deeply analogous to the break into “modernity” neo-Kantian intellectual history pursues on a larger historical scale.¹⁴ In this way, neo-Kantian Romanticism offers not only a special articulation of neo-Kantian intellectual history. Its critical trajectory enacts a strange microcosm of the progression of broader neo-Kantian intellectual history.¹⁵

Against this long line of neo-Kantian Romanticism, I want to contest the idea that Romantics themselves were ever invested in any neo-Kantian project and, thus, contest the influential, persistent literary histories of the “rise of Romanticism” falsely premised on this Humean crisis. In order to do so, I will need to consider why this neo-Kantian framework has remained so appealing in Romantic literary criticism: how and why this neo-Kantian framework managed to survive what post-structuralism billed (quite successfully) as a full-scale attack on its legitimacy. I want to argue that mid-century and post-structuralist neo-Kantian Romanticism are

¹⁴To put it schematically, we might say that a post-structuralist like Paul de Man would read a mid-twentieth century neo-Kantian like M.H. Abrams in a similar way that a neo-Kantian such as Carlyle would read Johnson. That is, both would be inclined to accuse their opponent of a kind of naiveté or perhaps even metaphysical bad faith. And this is true even as a neo-Kantian like Abrams would likely read Johnson’s reaction to Skepticism in a way similar to Carlyle. De Man repeats the same neo-Kantian pattern of break that Abrams and Carlyle do, except de Man’s target is not Johnson’s metaphysical morality but Abrams’ neo-Kantian humanism. And this is true even as Abrams clearly understood his humanism to arrive at an *anti-metaphysical* and even *natural* morality by departing from Johnson and understood Romantics like Carlyle to have contributed to this new anti-metaphysical, or “natural supernatural,” humanism. Most curiously of all, this second break makes de Man ultimately want to embrace Johnson’s blinkered metaphysics over Abrams’ anti-metaphysical metaphysics of humanism because Johnson’s is at least visibly and rationally constructed and therefore already sufficiently diminished. This is true even as de Man is finally more doctrinal and tyrannical in register than Abrams ever purported to be. In the end, this makes de Man’s neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism, while professedly anti-neo-Kantian, finally more spiritually akin to a neo-Kantian zealot like Wasserman. De Man claims, more forcefully than Wasserman or Abrams ever would or could, to have a view from nowhere, to have thoroughly abandoned any lingering humanism, the final navel-gazing metaphysics. And de Man’s radical position, in the final analysis, causes Abrams to question his own stance and to sympathize, for different reasons than de Man, with Johnson’s anti-Skepticism.

¹⁵The break post-structuralist Romanticism attempts, in many ways, amounts not to a *departure* but an *exacerbation* of a neo-Kantian logic. The relevant fact here is that while post-structuralists programmatically attacked the mid-century critic’s sympathetic and enthusiastic embrace of Romanticism’s distinctly neo-Kantian investments, post-structuralists still curiously retained a basic neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism. Post-structuralists certainly rejected the philosophical legitimacy of this neo-Kantian project, but they still accepted the assumption that the Romantics *themselves* were in fact invested in such a neo-Kantian project. The cumulative effect of post-structuralism was not to dispense with this neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism, but simply to shift its dramatic emphasis: to redescribe the nature and significance of Humean Skepticism for Romanticism so as to *exacerbate* its threat and to clarify its irresolvable status. To return to Schey’s terms, post-structuralism kept Hume as the “threat” but pursued a radically different description of Romanticism’s “response:” if the mid-century focused on how Romanticism “attempt[ed] to overcome” — or even *did* overcome — Hume’s threat, post-structuralists argued that the Romantic response to Hume simply “avoid[ed]” or “repress[ed]” that threat.

united not only by a shared picture of epistemological skepticism but by a shared investment in what I will call the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis. By *topos* of crisis, I mean something more abstract in character than the looming Hume that Schey observes, though a looming Hume is almost always enlisted in its service. Rather, I mean a narrative or dramatic structure that is first read loosely, at best, from Kant's negotiation of Hume and then progressively exacerbated and applied to construct and observe a break into modernity.

I say this *topos* was read "loosely" from Kant's negotiation because, while Kant may have first elevated Hume to world-historical proportions and licensed reading Hume as a kind of looming threat or crisis, Kant always understood Hume to play a *supporting* and largely *negative* role in his negotiation of epistemology. Hume is the dark anti-hero to Kant's hero. Kant writes, "Since the Essays of Locke and Leibniz, or rather since the origin of metaphysics so far as we know its history, nothing has ever happened which could have been more decisive to its fate than the attack made upon it by David Hume" (2). But Kant also writes, "[Hume] threw no light on this kind of knowledge; but he certainly struck a spark from which light might have been obtained, had it caught some inflammable substance and had its smouldering fire been carefully nursed and developed" (2). For Kant, Humean skepticism is merely suggestive and preliminary. Hume's threat is finally only apparent, more an effect of Hume's blindness than his insight. Kant clarifies that "I was far from following [Hume] in the conclusions to which he arrived by considering, not the whole of his problem, but a part, which by itself can give us no information" (5). Hume's philosophy only looks threatening because it is incomplete, immature.

Yet, as Kant's reading of Hume is reified and abstracted through nineteenth-century neo-Kantian intellectual history — and elaborated according to a different cultural logic and with distinct aims — Hume's threat comes to be seen as more serious and philosophical than it seems to have been for Kant, where — I hope to show — it is largely *rhetorical*. Over the nineteenth century, the structure of this Humean crisis changes in character, emotional complexity, and scope. Its tone shifts from taunting and dismissive to more ironic and melancholic: less focused on the evident advantages of the break into modernity and more on the hard costs of this break into disenchantment. And Kant's looming Hume grows to world-historical proportions so that, by the mid-twentieth century, neo-Kantian intellectual history distills Kant's negotiation with Hume into a vague and stylized, but also therefore flexible and potent, *topos* which could be

applied to shape any number of modernity narratives and to speak to any number of modern intellectual formations and decode them through epistemology.

This *topos* of crisis seems present at any stage in neo-Kantian intellectual history. Carlyle, for instance, applies an early version to dispense with Johnson on personal and intellectual grounds: Johnson is distinctly threatened by Hume. But it arguably achieves its greatest potency at the mid-twentieth century. The essentially empty character of the *topos* the mid-twentieth century critics inherited from neo-Kantian intellectual history gave mid-century critics a profound creative license with the neo-Kantian manner of interpretation. And their long conditioning in neo-Kantian intellectual history gave them an incredible proficiency and ingenuity with its interpretive lens. In short, one can tell that Romantic critics dropped their boats late into the long stream of neo-Kantian intellectual history (which arguably begins as early as Carlyle) by the sublimated character of the central crisis they observe, which is quite different than Carlyle's. Consider this programmatic statement from Christos Pulos' short but influential study, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism (1954)*:

This scepticism — the result of the development of thought over a period of nearly two centuries — could hardly constitute anything less than the most important intellectual problem of the next age — the age of romanticism. The central tendency of the romantic movement, viewed as an event in the intellectual history of modern man, was that of reorientation in a world of uncertainty and doubt. (5-6)

Measuring the distance between Pulos' "central tendency" of Romanticism and Carlyle's "Tendency of Thought," clarifies these major structural transformations in the neo-Kantian *topos*. A shared sense of the significance of Humean Skepticism links both Pulos and Carlyle here. Both appear to absorb Humean Skepticism and regard it as historically momentous. From my perspective, this is what makes these interpretations of Hume both Skeptical and "neo-Kantian" in the senses I have discussed and finally more continuous than discontinuous. Yet, there are evident differences. Where Carlyle sees Humean skepticism as a solution, Pulos is more inclined to see Humean skepticism as a problem (though a happy one) still in need of a solution (the Romantic "reorientation). Put another way, Carlyle's Kantian Universal history is unapologetically progressive, while Pulos' neo-Kantian intellectual history is ostensibly more therapeutic.

Pulos' neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism is obviously organized more centrally around Humean skepticism, and in this way it nicely demonstrates that the Humean crisis has always been (or at least quickly became) the most important detail of Kant's triptych. Ironically, Kant has never been all that central to a neo-Kantian intellectual history. To be sure, Kant's inestimable influence in Anglophone nineteenth-century intellectual culture — his utter dominance of the nineteenth-century intellectual landscape from at least Carlyle on — is perhaps the only way to explain how this threatening picture of Hume attained its hegemonic status. But by the mid-twentieth century (if not long before), Kant's specific therapeutic response to Humean skepticism more or less lost its special currency.¹⁶ In any case, Kant's role is more paradigmatic and spiritual in neo-Kantian intellectual history. Kant's negotiation with Hume functions more as a hermeneutic lens than a foundational text. His initial negotiation of Hume simply sets the conditions or terms of any and all future negotiations of Hume. Kant literally describes his project as the "prolegomena to any future metaphysics." And, in Anglophone intellectual history, Kant proves to be more or less dispensable, where even Carlyle demonstrates how Kant's Hume was wielded to negotiate a break within eighteenth-century Anglophone philosophy.

So, a looming Hume is indeed essential in some manner to the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis. But the extreme elasticity this *topos* achieved by the mid-twentieth century means that neither Kant nor Hume need necessarily be at the center of any neo-Kantian literary history of Romanticism. As we will see in Chapter One, Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* offers a much looser and more liberal neo-Kantian picture, whereas Wasserman's literary history is so dutifully neo-Kantian that it is essentially dogmatic. But regardless of how central Kant or Hume are in neo-Kantian literary histories, all mid-twentieth century critics work liberally and loosely with the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis available to them, and use it to observe and construct extensive links between epistemology and other major cultural developments. In this dissertation, I will be particularly interested in the way that Abrams and Wasserman draw on the neo-Kantian *topos* to connect the distinct shift of literary sensibility between neo-Classical and Romantic poetics with

¹⁶The philosopher Michael Williams, for instance, observes the ascendance of general "epistemological pessimism" — best embodied by twentieth-century "New Humeans" such as Stanley Cavell — which has encouraged re-centering Kant's picture exclusively on Hume (Williams 10-11).

the so-called ontological collapse of “analogy” observed most famously by A.O. Lovejoy in *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1966).

While neo-Kantian Romanticism arguably elevates the hermeneutic practice of reading various cultural phenomena through epistemology to a new level of sophistication, this practice is not specific to neo-Kantian Romanticism but is in some sense characteristic of all neo-Kantian intellectual history. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a widespread appreciation for the neo-Kantian project of epistemology (again, taken to be the paradigmatic insight of modern philosophy) encouraged intellectual historians to abstract freely from the disciplinary history of modern philosophy in order to situate, explain, and shape a variety of cultural, political, and literary historical developments within a broader narrative of modernity. This appreciation for Kant’s profound achievement recommended not only memorializing Kant and Hume’s discovery of modern epistemology; it encouraged employing that discovery as a hermeneutic lens for deciphering all other major cultural developments in order to observe, clarify, or construct their modern character. Put another way, a shared sense of the profound significance of Kant’s negotiation of Hume seems to have first recommended the genre of intellectual history as a legitimate and important lens for viewing and interpreting different kinds of modern intellectual formations. Moreover, a shared sense of the singularity of Kant’s negotiation seems to have recommended the integrity of a very concept of “modern intellectual history” itself: it encouraged the belief, for instance, that there might be a specific “intellectual history” of “modernity,” and that “intellectual history” was not only a possible and legitimate way to observe “modernity” but was somehow the *best* way to observe modernity.

I take “best” here to work in at least three senses: best in a basic empirical sense of “most legible,” best in a kind of intensive sense of “most essential,” and best in a moral sense of “most elevating and inspiring.” Best in the sense of “most legible” because the appeal of this neo-Kantian intellectual history was essentially imagistic or pictorial: it imposed a clear narrative shape and unity on an otherwise messy and disordered picture of modern history. The story of Kant’s response to Hume’s radical skepticism served as the most visible index of broader cultural and political shifts which, more properly, comprised modernity but which were much more diffuse and difficult, perhaps impossible, to observe. In other words, the neo-Kantian narrative distilled modernity’s ineffable but palpable *Zeitgeist* into an observable and even purified form. Epistemology reached laboratory conditions for the observation of modern

knowledge and even knowledge altogether: it turned the lens back on the knower, examined the very structure of knowledge, and the conditions that define its perception. Best in the sense of “most essential” because Kant’s clarification of the significance of Hume’s skepticism through epistemology — Kant’s ability to make visible this previously invisible or darkly understood set of concerns as well as their special significance — amounted to the most demonstrable evidence of a break with a previous moral and metaphysical order and the birth of a modern, scientific one. Kant’s “Copernican” turn away from objectivity to subjectivity, from knowledge-making to the conditions which make knowledge possible, established the terms for modern inquiry. And finally best in the sense of “most elevating” primarily because this break into modernity was read favorably, in distinctly *progressive* and even *developmental* terms. Hume’s radical skepticism and Kant’s clarification of its significance had dispelled with an inferior and inauthentic metaphysics and ushered in a more mature and clear-eyed picture of things, one that was epistemological rather than moral and therefore philosophical rather than rhetorical. The rise of epistemology inaugurated by Kant’s response to Hume could easily be construed as a major therapeutic break in the philosophical tradition: Kant’s negotiation of Hume initiated modern philosophy and, in some way, broke from the tradition: this is again the Copernican character of the enterprise; it echoes many of the same theme of disenchantment that was also empowerment: it was a *felix culpa*, painful and disorienting but ultimately for the best.

Epistemology clarified for the first time what truly “philosophical” terms looked like, and in the process it pointed out the woeful inadequacy of earlier approaches. From Kant’s perspective, Reid and Beattie’s inability to object to Hume on properly *epistemological* grounds is precisely what reveals their responses to be inauthentic rather than authentic; dogmatic and reactionary rather than critical and engaged; moral and rhetorical instead of intellectual and philosophical. This is as much a self-indictment for Kant as anything. Hume famously stirs Kant from his “dogmatic slumber” and “gave [his] investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction” (5). Not just new, but new and improved. And, according to the progressive, metonymic logic of neo-Kantian intellectual history, Kant’s epistemology also clarified what “modern” terms look like. And from one perspective, the *raison d’être* of neo-Kantian intellectual history seems to have been to enable a kind of reading that allowed the “modern” character of different intellectual enterprises to be read through the rise of epistemology. It allowed different disciplines to link up with philosophy-cum-epistemology as

the master discipline, so to speak, and assert their claim to be sufficiently modern, concerned with facts and not values, clear-eyed and not preoccupied.

The special advantages of linking up literary Romanticism with the broader neo-Kantian enterprise should be readily apparent, even as the grounds for doing so are, from my perspective, finally specious and a neo-Kantian lens finally distorts as much as it clarifies about literary Romanticism. As we have seen in Pulos' version, Humean skepticism appears to pose the central "intellectual problem" that gives the "age of romanticism" (5) its historical and philosophical coherence, not to mention the grounds for its claim as a special modern intellectual formation. Romanticism unites around a shared sense of Hume's threat. But this shared sense of threat also aligns Romantic literature with a broader constellation of "modern" responses to Hume. Indeed, for Pulos, the Romantic response to Hume is explicitly legion: it does not "follow a single pattern" (5) but rather manifests in a variety of interrelated modern developments. These include the "extension of the scientific method to new areas of investigation" as "men turned, as Hume had done, from metaphysics to history and the social sciences" (5) and, most notably for the literary critic, the rise of "what is loosely referred to as the transcendental movement" of "philosophy and literature" (6). In short, Hume's skepticism effectively initiates the neo-Kantian intellectual formation that Pulos characterizes as the "age of romanticism." And Pulos' own appreciation of the problem, primed by neo-Kantian intellectual history, encourages him to imagine the "age of romanticism" reaching well into the present. Pulos envisions Romanticism as an "event" within a continuous "intellectual history of *modern man*" (my emphasis, 6) — at an inflection point, no less. From one angle, Romanticism arrives at the culmination of a devastating line of epistemological skepticism "nearly two centuries" in the making. From another, Romanticism arrives at the beginning of the new "world of uncertainty and doubt" that Humean epistemological skepticism opens up. Humean skepticism thus not only radically upends the cultural and intellectual order so that the Romantics can pursue a new, distinctively modern project of reorientation and reconciliation; Humean skepticism also clarifies the new, distinctively modern — that is, to say epistemological — terms on which such a project of reconciliation must be grounded to avoid the metaphysical or theological preoccupations that ultimately constricted earlier literary and intellectual movements.

This is certainly a simplification of the rationale for the mid-century turn toward neo-Kantian Romanticism, one that does not adequately capture its tone of moral seriousness and

genuine *pathos*. But framing things this way should show that Pulos' version of neo-Kantian intellectual history is not as far from Carlyle's Kantian Universal History as one might expect. Not too far beneath its therapeutic surface lies a harder core of secular progressivism. The therapeutic character of neo-Kantian Romanticism is distinctly ironic. However consequential or disruptive Pulos finds Hume's skepticism, he is no more threatened by Hume than Carlyle was. He knows how to take Hume's Skepticism seriously, and neo-Kantian intellectual history would have offered any number of ways in which to do so. The confidence with which Pulos issues his programmatic statement nicely captures what seems to be a prevailing sense that the modern order has stabilized despite the crisis which neo-Kantian intellectual history observes at its center or the *anomie* that the constant observation of this crisis seems to generate in the discourse.

As Colin Jager has observed, the secular progressivism at the heart of neo-Kantian Romanticism provides a "substantial continuity in scholarly thinking about the [Romantic] period" despite "the various revisions of romanticism accomplished over the past decades" (xi). Indeed, from this perspective, we might say that the ultimate effect of post-structuralist Romanticism was to discard the therapeutic veneer of mid-century neo-Kantian Romanticism and rediscover the core of secular progressivism under neo-Kantian Romanticism and neo-Kantian intellectual history more broadly. The break with mid-century neo-Kantianism that post-structuralist Romanticism attempts, in this way, amounts not to a *departure* but an *exacerbation* of a neo-Kantian logic. The relevant fact here – as Zoe Beenstock, Sarah Zimmerman, and David Punter have also recently observed — is that while post-structuralists may have programmatically attacked the mid-century critics' sympathetic and enthusiastic embrace of Romanticism's distinctly neo-Kantian investments, post-structuralists still curiously *retained* a basic neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism.¹⁷ Put another way, they may have rejected the philosophical legitimacy of this neo-Kantian project, but they still accepted the assumption that the Romantics *themselves* were in fact invested in such a neo-Kantian project.¹⁸ The cumulative effect of post-structuralism, then, was not to dispense with this neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism, but simply to shift its dramatic emphasis: to redescribe the nature and significance

¹⁷See Beenstock's dissertation, "The Social Contract and the Romantic Canon" (2010): 1-10; Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999: 1-38; Punter, "Romanticism" in *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*: 106-118.

¹⁸McGann offers what has since become the programmatic statement of this critique: "[T]he scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are dominated by a Romantic Ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (*Ideology* 1).

of Humean skepticism for Romanticism so as to *exacerbate* its threat and to clarify its irresolvable status. To return to Schey's schema above, post-structuralism kept Hume as a "threat" but pursued a radically different description of Romanticism's "response": if the mid-century focused on how Romanticism "attempt[ed] to overcome" — or even *did* overcome — Hume's threat, post-structuralists argued that the Romantic response to Hume simply "avoid[ed]" or "repress[ed]" that threat. This is what I mean when I say that post-structuralism exacerbates neo-Kantian logic. The neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis proves so generative that it enables post-structuralists to imagine an entirely new and coherent type of break, from the epistemological to the onto-linguistic, from the humanistic model of subjective agency to a post-structuralist model of ideological subjectification. Neo-Kantian critique loves a crisis.¹⁹

Neo-Kantian Intellectual History as a Hermeneutic Circle

However generative this *topos* of crisis has proven to be, I want to suggest that there is something suspiciously convenient about applying it to any period. And I want to think of contesting the application of this *topos* of crisis in neo-Kantian Romanticism as a shorthand way of contesting the basic critical and historical integrity of applying this neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis altogether in any period. I want to demonstrate the need to dispense with it entirely, both in the literary history of Romanticism and in Western intellectual history, and to construct a new intellectual history that does not rely on it.

Indeed, as Richard Rorty observed long ago in *The Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, there is something suspicious about embracing the enterprise of neo-Kantian intellectual history.

¹⁹Of course, it is possible that most post-structuralists simply found this historical picture compelling and basically correct if woefully incomplete. But, viewed in retrospect, accepting the accuracy of this historical picture can be seen as strategic as well as sincere. Simply put, given their antagonistic charge, it is more convenient, and perhaps even necessary or constitutive, for both the deconstructionist and the New Historicist to *accept* this basic historical picture and work within it, rather than to correct or challenge it. Deborah Elise White suggests along these lines that "[R]eaders on the track of ideology often seem more insistent on the referential status of Romantic argument than the Romantics themselves. They hypostasize the very mystifications ostensibly being demystified" (White 2).

In her analysis of McGann's engagement with Abrams, Beenstock suggests that "instead of subverting" Abrams' neo-Kantian model or successfully replacing it with a non-ideological neo-Kantian aesthetics, McGann "actually perpetuates" Abrams' neo-Kantian model in a way that "fails to separate [McGann's] own position" from Abrams or to sufficiently "distinguish between the later insights of criticism and the original material contexts of the text themselves" (11). This seems to overstate the case against McGann, and I tend to prefer Colin Jager's observation that de Man "cagily" follows the mid-century literary history as a general description of the nature of these post-structuralist exchanges. In any case, both perspectives support my central point that post-structuralist approaches prefer to retain the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism — so as to toy with it, and read it parasitically and hermeneutically — rather than discard it.

In Rorty's account, the problem with neo-Kantian intellectual history is that it generates a hermeneutic circle in which philosophy-cum-epistemology achieves a privileged status with respect to other modern sciences by successfully representing itself as articulating a "theory of knowledge" distinct from and superior to these sciences "because it was their *foundation*" (132). In this way, Kant's Copernican revolution generates a rigidly Ptolemaic disciplinary formation in which the modern sciences form so many concentric circles around Kantian epistemology. This is a hermeneutic circle because Neo-Kantian intellectual history ostensibly draws its authority from the intellectual capital independently afforded to philosophy after Kant's discovery of epistemology. And yet it is neo-Kantian intellectual history that invents, inflates, and reinscribes the cultural capital of philosophy in the first place by pursuing and constructing (often quite creatively) new ways to observe epistemology's obvious yet somehow materially unobservable influence beyond the narrow disciplinary confines of philosophy. Of course, other modern disciplines, standing to benefit from this cultural capital and intellectual cachet, were also inclined to accept this picture and work within it, and to offer up their own intellectual historical narratives to confirm it.²⁰ Not every discipline had to see itself within a neo-Kantian intellectual history. But any discipline that did easily could and dutifully become its satellite, read its own practices through the refracted lens of epistemology, and thus offer its own claims to epistemological (read: philosophical, modern) significance. Neo-Kantian intellectual history, then, has a way of generating a self-fulfilling prophecy: it prints its own intellectual currency.

This Ptolemaic character of neo-Kantian intellectual history goes deeper. For, as Rorty notes, intellectual historians worked to sustain this picture of modernity united around epistemology even as it amounted to a *demonstrably false* representation of the way knowledge was produced in *any* modern scientific discipline. In reality, each discipline would develop localized practices that were not reflected in or dictated by epistemology. What sustained this false picture? From Rorty's perspective, there was simply an imperative to see Reason as universal, shared and progressively developing across the world in history: something like what Carlyle imagines. For Rorty, neo-Kantian intellectual history met that imperative, but it also inhibited any accurate description of "the way things really are." In a more recent analysis of this

²⁰ Marco de Waard nicely describes the effect of intellectual historical discourse as "vertiginously self-referential: history of ideas center on the emergence of the idea of history of ideas, narratives of progress historicizing the very notion of progress" (de Waard 459)

Ptolemaic picture, Bruno Latour has suggested this demonstrably false picture emerges as the logical outgrowth of the economy of neo-Kantian epistemology. The sense of inadequacy that epistemology's special claim lends "all forms of veridiction" which seem "by contrast...irrational and arbitrary" (*Modes* 94) encourages pursuing this unified description, and the constant smooth alignments of "habit" that emerge to organize each independent institution obscures its demonstrable inaccuracy. Latour sees this act of willful misdescription as so prevalent and characteristic of modern intellectual history that he gives it a name, "double click" or [DC], meant to evoke the disparity between the smooth, integrated user interface of any computer program with the sprawling lines of code that generate it. In any case, with this misdescription in view, we might even say that the hermeneutic circle constructed by the discourse of neo-Kantian intellectual history provides a way of maintaining and naturalizing this Ptolemaic picture of the special importance of epistemology against widespread material evidence to the contrary. In truly Ptolemaic fashion, neo-Kantian intellectual history saves the phenomena.

Rorty and Latour's respective analyses predict that there will be a good deal of distortion within neo-Kantian Romanticism. And my claim that neo-Kantian Romanticism functions as a microcosm of neo-Kantian intellectual history further hypothesizes that these distortions will mirror the most salient distortions of neo-Kantian intellectual history. There are obviously limits to the insights this microcosm can provide, and those limits also set the limits of this dissertation itself. Indeed, my arguments here about neo-Kantian intellectual history can only be partial and suggestive, not conclusive.²¹ There is likewise one caveat worth developing here in order to clarify how neo-Kantian Romanticism departs from the appropriations of neo-Kantian

²¹Any claims about the impact of neo-Kantian intellectual history beyond the field of Romanticism would finally need to be confirmed from other disciplinary perspectives. And my claims about neo-Kantian Romanticism are still very much under construction: in need of a more comprehensive examination of literary critical approaches to Romanticism across the twentieth century. The same can be said for the corrective picture of the intellectual historical context of British Romanticism I attempt to sketch here. This is no small part because neo-Kantian Romanticism has been so influential in American literary criticism. I believe it informs not only the most thoroughly developed lines of thought (e.g. Coleridgean organicism) but also the slightest critical prejudices and habits (e.g. a widespread indifference to Hume's commonsense rivals).

Still, while my archive is necessarily selective, I believe my selected texts are foundational and thus more representative than not. Likewise, I believe my major claims can be borne out through a more comprehensive study. Simply put, I do not believe neo-Kantian Romanticism would have achieved the state of development it has had neo-Kantian intellectual history not achieved the inestimable influence it did. As I hope to show, it was in part the sheer cultural authority that neo-Kantian intellectual history had at the mid-century that recommended its adoption within Romantic literary criticism.

epistemology within, for instance, the disciplinary history of philosophy or natural sciences. While neo-Kantian Romanticism is obviously preoccupied with Kantian epistemology in the same way that modern scientific disciplines once were, it does not attempt to describe its *own* disciplinary practices in terms of Kantian epistemology, but rather to interpret Romantic literature on the basis of what it perceives as its common investment in Kantian epistemology. I will claim that the Romantics' had no such programmatic investment in Kantian epistemology. But the major difficulty is how close the neo-Kantian Romantic account actually comes to describing Romantic authors' actual epistemological investments. Indeed, I believe British Romantic authors are indeed demonstrably invested in the project of epistemology. But British Romanticism perceives this project in distinctly *pre-Kantian terms*. British Romantic authors — especially the “first” generation authors like Wordsworth and Coleridge — are working within an Anglophone epistemology which, after Kant, is marked as more moral than philosophical. The difficult task will be to recover the terms of this investment as they have been overwritten in neo-Kantian terms on what might be best conceived as the palimpsest of epistemological thinking that has emerged since the seventeenth-century. Even using the term *epistemology* to refer to this palimpsest is risky, because this technical term itself does not emerge until the mid-nineteenth century, largely to describe a specifically post-Kantian enterprise.²² Often, the problem is not that neo-Kantian Romanticism is wildly off-the-mark: almost seven decades of criticism show that the neo-Kantian picture has been accurate enough to tolerate and build upon. In many places, correcting its inaccuracies will only require minimal work at the peripheries of its approximation. Yet, some inaccuracies and critical bias have been so thoroughly established, that they required a more polemic force: neither this lighter work nor the more passive drift out of the neo-Kantian orbit over the last decade in Romantic studies will suffice.

With its improbably tight feedback loop in view, Neo-Kantian intellectual history looks a lot like one of William E. Connolly's “abstract machines,” and indeed seems to be precisely of the order of ineffable magnitude Connolly constructs that concept to capture. Connolly defines an abstract machine as a “cluster of energized elements of multiple types that enter into loose, re-enforcing conjugations as the whole complex both consolidates and continues to morph” (135). Neo-Kantian intellectual history is “energized” by a shared enthusiasm for the project of

²²For a discussion of the mid-nineteenth century origins of the term *epistemology* see Taylor Schey, “Skeptical Ignorance: Hume, Shelley, and the Mystery of ‘Mont Blanc,’” 57-58.

observing modernity through epistemology; loose because the lens it uses to do so is finally topical and hermeneutic more than historical or analytic, more a theme to be taken up and expounded on than a concept to be applied; “re-enforcing” because these topical and hermeneutic aspects both afford a great deal of flexibility and range in their application while also turning every novel articulation and elaboration of neo-Kantian intellectual history into a variation of and contribution to one unified neo-Kantian Intellectual History; and the new, creative contributions inflect neo-Kantian intellectual history so as consolidate and morph the understanding of what is “shared” at its center: again, it distills the narrative of a potent and seductive *topos* of crisis-and-reconciliation, and finally of crisis alone, which it seizes as an opportunity for narrating the same successful break that neo-Kantian intellectual history observes in modern philosophy into a wide variety of fields.²³

The improbably tight feedback loop at the center of this abstract machine — which looks in hindsight almost explicitly and suspiciously designed to maximize the cultural capital of philosophy and to unify nothing short of the entire modern history of Western thought around a shared appreciation of philosophy-cum-epistemology — amplified neo-Kantian intellectual history into an almost unprecedented cultural force whose impact is as difficult to overestimate as it is to describe. Neo-Kantian intellectual history effectively *generates* the modern order it projects, almost entirely by the sheer dramatic potency of its projection, and *despite* the distorted nature of its many projections or their conspicuous lack of correspondence to any actual practices. Neo-Kantian epistemology is invoked systematically across the nineteenth-century intellectual culture to restrict the scope of religious and moral reasoning — branded as “value” rather than “fact” — in a strategic and wide-ranging displacement of religious authority which Jose Casanova has described as a process of “differentiation” and which Colin Jager helpfully glosses as “the emancipation of a variety of forms of cultural authority from religious control” (28). The anti-metaphysical dictates of neo-Kantian epistemology promote an extensive fictionalization and formalization of modern disciplinary concepts, which is used to police metaphysical impositions and distortions more broadly. In the end, the steady cultivation and exacerbation of its empty discourse of crisis — read loosely at best off Kant’s triptych — finally

²³ I want to claim that this *topos* of crisis is, in some sense, endemic to neo-Kantian intellectual history and, more specifically, to neo-Kantian critique. As Simon During observes in “The Eighteenth-Century Origins of Critique,” “critique requires division” (During 74).

achieves the strong sense of “break” which manages, in a profound way, to displace, or diminish, the previous moral and intellectual order figured by Johnson. We can measure this achievement simply by noting the semantic drift of the word *moral* itself. The neo-Kantian spirit of critique almost singlehandedly changes the meaning of *moral*, displacing and estranging the older, uncontroversial, humanistic, “orienting” sense that someone like Johnson or even Hume would have given the term to the more current sense of moral as committed, potentially in a preoccupied or disorienting and therefore controversial manner. Neo-Kantian spirit of critique turns *moral* into an accusation. It also turns it into a profession of faith — that is, a matter of faith or value instead of fact — and, in some contexts, a confession of sin.

Neo-Kantian intellectual history also generates a new way of looking at Skepticism centered on Hume, and disseminates it so thoroughly and successfully as to naturalize it. Neo-Kantian intellectual history’s elevating of Skepticism (especially as epitomized by young Hume) makes the Skeptic look increasingly more Heroic than Idiotic, more serious than unserious, worthier of engagement than dismissal. In the eighteenth century, Skepticism would have looked like a kind of Idiocy. And here I do not mean idiocy in the scientific sense developed in the late-nineteenth century, but Idiocy in the (neo)classical and developmental sense of *idios* recovered most recently by Walter Parker. As Parker helpfully observes, an idiot is “one whose self-centeredness undermines his or her citizen identity, causing it to wither or never to take root in the first place” (Parker 344). Idiocy is “private, separate, self-centered” because “concerned myopically with private things and unmindful of common things;” idiotic behavior is fundamentally disoriented, “a rudderless ship, without consequence save for the danger it poses to others;” and idiocy is “definitively self-defeating, for the idiot does not know that privacy and individual autonomy are entirely dependent on the community” (344). However, from the neo-Kantian perspective, the Skeptic enjoys a special moral prestige. A neo-Kantian perspective perceives a basic Heroism in this critical act of intellectual self-sacrifice and radical detachment. Skepticism takes will and effort. For a Skeptic like Carlyle, it is what distinguishes the Thinker from the Scholar.

At a higher level of generality, this debate about Skepticism’s significance amounts to a debate about the “evidential context” of Skepticism, to use a concept developed by the philosopher of science Simon Schaffer. For Schaffer, debates about evidential context center on the “proper implications of some trial” (Schaffer 59) — that is, whether one should interpret the

results of an independent trial as signs of general or particular, objective or subjective, phenomena. Discussing the evidential context of eighteenth-century natural philosophic self-experimentation, Schaffer writes: “Experimenters who used their own bodies tried to shift the evidential context from the body itself to some wider natural philosophical concern” while “critics who denied these implications tried to shift the evidential context back to the experimenter’s body. Trials which some reckoned revealed truths about the universe were judged by others to reveal much about the movements of Gray’s hands, Italian servingmen’s bellies, or Charles Deslon’s eyes” (59). In such a contentious rhetorical context, Schaffer argues, “[s]tabilizing an evidential context relied on the power and authority of the collective body of experimental philosophy” and “[w]inning that body’s assent was a condition of making evidence” (59). In other words, self-evidence could not finally be self-evidence to be perceived as universally significant; it must finally be judged so by a larger social body.

Following Schaffer, we might say that a Skeptical perspective works to frame the evidential context of Skepticism as revealing an essential, universal truth about the nature of knowledge-making. The Skeptic claims to access a deeper account of knowledge that is impossible to achieve without radically suspending the natural, committed, distorted conditions of everyday belief. The Skeptic’s study is a lab for observing the conditions of knowledge at a practically unattainable but nonetheless foundational state: in a vacuum, or at absolute zero, or the speed of light, so to speak — in the kind of revealing state of distortion these extreme natural conditions create. On the other hand, an anti-Skeptical or commonsense perspective works to shift the evidential context back to the Skeptic himself, to some trace of Idiocy. From a Common-Sense perspective, Skepticism obviously distorts more than it clarifies. Skepticism is a delusion endemic to the Study. Thomas Reid, for instance, diagnoses Hume’s skeptical conclusions comically, almost sympathetically, as a “metaphysical lunacy” (482): a kind of occupational hazard of philosophy, one “apt to seize the patient in solitary and speculative moments” (482). For Reid (and Hume), such lunacy may prevail in isolation, but it is cured by a return “into society” where “Common Sense recovers her authority” (482-83). Pursuing a total detachment from everyday commitments is not only practically impossible or undesirable. Claiming to have achieved such a total detachment is absurd enough to compromise one’s basic credibility or claim to reasonableness: Skeptical doubts are more unnatural than natural.

Neo-Kantian intellectual history obviously accepts some version of the Skeptic's view of the evidential context of Skepticism. And we might describe the central achievement of neo-Kantian intellectual history to have been to stabilize the evidential context of Hume's Skepticism — to affirm it through the “collective body” organized around it — so thoroughly as to naturalize it. Neo-Kantian intellectual history is what makes Hume look more Heroic than Idiotic. Hume could not do this alone. Neo-Kantian intellectual history treats the universal significance of Skepticism to be so self-evident as to be uncontroversial, even passé. It turns an open question about the evidential context of Skepticism into a new way to divide up History. And it views its interpretation so favorably as to moralize it. Neo-Kantian intellectual history presents a new developmental narrative, centered on a new kind of idiocy. To call the Skeptic Idiotic becomes idiotic in a different sense of unenlightened, illiberal.

Neo-Kantian Intellectual History Misreads Enlightenment Skepticism

In many ways, the new perspective on Skepticism generated by neo-Kantian intellectual history has been of inestimable value. It has taken considerable intellectual energy and effort to carve out its entirely novel account of the world. The fact that we can now celebrate Hume as a kind of Hero rather than roundly dismiss him as an Idiot is significant, worthy of analysis in its own right. And the remarkable trajectory of Hume's reception supports many postmodern insights about the indeterminacy of meaning, the free-floating nature of the cultural signifier. Yet, as influential and generative as neo-Kantian intellectual history has been, it is severely one-sided and selective picture of things. Its narrow emphasis on Humean skepticism amounts to what I will call a *misreading* of Enlightenment skepticism. I use this term in the more neutral, theoretical sense of a “strong reading” offered by Harold Bloom's concept of *misprision*, though I want to abstract Bloom's psychoanalytic account into something less contentious and more heuristic.²⁴ Indeed, I do intend to retain some of the accusatory or polemic charge of the term

²⁴ In Bloom's literary criticism, *misprision* describes the interpretive mechanism by which young poets open up space for their own poetic enterprise in an already established, crowded poetic tradition. From Bloom's perspective, the poet responds to the anxiety of influence with a willful misreading of the poetic tradition. Bloom describes this act of *misprision* as introducing a Lucretian *clinamen* or swerve in the tradition. The young poet “swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a clinamen in relation to it” (*Anxiety of Influence* 14).

Loosely following Bloom, I want to use misreading as an analytic concept to designate a kind of interpretation that is guided and in some sense distorted by a specific, identifiable preoccupation. Analyzing a misreading along these theoretical lines would mean a) identifying the specific preoccupation organizing the interpretation, b) providing a detailed description of how that preoccupation plays out at different scales of

misreading evokes, I take this neo-Kantian picture of break to be not simply distorted and misguided but in some sense willfully deceptive. But while I want to sound this polemic note, in the main I'd still like misreading to carry a more sympathetic and less accusatory sense: more a way of capturing the neo-Kantian hermeneutic logic, its commitment to selective rather than representative reading. So I'd want to calibrate the term for the appropriate balance of suspicion and sympathy.²⁵

Whatever the productive gains of this misreading, the neo-Kantian preoccupation with constructing and observing modernity produces two significant distortions. Neo-Kantian intellectual history imagines a specter of crisis around Humean skepticism at the expense of caricaturing Hume's commonsense critics and at the cost of misrepresenting the general character of Enlightenment skepticism, *including* Humean skepticism.²⁶ I have said that general character is not radical but constructive: not anxious, metastatic, or reactive but pragmatic,

interpretation and the distortion it introduces. In claiming that neo-Kantian intellectual history misreads Enlightenment skepticism, I want to argue that because neo-Kantian intellectual history is preoccupied with constructing and observing a picture of modernity — which is to say, constructing and observing a distinctly progressive break from an earlier order of things into a modern intellectual order, much like the one Carlyle takes to divide Johnson from Hume — it prefers to read Enlightenment skepticism through the narrow lens of Humean epistemological skepticism in order to generate a “crisis” sufficient enough to establish this break. Following Bloom, we can think of the Humean crisis as the *clinamen* or swerve that neo-Kantian intellectual history reads into the philosophical tradition. And we can think of the *misprision* to center around Kant's claim that the project of epistemology amounts to something fundamentally new and modern.

²⁵ Bloom's account offers a more sympathetic counterpoint to the suspicious note above since Bloom has a suggestively Heroic picture of the idiocy at the heart of *misprision*. Bloom suggests that, from the poet's perspective, this *clinamen* or swerve amounts to a “corrective moment” which “implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves” (14). Bloom suggests that while the poet regards this *misprision* as corrective, the poet's description is in some sense erroneous because deliberately askew. The poet is inclined to invent a problem in need of correction rather than observe a real one. In this way, the act of *misprision* is intentionally idiosyncratic and defiant. However, from Bloom's perspective, this idiosyncrasy is not problematic; it is what makes the act of *misprision* essentially original and poetic. Thus Bloom views *misprision* in distinctly positive, even celebratory terms. It is how the Poet transcends the measured but weak and subservient posture of the mere Critic. Poets misread in the end because they “can only read themselves.” For Bloom, to read critically and faithfully “is to be weak:” “to compare, exactly and fairly, is to be not elect” (19). Bloom obviously has something of the neo-Kantian spirit. Bloom's *Poets and Critics* are not that far from Carlyle's *Thinkers and Scholars*. Bloom's final picture of the elect seems to commit the same sort of error that the neo-Kantian intellectual history does: it tends to misdescribe the Poet's achievement by exaggerating and ultimately naturalizing it. But, registering Bloom's more basic sympathetic thrust, I believe it is possible to say that the neo-Kantian preoccupation with Humean skepticism does ultimately achieve something new and revelatory. So I imagine misreading in this sense as something like imposing a deliberate abstraction or reduction in the name of revealing a meaningful pattern.

²⁶ As Richard H. Popkin observes revising his own account of Enlightenment skepticism: “In assessing the role of skepticism in the Enlightenment, I think we have to detach, at least partially, the question of influence in later times and try to see what skepticism represented during the eighteenth century, how it affected the major thinkers of the time, and how it developed during the period” (282). And he frames this detachment explicitly as bracketing a neo-Kantian picture of things: He writes, “Decades before anyone thought of writing the history of British empiricism or Continental rationalism, there were historical sketches of classical and contemporary skepticism” (283).

instrumental, and proactive; not preoccupied with “radical epistemological uncertainty” but committed to attaining “moral certainty” sufficient to justify action in the face of irreducible uncertainty. But neo-Kantian intellectual history does not only generate this distortion in our historical picture of skepticism. Second and more polemically, I want to suggest that the narrow neo-Kantian emphasis on Skepticism misidentifies the central problematic of skepticism, which is finally more rhetorical than epistemological, more about persuasion than perception. As we might expect, in this abstract machine, each distortion reinforces the other. Neo-Kantian intellectual history’s constant observation of epistemological Skepticism effectively displaces the more rhetorical, probabilistic, and social account of skepticism that prevailed in eighteenth-century Anglophone philosophy. As such, it struggles to respect or even acknowledge the continued relevance of this early rhetorical picture. To pursue its special account of Skepticism, neo-Kantian intellectual history must draw a confident line between “properly philosophical” and “merely rhetorical” forms of skepticism. But I say we should be interrogating the work this kind of controversial distinction performs in a modern rhetoric of assent. And I would suggest that assuming any firm distinction exists often risks evading and exacerbating the evident problems of skepticism it purports to resolve. The line between rhetoric and philosophy is never fixed but dynamic, never decided but always under debate. And, as Paul Ricoeur observed long ago, it is the instability at this line that gives energy and urgency to the theory of persuasion or argumentation.

Let me say more about the sum effect of these distortions. As Rorty and Latour observe, though Skepticism may have had a profound effect on shaping a theory of modern scientific knowledge and in patrolling the boundaries of modern disciplinary inquiry, Skepticism never quite captured the kind of skeptical practices taken up in practice within these disciplines, much less in everyday life. As Michael Polanyi notes, the “ethos of radical doubt” has always been more aspirational, emphatically “avowed” than “always, or indeed ever, rigorously practised [*sic*]” (Polanyi 269) and, in any case, frequently relaxed in ways that are “marginal and acknowledged only in passing” (270). In practice, these domains have always been organized by a “constructive skeptical” tradition, which Lorraine Daston has described as a “new philosophy of rational belief” that emerged in the late seventeenth-century and promoted a “more modest reasonableness that solved everyday dilemmas on the basis of incomplete knowledge, in contrast to the traditional rationality of demonstrative certainty” (xi). As Henry van Leeuwen and M.

Jamie Ferreira have observed, the program of “constructive skepticism” has its origins in the probabilistic epistemologies of the late-seventeenth century philosophers John Tillotson, John Wilkins, and, to some extent, John Locke. The program is “skeptical” in the sense that it acknowledges the fact of epistemological uncertainty and “constructive” in the sense that it rejects that this basic fact should have any radical implications regarding our ability to arrive at degrees of “moral certainty” sufficient to justify practical action and judgment (Ferreira 2–4).

Neo-Kantian Romanticism’s emphasis on the radical, anxious, metastatic character of doubt does a poor job of capturing the fundamentally conservative, confident character of this Enlightenment tradition of constructive skepticism. Constructive skepticism may accept the radically skeptical premise that we are unable to attain certain knowledge about matters of fact, but it also accepts that the careful application of skeptical and rational procedures constitutes a sufficient response to the problem of uncertainty and, further, a viable method for “constructing” actionable, if still uncertain, knowledge about the world. Constructive skepticism is not paralyzed by the absorption of radical uncertainty but retains a fundamental confidence in the ability of a procedural, rational skepticism to address and alleviate, if not resolve entirely, the epistemic problem of uncertainty that radical skepticism identifies. It is rather motivated to a severe discipline of “error reduction” and an attempt to characterize the nature of legitimate belief and prescribe the appropriate and legitimate conditions for assenting to a belief. This constructive skeptical confidence in the possibility of uncertain action crystallized, for instance, in the evidentiary standard of “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Simply put, unlike Skepticism, constructive skepticism does not subordinate the problematic of action under uncertainty or relinquish a more basic confidence in the ability to achieve sufficient degrees of certainty.

In short, we might say that neo-Kantian Romanticism – and neo-Kantian intellectual history more broadly – overestimates the significance of neo-Kantian epistemology. And this leads it to underestimate the persistence of the older epistemology neo-Kantian epistemology claimed to displace. As a result of these two miscalculations, neo-Kantian intellectual history tends to overestimate the distance it achieves from that older epistemology. The neo-Kantian insistence that Skepticism is self-evidently philosophical — its insistence that it draws the line between philosophical and rhetorical skepticism correctly (if only initially) — obscures and, indeed, mystifies the fundamentally *rhetorical* and *social* character of its achievement. As Schaffer’s analysis clarifies, the achievement of Skepticism is finally not philosophical but

social: it amounts to stabilization of the *evidential context* of Skepticism. Describing neo-Kantian intellectual history's achievement in these terms supports Rorty's claims, against epistemology, that justification is finally a "social phenomenon rather than a transaction between 'the knowing subject' and 'reality'" (9) and, likewise, that "rational certainty" is "a matter of victory in argument rather than a relation to an object" (156). By rejecting this social account of justification for an epistemological one, neo-Kantian intellectual history attempts to place its case for Skepticism's significance beyond the rhetorical, in a manner that can make neo-Kantian critique not only appear mystifying than clarifying.

Of course, however mystifying the neo-Kantian pursuit of Skepticism can seem, it has surely been sincere and well-intended. Skepticism has earned its privileged place in the modern intellectual milieu because of its unmatched therapeutic and probative powers. But a neo-Kantian appreciation for Skepticism's potency has also arguably led to an uncritical faith in skepticism's efficacy and probity and an evasion of skepticism's obvious risks. "It remains deeply ingrained in the modern mind — as I find even in my own mind," writes Michael Polanyi in his groundbreaking study of neo-Kantian critical philosophy, "that though doubt may become nihilistic and imperil thereby all freedom of thought, to refrain from belief is always an act of intellectual probity" (271). By the same Skeptical logic, Polanyi argues, "To accept a belief by yielding to a voluntary impulse, be it my own or that of others placed in a position of authority, is felt to be a surrender of reason" (271). And for this reason, Polanyi laments, "You cannot teach the necessity for doing this without incurring — even in your own heart — the suspicion of obscurantism" (271). For Polanyi and many other Sceptically minded scholars, there is something strangely noble about adopting a skeptical posture despite its risks.

Several decades since Polanyi's groundbreaking work, we are beginning to understand the nihilistic and perilous consequences that threaten to follow from the enthusiastic embrace of skepticism within modern intellectual history. The troubling efficacy of climate skepticism and the doubt industry illustrate how an uncritical esteem for skepticism can be hijacked to bad effects. In his widely discussed 2004 polemic against post-structuralist critique, Latour lays the blame for these "absurd deformations" of "our weapons" at Kant's door. "The mistake we made — the mistake I made was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving *away* from them and directing one's attention *toward* the conditions that made them possible" ("Critique" 231). For Latour, "...[T]his meant "remaining too faithful to the

unfortunate solution inherited from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant” (231) and “accepting much too uncritically what matters of fact were” (231). I take Latour to mean that Kant’s mistake is the assumption that *any* description of matter of facts could be uncontroversial enough to be final or definitive. Against this kind of thinking, Latour insists that “[r]eality is not defined by matters of fact” (232) and that “matters of fact” are themselves “very partial[,] very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*” (232). Following Mary Poovey, I would add “very recent” renderings to this list.

Latour suggests that the problem of this confusion of matters of fact with matters of concern is that it has shifted the spirit of critique from persuasion to condescension and has changed the character of critique: once a “most ambiguous *pharmakon*,” critique has been transformed into a “potent euphoric drug” (239). And the act of critical explanation has resulted in descriptions in which “[y]ou [i.e. the critic] are always right!” (239): “[w]hen naive believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, claiming that they are made to do things because of their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that this is nothing but their own projection” (239). And this is true even as “not one of us readers would like to see *our* own most cherished objects treated in this way” (240). For Latour, this version of critique obscures any “real difference” between “conspiracists and a popularized, teachable version of social critique” (228). Instead, writes Latour, there is “something troublingly similar in the structure of [either’s] explanation, in the first movement of disbelief and, then, in the wheeling of causal explanations coming out of the deep dark below” (229). For Latour, it is time to “bring the sword of criticism to criticism itself” (227), to “devise another powerful descriptive tool” designed not to “debunk but to protect and to care,” and to “transform the critical urge in the ethos someone who *adds* reality to matters of fact” rather than “*subtracts*” reality from them, from a deconstructive to a constructive urge.

Glossing Latour, we might say that it is time to call Skeptics Idiots, but we only really know how to call them Heroes. We are in need of a way of reactivating the conservative character of skepticism while also retaining its radical promise against what I would argue was

always skepticism's more natural conservatism.²⁷ Yet, as Polanyi shows, a Skeptical ethos appears reflexively suspicious about such a constructive turn. And Susan Neiman observes in *Moral Clarity* (2009) that, while this allergy may have initially arisen from "humility and moral refinement," it has since resulted in "attitudes that make moral judgments themselves look misguided" (13). In this light, it appears a modern enthusiasm for Skepticism has not only enabled bad forms of skepticism but also undermined our only means of resisting those deformations.

In this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate how a return to the constructive skeptical tradition eclipsed by Humean skepticism can provide sorely needed insight into these contemporary problems with skepticism. My study offers a case for recovering the fideist and commonsense traditions of skepticism that a neo-Kantian preference for Humean skepticism has encouraged critics to ignore or dismiss as dogmatic and incorrigible. I look to these traditions of skepticism to recover the Enlightenment investment in common sense as it tethers, orients, and mitigates the practice of skepticism. I offer a case for dispensing with the disingenuous *topos* of crisis and pursuing a more substantive and sympathetic picture of Anglophone philosophy and, in particular, a more nuanced appreciation of commonsense skepticism. Likewise, where a critical preference for radical skepticism has encouraged viewing the Enlightenment project of attaining moral certainty as misguided or problematic, I accept that this project is fundamentally sound and serious, if in need of constant attention and refinement. Here I follow Neiman's observation that "[t]he fact that a use [of moral language] is careless doesn't make it insignificant." With "careless" Neiman is looking in two directions: not only to the glib manner with which most academics now handle moral language, but also to the problematic, historical articulations of morality that have understandably recommended this pessimism. In "Misreading Skepticism," I pursue a more careful, sympathetic approach to the moral convictions that orient many long eighteenth century thinkers but which scholars have long treated with suspicion under the sign of neo-Kantian critique.

²⁷ I say more natural conservatism because its dismissive posture appeals to a kind of intellectual and moral probity that often aligns with and reinforces the rationality of the institutions that condition it. Polanyi again has the clearest theoretical view of both dimensions: "Since the sceptic does not consider it rational to doubt what he himself believes, the advocacy of 'rational doubt' is merely the sceptic's way of advocating his own beliefs" (297). And this reinforces institutional rationality because "[w]e owe our mental existence predominantly to works of art, morality, religious worship, scientific theory and other articulate systems which we accept as our dwelling place and as the soil of our mental development" (286)

The most important literary-critical payoff of this more sympathetic engagement with this constructive skeptical tradition is the new view it affords of Romantic literature as it responds to this tradition. My readings of Romantic literary texts draw on this revised intellectual history to challenge the specious assumption that Romantics were deeply invested in radical Humean skepticism and to recover the Romantics' obscured and less understood investment in practical rationality. I argue that Romantic literary explorations of uncertainty should not be seen as responding to some anxiety or crisis generated by Humean skepticism. Rather, they should be seen as interrogating the confident, conservative character of Enlightenment skepticism. I demonstrate how Romantic literary works by William Godwin, William Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, and other Romantic authors interrogate the intellectual habits that Enlightenment philosophers recommend to attain practical certainty, often by thematizing and exposing the irreducible elements of subjectivity that these rationalized procedures fail to discipline. Collectively, my readings offer an important corrective to several influential neo-Kantian Romantic literary histories mistakenly premised on the crisis of Humean skepticism.

Summary of the Chapters

My study proceeds in six chapters. The first four chapters are dedicated to correcting the distortions introduced by neo-Kantian intellectual history and neo-Kantian Romanticism. They work at the margins of neo-Kantian intellectual history to develop a revised intellectual history of skepticism centered not on the problematic of “radical uncertainty” but on the problematic of “moral certainty” and to demonstrate how this larger problematic — elevated by the project of “practical rationality” — informs the broader intellectual landscape. The final two chapters then consider Romantic literary practices as they respond to this revised intellectual history and, more specifically, as they interrogate the conservative imperatives of Enlightenment skepticism.

Chapter One, “Thinking Through Neo-Kantian Intellectual History,” offers a more thorough examination of the character of neo-Kantian intellectual history in its various historical phases. Section One, “Neo-Kantian Intellectual History as a Religion,” offers a general framework for thinking about the observational practices of neo-Kantian intellectual history: that is, how and why it observes the crisis of modernity it does. This overview is followed by three historical snapshots of neo-Kantian intellectual history. Section Two, “Neo-Kantian Romanticism,” examines how Romantic literary critics adopted neo-Kantian intellectual history

at the mid-twentieth century. It considers the cultural factors which arguably compelled mid-twentieth century literary critics to conscript neo-Kantian intellectual history in this way and why we should take neo-Kantian Romanticism to say more about mid-twentieth century investments in neo-Kantian intellectual history (and Romanticism's privileged place in it) than it does about British Romanticism's investments in any neo-Kantian project. In short, it argues that literary critics were attracted to the cultural authority of neo-Kantian intellectual history, and pursued neo-Kantian Romanticism as a kind of justification of Romanticism's status as a modern intellectual formation. Section Three, "Hume is the Special Prophet," returns to Leslie Stephen's archetypal neo-Kantian intellectual history, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), for a closer examination of the how neo-Kantian intellectual history achieved its unique shape and prominence at the late nineteenth century. I show how Stephen pursues neo-Kantian intellectual history to elaborate what he saw as the overly narrow disciplinary history of philosophy. And I show how interpreting Stephen's text as a foundational articulation of neo-Kantian intellectual history helps answer longstanding critical question regarding the curious distance between the kind of sociological intellectual history Stephen envisions and the intellectual history he ends up writing.

One of the most questionable aspects of neo-Kantian intellectual history is how its integrity depends, severely, on the accuracy of the Kantian triptych at its origin. The fourth and final section of Chapter One, "Collapsing Kant's Triptych" returns to Kant's *Prolegomena* to consider how credible Kant's description of his own or the Common-Sense response to Hume really is. Whether or not Kant's negotiation was ever properly philosophical enough to warrant embracing it as uncritically as neo-Kantian intellectual history has, Kant's triptych is obviously rhetorical in some sense. Whatever distance Kant tries to create between either Hume or his Common-Sense contemporaries, Kant winds up in more or less the same place as Hume's critics. Kant may take Hume *more* seriously than Reid or Beattie. Kant may work *with* Hume more than he works *against* him. But in the end, Kant still dismisses Hume's threat as only apparent. With this rhetorical character in view, this section tries to redescribe the actual distance between Kant and Reid's responses to Hume. It then considers how Kant's sophisticated rhetorical negotiation of Hume lays the groundwork not only for the observational character of neo-Kantian intellectual history but, more specifically, for neo-Kantian intellectual history's successful stabilization of Skepticism's evidential context.

Chapter Two, “Neo-Kantian Critique Loves a Crisis,” places the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis itself under a more thorough scrutiny. Section One, “Whose Crisis is This?,” considers how neo-Kantian intellectual history has historically read this crisis *into* commonsense hostility towards Hume as a way of dismissing the legitimacy and intelligibility of the commonsense response to Hume. Section Two, “Johnson’s Kick Revisited,” returns to Johnson’s kick to offer a sympathetic description of Johnson’s anti-Skeptical skepticism which locates the source of Johnson’s hostility towards Skepticism *not* in his metaphysical or theological preoccupations but in his investment in constructive skepticism. Section Three, “Two Senses of Irreligious, Revisited,” considers the broader, qualified reception of Hume in the Romantic period. Section Four, “The Real Crisis: Practical Rationality, Constructive Skepticism, and the Problem of Assent,” builds on this analysis of Johnson’s kick to recover the problematic of “moral certainty” that the constructive skeptical project of practical rationality elevates and differentiates it from the crisis of “radical uncertainty” that neo-Kantian intellectual history observes. It shows how the problematic split between fact and value that neo-Kantian intellectual history sees as the final outcome of the Enlightenment project of practical rationality is not the problematic that was at its center. Section Five, “Moral Evidence as ‘The Province of Rhetoric,’” aims to recover the deeply rhetorical and social character of probable knowledge in the Enlightenment. Section Six, “Johnson’s Science,” offers a way of thinking about how Romantic literary authors (specifically the first generation) would have encountered and absorbed this broader project of practical rationality.

Chapter Three, “There Was No Radical Hume,” questions the credibility of the radically skeptical Hume propagated within neo-Kantian intellectual history, and looks to demonstrate the conservative, pragmatic tenor of Anglophone philosophy as a whole by taking Hume’s philosophy as representative of the outermost limit of Enlightenment skepticism and drawing out this conservatism within Hume. Section One, “Neo-Kantian Romanticism Misreads Hume,” considers how neo-Kantian Romanticism has constructed and instrumentalized this radically skeptical Hume in the service of narrating the rise of Romanticism. I correct this distortion of Hume’s philosophy by reviewing the “naturalistic” picture of Hume’s philosophy that has emerged in philosophical treatments of Hume since Martin Kemp Smith’s early, influential polemic against the looming Hume of nineteenth-century neo-Kantian philosophy. Section Two, “Hume Misreading Locke,” tries to capture the extent of Hume’s investment in “moral certainty”

by considering his reaction to what he saw as Locke's insufficient treatment of that category. Section Three, "What Crisis of Analogy?" shows how this radically skeptical Hume has been elaborated to construct neo-Kantian literary history's picture of the eighteenth-century "crisis" or "collapse" of the neo-Platonic divine analogy. I challenge the neo-Kantian account of Hume's skeptical rejection of analogy by observing the central role analogy occupies in Humean probabilism where it functions as the single psychological mechanism uniting Hume's epistemology and ethics. I argue that Hume's critique of analogy is motivated less by his anxiety about analogy than by his *confidence* in the possibility of a formal or normative criteria of analogy, or what I will call Hume's "strong" orientation towards analogy. Section Four, "Commonsense and Critical Analogy in the *Dialogues*," fleshes out Hume's more complicated picture of analogy with a reading of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In this reading, I challenge the tendencies to flatten the dialogue's literary form into a clear-cut argument against analogical arguments from design and to identify Hume's position with the dialogue's Skeptic, Philo. Instead, I consider the skeptical orientations of all three characters in the piece and make the case that Cleanthes, the natural theologian, finally "wins" the dialogue largely because his analogical argument from design simply looks more intuitive and intelligible than either Philo's "strong commonsense" or "strong critical" arguments against it. As a whole, Chapter Three aims to demonstrate how no picture of Hume's philosophy is sufficient unless it appreciates how Hume's naturalistic investments limit his skeptical ones — or, alternatively, how his commonsense investments orient, tether, and constrict his critical ones²⁸.

²⁸I make a methodological decision here not to pursue strong definitions of either "commonsense" or "critical." This will likely seem evasive. But I believe it is justified for a few reasons. First, it responds to the empty or negative character of both terms, which in the eighteenth century seem to operate as what Robert Mitchell has called "variable regulative standards:" not measured against a formal standard but rather "read blindly and negatively through the actions of others" (keynote, *North American Society for the Study of Romanticism*, 2017). There is simply no way of specifying exactly what either term meant; both were experienced viscerally and implicitly. Instead, I believe it is only possible to consider them schematically, as binaries in constant tension. This schematic approach seems more advantageous than inhibiting not least because it helpfully aligns with the more or less schematic and heuristic ways that someone like Hume would have been trained in the philosophical societies of Scotland, where political, historical, and philosophical questions would have been posed in terms of simple binaries (e.g. superstition or enthusiasm, wit and genius, self-interest and disinterest) which one could analyze and elaborate into viable generalities that could measure the space between the binaries or illuminate each concept in turn or perform a synchronic analysis of co-existence in the world. Or in which different prevailing "tendencies" could be analyzed diachronically, traced backwards or forwards through the genre of conjectural history in a procedure that Devin Griffiths has recently identified as the rhetorical tradition of *comparativo* that has since evolved into the modern comparative method. The most important thing to bear in mind is that these have much different connotations than today (see "The Comparative Method and the History of the Humanities", forthcoming).

With the terms "commonsense" and "critical" I am aiming to develop analytic tools that recover what I take to be the marked nature of the critical in the period, where it potentially lacks the esteem that we have afforded it as

Chapter Four, “Making (Common) Sense of Analogy,” situates Hume’s thinking about analogy within a broader Enlightenment program devoted to determining the “scope” and “force” of analogy and distinguishing privileged from problematic uses of analogical reasoning.²⁹ The chapter proceeds in eight sections that aim to construct a more variegated and complex picture of analogy in the long eighteenth century than the one offered by neo-Kantian Romanticism. Section One, “Bad Analogies,” introduces an original analytic schema meant to capture the two major orientations towards this critical program: a “strong” orientation, which remains optimistic about the discovery of normative criteria that might distinguish good and bad analogies, and a “weak” orientation, which remains skeptical and dismissive of this critical program. Section Two, “Weak Analogy in *Tristram Shandy*,” diagnoses the central problem of neo-Kantian Romantic approaches to analogy as an underappreciation of the critical force of what I will call a “weak” orientation towards analogy in the long eighteenth century. Section Three, “Commonsense and Critical Orientations,” develops the original analytic along a second axis that distinguishes between “commonsense” and “critical” orientations. A “commonsense” orientation anticipates the “rule” of analogy to be more intuitive than counterintuitive — that is, more continuous than discontinuous with commonsense — while a “critical orientation” anticipates that rule to be more counterintuitive than intuitive, more a matter of expert critical judgment. Section Four, “Disciplining Playfair’s Analogy,” pursues a finer definition between different “weak” orientations available in the period. Section Five, “Analogy as Presumption: The Lawrence-Abernethy Debate,” draws on a case study from Romantic science to consider a unique rhetorical strategy of “analogy-as-presumption” that emerges out of the weak orientation but which is increasingly disciplined out by the strong critical orientations that emerge in the early nineteenth century scientific practice. Section Six, “Rhetoric and Psychology,” tries to clarify how a “psychological” account of analogy preferred by the strong orientation gradually displaces and reconfigures the “rhetorical” account of analogy preferred by the weak perspective. Section Seven, “Common Sense, For and Against Analogy,” examines the Scottish Common-

a result of our more general preference for intellectual originality rather than normality. This preference for originality is itself statistical, thought to be a matter of a resourceful and ever active empiricism. In short, common sense would have had the upper hand due to a deeper investment in what Dror Wharman calls identity-as-identity, or a “collective grouping highlighting whatever a person has in common with others” (276).

²⁹I have chosen here not to pursue or promote any specific definition of *analogy* here, but rather to focus on historical attempts to “formalize” analogy and, more importantly, varying historical estimations of the viability or fruitfulness of the project of formalizing analogy.

Sense critique of analogy initiated by Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart. And Section Eight, “Analogy-as-Assent in Associationist Aesthetics,” looks at how this broader context informs approaches to analogy within associationist aesthetics, where a psychological account of analogy leads critics to pursue analogy as a potential site for observing a universal commonsense anticipated and projected by Scottish commonsense philosophy.

In Chapter Five, “Romantic Analogy Reconsidered,” I turn to consider the uptake of this Enlightenment discourse of analogy within Romantic poetic practice. In general, I try to demonstrate how Romantic poetics can be seen as developing rather than rejecting the tenets of associationist aesthetics, especially as they center around the perception and articulation of analogies as sites of communal assent. To establish the grounds for this reading, I revisit a central piece of evidence for the Romantic break with associationist aesthetics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1802 letter to William Sotheby, and develop an alternative account of its significance. I then turn to consider Wordsworth’s specific engagement with associationist aesthetics in both his poetic theory and practice. I argue that, whereas Wordsworth seems to hew closely to the tenets of associationist aesthetics in his poetic theory – especially its emphasis on general over particular associations – in his poetry practice seems to thematize the kinds of error of idiosyncratic perception that aesthetics discourages and elevates them as special sites for observing the imagination. And I explore the effects of this interest in visual analogies in two poems, “Resolution and Independence” and “The Thorn.”

The sixth and final chapter, “Disciplines of Doubt,” considers engagements with eighteenth-century legal epistemology in three Romantic literary works: Wordsworth’s *The Borderers*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and William Godwin’s *Things as They Are: Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. In my reading of *The Borderers*, “Staging Risk in the Borderers,” I propose a new way of thinking about what William Jewett has described as the drama’s “master plot of ‘strange repetition’” (Jewett 82) as a kind of procedural and experimental rationalism. In “Victor’s Reasonable Doubt,” I focus on the novel’s engagement with the concept of circumstantial evidence in the early trial scene and consider the difficult relation between Victor Frankenstein’s cold, constructive skepticism and his hotter but suppressed psychological turmoil. And in “Caleb’s Unreasonable Doubt,” I focus on the relation of doubt and desire in *Caleb Williams* and argue that the novel’s interest in doubt should be read in dialogue with adoption of the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard within eighteenth-century legal epistemology. I

consider how the novel insists on the ways desire conditions doubt and how that insistence subverts the claims to “disinterestedness” and “reasonableness” that recommend “reasonable doubt” as a legitimate and adequate response to the risks posed by judgment under uncertainty. Chapter Six ends with a brief coda that draws on this reading of *Caleb Williams* to gesture towards a concept of “Romantic doubt.” The dissertation concludes with a more general, if also brief, reflection on ways to think beyond neo-Kantian Romanticism.

CHAPTER ONE

Thinking Through Neo-Kantian Intellectual History

1.1 Neo-Kantian Intellectual History as a Religion

In my introduction, I claim that subscribers to neo-Kantian intellectual history regard it as the “best” way to view modernity in three senses: best in the empirical sense of “most legible,” best in an intensive sense of “most essential,” and best in a moral sense of “most elevating and inspiring.” In this section, I elaborate on this claim, and I want to begin by proposing that neo-Kantian intellectual history amounts to a quasi-theological practice in the way it vigilantly observes the modern break to memorialize and clarify its nature. This quasi-theological view captures the doctrinal stability that the first two empirical and intensive senses of best establish. More importantly, this quasi-theological view helps visualize how the third (and, from my perspective, most interesting) moral sense of best emerges diachronically. As we shall see, for Kant, epistemology is importantly *not* moral or practical, but philosophical (Of course, this is because for Kant moral certainty was never in doubt). But, as Lorraine Daston notes, by the early nineteenth-century, “epistemological belief” acquired a “moral aura” of its own (“Scientific Error” 24) centered on the intellectual probity of Skepticism as a practice. Thus, for someone like Carlyle, Skepticism is a matter of manly composure, precisely the kind of composure Johnson — almost inexplicably — seems to lose in the face of it. This moral aura grows so that, by the mid-twentieth century, if not well before, neo-Kantian intellectual history achieves the status of a kind of modern religion, especially in its strongest and most compulsory forms. Reciting it is perceived as fundamentally orienting, unifying, and fulfilling: it offers a central story which clarifies the modern condition as a condition of disenchantment, disillusionment, and dissolution. It sets the project of modernity to be coping with and embracing this newly modern condition of crisis and, most notably, resisting older metaphysical ways out of it.

Indeed, many scholars have already noted neo-Kantian intellectual history’s quasi-theological character and diagnosed some of its major problems, and it will be helpful to review

some of these findings since they establish the basis of my revised intellectual history. Polanyi, Daston, and others, for instance, have identified one of its central dogmas to be what Polanyi describes as the “doctrine of doubt” and Daston as an “ur-belief” that “it is both possible and desirable to believe only what one wills to believe, and that the will to believe can be compelled by reason” (“Scientific Error” 24). For Polanyi, the problem with this dogma is that its rationalism is so naively overconfident that it is finally disingenuous: Polanyi writes, “[N]o proclamation of intellectual integrity could be more sincere,” but “its words are devoid of any definite meaning, and their ambiguity conceals precisely the kind of personal convictions which they so loudly repudiate” (*Personal Knowledge* 269). Whatever its intent of this *ethos* of radical doubt, the final effect is mystification. Again, Polanyi: “to claim that you strictly refrain from believing anything that could be disproved is merely to cloak your own will to believe your beliefs behind a false pretense of self-critical severity” (271).

For Polanyi, the uncritical adoption of this doctrine of doubt — bound up in the modern idea of “objectivism” — has erased what Polanyi calls the “fiduciary stance” — or set of unquestioned, background commitments that undergird any modern intellectual practice: as such, it has “totally falsified our conception of truth, by exalting what we can know and prove, while covering up with ambiguous utterances all that we know and *cannot* prove, even though the latter knowledge underlies, and must ultimately set its seal to, all that we *can* prove” (286). In his analysis of neo-Kantian critique in *The Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974), Wayne Booth provides a complementary account of this falsification. Booth describes a second, “modern dogma” that installs the misleading distinction between objective facts and subjective values. Under the sway of this dogma, “values” are doomed to appear problematic, irrational enough to be incorrigible, beyond argumentation or persuasion, and simply a matter of commitment. “Facts,” in contrast, emerge as privileged, self-evident and rational enough to be *uncontroversial* and beyond persuasion because they are more empirical proof or simple perception than argumentation.³⁰ For Booth, the problem with this distinction is that it mischaracterizes the nature of “rationality,” which is not adequately described as the “surrender

³⁰ See *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) for Booth’s fullest and first articulation of this thesis. Booth’s original study dates itself by being too occasional (written in response to a specific controversy at the University of Chicago) but nonetheless offers a prescient treatment of many contemporary issues concerning, for instance, reactions to conservative speakers on campus. For a more recent, condensed account, see “Blind Skepticism versus a Rhetoric of Assent.” *College English* 67.4 (2005): 378-88.

only to hard empirical proof.” Against this mischaracterization, Booth insists that “[r]easonable rhetoric is...what we all depend on — the empirically unprovable but ‘unquestionable assumptions’ in every corner of our lives” (“Blind Skepticism” 381). Booth’s objection amounts to something like Latour’s distinction between matters of fact and matters of concern.

Polanyi and Booth offer critiques of these two dogmas of neo-Kantian intellectual history at the level of theory: for Polanyi and Booth, the problem with these dogmas is that they misdescribe the nature of belief and argumentation. In the next chapter, I will pursue something like a critique of these neo-Kantian dogmas at the level of historical description. I will argue that they are not the dogmas that would have oriented the long eighteenth-century practice of epistemology. The neo-Kantian doctrine of radical doubt may have developed out of the earlier Enlightenment program of critical intellectual reform, but eighteenth-century thinkers would have been more focused on procedural principle of “reasonable doubt” and would have stressed the importance of acquiescing to a belief once all doubts had been resolved. Likewise, though the neo-Kantian distinction between fact and value arguably emerges as an effect of epistemology over the *longue durée*, it would not have been the distinction that Enlightenment epistemologists observed. Rather, that distinction would have been between “moral” and “demonstrative” knowledge and the kinds of certainty they afforded.

Of course, a theological picture of epistemology has its obvious limits.³¹ But it is still worth pursuing a quasi-theological account of neo-Kantian intellectual history because, as Polanyi and Booth’s wry appeals to religious language suggest, there is something distinctly ironic about the disparity between the practice of neo-Kantian intellectual history and its self-descriptions of that practice, between its claim to reject metaphysics and its actual practice, which this theological description succinctly captures. These ironies are on clear display in the mid-twentieth century, when neo-Kantian intellectual history achieves its fullest theological

³¹ Daston offers an important account of the differences between an epistemological and religious orientation: “The ethos of belief preached by epistemology may occasionally borrow the vocabulary and timbre of religion, but it springs from fundamentally different impulses. To grant belief to claims, theories, and propositions does not resemble a state of religious conviction, even though both may command the full investment of the self. The one seeks at all costs to avoid credulity, the other incredulity, but even this opposition does not fully capture the distinction. Epistemological belief — and still more principled disbelief — is willed and cultivated; on this account, assent is freely granted by an autonomous cognitive agent who bears responsibility for this decision. In contrast, religious faith is a gift, freely endowed but not willed” (“Scientific Error” 23).

status and the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis essentially *unites* its professors around a shared vision of modern society's dissolution and fragmentation.

Despite its claim to have dispelled with metaphysics, neo-Kantian intellectual history functions in a way that is hard to distinguish from metaphysics. It offers a strong, committed description of the way things *really* are. Neo-Kantian intellectual history has this metaphysical character because metaphysics, like skepticism, is less a matter of content than a matter of form: less a worldview itself than an enthusiastic embrace of or strong disposition towards a preferred worldview at the exclusion of others. While claiming to be defined by the spirit of Skepticism, neo-Kantian intellectual history adopts a fairly uncritical posture towards the authority of its own critical descriptions (especially its description of Skepticism). But, as Polanyi notes, its Skeptical impulse — its radical *ethos* of doubt — must assume “a much *stronger* will to believe than the usual beliefs of a person discharging no judicial responsibility” (*Personal Knowledge* 279). Or, as William James puts it, Skepticism is itself volitional, not “avoidance of option” but “option of a certain particular kind of risk:” “*Better risk loss of truth than chance of error* — that is your faith-vetoer's exact position” (James 344).

Neo-Kantian intellectual history obscures its metaphysical character by framing the discovery of neo-Kantian epistemology as a “subtraction story.”³² Neo-Kantian intellectual history offers a subtraction story in which the rise of epistemology is viewed not only as a modern historical innovation but as a kind of transhistorical discovery. Kant's response to Hume's epistemological skepticism is understood to initiate a special inquiry into the *transhistorical* conditions which make knowledge possible. Neo-Kantian epistemology provides the philosophical terms that allow the dismissal of theological and metaphysical preoccupations to seem more uncontroversial than controversial: a matter of intellectual duty and necessity

³²Here I am following Charles Taylor's influential analysis of the logic of secular humanist narratives in *A Secular Age* (2007). For Taylor, these narratives frame the rise of secular humanism as a process of “subtraction:” a progressive abandonment of inauthentic metaphysical commitments and the gradual discovery of an authentic account of the human condition. On Taylor's account, his rhetoric of subtraction encourages viewing secular humanism not only as a distinct historical or political formation but also as a *transhistorical*, natural description of the human condition. For Taylor, framing the rise of secular humanism as subtractive in this way allows portraying the rise of secular humanism in distinctly progressive and developmental terms. The secular humanist worldview is privileged because it is immanent rather than transcendent, uncommitted rather than creedal, natural rather than metaphysical, and finally, more mature than naive. These progressive contradistinctions also license a dismissive posture towards religious modes since, from within this subtraction story, creedal and metaphysical commitments or any sincere investment in transcendence appear naive, if not dishonest or delusional: relics of a more primitive and premodern way of thinking. For Taylor's description of “subtraction stories,” see *A Secular Age* (Belknap, 2007), especially 26-29, 569-79.

rather than creedal choice. And this “subtractive logic” itself arguably emerges from what Polanyi describes as the neo-Kantian’s “sustained effort to eliminate” all “psychological elements” (*Personal Knowledge* 258) on the conviction that the “uprooting of all voluntary components of belief will leave behind unassailed a residue of knowledge that is completely determined by the objective evidence” (269). Here again we see the improbable alignment of historical and theoretical factors that account for the potency of the neo-Kantian abstract machine.

If neo-Kantian intellectual history is a modern faith, it is a modern faith temperamentally inclined to accuse others of bad faith, all while looking conspicuously guilty of bad faith itself because of the dogmatic and uncritical way it appears to embrace its own convictions. As Rita Felski recently notes, critique “does not tolerate rivals” because it “insists that those who do not embrace its tenets must be denying or disavowing them” (“Critique” np) rather than simply disagreeing with them. In response, critique deploys a “posture of detachment” (np) — an unwillingness to engage its rivals seriously on their terms, because these terms are taken to be obviously problematic, untenable, incorrigible, and therefore illegitimate. In his recent analysis of Nietzschean critique, Simon During suggests that what distinguishes critique is that it “separates itself from rhetoric:” “[Critique] gives up, (ostensibly, at least) on its effort to *persuade*” (During 74). Its “habitual pose is an elevated one in which, as we might put it, skepticism, denunciation, and prophecy” (75) co-exist. I would argue that it is less that neo-Kantian critique has no rhetorical strategy, but that its strategy is to treat its rivals as beyond persuasion or even comprehension. We might see this as the difference between Johnson and Carlyle’s laughter. Johnson’s kick seems still firmly committed to the persuasive power of wit: Johnson hopes that his critics will laugh *with* him *at* Berkeley. Carlyle laughs *at* Johnson’s anti-Skeptical reaction.

To examine this difference, we can return for another look at Carlyle’s dismissal of Johnson and note that Carlyle has to impose an intellectual threat on Johnson, to read Johnson’s hostility as a defensive reaction. But Carlyle goes a step further, and also judges Johnson’s defensiveness-cum-hostility towards Hume to be utterly *unwarranted*, misplaced enough to be embarrassing. This is because Carlyle finally seems to believe Humean Skepticism to be *uncontroversial* in nature — momentous or significant because, in retrospect, so incredibly self-evident. From Carlyle’s perspective, there is no way to comprehend Hume’s Skeptical

philosophy and still find it controversial or threatening. For Carlyle, to see Hume's Skepticism as threatening and controversial is to *misunderstand* it. To see something threatening in Skepticism is somehow, paradoxically, to "see nothing" in it. It is as if, for Carlyle, Johnson's overreaction amounts to no reaction at all.

This strange neo-Kantian logic becomes more clear in Kant's comical treatment of Hume's commonsense critics in the *Prolegomena*. Here is Kant commenting on Hume's contemporary reception:

It is positively painful to see how utterly his opponents, Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and lastly Priestley, missed the point of the problem. For while they were taking for granted that which he doubted, and demonstrating with zeal and often with impudence that which he never thought of doubting, they so misconstrued his valuable suggestion that everything remained in its old condition, as if nothing had happened. (Kant 4)

We will want to focus on Kant's distinction between what Hume "doubted" and what Hume "never thought of doubting" at the center of this comedy of misdirection. Here is how Kant glosses this distinction:

The question was not whether the concept of cause was right, useful, and even indispensable for our knowledge of nature; but whether that concept could be thought by reason *a priori*, and consequently whether it possessed an inner truth, independent of all experience, implying a more widely extended usefulness, not limited merely to objects of experience. This was Hume's problem. It was a question concerning the *origin* of the concept, not concerning its indispensability in use. Were the former decided, the conditions of its use and the sphere of its valid application would have been determined as a matter of course. (4)

Kant understands the Common-Sense error to turn on a distinction between *a priori* and *a justification of the concept* of cause. And he understands this distinction loosely as one between what Kant calls "pure" and "practical" justification but what I will eventually want to call "epistemological" and "moral" justification. *Moral* here has the older, now somewhat archaic epistemic sense of "right, useful, and even indispensable" knowledge gathered from "experience." It is knowledge gained through intercourse with the world, from being in and empirically observing the world: for instance, knowledge of what Hume calls the "course of nature," or of moral duty, of other people's behavior, of history.

It's worth noting, in anticipation of my revised intellectual history, that Kant is observing the distinction between demonstrative and moral knowledge, not one between subject or object,

or fact or value. And he is observing it in a way that clarifies his thorough conservatism. From Kant's perspective, Hume never doubts the *moral certainty* of causation: that is, the reasonableness and necessity of having a practical or moral faith in the "indispensability" of causation. Rather, for Kant, what Hume doubts is whether the necessity of causation may be grounded at a deeper *epistemological* level than this practical, experiential one: that is, whether causation has an "inner truth" or *a priori* claims to a "more widely extended usefulness" than its evident everyday usefulness. And, for Kant, while this deeper epistemological question promises to completely determine the moral sphere, it is also in some sense entirely disconnected with and immaterial to the practical sphere.

The mistake Hume's Anglophone critics make, as Kant sees it, is that they illegitimately import what would otherwise be legitimate moral convictions about the practical value of causation (as acquired from experience) into the *philosophical* realm — which is to say, the epistemological realm. Put another way, Hume's critics pursue a moral defense of the practical value of causation which, from Kant's perspective, is entirely inappropriate and unnecessary in the given epistemological context. Kant takes Hume to have "demonstrated irrefutably that it was entirely impossible for reason to think *a priori* and by means of concepts such a combination as involves necessity [in the causal sense]" (3). But again, for Kant, this demonstration only speaks to an impossibility of a theoretical concept of necessary causation; it says nothing about the legitimacy — not to mention the necessity — of moral certainty in causation. The appeal that Hume's critics make to "common sense," however valid in the context of moral or practical knowledge, has no philosophical currency. For Kant, this appeal comes off as "defiant without any insight." It is dogmatic, confused, and ultimately pointless: dogmatic because common sense seems to function as oracular truth rather than rational justification; confused because ultimately Kant takes Hume's critics to be misidentifying their practical, moral conviction in causation as grounded in (and thus evidence of) something deeper than warranted; but finally pointless because, just as Kant takes a practical faith in causation to be uncontroversial, he also takes Hume's insight to be finally *uncontroversial*, only an *apparent* crisis when misunderstood.

In short, for Kant, Hume's insight should look intellectually threatening — not least, because it threatens to diminish the power of Reason — but not morally threatening. But Hume's critics get these signals crossed. This is why Kant cringes at the "positively painful" sight of Hume's critics. Their confusion — and the hostile, half-baked response their confusion generates

— is more embarrassing than anything. The fact that Hume’s critics even take Hume’s insight to be morally controversial testifies to their inability to grasp this elementary distinction between moral and epistemological considerations. Their overreaction is finally no philosophical reaction: as Kant says, “they so misconstrued his valuable suggestion that everything remained in its old condition, as if nothing had happened” (4). “As if nothing happened:” their overreaction amounts to no reaction at all.

Kant’s reading of Hume’s contemporaries helps illuminate Carlyle’s remark that “[p]itiable it is, no doubt, that a Samuel Johnson must confute Hume’s irreligious Philosophy by some ‘story from a Clergy-man of the Bishoprick of Durham’” (155). Carlyle’s dominant affective response, like Kant’s, is condescension and pity. And, viewed in light of Kant’s negotiation, Carlyle seems to be deftly capitalizing on a double sense of *irreligious* to make the same point Kant does regarding the distinction between epistemological and moral concerns. Of course, “irreligious” is generally taken in the sense of being explicitly hostile to religion or “without regard” to religion. But it can also be taken as in the more neutral sense of “having no reference to religion” at all.

To be sure, Carlyle would have regarded Hume’s philosophy to be *irreligious* in the hostile sense insofar as Carlyle accepted Hume’s general outlook to be anti-dogmatic, of a piece with Voltaire’s.³³ However, one of these effects of neo-Kantian history is to cultivate the second, neutral sense of *irreligious* around epistemology. This semantic play between these two senses will be important for understanding the neo-Kantian process of “differentiation” that Casanova analyzes. Following Kant’s insistence on the philosophical nature of Skepticism, it seems warranted to suggest that Carlyle is commenting more subtly on how Johnson’s theological preoccupations encourage him to interpret Hume’s philosophy as *irreligious* in the *first* hostile sense (prompting Johnson to respond in kind with hostility) when, in fact, Johnson should see that Hume’s philosophy is finally *irreligious* in the *second* sense: or, maybe better, Johnson should see that Hume’s philosophy comes by this hostile sense honestly and uncontroversially, so to speak, *through* the second neutral sense. In other words, this neutral sense shows Taylor’s

³³This seems to be Hume’s preferred reading as well: “If my philosophy, therefore, makes no addition to the arguments of religion, I have at least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but that every thing remains precisely as before” (*Treatise* 164). Of course, many attempt to read this qualification as feigned. But I think of it as ground honestly conceded. Of course, this is a contentious claim. For a reading of the hostilely *irreligious* nature of the *Treatise*, see Russell, *The Riddle of Hume’s Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*.

rhetoric of “subtraction” hard at work. Johnson’s appeal to the authority of a local clergyman does not simply reflect Johnson’s intellectual slavishness or his parochial, outmoded evidentiary practices. It signifies that Johnson has mistaken what is properly an epistemological problem for a moral or theological one. For Carlyle, Johnson’s appeal to a theological or moral authority simply has no philosophical sanction. Johnson’s moral preoccupations blind him to the neutral philosophical character of Hume’s philosophy; they cause him to react to Hume in an inappropriate and even embarrassing manner. For Carlyle, if Johnson had properly understood Hume, he would have seen that Hume presents no threat. Johnson’s hostile response thus indicates that Johnson simply lacks a legitimate or coherent framework for understanding Hume. Again, this is why Johnson’s response is “pitiable” more than anything. Johnson sees controversy where there should be none, and it puts him on the wrong side of History.

The logic of Kant and Carlyle’s readings could be compressed in the following manner. Hostile responses to Hume are illegitimate finally because they are simply confused. We know that these responses are confused because they are hostile where they should not be or, in Kant’s case, alarmed for the wrong reasons. Hostile responses come from within a preoccupied moral or theological perspective, where Hume’s philosophy still seems controversial and threatening, and not from within an epistemological perspective, where Hume’s insights will seem quite obvious, even banal. In this way, hostile reactions to Hume involve a kind of category error.

Diagnosing this hostility as an intellectual error is ostensibly a sympathetic reading — for instance, it is more plausible than Carlyle’s portrait of Johnson’s sheer envy — but it is also condescending and ungenerous in its way. It is doubtful that any of Hume’s commonsense critics would own that they felt threatened by Hume on intellectual grounds, or that they failed to catch the drift of his argument. The neo-Kantian perspective simply struggles to entertain the legitimacy of a commonsense rejection of Hume. It cannot read commonsense hostility as evidence that Hume’s Skepticism might indeed be less significant than neo-Kantian intellectual history assumes: or that there might be a legitimate, coherent commonsense skeptical case to be made against Skepticism. Instead, a neo-Kantian perspective is more inclined to invoke the *topos* of crisis to dismiss this anti-Skeptical perspective. Neo-Kantian intellectual history tends to interpret this hostility not only as a sign of *incomprehension* of Skepticism, but also to interpret the hostility itself as *incomprehensible* under the sign of Skepticism. More strikingly and incredibly, a neo-Kantian perspective can interpret this mutual incomprehension as even *stronger*

evidence of Hume's profound historical significance and impact. Hostility towards Hume reads like a riddle whose answer is modernity.

"The attempted answers [to Hume] are a sufficient proof that even the leaders of opinion were impenetrable to his logic" (Stephen 1), writes Leslie Stephen in his influential neo-Kantian intellectual history, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876):

Johnson thought that Hume's speculations were a case of 'milking the bull' — that is to say, of a morbid love of change involving a preference of new error to old truth — and imagined that he had been confuted by Beattie... If Hume impressed men of mark [e.g. Johnson and Warburton] so slightly, we are tempted to doubt whether he can have affected the main current of thought. Yet, as we study the remarkable change in the whole tone and substance of our literature which synchronized with the appearance of Hume's writings, it is difficult to resist the impression that there is some causal relation. A cold blast of scepticism seems to have chilled the very marrow of speculative activity. Men have lost their interest in the deepest problems, or write as though paralysed by a half-suppressed consciousness of the presence of a great doubter. (1-2)

The trouble with these ambitious claims is that Stephen has almost no direct evidence for them. But this absence, quite improbably, becomes *more* evidence of Hume's influence, which is "more obscure because chiefly negative." In light of this conspicuous absence of evidence, it is clear that Hume must have "produced in many minds a languid scepticism which cared little for utterance, and might see, without proclaiming, the futility of Warburton's insolence or Johnson's dogmatic contempt" (2). For Stephen, it is "as if they felt what Hume saw, or perceived implicitly and obscurely what he brought out with the most explicit lucidity" (2). Observing Hume's profound, obscure, negative, and conspicuously unverified influence, Stephen asks:

What is the real nature of this process? How is it that a tacit intellectual co-operation is established between minds placed far apart in the scale of culture and natural acuteness? How is it that the thought of the intellectual leaders is obscurely reflected by so many darkened mirrors, even when we are unable to point to any direct and overt means of transmission? How far may we believe in the apparent unity of that shifting chaos of speculations of more or less independent thinkers, which forms what we vaguely describe as public opinion, or the spirit of the age? (2)

Neo-Kantian intellectual history is, in one sense, one long effort to settle these persistent and worthwhile questions about cultural and intellectual processes. And, analyzed from without, neo-Kantian intellectual history offers suggestive answers about them: its success in creating a unified picture of modernity and achieving a cultural hegemony centered around epistemology is

simply staggering and unprecedented. Its sheer force as a generator of cultural capital, as a self-organizing and self-reinforcing intellectual cultural system — at least up through the mid-twentieth century — is stunning. But the trouble is that, from within, neo-Kantian intellectual history asks these momentous questions in the narrowest of ways, about the wider cultural impact of Humean Skepticism, which it already takes for granted as an intellectualist reflex. It must premise Hume’s profound influence before it can interrogate its effects, despite a conspicuous absence of warrant for doing so. In some sense, the only thing driving Stephen’s account of Hume’s historical and cultural significance is Stephen’s conviction of Hume’s historical and cultural significance — which is to say, of the philosophical significance of Humean Skepticism. Stephen does not ask *whether* “the thought of intellectual leaders is obscurely reflected by so many darkened mirrors,” or how we could detect this “even when we are unable to point to any direct and overt means of transmission” (2), but *how* it does so: he wants to know the “real nature of this process.” He already accepts the reality of the phenomenon.³⁴

1.2 The Great Endeavor: Mid-Twentieth Century Neo-Kantian Romanticism

In his 1963 essay, “Romanticism Re-Examined,” Rene Wellek offers a picture of a broad consensus emerging across the field of Romantic literary studies at the mid-twentieth century. Wellek observes a “growing area of agreement and even convergence among the definitions or, more modestly, descriptions of Romanticism as they have been attempted by responsible scholars in recent decades in several countries” (112). Wellek’s picture of a field united around a shared, stable definition of Romanticism was intended to rebut critics of the previous generation who, following A.O. Lovejoy, had become skeptical about arriving at any definitive account of Romanticism and, more basically, pessimistic about the intelligibility of Romanticism as either a stable theoretical or historical concept. Lovejoy had argued that “the ‘Romanticism’ of one country may have little in common with that of another” and, likewise, “the romantic ideas were

³⁴ Reinhart Koselleck’s insight about the relation of critique and crisis in the eighteenth century remains instructive for understanding this strange relation. Koselleck discovers this strange relation itself by observing the curious fact that, in all the Utopian critique of Enlightenment, the one truly looming political crisis, the French Revolution, remained unmentioned on. And it is on the basis of this conspicuous silence, that Koselleck argues that “the critical process of enlightenment conjured up” the crisis at the center of the [Utopian] critique it practiced” in the same measure that “the political significance” of the true “looming” political crisis of the period, the French Revolution, “remained hidden from it” (9). From Koselleck’s perspective, critique may love to observe a crisis, and crisis certainly exists, but critical attempts to describe any crisis will also risk *misreading* or displacing it in some manner.

in large part heterogeneous, logically independent, and sometimes essentially antithetic to one another in their implications” (Lovejoy 261). From Wellek’s perspective, Lovejoy’s skeptical critique had encouraged an increasingly negative and even “despairing, nihilistic” picture of Romanticism as fundamentally incoherent, dynamic rather than static, disordered rather than ordered. As his charged phrase “responsible scholars” suggests, Wellek found this negative picture of Romanticism to be fundamentally irresponsible, both critically and philosophically, and in need of correction.

Wellek had already contested Lovejoy’s thesis more than a decade before, and “Romanticism Re-examined” constitutes Wellek’s redoubled effort to gather more conclusive evidence in support of the concept of Romanticism he lays out in his earlier essay, “The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History” (1949). For Wellek, this concept of Romanticism resided, first, in a shared “set of norms” based in “similar or analogous concepts of the imagination, nature, symbol, and myth” (109). From Wellek’s perspective, his comprehensive 1963 survey revealed that his definition of Romanticism was being independently corroborated and confirmed across studies “diverse in method and emphasis” (132). Responding directly to Lovejoy’s doubts about the conflicting “implications” of romantic concepts, Wellek writes:

In all of these studies, however diverse in method and emphasis, a convincing agreement has been reached: they all see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. (132)

Wellek closes his essay with a final enthusiastic note, where he offers another iteration of his thesis:

I dislike being called ‘the champion of the concept of a pan-European Romanticism.’ I would not be understood as minimizing or ignoring national differences or forgetting that great artists have created something unique and individual. Still, I hope to have shown that in recent decades a stabilization of opinion has been achieved. One could even say (if we did not suspect the word so much) that progress has been made not only in defining the common features of romanticism but in bringing out what is its peculiarity or even its essence and nature: that attempt, apparently doomed to failure and abandoned in our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness by poetry which is ‘the first and last of all knowledge.’ (132)

The picture of Romanticism Wellek presents as uniting mid-century Romantic studies constitutes what I have been calling a neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism. Again, according to this

interpretation, Romanticism is defined by its characteristic turn to “imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature.” Perhaps more importantly, that turn is read primarily as a therapeutic response to a series of interrelated crises or breaks that define modernity. This view is “neo-Kantian” because of the way it situates Romanticism within a constellation of therapeutic responses taken to be directly inspired by or simply loosely aligned with Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in philosophy. In this sense, as we have already seen with Pulos, Romanticism is taken to be one response among many parallel responses to the same basic crisis. As Wellek writes, Romanticism is a “*part* of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious” (my emphasis, 221). While this interpretation situates Romanticism within a field of responses, it also distinguishes Romanticism as a distinct and special kind of response: poetic rather than philosophical or, perhaps better, a philosophical response that was characteristically poetic. Wellek’s final description of Romanticism’s “peculiarity” or essence can thus be read in two directions: from one view, Romanticism participates in the peculiarly modern philosophical project of crisis and reconciliation: in other words, the essence of Romanticism resides somewhere in the “attempt” at reconciliation itself: its participation in the “great endeavor” makes Romanticism an essentially modern formation. Yet, from another view, Romanticism also explores a peculiar response to this peculiarly modern crisis: taken at this closer angle, Romanticism’s peculiarity lies in its attempt to reconcile these crises “by poetry... ‘the first and last of all knowledge’” (221-222). Taking both senses together, Romanticism is a special (read: poetic) means to a special (read: modern) end.

Fifty years on, it is evident that Wellek’s confidence in the stability of this neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism was in some sense wildly misplaced. For practical as much as philosophical reasons, the contemporary pictures of Romanticism — much less the field of Romantic study — is far from unified, and much more closely resembles that offered by Lovejoy and his fellow pessimists. There is not simply a general skepticism regarding the possibility of a unified picture of Romanticism or of a unified field of Romantic studies. There is a general suspicion about the very enterprise of unification itself and, therefore, a lack of enthusiasm to pursue it.³⁵ From the current critical perspective, there can be no Romanticism, only

³⁵ In *Local Transcendence* (2008), Alan Liu observes that one of the major features of New Historicism was to substitute the kind of “methodical *narratio* or presentation of facts in the history of ideas” pursued by mid-century critics like Abrams for a “bricolage” of *exordium* and *digressio*” (30). And this stylistic shift is arguably responsible

romanticisms.³⁶ To suggest otherwise reflects, at best, an untutored naiveté or, at worst, a kind of retrogressive nostalgia.

Of course, this is not to say that there is no longer any appreciation for this neo-Kantian view or how it shaped the modern landscape of Romantic literary criticism from the mid-century on. Indeed, one of the latest and most sophisticated elaborations of this neo-Kantian interpretation, M.H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* (1973), is arguably still regarded as the single most important contribution to modern Romantic literary studies and continues to be discussed productively. And Charles Taylor's recent, surprising resuscitation of Earl Wasserman's *The Subtler Language in A Secular Age* (2007) also demonstrates a continued appreciation for this mid-century neo-Kantian perspective beyond the field of literary studies. It would not be a stretch to say that the prestige Romantic literary studies have enjoyed both within the broader field of literary studies and beyond since the mid-twentieth century is largely based on the perceived achievements of this mid-twentieth century current of neo-Kantianism.

Yet, despite this continued and widespread reverence for these achievements, the contemporary critical assessment of this mid-century neo-Kantian interpretation of Romanticism is decidedly qualified. Any appreciation for it seems contingent upon establishing a comfortable critical and historical distance from its narrow, canonical vision of Romanticism, and the enthusiasm with which it was constructed. Likewise, any contemporary recovery of its merits must occur on updated post-structuralist terms, which would likely be unrecognizable and even suspect to its practitioners. To be sure, in the current post-structuralist critical milieu, this mid-century constellation is more likely to suffer from neglect than mishandling. But when this mid-century constellation is engaged, it is viewed largely through the trenchant critiques of its approach offered by New Historicism and deconstructionism. These two defining post-structuralist movements, at odds in so many other ways, were essentially united in their mutual rejection of the preceding era of criticism. And, in retrospect, they were remarkably successful in

for the persistence of this older mid-century *narratio*. In any case, I believe the persistence of neo-Kantian Romanticism is more about inertia than active preservation. Contemporary attempts at such master narratives — those, for instance, offered recently by William Warner and Clifford Siskin — have substituted history of ideas with histories of mediations — technologies in the form of intellectual and material networks. From these Latourian perspectives, the emphasis on epistemological questions within the history of ideas constitutes yet another form of mystification, namely, the erasure of the material technologies that make these networks possible.

³⁶Consider Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle's claim in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism* (2016): "Indeed, there are as many 'romanticisms' as there are 'Romanticisms,' and one small but telling index of this multiplicity is the variation in lower- and uppercase deployments of the term" (1).

painting this mid-century neo-Kantian position as embarrassingly naive, blinded by an uncritical optimism and overbearing humanism that, however sincerely, ultimately did more harm than good. As such, the decisive turn away from Wellek's progressive vision towards a darker and more fragmented post-structuralist vision of Romanticism is now almost universally viewed as welcome progress.

Indeed, given the remarkable success of the New Historicist and deconstructionist critiques, the most important legacy of this mid-century constellation marked by Wellek, Abrams, Wasserman, Wimsatt, and others may turn out to be how these two influential variants of post-structuralism came out of an explicit rejection of many of their organizing assumptions. Then again, this view of a decisive break — and more specifically, the view of this break as a welcome one — comes from deep within post-structuralism. This is a good reason to question its accuracy.

Of course, it would be fruitless to deny what is clearly a major shift in critical sensibility and interest between the 1960s and the 1980s. But the picture of a total break, especially as it was presented in foundational post-structuralist critiques of this mid-century neo-Kantianism — say, de Man's "Rhetoric of Temporality" or McGann's *Romantic Ideology* — seems overstated in hindsight, at least as much rhetorical as substantive. But because this mid-century neo-Kantian constellation is now almost exclusively viewed in relation to the rise of post-structuralism — or even more narrowly through the somewhat clownish vision of it sketched by early post-structuralist critiques — there has been a general tendency to accept this picture of discontinuity and therefore to overestimate the distance these post-structuralist critiques achieved from this influential mid-century neo-Kantianism. Indeed, even many critical efforts to relitigate these the debates, while almost always explicitly framed as attempts to soften these post-structuralist critiques and to recover the merits of mid-century criticism or its critical picture of Romanticism, tend to work within the strategic and somewhat misleading terms those critiques offer.³⁷

³⁷The many attempts, for instance, to resuscitate the dynamic potential of Coleridgean organicism seem to grant, following the post-structuralist critique, that the *locus classicus* for this mid-century interpretation of Romanticism is Coleridgean organicist poetics. But, in hindsight and with a sufficient appreciation for the mid-century's neo-Kantian investments, the *locus classicus* of this neo-Kantian current is arguably more likely Shelley's radical epistemology, as originally and systematically elaborated by Wasserman in his influential account of Shelley's "skeptical idealism" and carried forward by John Wright, Jeannie Hall, Jerrold Hogle, William Keach, and, most recently, Mark Bruhn. To be sure, it is not necessarily incorrect or even misguided to identify mid-century criticism with Coleridgean organicism. But in light of deconstructionist efforts to claim Shelley for their own — most notably in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979) — it also seems possible to regard this emphasis on Coleridgean organicism as a kind of strategic diversion or, at least, as an easier target. And it distinctly encourages reading mid-century

In short, while it is possible, and even necessary, to regard the post-structuralist turn as initiating a significant break with this mid-century way of thinking about Romanticism, it seems equally possible to view post-structuralist approaches to Romanticism as still in many ways captivated by the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism introduced in the mid-twentieth century, still developing along many of the same intellectual currents set by neo-Kantian Romanticism. In other words, we might say that the post-structuralist account of this break is accurate in its way but also partial and therefore distorted. With the benefit of hindsight, it even seems possible to regard these post-structuralist approaches not simply as elaborating this neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism but also in some sense exacerbating it. The fact that post-structuralism has only recently been treated as a continuation of the neo-Kantian approach adopted by mid-century reflects an underappreciation of the logic of neo-Kantian intellectual history — what actually made this neo-Kantian picture appealing to the mid-twentieth century Romantic critics in the first place, much less what keeps it around. Put schematically, we might say that we still do not sufficiently understand why Wellek takes this neo-Kantian picture to be something “responsible” scholars would see.

More recent examinations of these post-structuralist critiques have, indeed, begun to close the distance between post-structuralism and mid-century criticism, several explicitly along neo-Kantian lines. Zoe Beenstock, Sarah Zimmerman, and David Punter, among others, have recently observed that post-structuralist critiques did not necessarily, or at least programmatically, challenge the historical integrity of the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism embraced at the mid-twentieth century.³⁸ In other words, it might still seem more or less unobjectionable to say, as neo-Kantians like Wellek first did, that Romantics themselves were deeply invested in a neo-Kantian project of reconciliation and that they pursued this project through symbolism, myth, and organicism. Or at least that this would be regarded as a narrow

critics like Wasserman and Abrams backwards rather than forwards so that it may be aligned with New Criticism as it has been thoroughly reduced and ridiculed before it can be with post-structuralism. For revisionary treatments of organicism, see David Fairer, *Organising Poetry*; Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*; Charles Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; Krieger, Murray. *A Reopening of Closure: Organicism Against Itself*. The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989; Loesberg, Jonathan. *A return to aesthetics: autonomy, indifference, and postmodernism*. Stanford University Press, 2005; Rajan, Tilottama. "Organicism." *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 30.4 (2007): 46-50; Wolfson, Susan J. "Coleridge's Similes" in *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997.

³⁸ See Beenstock's dissertation, "The Social Contract and the Romantic Canon" (2010): 1-10; Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999: 1-38; Punter, "Romanticism" in *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*: 106-118.

and therefore incomplete picture of Romanticism before it would be regarded as a wildly inaccurate or distorted one. As such, many might be inclined to still accept the basic integrity of the mid-century description of the broader set of social and cultural “crises” that initiate the Romantics’ neo-Kantian project. In other words, it still might seem unobjectionable to say, as neo-Kantian Romanticists like Abrams and Wasserman first did, that the rise of creative and expressive theories of art in the Romantic period amounts to a response to the “collapse” of a network of analogical correspondences that Wasserman calls the “divine analogy” and Abrams describes as a “Renaissance vitalism,” which imagined an “integral universe without absolute distinctions, in which everything is interrelated by a system of correspondences” (171). Or that, as analogy surrendered its ontological status for an epistemological one, as this foundational neo-Kantian narrative goes, analogy accordingly lost its ability to sustain this integration. Philosophers abandoned the divine analogy to pursue new empirical ways to justify our knowledge of the external world. Poets, too, were left with an epistemological rift that only the turn to Romantic symbolism could fill.

Instead of challenging the historical integrity of this neo-Kantian picture, post-structuralism focused its critique on the mid-century’s sympathies for this neo-Kantian project and its celebratory treatment of Romanticism’s participation in it. Returning to Wellek’s remarks above, we might say that, from a general post-structuralist perspective, the problem is not necessarily with the historical accuracy of Wellek’s description of this central Romantic project, but with how Wellek himself seems to be taken in by the terms of that project. The problem is not Wellek’s description of the neo-Kantian “endeavor;” it is his description of this endeavor as “great,” an adjective which I take to refer not only to its historical import but also its elevating or inspirational character. Put schematically, we might say that post-structuralism does not dispense with Romantic Idealism; rather, it redescribes Romantic Idealism in pejorative terms as Romantic Ideology. Under the sign of post-structuralism, the Romantic investment in myth and organicism, which the mid-century critics celebrated and viewed in poetic and philosophical terms, comes to be seen in more firmly ideological terms and, as such, not celebrated but treated with suspicion, dismissed as mystification. Just a decade later, Jonathan Culler could deride the Romantic critics’ “love for the metaphoric” and its commitment to the “noble futility” of the symbol’s task (Culler 228). McGann offers what has since become the programmatic statement of this critique: “[T]he scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are dominated by

a Romantic Ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (*Ideology* 1).

New Historicism and deconstructionism arrive at their shared conclusion about neo-Kantian Romanticism along different routes.³⁹ But, from either demystified perspective, Wellek is on the wrong side of history and ideology here: he should be celebrating the fact that such a suspiciously ideological project has been "apparently doomed to failure and abandoned in our time" (Wellek 222), not lamenting it. Wellek's evident enthusiasm for these strategies of mystification, as well as his evident disappointment in their failure, therefore reflects, at best, a certain naiveté about the way Romantic Literature — or all Literature — really works. From the post-structuralist perspective, Wellek is too deep within Romantic Idealism to see it clearly — which is to say critically, for what it really is, Romantic Ideology. He is also therefore too mystified by this narrow vision of Romantic Ideology to see the value of Romantic literary criticism lies in the way it resists or interrupts rather than facilitates this neo-Kantian project of reconciliation.

This post-structuralist line of critique seems sound enough. Wellek's editorializing (e.g. "great" and "apparently doomed to failure and abandoned in our time") does seem odd, or at least clearly at odds with the somewhat stilted, passive-voice formulations he employs elsewhere (e.g. "a stabilization has been achieved," "progress has been made," "convincing agreement has been reached"). And, in light of this evident incongruity, it does not seem unwarranted to question if Wellek's scientific language simply dresses up what are really his own moral, intellectual, or even ideological preoccupations, or if these preoccupations somehow compromise Wellek's critical perspective. But if Wellek is too deep within Romantic Idealism to see it as Romantic Ideology, then he is also arguably too deep within the neo-Kantian intellectual history that defines the "great endeavor" not to describe Romanticism in its special neo-Kantian idiom. After all, in order to recognize Romanticism as a "part" of this "great endeavor," Wellek would first have to recognize the endeavor itself. In this respect, it seems worth not simply questioning Wellek's sympathetic estimation of Romanticism's contributions to this neo-Kantian project, but also questioning the basic integrity of Wellek's historical account of the Romantic investment in

³⁹From the deconstructionist perspective, Romantic appeals to myth and organicism — and to language more generally — simply obfuscate and mystify what, rightly understood, are irreconcilable *aporia*. From the New Historicist perspective, the entire enterprise of Romantic Idealism simply sublimates and distracts from real historical crisis — that is to say, political and economic crisis.

such a neo-Kantian project. We might ask, in other words, were the British Romantic poets manifestly interested in this neo-Kantian project, as Wellek sees it? Or is Wellek's sense of their investment more properly a matter of Wellek's investment in this great endeavor? Or simply his investment in a unified picture of Romanticism and, thus, in how this neo-Kantian picture provides one? Is it possible that this influential neo-Kantian intellectual history unduly encourages or even conditions Wellek, so to speak, to see Romanticism in terms of this neo-Kantian narrative crisis-and-reconciliation? Even if all these questions turn out to be too cautious and counterproductive, even for instance if Wellek's neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism turns out to be not only accurate but even revelatory and insightful — in other words, even if his neo-Kantian conditioning allows him to see Romanticism correctly as neo-Kantian in ways even the Romantics could not have — is it possible that his evident investment in this intellectual history of crisis distorts this otherwise insightful picture in some minor respect? If there are any identifiable distortions encouraged by this neo-Kantian intellectual history, where exactly do they occur? How, if at all, are they significant? And how, if at all, might they be corrected?

Before I examine some recently proposed answers to these newly pressing questions and offer my own, I want to observe that neither deconstructionism or New Historicism was ever really in a good position to ask them.⁴⁰ As I have already suggested, post-structuralist critiques

⁴⁰ I'll consider each case in turn. The deconstructionist seems inclined to tolerate the basic historical accuracy of this neo-Kantian picture largely because it is philosophically inclined to accept the "onto-linguistic" reality, for lack of a better word, of the crises at its center. And this is true even as it rejects how the neo-Kantian picture describes these crises, much less the responses they offer. As de Man writes, the dialectic of subject and object is not a legitimate philosophical problem but simply "a temptation that has to be overcome" (*Blindness and Insight* 204-5). So, more precisely, the deconstructionist seems willing to tolerate the seductive sense of coherence this neo-Kantian picture offers long enough to deconstruct it, to reveal its more basic incoherence as well as its onto-linguistic nature. This nuanced negotiation effectively spells out the deconstructive project: namely, to reveal Romanticism's therapeutic responses to these onto-linguistic crises as unsuccessful and inauthentic: unsuccessful because therapeutic response is, in some sense, impossible. Inauthentic because, once one recognizes the irreconcilable nature of these onto-linguistic crises, the only authentic response must be no response at all. There are only crises to be observed as they endlessly disrupt efforts to resolve them. Thus, the neo-Kantian picture of crisis-and-response aligns with the deconstructionist's basic onto-linguistic picture of a reality as defined by radical indeterminacy and crisis in ways that make it a convenient dramatic foil: staging its failures ensures new, more sophisticated grounds for appreciating Romanticism, which becomes valuable for the way its failed linguistic responses to these crises expose their eternal character.

Indeed, in "Criticism and Crisis," de Man suggests that "all true criticism occurs in the mode of crisis" (8). But de Man is inclined to see crisis working in reverse: for de Man, "what was considered a crisis in the past often turns out to be a mere ripple" and "changes first experienced as upheavals tend to become absorbed in the continuity of much slower movements as soon as temporal perspective broadens" (6). This view dictates the project of reopening crisis. But, from my perspective (at least with this neo-Kantian formation in view), crisis functions as a method of critique because critique tends to impose or project crisis *onto* the past where none, in fact, occurred or where it was felt as a mere ripple. In any case, this critical practice involves some sort of misdescription.

of this mid-century interpretation did not systematically challenge the historical accuracy of this neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism and took issue, instead, with the mid-century's sympathetic and even celebratory assessment of this picture. Now, it is possible that most post-structuralists simply found this historical picture compelling and basically correct if woefully incomplete. But, viewed in retrospect, accepting the accuracy of this historical picture can be seen as strategic as

In contrast to the deconstructionist, the New Historicist is inclined to reject the legitimacy of the neo-Kantian picture of philosophical crises more thoroughly. This is because the new historicist reads this philosophical picture, following Marx's materialist critiques of Hegel's Idealism, politically as false consciousness: an illusion that somehow refracts and displaces real historical crises so as to distract attention from them. McGann again offers the programmatic statement: "The poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities" (*Romantic Ideology* 1). The New Historicist is thus more generally anti-philosophical than the deconstructionist and therefore views this neo-Kantian picture with a different sort of suspicion. Nevertheless, the New Historicist is still inclined to the historical accuracy of the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism, if only because New Historicism must accept its ideological efficacy and, thus, its real historical significance. That is, the New Historicist must grant that a historical preoccupation with Idealism has successfully obscured the materialist dynamics of history. Otherwise, the New Historicist project of clarifying and correcting the effects of this obfuscation would be pointless.

It also seems true that, from a New Historicist perspective, this neo-Kantian picture of philosophical crisis remains attractive for the way it allows one to observe materialist dynamics, as they are defined by political and economic crisis, *through* these neo-Kantian sublimations. This subtle negotiation is therefore strategic in a similar way to the deconstructionist's: accepting that idealist and materialist dynamics are linked up in this way also helps determine the New Historicist agenda: namely, to contest these sublimations by redirecting attention to the real historical crisis they obscure or evade. Assuming this broader linkage also opens up a more sophisticated and sympathetic approach to Romantic Idealism, one in which these Romantic negotiations of crisis can start to look less sinister and more personal, less about power and domination and more about ideological subjects struggling under the weight of contradiction and using the critical tools made available by Idealism to negotiate what are, rightly understood, historical and economic crises.

In her analysis of McGann's engagement with Abrams, Beenstock suggests that "instead of subverting" Abrams' neo-Kantian model or successfully replacing it with a non-ideological neo-Kantian aesthetics, McGann "actually perpetuates" Abrams' neo-Kantian model in a way that "fails to separate [McGann's] own position" from Abrams or to sufficiently "distinguish between the later insights of criticism and the original material contexts of the text themselves" (11). This seems to overstate the case against McGann, and I tend to prefer Colin Jager's observation that de Man "cagily" follows the mid-century literary history as a general description of the nature of these post-structuralist exchanges. In any case, both perspectives support my central point that post-structuralist approaches prefer to retain the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism — so as to toy with it, and read it parasitically and hermeneutically — rather than discard it.

Like the New Historicist, I am inclined to reject the terms offered by this neo-Kantian picture — in other words, its own account of its significance, be it philosophical or historical — as in some important manner a distortion of its actual historical significance. As such, I am inclined, with the New Historicist, to redescribe the nature and significance of this neo-Kantian picture as primarily ideological and rhetorical. Yet, whereas the New Historicist might still be willing to engage or entertain what we might call the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis — even if only with the intention of reading that *topos* against the grain, hermeneutically and historically, to see the real crises it sublimates or obscures; or of merely drawing affective energy from this *topos* to describe these real crises — I take this *topos* of crisis, in some sense, to be the most suspicious aspect of this narrative. From my perspective, to treat this drama of crisis as a hermeneutic, to retain it even if only to appropriate it, is to fail to sufficiently interrogate it. It is to somehow take for granted that this *topos* of crisis is secondary — the narrative of "crisis" simply paves the way for "response" — which allows one to see the possibility of appropriating its negativity for demystification. But I want to suggest the ideological content of the neo-Kantian picture is in this picture of crisis itself.

well as sincere. Simply put, given their antagonistic charge, it is more convenient, and perhaps even necessary or constitutive, for both the deconstructionist and the new historicist to accept this basic historical picture and work within it than it would be to correct or challenge it.⁴¹

Recent clarifications regarding the limited scope of the post-structuralist critique have encouraged a more comprehensive examination of the legacy of mid-century Romantic criticism. These new examinations, while abandoning the antagonistic spirit of the post-structuralist critiques of mid-century Romanticism, are informed by a new suspicion that the neo-Kantian interpretation developed by mid-century critics finally says more about their own cultural preoccupations than it does about the Romantics' own investment in any neo-Kantian project. This suspicion has in turn encouraged more radical challenges to the basic integrity of the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism. My aim here is to contribute to that critical reassessment. It will be expedient to review a few of the more pertinent contributions in this direction so as to situate my contributions within and against them.

Gavin Budge's essay collection, *Romantic Empiricism: Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830* (2007), offers the most direct critique of the neo-Kantian tendency of twentieth-century Romantic literary criticism.⁴² In his introduction, Budge questions how "the exclusive identification of Romanticism with philosophical idealism" (21) has "led to the exclusion of the Romantic empiricism of the Common Sense tradition from the theoretical canon" (21). From Budge's perspective, the desire to align British Romanticism with German idealism has not only encouraged a neglect of Anglophone Common Sense philosophers. It has

⁴¹Deborah Elise White suggests along these lines that "[R]eaders on the track of ideology often seem more insistent on the referential status of Romantic argument than the Romantics themselves. They hypostasize the very mystifications ostensibly being demystified" (White 2).

⁴²This important intervention from Budge *et al* comes in the wake of a broader sympathetic re-evaluation of empiricism, largely driven by new critical interest in the relation of Romantic literary practice with Romantic scientific practices. In the new critical milieu, empiricism is no longer dismissed as an overly mechanical or reductive set of observational procedures (as epitomized, for instance, by Geoffrey Hartman's "ocular man") but as a kind of generative mode of subjectivity. Common Sense introspection, for instance, has received a notable re-evaluation as an important moment in what Noel Jackson has called "the historicity of inwardness itself, or the social contexts of self-contemplation" ("Critical Conditions" 119). I discuss this scientific turn at more length in Chapter 2. Jonathan Kramnick has alternatively returned to Common Sense's emphasis on "direct perception" in search of an "aesthetic ecology" and an alternative to representationalist theories of mind; Susan Manning, to Common Sense discourse of analogy for an alternative approach to comparative literary history. These various turns reflect a broader historical drift from the neo-Kantian framework I am more actively confronting here. See also Marjorie Levinson's *ennui* with those past "skirmishes" waged under the sign of Kant "on a field divided between nature and culture, with both sectors divided yet again (as in, the nature field split into the human over against the merely natural, and the culture field split into different moments and versions of modernity)" ("Motion and Spirit" 633) that precipitated her turn to Spinoza for "another way of *being Romantic*" (634).

also encouraged reading the rise of British Romanticism as a generative “break” from Anglophone philosophy and associationist aesthetics in favor of a more robust German idealism. This progressive narrative has licensed, in turn, an active dismissal and negative estimation of Anglophone philosophy, which is cast as intellectually inferior to German Idealism because “parochial,” “politically reactionary,” and “blindly nationalistic” (Budge 12). For Budge, the critical assumption that German idealism “influenced” British Romanticism — while now not only well-established but even *de rigueur* — is historically misleading if not entirely misguided. For Budge, at the least, this approach fails to register the considerable intellectual authority that Common Sense philosophers, particularly Dugald Stewart, enjoyed through the Romantic period and most of the nineteenth century. Moreover, aligning German idealism with British Romanticism in any direct way seems wholly unwarranted by the material record. Budge observes that, with few exceptions, such as Carlyle and Coleridge, the “idealist mode of philosophizing only became widespread in Britain during the 1860s and 1870s” (22). In the “absence of compelling evidence that British Romantic writers were well versed in German idealism,” Budge argues, critics interested in working from this assumption have to rely on a suspect methodology of observing what Abrams describes in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) as “striking analogues” between British Romantic poetry and German Idealist philosophy. For Budge, this way of reading is not only generally suspect: it arguably gets the lines of influence wrong. Viewed in light of the continental reach of Anglophone philosophy, most notably Hume, in the eighteenth century, any “striking analogues” would be just as likely to reflect the influence of Anglophone thought on German thought.

Following Roy Porter, Budge attributes this preference for German idealism and against Anglophone philosophy to an “intellectualist fallacy dear to academics who...prize ‘profundity’ above all and rate dead thinkers on an abstrusity scale” (Porter 10). Against this intellectualist fallacy and in defense of Common Sense philosophy, Budge contends:

[W]hatever the intrinsic intellectual significance of the Common Sense school, which is currently being reevaluated, its historical influence on early nineteenth-century thought is undeniable, in a way that makes it an important context for the study of British Romanticism; nor should it be assumed that great literary achievements always stem from thinking that academic philosophers would agree in finding philosophically significant. (Budge 12)

I agree with Budge's remarks in the main, and I intend this dissertation to contribute to the wider reassessment of the Common Sense school he recommends. However, I find Budge and Porter's appeal to an "intellectualist fallacy" to be fairly unilluminating – not to mention ungenerous – as an explanation for these trends. And I believe it is possible to trace them to more definite "cultural forces" (21) which are distinctly "neo-Kantian" in character. I will offer a few correctives to Budge's analysis so as to make that character more evident. Budge, for instance, consistently singles out Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* as the origin of these critical biases, but I believe it is more appropriate to see *Natural Supernaturalism* as an endpoint rather than a starting point: that is, *Natural Supernaturalism* should be regarded as the culmination of the distinct but influential strain of neo-Kantian Romanticism emerging out of mid-century criticism — its latest, most thorough articulation, so to speak. Wellek's wide survey in "Romantic Re-examination," conducted nearly a decade before Abrams' seminal work, should clarify that *Natural Supernaturalism* is more *terminus ad quem* than *terminus a quo*, even as Wellek is obviously conducting his survey from deep within a neo-Kantian perspective as much as he is actually observing its widespread adoption in the mid-century.

This adjustment to Budge's timeline seems important for three reasons. First, I believe it allows us to differentiate the "intellectual historical" neo-Kantianism of the mid-century critics from the slightly more theoretically and historically engaged neo-Kantianism that follows it — best exemplified, for instance, by Paul Hamilton's *Coleridge's Poetics* (1983). I call this mid-century formation "intellectual historical" because, as I hope to show, it is primarily read *through* the reductions of neo-Kantian intellectual history. This intellectual-historical approach, while exhibiting a distinctly philosophical bias, also tends to engage the philosophy at a slight remove. In other words, mid-century Kantianism reads an already stabilized and even doctrinal neo-Kantian intellectual history hermeneutically and analogically for insights into literary historical developments. Not only this, but mid-century Kantianism tends to read literary history in a uniquely "intellectual historical" way, through neo-Kantian intellectual history's metonymic logic and in its distinctly progressive spirit. Against Budge, then, I would argue that Hamilton's later neo-Kantianism, while obviously beholden to this mid-century approach and captive to its progressive and reductive tendencies (as Budge's critique suggests), still ultimately pursues a more direct historical and philosophical engagement with the German tradition: that is, it reaches, to some extent, beyond the reductive and even arguably peripheral version of Kant

cultivated within the neo-Kantian intellectual history of modernity.⁴³ While obviously indebted to intellectual history, this later neo-Kantian Romanticism does not reflect the extensive training in intellectual historical hermeneutics that the mid-century critics received. Secondly, differentiating this strain of mid-century intellectual historical from neo-Kantianism also allows us to distinguish Abrams' study *within* the mid-century approaches as, relatively speaking, the *least* likely to suffer from the kind of uncritical intellectualist fallacies Budge takes to be guiding this philosophical bias more broadly. Abrams, to my mind, turns out to be most forthright of these mid-century neo-Kantians because he is the least invested in reading the rise of Kantian epistemology progressively, as a modernity narrative, in the manner encouraged by Anglophone intellectual history. This is not to say that Abrams' vision is not progressive: indeed, this intellectual historical approach seems to be irreducibly — not to mention unapologetically — so. But the “break” can be stressed in different ways and to different ends. Third and most importantly, acknowledging the broader mid-century consensus around neo-Kantian Romanticism allows us to look beyond Budge's charge of intellectualism for other reasons neo-Kantian Romanticism was embraced not only by a few neo-Kantian converts but by the field at large. Against that charge, I will argue that the widespread embrace of neo-Kantian Romanticism reflects the hegemonic status that neo-Kantian intellectual history had attained by the mid-twentieth century. This hegemonic status made it not only possible or even appealing but even somehow inevitable or impossible not to view Romanticism — and modernity more broadly — through the special lens of neo-Kantian intellectual history.

Of course, Budge's charge of intellectualism is not entirely unfounded. Earl Wasserman's literary historical account of the rise of Romanticism, for example, mobilizes a much more doctrinal and therefore, to my mind, more suspect neo-Kantian intellectual history. Wasserman begins his influential 1964 essay, “The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge” with a concise intellectual historical survey of eighteenth-century poetic and philosophical responses to what he calls the “problem of the transaction between the perceiving mind and the perceived world” (18). Wasserman argues that eighteenth-century topographical poetry is manifestly preoccupied with the problem of representing the external world, but it also “betrays an uncertain or ineffectual conception” (17) of the nature or extent of this problem. As such, eighteenth-

⁴³The emphasis has now arguably moved from German idealism to Jena Romantics. For a contemporary example, see Thomas Pfau's *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840*. For an earlier, influential example, see Anne Mellor's *English Romantic Irony*.

century poets' analogical engagements with nature do more to "evade" rather than engage that problem. For Wasserman, eighteenth-century poets "hedged on this question, which I shall—very loosely—call epistemological"; eighteenth-century philosophy, on the other hand, "certainly did not" (18). Wasserman then offers a philosophical history of epistemology in which this epistemological question was incubated within British empiricism, which had "long tended to unsettle any assurance of an external world" (18), epitomized by Hume, who "completed Berkeley's subversion of the 'external' by sceptically concluding that we can have no real knowledge of the existence of nature or the external causes of our impressions" (18), and finally resolved in Kant's "epistemology of transcendentalism" (18). Kant's success comes on the heels of Common Sense's failure. Here's how Wasserman's survey ends:

Meanwhile, the mechanists like Hartley and the French school tried to cut the epistemological knot by explaining both mind and nature as matter and motion; and the Scottish School took the coward's way out by eschewing theory and limiting itself to description of mental phenomena on the basis of unassailable, God-given common sense. The stage was set for Kant and the epistemology of transcendentalism. (18)

The stage is also set for a parallel "epistemological" response of the major British Romantics, who Wasserman sees as united around a shared sense of "the necessity to resolve the question their predecessors had made so pressing through philosophic and aesthetic concern and poetic neglect or incompetence" (22).

Wasserman's approach illustrates how subscribing to a stricter variant of this neo-Kantian intellectual history (i.e. one centered on the drama of epistemology) encourages a dismissive posture towards *both* eighteenth-century Anglophone philosophy and eighteenth-century poetry by reading the limitations of eighteenth-century Anglophone poetics *through* those of eighteenth-century Anglophone philosophy. Eighteenth-century philosophy is too confined to its transcriptional empiricism to pursue a more liberating transcendentalism. And through this philosophical lens, eighteenth-century poetry seems similarly transcriptional: it is "a poetry of hobbling simile, rather than symbol" that "never fulfills itself to allow the poet to withdraw from a self-supporting creation" but "ends only when the poet has spent himself, the poem being sustained as long as he continues to *annotate* his sensory data with significances" (my emphasis, 22).

Wasserman's neo-Kantian bias is so severe that it seems to require little commentary.⁴⁴ Here and elsewhere, Wasserman's neo-Kantianism comes off as almost doctrinal — a notable irony given his scathing treatment of the “Scottish School” for its appeal to the “unassailable” and “God-given.” One might think that the tyrannical character of Wasserman's literary history — the way it not only seems to impose the philosophical problem of epistemology on literary history but has a distinctly neo-Kantian understanding of that problem — would make it seem, at the least, an undesirable approach to eighteenth-century Anglophone philosophy and poetry. And yet, Paul Hamilton essentially rehearses Wasserman's critique of Common Sense philosophy two decades later in *Coleridge's Poetics*. This direct transmission is strange because Hamilton's neo-Kantian study otherwise amounts to a serious, thoughtful engagement with Common Sense philosophy. Even as Hamilton understands Coleridge's poetics to draw on a common sense philosophy of language, he still asserts with Wasserman that “the British reaction to Hume pales before Kant's awakening from dogmatic slumber in Germany” (28). Even as Hamilton can insightfully and sympathetically characterize the Common Sense response to Hume as a call for a “renewed trust in the criteria for...knowledge...to which our human limitations inescapably bind us” (28), he can still dismiss Common Sense philosophy as hampered by a “deep conservatism,” which “wished to leave things as they are” (38), and Common Sense philosophy of language as “nothing more than documentary” (39) meant to “explain existing usages [of language] certainly, but not in the interests of original criticism or innovation” (38). Wasserman's strongly negative assessment remains surprisingly unaltered by Hamilton's more sympathetic readings. The intellectual historical narrative of “break” seems finally too essential for Hamilton to discard.

Of course, in light of the more recent literary-critical turn towards a more descriptive practice on the anthropological models of Bruno Latour or Clifford Geertz, Wasserman and Hamilton's mutual dismissal of Common Sense on the grounds of its merely “documentary” tendencies should already seem outdated: a relic of a former, more idealist moment in Romantic

⁴⁴Wasserman's tyrannical terms, which incidentally will make it seem plausible that de Man is deeply indebted to Wasserman for his critical sensibility and, therefore, that the proximity between post-structuralism and mid-century. But in the end Wasserman is a kind of neo-Kantian zealot, not to be trusted — so zealous that, even as his detailed elaboration of this neo-Kantian vision, viewed as a whole, proves somewhat idiosyncratic and contemporary, inspired and taken, for instance, by Sapir-Whorf theory, it nonetheless perfectly and enthusiastically elaborates along strict Kantian lines, at all levels: at the local level, most evident in his influential and distinctly Kantian reading of Shelley's “Mont Blanc” to his broader picture of things.

literary criticism.⁴⁵ But, as we will see, the taste for distinctly neo-Kantian (or epistemological) readings of British Romanticism has hardly subsided. Kicking this habit will require a little more polemic force.

What is most frustrating about this neo-Kantian line of thinking is not necessarily its unapologetic progressivism or its evident bias against Common Sense (i.e. “the coward’s way out”). Rather, it is that it seems to be read *directly* off Kant’s own negotiation in the *Prolegomena*. In other words, Wasserman’s progressive interpretation of Kant’s “epistemology of transcendentalism” and Hamilton’s claim that Reid offers a “very crude reply to Hume’s scepticism” (44) is not a newly formulated critical orientation or even a later intellectual historical imposition. Rather, both simply and uncritically *reproduce* Kant’s *own* account of the superiority of his response to Hume, not to mention Kant’s sense that his epistemology is not only a historical project but indeed a *transhistorical* one: a project that simply remained undetected prior to Hume and even unregistered before Kant himself saw what Hume saw through a glass darkly. Indeed, this ostensibly transhistorical character of epistemology is what merits not simply Kant’s but Wasserman’s dismissive progressivism: epistemology is a problem that others *could* and *should* have seen but either did not or simply evaded.

Wasserman’s (and Wellek’s) evident investment in neo-Kantian intellectual history should clarify that Budge’s account overlooks an earlier, important neo-Kantian constellation which, I would argue, Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism* effectively caps. Budge’s oversight is unexpected, given that his survey of neo-Kantian bias in literary studies ultimately stretches back, following Cairns Craig (in the same volume), to nineteenth-century British Idealism and, following Ian Reid, to British Idealism’s instrumental role in shaping the discipline of English up to the second World War (24). On the other hand, Budge’s oversight is telling in itself, because it speaks to the strange treatment Kant receives in neo-Kantian Romanticism, how Kant’s presence is so spectral that even someone looking for it wouldn’t necessarily find it. Wasserman’s single invocation of Kant is surely potent enough to capture the severity of his neo-Kantian bias. But it is also notably the *only* invocation of Kant in Wasserman’s entire article. Similarly, though Wellek is obviously looking at a neo-Kantian formation both inside and outside the field, Wellek only mentions Kant once in “Romanticism Re-examined” and, even then, only tangentially.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Heather Love, “Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn.” *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 371-91.

Kant's conspicuous absence could, of course, be regarded as evidence against my thesis about the dominance of neo-Kantian perspectives at the mid-century. But I believe it can be interpreted in two ways that ultimately support my thesis. First, for someone deep within this neo-Kantian perspective, Kant would have been too obviously a part of this neo-Kantian picture to merit mentioning or placing at its center. After all, Kant's critical philosophy essentially defines what Wellek calls "the great endeavor." So Kant is arguably everywhere and nowhere. But, second, by the mid-twentieth century, Kant himself is already so strangely peripheral to both neo-Kantian Romanticism and neo-Kantian intellectual history that he need not appear. Even a doctrinal account like Wasserman's — which explicitly and forcefully invokes Kantian epistemology — still must read Kantian epistemology hermeneutically in order to disclose the logics driving aesthetic theory and poetic practice. Epistemology helps clarify the underlying philosophical problem effectively generating both eighteenth-century topographical poetry and Romantic symbolism as (respectively, inauthentic and authentic) responses. As we will see, this has to do with the way neo-Kantian intellectual history treats *all* neo-Kantian responses as special, independent, and connected only by the shared crisis they observe.

But if Wasserman's neo-Kantian investments complicate Budge's timeline, Wasserman's uncritical reproduction of Kant's own rhetoric certainly supports Budge's claim that an intellectualist tendency in neo-Kantian Romanticism makes it inclined to take the more abstruse Kant at his word, even when simple good sense about rhetoric might dictate otherwise. Yet, appreciating this broader consensus around Kant allows us to look beyond Budge's intellectualist fallacy and see other "cultural forces" that would have recommended neo-Kantian Romanticism not only to a few neo-Kantian converts, but to the field in its entirety. While Budge's charge of intellectualism seems important, it is also insufficient and, I think, secondary. I want to suggest rather that the widespread elaboration of neo-Kantian Romanticism registers the monolithic status that the neo-Kantian picture of "crisis" had achieved by the mid-twentieth century as a result of its progressive sublimation through neo-Kantian intellectual history. That is to say, that Romantic literary critics turned to neo-Kantian accounts of Romanticism because neo-Kantian intellectual history was everywhere. In the period, there was only one Western intellectual history, and it was neo-Kantian.

Abrams paints a vivid — and, from my perspective, conclusive — portrait of the sheer ubiquity this neo-Kantian discourse of crisis had achieved in *Natural Supernaturalism*. It is worth quoting at length:

I hope to make it clear that it was indeed a cardinal concern of Wordsworth as bard, and of Coleridge as both metaphysician and bard, to help redeem man by fostering a reconciliation with nature, which, because man has severed himself from his earlier unity with it, has become alien and inimical to him. I also propose to show that this concern was an element in a set of interrelated concepts which had wide currency in the age of Wordsworth and Coleridge — concepts which have evolved into the reigning diagnosis of our own age of anxiety: the claim that man, who was once well, is now ill, and that at the core of the modern malaise lies his fragmentation, dissociation, estrangement, or (in the most highly charged of these parallel terms) ‘alienation.’ The individual (so runs the familiar analysis) has become radically split in three main aspects. He is divided within himself, he is divided from other men, and he is divided from his environment; his only hope for recovery (for those writers who hold out hope) is to find the way to a reintegration which will restore his unity with himself, his community with his fellow men, and his companionability with an alien and hostile outer world. These ideas are shared in our time by theologians, philosophers, economists, sociologists, psychologists, artists, writers, critics, and readers of *Life* magazine and *The Reader’s Digest*, and the copious writings on this theme have been assembled into widely-read anthologies. (Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism* 145)

This is arguably Abrams’ most direct articulation of his thesis. What is most salient is his deep familiarity with the neo-Kantian account of modernity. Here we see that Abrams not only has a clear picture of modernity *as* a crisis, or how this crisis of modernity inflects Romantic literary practice, or how it informs and saturates modern intellectual culture at the mid-twentieth century, but a clear sense of how all these phenomena are events in the same intellectual history: how, for instance, the ubiquitous modern discourse of crisis has evolved from the Romantic discourses Abrams examines. My claim is that neo-Kantian intellectual history makes this sense of continuity not only possible but so familiar as to feel rehearsed (“so runs the familiar analysis”).

It’s worth analyzing the complexities of tone that arise from Abrams’ deep familiarity. Abrams’ parenthetical “for those writers who hold out hope” exhibits the same strange melancholy we already saw in Wellek’s editorializing (“apparently doomed to failure and abandoned in our time” (221)). Like Wellek’s, Abrams’ melancholy seems accompanied by an

ironic distance — captured, in part, “so runs the analysis.”⁴⁶ But the character of Abrams’s irony is also distinct in a way that suggests it comes at a later moment and with a different estimation of the quality of this neo-Kantian picture. Wellek’s ironic appropriation of the trope of progress (“one could even say (if we did not suspect the word so much) that progress has been made” (221)) injects an anti-progressivism against his otherwise evident enthusiasm about this critical consensus. For Wellek, the critical consensus looks like a consolation prize given what Wellek sees as the abandonment of the neo-Kantian enterprise at large. At least good Romanticists can still independently observe its significance.

In contrast, Abrams’s critical distance responds not to the *abandonment* but to the *oversaturation* and *oversimplification* of this neo-Kantian discourse within intellectual culture more broadly. By the time of Abrams’s study, the neo-Kantian theme of crisis seems to have been treated widely enough to have been handled at varying levels of subtlety and sophistication. This leads Abrams to qualify his investment in it in a way that Wellek and Wasserman do not:

[A] similar conceptual scheme is recognizable in writings which range from positions near the lunatic fringe of thought to some of the most subtle attempts in our literature to assess man and his place in nature and in the historical process; so that its presence is not in itself an index to the quality or adequacy of the world view of which it is a part. In addition, the fact that the concept of divided and alienated man is one of the oldest of commonplaces does not controvert either its general relevance to the human condition or its special usefulness as a speculative instrument for examining our own greatly troubled era, which was inaugurated by the new science and the new philosophy of the seventeenth century and which reached its first great crisis in the age we conventionally call Romantic. (146)

Here I think it should be clear that Abrams’s neo-Kantianism is much less committed than Wasserman’s. Abrams takes the critical long view, so to speak, by reframing the neo-Kantian lens as a “conceptual scheme” and as a “speculative instrument” (146). And, as a result, Abrams’s account of the neo-Kantian crisis is also more diffuse than Wasserman’s: not tightly focused around the Kantian drama of epistemology but extending well into the contemporary moment and even backwards indefinitely. Although Abrams is clearly invested in the *special* applicability of this scheme to the modern moment, it is not a characteristically modern scheme in the way that Wasserman takes epistemology to be. Indeed, Abrams’s most forceful gesture towards its

⁴⁶ It is worth mentioning that this ironic distance does seem to appear in Wellek’s account. Consider, for instance, how the critical consensus that Wellek perceives in the field functions as a consolation against apparent irresolvability of the larger crisis: a minor victory.

general significance and away from specifically modern significance even suggests this conceptual scheme is not distinctly neo-Kantian. Abrams writes, in a moment of great insight,

If we are indulged the convenience of sweeping initial generalizations, the basic categories of characteristic post-Kantian philosophy, and of the thinking of many philosophical-minded poets, can be viewed as highly elaborated and sophisticated variations upon the Neoplatonic paradigm of a primal unity and goodness, an emanation into multiplicity which is ipso facto a lapse into evil and suffering, and a return to unity and goodness. (169)

This “sweeping initial generalization,” which reaches up and back in search of instructive analogues as a preliminary measure for progressive specifications, is characteristic of Abrams’s critical style. As a local analytic procedure, it arguably allows Abrams to dislodge himself from this neo-Kantian framework. And I would say that this generalization feels transgressive to Abrams (i.e. like an “indulgence” or a “convenience”) because of the way framing this neo-Kantian constellation as Neoplatonic obviously compromises the specificity (read: modernity) of the neo-Kantian categories Abrams is setting out to describe, not to mention the specificity (read: poetry) of Romantic approaches to these categories. “Highly elaborated” and “sophisticated” work against the larger continuity Abrams proposes in order to maintain this specific difference. And all of these qualifications speak finally to Abrams’s special neo-Kantian investments.

Abrams’s perspective clarifies two important aspects of the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis at the mid-twentieth century. First, while Abrams describes this neo-Kantian *topos* as a “conceptual scheme,” as I have already suggested, its character is more thematic and dramatic than structural or analytic: more a motif to be taken up and elaborated than a theoretical analytic to be definitely applied to a specific historical or theoretical problem. Abrams is not only invested in the special applicability of this *topos* to the contemporary moment, but its *iterability* within the modern era. Indeed, one way to capture this topical character is to consider how neo-Kantian intellectual history treats its “crisis” and its “response” in profoundly different ways. In neo-Kantian intellectual history, the “crisis” is defined in such a capacious manner so as to make it singular, unified. The neo-Kantian *topos* enables a way of seeing what would be wildly different problematics in any other context — for Wellek, the alienation of “subject and object,” “man and nature,” and “consciousness and unconsciousness” or, for Abrams, the division of man “from himself,” “from society” and “from nature” — as somehow different iterations of the *same* central crisis of modernity, which Abrams traces to the “first great crisis,” which I have roughly

described as the Enlightenment project of critical intellectual reform. In contrast, this topical character recommends treating each neo-Kantian “response” as independent and disconnected: the response emerges as a constellation or array. Thus, even as Abrams is obviously interested in describing the Romantic response to the “first great crisis,” he is arguably more interested in the *plurality* of responses this first crisis generates than *any particular* response, Romantic or otherwise. We are back to Pulos’ claim that the neo-Kantian response did not “follow a single pattern” but rather manifested in a variety of interrelated modern developments (5).⁴⁷ Viewing the crisis as singular likewise recommends seeing no response as final or definitive. Indeed, for Abrams, the fundamental inconsistency among the different responses demonstrates that there is, finally, no cure, only innumerable diagnoses of the same crisis as it emerges in different forms — or, perhaps better, only different speculative meditations on the central *topos* of crisis from within different sites of modernity.

Wasserman’s picture of Romantic symbolism is also distinctively plural in this sense. For Wasserman the originality of each individual response is precisely what guarantees its poetic character. As Wasserman asserts, “[e]ach of these [Romantic] poets offers a different answer, and each is unique as poet as his answer is special; but all share the necessity to resolve the question” (22). Wasserman’s statement seems to stress this individualistic or idealist logic to its absolute limit: it is almost the sheer idiosyncrasy of each response — not only its original character but its fundamentally *intranslatability* and *irreproducibility* — that guarantees its poetic aspect. This is essentially what Wasserman means by “subtler languages:” languages that are constituted not semantically but syntactically, as autonomous artistic forms. This is why I have claimed that in this neo-Kantian discourse, crisis proves more far more essential than any particular response, even Kant’s. There seems to be only a generative *responsiveness* to the crisis of modernity, and this response simply *is* what generates modernity.

With this iterability in view, we can think of this neo-Kantian *topos* as essentially an “empty” formal structure. And with this description I follow Mark Greif’s recent, helpful analysis of what he calls the “crisis of man” discourse at the mid-twentieth century. Greif

⁴⁷ Of course, whereas Pulos seemed to hold the different responses apart — for instance, scientific from poetic or philosophical — in Abrams’ view this plurality demands a kind of qualitative or comparative assessment. That is to say, there is something suspicious as well as appealing for Abrams about the ubiquity of this discourse. Viewing the crisis as singular enables assessing these different responses against each other and seeing some responses as better than others: some are “subtle” and others exist at the “lunatic” fringe. And yet, for Abrams, all eyes seemed correctly trained on the same issue of alienation in a way that clarifies and confirms its significance.

observes that “one of the striking features of the discourse of man...in a sense the most striking, is how unreadable it is, how tedious, how unhelpful” (11). Greif suggests that this obscurity is not simply the product of historical or cultural drift. Rather, it reflects what Greif calls an almost strategic “emptiness” endemic to the discourse: according to Greif, this discourse was “empty in its own time, even where it was at its best; empty for a reason, or, one could say, meaningful because it was empty” (11). To illuminate the meaningful character of this discourse, Greif draws an illustrative distinction between “empty discourse” and what he calls “cant.” For Greif, cant amounts to suspect profundity in which “words deliberately do not mean anything that can be questioned, argued about, or refined by disagreement” but instead tend to function like shibboleths, “symbols of mystery or profundity” meant to “credential the speaker’s other utterances without adding discriminable content” (11). In other words, Greif views cant suspiciously as a symptom of dogma or bad faith. In contrast, Greif sees empty discourse as a more noble enterprise which, while at times perplexingly numinous, “behaves as if it wishes to be filled with a single inductive or deductive answer—a definitive argument meant to persuade all hearers and end inquiry through complete satisfaction— but in fact generates the continuation of attempts, or tacitly admits to unanswerability” (13). The remarkable aspect of this kind of discourse, for Greif, is the way this “empty gesture” generates a sense of community organized around a shared enterprise. For Greif, the “best part of the crisis of man” is that “interminable analysis” functioned as “the intellectuals’ form of action, a means to pull others into the framework of affirmation and contradiction that their thought created” (4).

Greif doesn’t explicitly see a neo-Kantian framework at work here, but I believe he is looking at the same popular structure Abrams is. And, as Abrams’s thesis clarifies, the connection between this broader discourse and the more specialized Kantian version is not hard to see (or at least worth clarifying). In any case, the neo-Kantian observation of its *topos* of crisis is “empty” precisely in the manner Greif describes. It issues a broad, ongoing, insistent call to responsiveness: and this responsiveness itself generates a firm sense of what modernity is, its meaningfulness as a concept. This leads to my second comment about Abrams’ depiction of the neo-Kantian crisis. Abrams characterizes this neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis as a “speculative instrument for examining our own greatly troubled era,” but it seems to also function as a specialized instrument for *observing* or even *constructing* modernity. The central *topos* undergirds Abrams’ entire sense of modernity: it allows him to see “our” era as continuous with

the Romantics. This is true for Wasserman as well, who can assert that “[t]he condition of man has not changed in this last century and a half; and Wordsworth’s predicament is ours” (258).

I agree with Greif that, in the end, this empty discourse deserves more sympathy than suspicion, and one aim here is to offer a more subtle and sympathetic picture of what the mid-century critics were after than the fairly ungenerous one their post-structuralist critics have long offered. But I also will suggest that the neo-Kantian enterprise is also capable of being so broad that it borders on vacuous, so ongoing that it would seem to undermine itself, at times so insistent on its self-evident value that it looks like dogmatic cant, and finally, so distorted that it is worth abandoning. If I am correct that the rise of neo-Kantian Romanticism reflects, more than anything, the monolithic status of the neo-Kantian picture of modernity at the mid-century, then it should be clear that, in order to figure out what’s distorted about these literary histories, we will first have to try to grasp what seemed so *right* about this neo-Kantian picture: its basic logic and appeal, so to speak. We will need to consider the factors that would have made it not only *possible* or even *appealing* but even somehow *inevitable* or impossible not to view Romanticism, and modernity more broadly, through the lens of neo-Kantian intellectual history.

We can measure the sheer gravitational pull of this neo-Kantian formation by returning to Wellek’s “Romanticism Re-examined” and observing how thoroughly its looming presence seems to distort Wellek’s approach to the problem of defining Romanticism. Consider, for instance, how strange Wellek’s appeal to this neo-Kantian picture seems given his stated objective, how unappealing locating Romanticism within this neo-Kantian picture *should* be as a solution to his problem. Wellek is trying to stabilize the concept of Romanticism and to correct for the promiscuous “anti-historicism” that Lovejoy’s skepticism about defining Romanticism had encouraged. But, if you were trying to combat anti-historical promiscuity, why would you turn to neo-Kantian intellectual history? Why turn to a framework so unexacting that it permits the crises of “subject and object,” of “man and nature,” and of “unconsciousness and consciousness” — wildly separate problematics in nearly any other context — to be treated as iterations or variations of the same basic crisis? So we will have to account for how, from Wellek’s perspective, situating Romanticism within this loose neo-Kantian constellation could seem more stabilizing than destabilizing. We will have to account for how Wellek sees this as a move “responsible scholars” (221) make.

First, if the objective is to specify the essence of Romanticism, why go about this problem by situating Romanticism within a broader constellation? Why begin by characterizing Romanticism simply as one response among a plurality? This move seems at cross-purposes with the project of defining *Romanticism*. More importantly, why attempt to define Romanticism's poetic character in the distinctly *philosophical* terms offered by this neo-Kantian picture? This seems at cross purposes with the project of "defining Romanticism *as poetic*." Aligning Romantic poetry with this broad philosophical formation would seem to establish an immediate and strange tension between philosophy and poetry. It also seems to encourage an incoherent and self-defeating logic where, in order to achieve its special status, Romantic poetry must prove itself to be philosophical. This sophistication seems concede too much to philosophy from the start for no evident reason. In any case, it hardly seems a satisfying picture of self-determination through poetry. So we will have to explain how, from Wellek's perspective, aligning Romantic poetry with this broader philosophical formation manages to *specify* or clarify Romanticism's poetic essence more than confuse it.

Abrams's specification that the Romantic poets were "philosophical-minded" reflects a strange deference to philosophy similar to Wellek's. Indeed, if we recall Budge's complaint about Abrams's appeal to "striking analogues" to support his neo-Kantian reading of British Romanticism, it is possible to argue that Abrams's adoption of the neo-Kantian framework as an all-encompassing interpretive framework constitutes a notable departure from his preferred literary critical procedures. Consider, for instance, the terms in which Abrams chastises a prevailing critical tendency of analogy in his influential essay "The Correspondent Breeze." Abrams recoils against the "logical procedure" of treating "loose analogy as though it were identity" ("Correspondent Breeze" 127). Abrams writes:

This strategy, to be sure, has a singular virtue; it cannot fail. Only leave out enough of the qualities that make a poem, or any complex experience, distinctive, and it can be reduced to an abstract pattern — almost any abstract pattern, including, if that is our inclination, the pattern of the vegetational cycle of death and rebirth. From a different premise, but by a similar argument from analogy, Hegelians have been able to demonstrate that works of literature are moments in a dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; Marxists, that they reflect the conditions of production and the resulting class-structure of their times; and Freudians, that they project the infantile fixations, especially the Oedipus complex, of their authors. ("Correspondent Breeze" 127-8).

From my perspective, it is unclear how applying the neo-Kantian *crisis* does not involve the same logical procedure Abrams ridicules here. This is not to accuse Abrams of hypocrisy. It is simply to suggest that the neo-Kantian framework must have been compelling and self-evident enough to appear legitimate to even someone like Abrams, who seems inclined to view any strong methodology with suspicion. The neo-Kantian approach somehow had a wider sanction or, in any case, a more evident appeal to make its strong methodology seem unobjectionable.

In *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (2007), Colin Jager proposes that the longstanding appeal of mid-century interpretations of Romanticism literary history has to do with the way these interpretations “naturaliz[e] romanticism’s triumph as a historical inevitability” in a “secularization narrative [in which] romanticism rescues belief — a true or sincere relationship between internal and external — while jettisoning its metaphysical content” (49). From Jager’s perspective, the persistence of Wasserman and Abrams’s account reveals a suspicious blind spot around the secularization in Romantic literary criticism since the mid-twentieth century. Jager too has his eye most notably on how this formation escaped post-structuralists’ substantial revisions:

...[D]espite the various revisions of romanticism accomplished over the past decades, the narrative of secularization has provided substantial continuity in scholarly thinking about the period. Romantic exceptionalism has been under revision for some time, but we are only now beginning to challenge an interpretation of the period in which religion gives way to a secularized modernity posited as inevitable. (Jager xi)

From my perspective, Jager is observing more or less the same blind spot that I observe in the contemporary field: what Jager is viewing through secularization I am viewing through neo-Kantian Skepticism. And I would suggest that Jager’s analysis, while correct and insightful, is finally somewhat constricted by his commitment to the terms of secularization.

To be sure, the continued currency of Abrams and Wasserman’s progressive literary histories likely speaks to the secular disposition of Romantic scholars.⁴⁸ And Jager’s most recent work, *Unquiet Things*, forcefully reframes this narrow secularity not only as a modern preoccupation but one that was importantly resisted by deeply religious Romantic figures like

⁴⁸ To use Taylor’s terms, I would say there is a general inclination to accept a version of the subtraction story offered by secular humanism and, as such, to accept Abrams and Wasserman’s deeply secular account of Romanticism as unobjectionable or, at least, not especially preoccupied with secularization, even as it can be shown to be preoccupied in other ways.

Coleridge and even disowned by irreligious Romantics like Shelley.⁴⁹ And, from my perspective, this bias towards secular humanism does not start with neo-Kantian Romanticism but begins as early as Abrams's *Literature and Belief* (1957) (though this volume includes a representative selection of religious literary perspectives).⁵⁰ However, I believe it is potentially misleading to interpret Wasserman and Abrams's progressive literary history as primarily symptomatic of their preoccupation with secularization. Rather, I want to suggest that this progressive literary history more likely reflects their preoccupation with neo-Kantian intellectual history as it undergirds this modern secular order. It seems necessary, for instance, to distinguish the content of Abrams and Wasserman's literary history, which does appear to be in some sense secularization-narrative-cum-literary-history, from its form or narrative shape, which reflects a distinctively neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis-and-reconciliation. The secularization-narrative-cum-literary-history should be seen, then, as one instantiation of this neo-Kantian *topos*. This distinction helps us see two things that recommend abandoning the analytic framework of secularization and pursuing, instead, Wasserman and Abrams' investment in this neo-Kantian intellectual historical narrative of modernity.

First, identifying Abrams and Wasserman's literary history as a variation of this neo-Kantian *topos* helps clarify that, while this literary history is certainly a kind of secularization narrative, it is not a variation of the "secularization" thesis whose rampant application Hans Blumenberg interrogates in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Conflating these two versions of secularization is easy because both frameworks are flexible enough to tolerate fairly loose applications, and, in its looser form, the secularization thesis can look more or less like Abrams and Wasserman's progressive literary history. But, as Blumenberg's study reveals, in its strictest form, this secularization thesis purports to be analytic and historical, centered on transitions in ecclesiastical and legal distinctions (indeed, something more like the political history of secularity Jager pursues in *Unquiet Things*). Since the secularization thesis presents itself as socially scientific and descriptive, it is not characteristically progressive or at least professedly

⁴⁹Michael Tomko, Jeffrey Barbeau, Lori Branch, and others have also contributed other correctives to this narrowly secular conception of Romanticism. See in particular Tomko, "Seasons of the Secular" *Religion and Literature* 41.3 (2009): 127-37 and *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien* (Bloomsbury, 2016); and Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Baylor, 2006).

⁵⁰In *Literature and Belief*, Abrams argues that all great works of art exhibit "a central and essentially ethical humanity which transcends particular creeds" and establish "a common base of human sympathies and values" with readers "whether they are believers or unbelievers" (x).

so. As Blumenberg's annoyance demonstrates, only bad sorts of secularization theses gesture towards Progress.

In contrast, the neo-Kantian *topos* operates according to a much different logic and is assessed by much different criteria. It reflects a uniquely "intellectual historical" way of seeing the history of modernity hermeneutically through the history of philosophy. Moreover, this way of seeing modernity is unquestionably and unapologetically *progressive*: it frames its narrative of crisis-and-reconciliation in progressive and even developmental terms. Indeed, in its loosest form, this progressivism turns out to be the neo-Kantian intellectual history's essential feature: the most important aspect of neo-Kantian intellectual history is the *break into modernity* it observes. So while the neo-Kantian *topos* could be applied to construct a progressive secularization narrative or a progressive literary history alike, its principal value is perhaps how it enabled a way of reading different progress narratives (e.g. secularization, disciplinary specialization) so many responses to one central crisis, so many variations of *one* central neo-Kantian narrative of modernity clarified by epistemology. I would suggest the "modern" progress narrative Wasserman and Abrams reads off this neo-Kantian intellectual history and into Romantic literary history — this narrative in which Romanticism "rescues belief — a true or sincere relationship between internal and external — while jettisoning its metaphysical content" (50) — is primarily a "philosophical" one and only secondarily one about secularization: more a story about a transition in a basic understanding of *belief* than a story about the transition from *Belief* to *belief* (though obviously the latter as well).

Recognizing this distinction between form and content, we might then say that the progressive character of Wasserman and Abrams' literary history — the feeling of "historical inevitability" that Jager senses from it — is intrinsic to the neo-Kantian *topos* itself. So we might say that Abrams and Wasserman's application of the neo-Kantian *topos* to the literary history of Romanticism, while ostensibly licensed by the Romantics' own neo-Kantian view of things as so many "philosophical-minded poets" (169), also speaks in a manner to Wasserman and Abrams' own critical estimation of the rise of Romanticism as ultimately modern and progressive in character (an estimation that, admittedly, most Romanticists would still likely accept). In other words, Abrams and Wasserman are speaking from within this neo-Kantian perspective as much as they are commenting on the Romantics' investment in it: they define Romanticism's achievement in distinctly neo-Kantian terms. And the reason this seems worthwhile is because

these neo-Kantian terms are the most salient and significant. We might say Wasserman and Abrams' application of the neo-Kantian *topos* to Romantic literary history is not simply a description but also a kind of *justification* of their view of Romanticism as progressive and modern: in other words, an attempt to confirm Romanticism's progressive and modern character by linking it, hermeneutically but also legibly, to the master narrative of modernity offered within neo-Kantian intellectual history, which is to say, the rise of modern philosophy as initiated by Kant's discovery of epistemology.

If this analysis is correct, it would seem that Budge might have arrived at the right question but asked it in too narrow a manner. Budge asks why Romantic literary critics have felt compelled to imagine British Romantics as rejecting Anglophone empiricism for German idealism. And his answer, as we have seen, is a mixture of intellectualist bias along with institutional and cultural forces (21). But the question could equally be expanded to ask why neo-Kantian Romanticists pursue readings of poetry *through* philosophy and, more specifically, *in terms of epistemology at all*. Why must poetry be explained in terms of philosophy? I hope to have shown that the answer might indeed have to do with a desire to justify the value of literary critical studies by framing it within the authoritative, monolithic neo-Kantian intellectual history of modernity read of the history of modern philosophy. It is as if these neo-Kantian readings of Romanticism are offered up as justifications for situating Romanticism within this neo-Kantian constellation. Or, more likely, it is as if someone like Wellek is conditioned by this intellectual historical manner of interpretation into seeing Romanticism in these terms. This, I would suggest, is why Wellek believes this is something that "responsible" critics do. Neo-Kantian intellectual history dictates the very definition of responsibility.

Of course, I do not mean to discount entirely the value of reading poetry through philosophy, or even of neo-Kantian epistemology. My question simply has to do with why or how one pursues such a reading. And my sense is that neo-Kantian Romanticism, at least initially, pursued it for reasons that have more to do with achieving legitimacy within a mid-century intellectual formation than engaging with the intellectual historical climate of the Romantic period. Indeed, I believe that using philosophy is a lens for viewing Romantic poetry as ultimately indispensable because I believe the Romantics themselves *were* in fact trying to represent poetic practice as philosophically legitimate, and to situate their practice within a new constellation of intellectual reforms. But I would suggest that neo-Kantian Romanticism is

finally committed to the same kind of project of cultural legitimization, and that this distorts both its description of the Romantic engagement with philosophy and its assessment of the outcome of this engagement. From the neo-Kantian perspective, Romantics look like they are shoring up an already established distinction between fact and value. But, I want to suggest, this distinction is not nearly as salient or as firm to the Romantics, who are still working with an order epistemic picture centered on an older concept of moral science. Likewise, the neo-Kantian picture imagines the Romantics successfully out-doing philosophy at its own game, through its poetic explorations. But it is more likely that Romantic poets saw themselves as being systematically displaced by an ascendant philosophy and, therefore, inclined to make poetry more amenable to this rationalistic vision.

1.3 “Hume is the Special Prophet:” Stephen’s Neo-Kantian Intellectual History

When a new edition of Leslie Stephen’s *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) was released in 1949, the literary critic William K. Wimsatt reviewed Stephen’s influential intellectual history in *The New Scholasticism*. Though known best for his monograph *The Verbal Icon* and his formulation of the intentional fallacy, Wimsatt was also a central architect of neo-Kantian literary history.⁵¹ What’s relevant about Wimsatt’s review is that it does not treat the specific merits of the new edition — say, the introduction or the new editorial notes — but the work itself. Of course, Wimsatt comments on the peculiarity of his approach: any review of the book is “bound to be retrospective, breathing a kind of ghostly atmosphere. To Wimsatt, it seems distinctly of its time, “a massive Victorian celebration of the Age of Reason” concerned with “the minute intelligence of certain ‘battles long ago’” (348). But Wimsatt reads Stephen’s work for “its reflection of a more recent world-view.” It remains for him the “most informative single guide book from the sceptical point of view” (349). Wimsatt observes that, while our picture of the eighteenth century has advanced a great deal, it has not altered Stephen’s: it has confirmed more than it is has corrected: “What has happened in the history of scholarship since Stephen wrote is not so much that the peculiar era which he chose has been

⁵¹Wimsatt’s 1949 essay, “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery,” was the first major essay to adduce Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s comment about William Bowles’ “dim analogies,” as evidence of Coleridge’s dissatisfaction with eighteenth-century topographical poetry and his desire to develop a more integrated form of symbolism. In his 1949 essay, “The Concept of Romanticism,” Wellek describes it as “excellent” and suggests that it “certainly supports my argument.” I discuss both Wimsatt’s argument and its impact in Chapter Five.

taken from him by later and better authorities, but that the isolation in which he tended, excusably, to see it has been illuminated by numerous later researches in adjacent areas” (349). For Wimsatt, Stephen’s work is prophetic, his insights well ahead of their time: as such, it is “no small marvel that so much of what is important to [eighteenth century studies] is to be found at least adumbrated in Stephen’s volumes” and that “he in that mistie [*sic*] time, could see so clearly” (350).

Contemporary scholars of intellectual history have also viewed Stephen’s work as prophetic, but in a much different way than Wimsatt does. Whereas Wimsatt values Stephen’s work for its foundational success, modern scholars tend to focus on its failures, most notably, the unrealized potential of Stephen’s initial plan for his intellectual history and its distance from the intellectual history Stephen actually writes.⁵² As M. de Waard observes, Stephen’s introduction appears to offer a “programmatically manifesto” for a “new mode of inquiry” that dispenses with the intellectualism of disciplinary histories of philosophy for a new kind of sociological history focused not on what Stephen called the “logical conditions” but the “social conditions” of knowledge production. Stephen promotes this new kind of inquiry as a corrective to the simplistic picture of intellectual influence provided by historians of philosophy, one more in keeping with the facts of intellectual development. Historians of philosophy, Stephen writes, “naturally limit their attention to the ablest thinkers” (3). They “tell us how the torch was passed from hand to hand — from Descartes to Locke, from Locke to Hume, and from Hume to Kant” (3). And, in this way, they construct a tidy picture of the “progress of speculation” in which that progress appears “determined by logical considerations” (3), in a dialectic process in which “each philosopher discovers some of the errors of his predecessor, and advances to some closer approximation of the truth” (3).

For Stephen, this kind of tidy picture has its place. But the obvious problem with this picture is that it does not capture the messiness and irregularity of intellectual development: how thought “moves in a spiral curve” (3), how intellectual transformations are never clear or complete, how superstitions “apparently suppressed, break out anew in slightly modified shapes,” and “a phase of thought” that once looked to “involve a new departure” turns out to be a

⁵²John W. Bicknell originally establishes this question in an influential 1962 article: “Why does Stephen tell us how intellectual history should be written and then follow another method?” (Bicknell “Tract” 104). For Bicknell’s more extensive treatment of this and other aspects of Stephen’s intellectual history, see Bicknell, “Leslie Stephen as an Intellectual Historian.” Diss. Cornell University. 1950.

“superficial modification of an old order of ideas” (3). And this messiness suggests that the “logical instincts” must be only partial causes of intellectual transformations. This fact therefore recommends a new kind of inquiry into “the main influences, outside of the more logical instincts, which most obviously affect the progress of a new system of thought” (10).

The problem, as modern scholars see it, is that Stephen does not end up following this tantalizing plan for a sociological intellectual history. Indeed, once he motivates the case for such a history of “social conditions” that influence thought, he seems to revert to the old intellectual historical model he intended to transcend. Stephen indicates that his book will “deal chiefly with the logical conditions” and leave these sociological conditions untreated. De Waard notes a “special irony” in Stephen’s inability to escape his “intellectualism,” because it seems to enact the same error that Stephen’s introduction diagnoses: he writes, “[I]n Stephen’s own terms, his notion of the persistence of ideas, of intellectual survivals and arrested growths, may apply to his own theorization of intellectual agency in the introduction” (466). And Stephen’s “failure to fully confront the disjuncture between intellectual production and social change in history makes the residual intellectualism of his own reflections” function as “an apt example” of the concept of “rationalization” that Stephen theorizes to explain this persistence in the eighteenth century. Rationalization, as de Waard notes, is a “form of preserving ideas that are in fact on the wane” (466). In this view, Stephen’s introduction simply shores up the intellectualism it claims to challenge.

I agree with the general thrust of de Waard’s analysis, but here I want to suggest that Stephen does not simply see himself as departing from older disciplinary histories of philosophy, but as doing something new — or, at least, a more ambitious version of these disciplinary histories. In short, in his work, Stephen is newly writing and expanding the reach of neo-Kantian intellectual history. And it is Stephen’s version of neo-Kantian intellectual history that Wimsatt not only recognizes but also regards as foundational. It departs from previous disciplinary histories in a few important and distinctive ways that de Waard’s otherwise sound analysis does not capture. De Waard certainly sees the more distinctive formal features of Stephen’s text, but without a strong sense of neo-Kantian intellectual history, which evidently unites Stephen with Wimsatt, de Waard does not make enough of these formal features.

For instance, de Waard notes that Stephen “opens his introduction...by considering a problem in the study of David Hume as a starting point for a more general reflection on the

theory of history of ideas” (462). But Stephen’s work does not merely proceed from a “problem in the study of David Hume.” Stephen *invents* a new kind of intellectual historical problem *as* a problem in the study of David Hume. As one contemporary reviewer writes, in Stephen’s text “Hume is the special prophet of the century” (493).⁵³ Indeed, Stephen’s intellectual history begins with a looming Hume: “Between the years 1739 and 1752 David Hume published philosophical speculations destined, by the admission of friends and foes, to form a turning-point in the history of thought” (1). It is a curious, *in media res* way to open what Stephen bills in the preface as a “systematic account” of religious thought from 1688 to 1750 and the “deistical controversies” that defined that period. But it conforms to the metonymic logic of neo-Kantian intellectual history, where Hume stands in for epistemology, and epistemological stands in for philosophy. The image occurs in an introductory section entitled “the influence of great thinkers” (ix) and in an introductory chapter entitled “The Philosophical Basis.”

At first glance, this looming image of Hume — taken with the titles of the sections in which it occurs — would seem to imply Hume’s direct influence on the “history of thought.” But again Stephen is not exactly convinced that Hume plays more than an indirect or indexical role in this intellectual shift. This is not only because Hume’s influence is “obscure because chiefly negative” but because, for Stephen, Hume was admittedly a prophet with few followers in his time: “[t]he uneducated masses were, of course, beyond his reach” and “even amongst the educated minority he had but few readers; and amongst the few readers still fewer who could appreciate his thoughts” (1). In any case, for Stephen, “the rapidity and extent of the transformation of the whole body of speculation” that followed Hume was “too manifold and potent to be embodied in any single personality.” For Stephen, the widespread ramifications of Hume’s Skepticism suggest that merely “logical conditions” cannot explain them: instead, some “social conditions” would have needed to be “favourable to their development” (19). So, despite appearances, this first section is intended as a corrective to some kind of narrower history of philosophy centered on Kant.

⁵³The reviewer also notably regrets that “one hears nothing of Kant and other thinkers” (493) even though we “were never more interacting with these” (493). Of course, Kant *does* appear, but only at the periphery in neo-Kantian fashion. But the comment should speak to extent of Kant’s hold on the broader intellectual landscape, in light of which neo-Kantian intellectual history seems to be, bizarrely, a kind of diminishment of Kant’s presence — but which, as I have suggested, is actually a kind of submersion or sublimation. This sublimated and peripheral quality is what makes neo-Kantian intellectual history so difficult to see.

We can get a more complete sense of Stephen's dissatisfaction with the current state of intellectual history by turning to his preface. There, Stephen specifies his intent to be to trace eighteenth-century deistic controversies to what he sees as their "origin" (v) in philosophy:

In order to give a satisfactory account of the deist controversy, it thus seemed necessary to describe the general theological tendencies of the time; and in order to set forth intelligibly the ideas which shaped those tendencies, it seemed desirable, again, to trace their origin in the philosophy of the time, and to show their application in other departments of speculation. (vi)

It is the clarity afforded by this philosophical basis that justifies "repeating a thrice-told tale" of philosophy in order to indicate "the application of the principles accepted in philosophy and theology" beyond these narrow fields. These applications in "other departments of speculation" include their application to "moral and political questions, and their reflection in the imaginative literature of the time" (vii).

For Stephen, this more ambitious and holistic picture will ensure a "a more detailed and systematic account" of the deistic controversy and correct the "narrowness and unfairness" of earlier committed accounts that were "in no sense philosophical" (v). In this, he is following the more neutral, encyclopedic approaches to intellectual history that he sees emerging around him. But he is departing from the tendency of even the best of these to be "annal[s]" rather than "histor[ies] of thought" (vi). Stephen, in other words, is interested in a more thoroughly shaped and even stylized intellectual history: one with a stronger central narrative which might organize the otherwise diffuse and distributed effects of Hume's skepticism.

Stephen admits that his more ambitious moral and literary speculations remain inadequately developed. Pursuing them further would have meant expanding the book "beyond all permissible limits," not to mention "trespassing upon the province of literary criticism" (vii). From Stephen's perspective, the book had already "assumed such dimensions that I have been unable to describe it satisfactorily by any other than the perhaps too ambitious title which it bears" (vii). But Stephen does offer his own neo-Kantian literary history of sorts, and it is worth exploring not only as a foundation and a counterpoint to the versions developed within literary criticism in the mid-twentieth century, but as a way into Stephen's map to what he imagined as a more thorough intellectual reform: what needed to be done to generate the kind of critical and scientific turn he saw unevenly developed at the *fin de siècle*.

Stephen develops this line of thought with a meditation on a line of Wordsworth's poetry. Stephen wants to specify the "sentiment" behind Wordsworth's melancholic profession in his sonnet "The World is Too Much with Us" that he would rather be "a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" (14). For Stephen, Wordsworth's problem is disenchantment: Wordsworth wants to restore the "long-vanished charm" of an earlier mythical world. And his line demonstrates the inability of the new scientific order to speak to these older mythical investments. For Stephen, the "new order, constructed by the reason, remains colourless and uninteresting" because these "old associations have not yet gathered round it" (14) but remain tied up in "an old mode of conceiving the universe." These lasting associations mean, whenever "emotions are roused" (14), they revive this picture: we still have access to these superstitions through our affective registers: they undermine the "purely intellectual impulse" which is "of the highest importance" but finally motivated by only a "feeble desire" (6). This is why rational visions are finally "colourless and uninteresting" (14).

Stephen notes that while a scientific orientation would tempt one to say that "Wordsworth is simply wrong" (14), these sentiments are still live enough such that "any attempt to dispute [their] accuracy is resented as needlessly cruel" (14). And Stephen wants to show how Wordsworth's lament is finally justified, how it speaks to a set of legitimate concerns. Still, he has to work to get to their qualified value. He concludes that the "loss which Wordsworth might fairly lament" was "not the loss of a mistaken theory about facts," nor "the loss of a consoling prospect for the future," but finally "the loss of a system of symbols which could enable him to express readily and vigorously every mood produced by the vicissitudes of human life" (16). For Stephen, Wordsworth is not entitled to the first two lamentations because, from Stephen's perspective, both losses are finally gains. A new theory about facts is not only an unqualified intellectual gain, but one that can provide the basis for a new moral order, a "consoling prospect for the future" (16). But Wordsworth does legitimately lament the loss of a prior order of symbols, myths and superstitions that were once a "living reality" but which have become a "poetical plaything" (16). But, for Stephen, even as the desire for this "living reality" is meaningful, this new disenchantment is finally a gain since it necessitates a "new language" which "may be learnt" and by which "loss may be replaced" (16). And this new, scientific vision of morality will itself finally be a gain since "it will be content with direct vision, instead of mixing facts with dreams" (16). In this sense, Wordsworth's attempt to hold onto these mythical

symbols may fruitfully identify these persistent emotional needs, but it inhibits the new scientific vision by sustaining an older, limited mythology. This leads Stephen to believe the “imagination exercises, on the whole, a retarding influence” on intellectual progress.

It is worth momentarily measuring the distance between Stephen’s neo-Kantian literary history and that espoused within mid-century neo-Kantian Romanticism. For we see the same collapse and displacement of an older superstitious order for a new modern scientific order, and we see the same acknowledgement that Wordsworth turns to myth as a reaction to this order, but Stephen regards this response as finally unphilosophical where Wasserman and Abrams see it as the turn of “philosophical-minded” poets (Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism* 169). For Wasserman and Abrams, Wordsworth *achieves* the new symbolic language that Stephen imagines lying beyond the horizon and written in a more social scientific register. And, for Wasserman and Abrams, the moral component of Wordsworth’s negotiation is submerged, implicit in his responsiveness to what is more centrally an *epistemological* or *philosophical* problem instead of a *moral* one. Stephen calls for an explicit articulation of morality founded on epistemology. In one sense, neo-Kantian Romanticism seems to frustrate Stephen’s hope by abandoning any such moral articulation for an even more rigidly epistemological picture. But this moral component is in fact merely sublimated into a tone of moral seriousness that suffuses almost all of mid-century neo-Kantian Romanticism.⁵⁴

But, for Stephen, this new symbolic language will not only be decisively moral and practical, but more communal than individual. It will also finally need to be as rhetorical as it is philosophical. It must *persuade* the holdouts to adopt the new scientific vision in ways that its narrow philosophical development simply has not. It must show how these visions may be applied to their legitimate and intractable — even natural — moral desires for utility and meaningfulness. It will provide a foundation for a similar kind of humanistic *ethos* Abrams imagines in his earlier work to be organized around literature. It will arguably respond to the same imperative that causes Wordsworth to see poetry as the indispensable handmaiden to

⁵⁴For Wasserman, the responsiveness is distinctly private and merely expressive: we can only observe each individual poet’s negotiation of symbols: and these individual negotiations offer only individual gains. They do not add up to a moral community; the grounds for such a community simply do not exist. And language is finally more confining than liberating at the level of semantic content. New symbolic negotiations must be pursued at the order of form, as a disruptive use of “syntactic structures.” For Abrams, that moral component only becomes an explicit creedal commitment once post-structuralism threatens to dispense with it altogether. See “What is a Humanistic Criticism?” in *The Emperor Redressed*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 13-44.

“science.” Stephen too admits that literature and theology speak clearest to these moral desires at the current moment, but Stephen cannot see literature speaking as clearly or directly as science one day might because it must do so indirectly, by “mixing facts with dreams” (16). Even if literature and theology must finally remain eradicable, Stephen at the least wants the option to “express our emotions directly as well as by the intervention of crude hypothesis” (15). For Wasserman and Abrams, however, there is only the ironic literary re-appropriation of “crude hypothesis” (15) in the subtler and ineffable (read: formal) languages of art.

It is also worth measuring the distance between Stephen’s view of skepticism and the mid-century perspective, since this will surely complicate the one-sided picture of Stephen as a kind of arch-skeptic committed to Polanyi’s doctrine of doubt. As discussed above, from Wimsatt’s perspective, Stephen’s text appears to be a “guide book” to a “sceptical point of view.” The comment appears to look two ways: not only to Stephen’s own Skeptical perspective but to the insight this Skeptical perspective allows Stephen into the rise of Skepticism in the preceding century. But, even as Stephen pays a clear respect to Humean skepticism in his introduction, he also frequently decries the kind of scientific skepticism he sees as partially responsible for the impoverished and underdeveloped condition of a science-based morality. For Stephen, the thinker who “perceives the error” in older myths is also “tempted to abandon” the moral truth that these teachings also convey: “If moral teaching has been for ages connected with a belief in hell, the thinker who sees that hell is a figment sometimes infers that the moral law is not obligatory” (9). Stephen notes that scholars frequently attribute this to a kind of credulity — a desire for novelty, but that, “at a distance,” what is “more remarkable” is the “conservatism” of this skeptical conclusion, not its “destructiveness” (9). As such, “The philosophic doctrine, misunderstood by the ruder intellect, gives rise to a crude scepticism, which is but another form of superstition,” which results in a kind of complacency. The skeptic’s self-satisfaction means that “the attempt to accommodate the hostile systems” that are “unconsciously carried out” as a kind of intellectual principle of natural selection is suspended. Skepticism becomes a device “consciously adopted” for “evading responsibility” and which may “at times lead to downright dishonesty and disregard of the great virtue of intellectual candour” (9). In short, Stephen has his own full-blown critique of the “doctrine of doubt” even as he is one of the more salient Victorian subscribers by Wimsatt’s standards. Stephen knows how to see Humean Skepticism as Heroic, but he still takes skepticism to be more often a kind of Idiocy. By the mid-century, however,

there seems to be a much firmer and more comprehensive Heroic account of skepticism — again, we have something like the “intellectual probity” that even Polanyi struggles not to afford Skepticism despite its excesses.

1.4 Collapsing Kant’s Triptych: Kant, Reid, and the Epistemologist’s Dilemma

I would like to return to Kant’s account in the *Prolegomena* to examine its rhetorical and strategic aspect. The question is why Kant observes Hume’s skepticism as a threat only to dismiss that threat as apparent. From a sympathetic perspective, this is because Kant has a sincere appreciation for Hume’s pioneering insights. But from a suspicious perspective, Kant simply instrumentalizes Hume as an authoritative second opinion about the significance of his own project of epistemology. Rorty was arguably the first within philosophy to notice this strategic aspect and systematically challenge the convenience of Kant’s maneuver. Within philosophy, it is simply more convenient to accept Kant’s picture of things as authoritative: doing so places philosophy at the top of the modern intellectual hierarchy. Likewise, accepting this hierarchy outlines a clear program for other critical disciplines like Romantic literary criticism, even as literary critics have strangely had to subordinate themselves to philosophy and develop theories of poetry on philosophic terms.

The fact that hardly anyone prior to Rorty entertained the idea that Kant’s negotiation was more rhetorical than philosophical is evidence of the profound rhetorical efficacy of Kant’s triptych. Kant’s triptych appeals to a shared desire to observe the modern break. Kant succeeds in distinguishing his response from the common sense response by convincing everyone that his own response is properly philosophical and critical and that the Common Sense response is simply reactionary and descriptive. After Kant, it somehow becomes impossible to dismiss Hume outright as unserious, as Kant portrays Reid and his contemporaries to have done. Moreover, Kant importantly succeeds in convincing most everyone not simply that Hume’s philosophy is epistemological but that it is finally and radically *skeptical* in character. The former distinction is how he achieves a basic continuity with Hume; the latter is how he achieves distance from Hume.

But how accurate is Kant’s triptych? What happens to this progressive intellectual history of modernity read off this triptych, or the literary history that mid-century critics read off this intellectual history, if this Kantian triptych could be *collapsed* into a single point, shown to be

more a sign of the proximity of Kant, Reid, and Hume than their distance? What would happen to this neo-Kantian topos of *crisis* read off various sites of Kant's triptych? I want to say that a more thoroughly rhetorical interpretation of Kant's negotiation ultimately makes this collapse possible. A closer look at Reid's response to Hume reveals that Reid took Hume *more* seriously than Kant lets on. And a closer look at Kant's suggests that he took Hume *less* seriously than he would seem to claim. Furthermore, a closer look at the rhetorical strategy Kant finally uses to dismiss Hume suggests that he significantly overstates his distance from Reid and that, in fact, Kant and Reid are deploying a shared anti-skeptical rhetoric. Likewise, a closer look at the exclusively *negative* role Hume plays within Kant's anti-skeptical rhetoric suggests that Kant's depiction of Hume as a radical skeptic is primarily strategic, intended to exaggerate not only the distance between Kant and Hume, but also the distance between Hume and Reid's common sense contemporaries, and finally the distance between all three points. In this section, I want to take a closer look at Reid's response to Hume in an attempt to describe what I take to be the actual difference between Kant and Reid. After recalibrating this difference, I want to consider some proposed reasons for why Kant's response has proved more appealing and enduring than Reid's.

To measure the distance between Kant and Reid in a different manner, we can draw on the general heuristic schema Michael Williams proposes for distinguishing between different responses to Skepticism. Indeed, Williams's schema is merely one of numerous ways philosophers have attempted to parse the various kinds of objections to skepticism. But the value of Williams's approach, from my perspective, is the way it focuses on the problem of "how seriously" one should take the skeptic.⁵⁵ For Williams, there are initially two broad classes of responses: *constructive* and *diagnostic*. Here Williams uses *constructive* in a more specialized manner than I have been using it. For Williams, a *constructive* response effectively *accepts* the accuracy and legitimacy of the problem of epistemological skepticism as the Skeptic describes it and then constructs a system that responds directly to that skeptical challenge. As Williams writes, "The constructive epistemologist hopes to meet the sceptic by arguing for a positive theory of knowledge, a theory that will enable him to explain how and to what extent

⁵⁵ Of course, it should be said that Williams constructs his general schema in an effort to clarify the nature of his own, uncommon response to skepticism — which as we will see, finally aligns with Reid's. In this sense, the general schema is obviously in some sense a means to an argumentative end. But, nonetheless, I believe most will find his parsing uncontroversial and, finally, insightful.

knowledge... is possible. He therefore takes the sceptic's questions more or less at face value" (Williams xvi). From this perspective, Kant's subjective idealism is a constructive response *par excellence*. A *diagnostic* response, on the other hand, "suspects that there is something drastically wrong with the way the questions are posed" and therefore pursues not a "proof of what the sceptic doubts" but "further investigation of his claims to doubt it" (xvi).

From Williams's perspective, there are in turn two major classes of diagnostic responses, *therapeutic* and *theoretical*, which amount to two distinct strategies for dismissing the skeptic (xvi). The *therapeutic* response approaches the skeptic's problems as something that needs to be "dissolved" rather than "solved:" the *therapeutic* response believes that "the sceptic does not mean what he seems to mean, or even that he fails to mean anything at all" (xvi). In contrast, a *theoretical* response aims to "show that sceptical arguments derive their force, not from commonsensical intuitions about knowledge, but from theoretical ideas that we are by no means bound to accept" (xvii). From this perspective, we might say the difference between theoretical and therapeutic responses turns on the same problem of evidential context I discussed in the Overview. A therapeutic response takes the Skeptic to be on to something, on the basis of what Williams calls the basic "intelligibility" of the Skeptic's claims. As Williams explains, the therapeutic approach acknowledges that "we will never find it easy to convince ourselves that we do not understand the sceptic at all. Rather, our sense that we *do* understand him — well enough at least to appreciate why certain anti-sceptical strategies [*e.g. constructive* approaches] are doomed to fail — works against the credibility of views about meaning that suggest we don't" (xvi-xvii). From this perspective, any constructive response to skepticism finally looks more *theoretical*, more committed, and thus more problematic than the skeptic's minimally theoretical assumptions. The same is true of any *theoretical* response, which tries to frame the skeptic's problems as overly technical and theoretical — we might say elitist — and thus idiotic. From the theoretical perspective, sceptical problems do not point to intuitive problems of knowledge but simply reflect bad, or at least contestable and controversial, theoretical premises.

As Williams observes, these classes of response are not mutually exclusive but only roughly heuristic distinctions. This becomes apparent if we try to apply them to Boswell and Johnson's respective responses to Berkeley's skepticism. From one perspective, Boswell's response would appear to be diagnostic and therapeutic because Boswell seems willing to accept the coherence and intelligibility of Berkeley's sceptical proposition, even as he understands it to

be false at some deeper level. But considering that this intelligibility takes place at the level of rhetoric — as mere “sophistry” — one might also make the case that Boswell’s response is theoretical: that is, that Berkeley’s arguments are functioning in a hermetically sealed world of theory, in which such things have a look of intelligibility and coherence that does not transfer to the world. Likewise, from one perspective, Johnson’s kick looks distinctly constructive in Williams’ more specialized sense of the word: it proves knowledge of the world through contact with it, through its resistance to Johnson’s will, and through the pain that resistance creates. But, given Johnson’s adoption of Berkeley’s terms — his attempt to dissolve rather than solve Berkeley’s problems from within — Johnson’s kick could be seen as diagnostic and therapeutic. And, in one more turn, with an eye on Johnson’s deeper disdain for Berkeley and the evidently performative and ironic nature of this “therapeutic” response, Johnson’s kick could also be seen as a theoretical response. From Johnson’s perspective, we are “by no means bound to accept” these skeptical premises. Johnson adopts them by choice, and the choice is idiotic.

Williams’ sees Kant’s idealist response as constructive *par excellence*, but I want to make the case that Kant’s rhetorical sophistication in the *Prolegomena* allows us to view Kant’s response along *therapeutic* lines. As we have seen, from Kant’s perspective, Hume identifies a meaningful set of issues — which Kant parses as a difference between *epistemological* and *moral* certainty — but draws the wrong set of conclusions regarding this meaningful issue. That wrong conclusion reflects on Hume’s lack of rigor and, in some sense, his incomplete understanding of the intuitive problem that he stumbles across. And in this sense, Kant responds to Hume by returning to Hume’s legitimate insights to dissolve Hume’s illegitimate ones: again, as Williams writes, Kant shows that Hume “does not mean what he seems to mean” (xvii). And Kant’s idealism emerges as a more complete diagnosis and clarification of Hume’s error, even as it also emerges as a constructive means to shore up Hume’s insights. Hume’s skeptical crisis is in this sense only apparent.

While the therapeutic character of Kant’s approach is certainly debatable, the value of reading Kant’s response as therapeutic is that it captures what I take to be the more spiritual role Kant plays within the neo-Kantian intellectual history. As Williams observes in his extensive historical survey of philosophical responses to skepticism, the therapeutic response has come to dominate the field as an “epistemological pessimism” has discouraged constructive and theoretical responses. From my perspective, this pessimistic drift away from constructive

towards therapeutic responses is another way to describe the broader shift in emphasis from Kant towards Hume in neo-Kantian intellectual history. Kant's instrumental role was to initiate and standardize this therapeutic tendency by necessitating that Hume's skepticism be taken seriously as a hint towards neo-Kantian epistemology. This therapeutic approach has survived long after Kant's particular constructive response fell out of favor. Kant is the first to rule out a baldly theoretical response to Hume. After Kant, the immediate dismissiveness of the theoretical response looks suspiciously easy and unphilosophical: more a sign of a moral reaction to Hume than any intellectual engagement with him. And, with the exception of ordinary language philosophy and a few other schools, a therapeutic negotiation of Hume has remained the privileged approach. Of course, it is perhaps too much to say that Kant is responsible for the currency of the therapeutic approach, but it seems accurate to say that Kant's initial negotiation of Hume is representative of what has become the dominant intellectual disposition.

Whatever the nature of Kant's response to Hume, Reid's is unmistakably *theoretical* in character. As I mentioned in the Overview, Reid takes Humean skepticism to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the false premises at the center of the Cartesian project of epistemology. Hume's skeptical conclusions are absurd, but soundly reasoned: therefore, they must illustrate the absurdity of the premises. Here's how Reid frames it in his letter to Hume: "I agree with you therefore that if this system shall ever be demolished, you have a just claim to a great share of the praise, both because you have made it a distinct and determinate mark to be aimed at, and have furnished the proper artillery for the purpose" (5). In other words, Reid understands the value of Hume's skepticism to be instrumental and therapeutic. But Hume's skeptical system itself (insofar as he retains one) is theoretically mistaken: since "this curious system appears not to be fitted to the present state of human nature" (58).

What is the theoretical error at the center of the Cartesian project? For Reid, this has to do with the way Descartes inherits and reworks a bad analogy from an earlier Scholastic theory of mind. Reid explains this error by describing what he sees as the "two ways" of developing knowledge. The first way, "the way of reasoning," constitutes a kind of clear, logical reflection that is endemic to true philosophy. Reid distinguishes this from the "way of analogy," which for Reid is the "most common way, in which men form their opinions concerning the mind and its operations" ("Common Sense" 453). For Reid, the way of analogy may be sufficient for common life, but is bound to distort more than it clarifies in philosophy. Analogy is simply too

promiscuous and pervasive: “There is nothing in the course of nature so singular, but we can find some resemblance, or at least some analogy, between it and other things with which we are acquainted” (453). The mind even “naturally delights in hunting for such analogies and attends to them with pleasure” (453). For this reason, “[a]rguments from analogy are always at hand, and grow up spontaneously in a fruitful imagination” (454). As such, the “way of analogy” is naturally and instinctively more appealing than the “way of reasoning,” which though “more direct” and “more conclusive” demands “painful attention and application” (454). We can think of Reid’s distinction as one between critical and commonsense reasoning.

For Reid, the problem with older scholastic theory of mind is that it “seems to have been purely analogical” (458). By this, Reid means that it posited a basic analogy between matter and the mind, one which led philosophers to privilege “matter” over “mind” and to understand “sensation” to be dependent, in some sense, on the qualities present in matter. For Reid, this is a common way of reasoning about the mind, one distinctly reliable and intuitive in everyday context and illustrated by a pervasive system of analogies between mental and physical operations in ordinary language, what Berkeley calls the “analogy of language.”⁵⁶ In these everyday contexts, Reid writes, “when we form our notions of the operations of the mind by analogy, this way of conceiving them seems to be very natural, and offers itself to our thoughts: for as everything which is felt must make some impression on the body, we are apt to think, that every thing [*sic*] which is understood must make some impression on the mind” (483-84). But for Reid, this way of thinking severely distorts our philosophical perception of what knowledge is. And though Descartes’s innovation had managed “to trust less to analogical reasoning upon this subject, than any philosopher had done before him” (464), Descartes’ system finally “hath retained some of the old analogical notions concerning the operations of the mind” despite “profess[ing] to set out in the way of reflection, and not of analogy” (484). From Reid’s perspective, Descartes does not discard the material analogy of the “old philosophy,” but simply shifts the privileged site from the matter to the mental impression. Retaining this basic analogy, for Reid, paves the way for skepticism since it necessarily privileges “the existence of ideas” and the “necessary relations that govern them.” These ideas and relations seem to emerge as the only self-evident principles (478). Relocating the certainty in the subject necessarily exacerbates the

⁵⁶The phrase occurs in Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues*. The skeptic Philonous glosses it with the observation that “most mental operations are signified by the words borrowed from sensible things, as can be seen in the terms ‘comprehend,’ reflect,’ ‘discourse’ etc.” (Berkeley 55).

rift between mind and matter by privileging the former and problematizing the latter. Following Descartes's premise, for instance, Locke had chipped away at the "primary" qualities with his discussion of various "secondary qualities" inherent only in the mind. And Hume and Berkeley simply perform the same critique on substance and extension. In short, if the old system tended to "materialize the mind, and its operations," the "Cartesian has a tendency to spiritualize body, and its qualities" (466).

For Reid, this very distinction between primary and secondary qualities stems from the same representationalist fallacy: the assumption that "we can know nothing about body, or its qualities, but as far as we have sensations which resemble those qualities" (466). From Reid's perspective, this is simply a misguided conception of knowledge and belief built on a bad analogy: "thought, volition, remembrance, and the other attributes of the mind, are altogether unlike to extension, to figure, and to all the attributes of body" (465). And this bad analogy leads to a woefully narrow representationalist theory of belief that reduces belief to the terms of discrete ideas or representations: for Reid, "in belief there is something more than an idea, to wit, an assent or persuasion of the mind" (46). Sensation and reflection cannot be neatly separated, as Hume assumes, because "every operation of the senses, in its very nature, implies judgment or belief, as well as simple apprehension" (481), and this "belief is not produced by comparing ideas, and perceiving their agreements and disagreements" (481). Rather, it is "included in the very nature of the sensation" and "perception" (481).

To correct this bad analogy, Reid goes on to offer a more constructive account of the "first principles" of "common sense" and how these emerge from our "constitution." This account is what neo-Kantian intellectual history often emphasizes. But I believe Reid is largely tentative about his positive description of common sense, even as he is thoroughly convinced of its existence. He only can surmise that common sense is more a "cause" of than an "reason" for his belief (9), and he generally prefers to define commonsense, as Hume does, negatively, against a category of the "*absurd*" (482), or any principles "manifestly contrary to any of those first principles" (482) of common sense. In any case, I want to examine Reid's theoretical response, not his constructive one, much in the same way I want to examine Kant's therapeutic response instead of his constructive one. The distinction between these responses simply aims to capture the *initial* posture towards Hume's skepticism: how serious one must initially take Skepticism.

I want to suggest this difference in initial posture towards Hume is a helpful way of describing the difference between Kant and Reid. And an exploration of this difference affords a better understanding of how neo-Kantian intellectual history manages to stabilize the evidentiary context of Skepticism. To see this, I will need to return to Williams' analysis of skepticism to consider how he finally draws on this schema for his own theoretical response to Skepticism. As it happens, Williams' response tracks remarkably close to Reid's in ways that I believe afford a new appreciation for Reid's insight.

In his response, Williams proposes that this distinction between the therapeutic and theoretical is finally the crux of the question: from his perspective, the "absolutely crucial question to ask about scepticism is this: to what extent are sceptical doubts 'natural' or 'intuitive' and to what extent are they the product of contentious and possibly dispensable theoretical preconceptions" (Williams 1). While Williams wants to claim Skepticism does depend on such "dispensable theoretical preconceptions," his analysis carefully attends to the strong and almost irresistible claim Skepticism has to being a 'natural' or 'intuitive' problem" (17). For Williams, the "conviction" that it is an intuitive problem amounts to the "wellspring" of skepticism (17).

Williams suggests that, while therapeutic responses seem more sophisticated in that they attempt to work with this conviction (if only finally to work *against* it), going down this therapeutic path effectively generates what Williams calls the "epistemologist's dilemma:"

Conceding [skepticism's] naturalness lands us in the epistemologist's dilemma: we can either accept scepticism, or make changes in our pre-theoretical thinking about knowledge that shrink the domain, or alter the status, of what we previously thought of as knowledge of objective fact. In making such changes, however, we inevitably appear to be making very large concessions to the sceptic. Unkindly put, the epistemologist's dilemma is that we can either agree with the sceptic directly, or in a roundabout grudging way — Hobson's choice. (22)

For Williams, the way out of this dilemma is to locate the "the sceptic's essential *epistemological* presuppositions" (37) — not in order to claim they are mistaken but simply to illustrate they are *theoretical* in nature and therefore *contentious*. That is, the task is to show that skeptical problems may be "fully genuine" but "*only given certain theoretical ideas about knowledge and justification*" (37). What makes Skepticism appear natural or intuitive is the way it compresses these theoretical ideas so thoroughly as to make them invisible: for Williams, Skepticism is the "distillate from a complex infusion of theoretical ideas" (41). The Sceptic's own sincere sense of the non-theoretical status only submerges this distillate further. Again Williams: "the sceptic

does not see himself as making assumptions: rather he takes himself to be exploiting features of our everyday concepts that we are all bound to recognize. This is what we need to show is not the case” (45).

From Williams’ perspective, once you demonstrate the theoretical and controversial nature of skepticism — and “redistribute the burden of theory” to the skeptic — skepticism loses its “powerful immediate appeal” (17); skepticism is deprived of “what would otherwise be an overwhelming dialectical advantage” (xvii) of seeming minimally theoretical. The task is to meet “The sceptic’s implicit theory of our epistemic concepts” with “an alternative which fits in equally well with the uncontroversial data, while failing to generate sceptical consequences” (39). Here Williams begins to align distinctly with Reid. For Williams, the problem of Skepticism begins in “a contentious epistemological theory, itself the product of mistaken analogies” (51). The common feature of Skeptical arguments is that they all involve making “analogous cuts between what we are allowed to know, at least for the sake of argument, and what we hope (or like to think) we know” (52). Sceptical arguments start with partitioning propositions into “privileged and problematic classes” (52). But, for Williams, once this simple assumption about the “epistemological priority” of one class over another is “in place,” Skepticism is “just around the corner” (52). From this perspective, the skeptic bakes in a theoretical distinction between problematic and privileged sites of knowledge which effectively generates the *aporia* Skepticism observes.

From my perspective, this is not only remarkably close to Reid’s analysis. It also bears an uncanny resemblance to Taylor’s analysis of the logic of subtraction story. Indeed, I take Williams’ “epistemologist’s dilemma” to reveal something important about the way neo-Kantian intellectual history stabilizes the evidential context of Skepticism. Neo-Kantian intellectual history would seem to privilege Kant’s therapeutic response over his constructive one largely because of the flexibility it affords. If neo-Kantian intellectual history stabilizes the evidential context of Skepticism, it only stabilizes or naturalizes a basic sense of the philosophical import of Skepticism. It does dictate *how* Skepticism is significant; or even *whether* Skepticism must finally be seen as philosophically significant. These remain open questions. This is why, as we have seen, Hume’s Skepticism can be viewed variously as a problem or a solution, as therapeutic or progressive, as irresolvable or resolvable, or any of these to different degrees. This is why nearly every major philosopher interested in Skepticism has been able to pursue a unique

interpretation of Hume. Neo-Kantian intellectual history simply dictates that one must take Skepticism seriously. As I said, Kant somehow makes it impossible to not take Hume seriously. Even as one can finally dismiss Skepticism as some kind of misunderstanding (in the way most New Humeans do), one cannot dismiss Hume outright (as Reid does). And this is true even as Hume himself seems to find this commonsense rejection to be a legitimate response to the Skeptic's most anxious and excessive registers.

Stabilizing the evidential context of Skepticism in this loose manner seems to have enabled the remarkable kinds of growth we have observed the historical progression of neo-Kantian intellectual history. It frees neo-Kantian intellectual history to repurpose itself at different moments for different ends and, therefore, to consolidate and reinforce its interpretive power: to grow into one of Connolly's abstract machines. It is improbably an intellectual "platform" in both the new and old sense of the world: an organ for disseminating a message *and* an environment for constructing one. This lack of resolution generates the ceaseless activity of interpreting Skepticism's philosophical significance that still dominates Humean studies, if not a broader set of philosophical treatments into skepticism. This open-ended structure facilitated the remarkable shift in Hume's reception that took place over the nineteenth century, where, as we will see, Hume went from being seen in moral-individual terms as an Idiot to being seen in intellectual-historical (and neo-Kantian) terms as a Hero. It also enables the gradual displacement of Kant from the picture of things and permitted the amplification of the minimal *topos* of crisis in Kant's triptych into an empty discourse of world-historic proportions of the mid-twentieth century.

The credibility of this *topos* of crisis increases precisely as the contentiousness of the once live debate about the evidential context of Skepticism comes to seem ever quainter. As Carlyle shows, a sense of the quaintness of Johnson's hostile reaction to Hume comes sooner rather than later. And, as neo-Kantian Romanticism shows, it does not necessarily last: Hume regains his threatening character as he is resituated in a different kind of therapeutic narrative of modernity. Establishing the significance of Skepticism in this minimal sense also seems to have been sufficient enough to have a staggering impact on the shape of modern intellectual history. The extended meditation on Skepticism recommended by neo-Kantian intellectual history does generate a unique and even uniquely modern social construction, the scientific fact, and a modern order organized around the observation, collection, and analysis of facts.

CHAPTER TWO

Neo-Kantian Critique Loves a Crisis

2.1 Whose Crisis is This?

The neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis obviously has a great seductive pull, but this specter of crisis starts to collapse under even the most minor scrutiny. To begin to challenge the credibility of this *topos*, let's return to Carlyle's reading of Johnson and ask: who exactly in this picture would have experienced Hume as a serious threat? Whose crisis is this? Carlyle's or Johnson's? We can then build on this analysis to go farther than post-structuralist Romanticists were inclined to do and ask if the Romantics *themselves* were ever threatened by Hume or ever invested in a project of reconciliation and reorientation as neo-Kantian Romanticism imagines.

It should be clear that, while someone like Johnson reacts hostilely to Hume, it is unlikely that Johnson or his commonsense allies would have taken Hume's epistemological skepticism seriously enough to find it capable of generating an authentic intellectual crisis. Their hostility would instead have been premised on the fundamental illegitimacy of Hume's Skepticism, which seems misguided and immoral, more idiosyncratic than representative, more excessive than essential. Hume's bad influence might indeed pose a social or moral threat — it might encourage similar acts of intellectual vanity — but, *pace* Carlyle, Hume's skeptical reasoning would probably not have posed a personal or intellectual threat to Johnson or his commonsense allies. Beattie offers an *ad hominem* screed against Hume so ungenerous and loud that it is essentially unreadable, but his torrent comes from disdain, not fear.⁵⁷ And as we have seen, Reid takes Hume to have achieved something momentous and, by performing *reduction ad absurdum* of the representationalist tradition initiated by Descartes and carried forward by Locke, to have revealed the wrongheadedness of the entire line of inquiry. But Reid has a much different description of Hume's philosophical contribution than Kant because Reid has no respect for the more radical project of epistemology as Hume and Kant define it.

⁵⁷See Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1771).

In this light, to experience Hume as an authentic intellectual threat in any way, one would have to be working *within* a Skeptical perspective, a neo-Kantian framework. Yet, as we have already seen, a neo-Kantian Romantic like Carlyle — that is, someone who would have absorbed both Kant and Hume’s insights — would have been more inclined to *celebrate* Humean skepticism as *progressive*. Again, we can think of the distance between Carlyle’s Tendency and Pulos’ tendency here. Carlyle may take Hume’s philosophy to be therapeutic, but this is the minor note to Carlyle’s more dominant progressive one. It is only in Pulos that the therapeutic tenor dominates or the epistemological project perceived as ongoing rather than complete. So, in this historical picture, it seems as if the crisis must somehow finally be Johnson’s. This sense of intellectual threat, therefore, would have to be *imposed* on Johnson, so to speak, from within a neo-Kantian perspective: read *from* or *into* Johnson’s hostility, against the grain of Johnson’s own sense of its origin or character. Indeed, this is exactly the kind of reading Carlyle pursues by interpreting Johnson’s reaction to Hume to be fundamentally defensive — and therefore illegitimate — in nature. The *topos* of crisis allows Carlyle to trace Johnson’s hostility to some other explanation than the one Johnson gives.

This hermeneutic of suspicion is obviously a questionable interpretive practice. That said, Johnson’s hostility towards Skepticism does appear problematic or at least, worth investigation, since it makes Johnson more inclined to dismiss Skepticism than engage it. But what is the source of this hostility? What critical work is it performing? Does it compromise Johnson’s response in the way Carlyle imagines? Can it be read another way? To answer these questions, we will need to return to Johnson’s kick for a more thorough analysis of Johnson’s skepticism and the place of his hostility within it.

2.2 Johnson’s Kick, Revisited

In the introduction, I claimed that Johnson’s kick was skeptical in form, though anti-Skeptical in content. In one sense, determining whether Johnson is skeptical in form amounts to a kind of threshold judgment: we are asking if Johnson’s argument is minimally skeptical. This low threshold seems accurate. We can simply point to Johnson’s basic posture towards Berkeley for evidence of his minimal resistance. At the same time, such a low bar recommends against approaching the question of the skeptical character of Johnson’s kick as if it were solely a threshold judgment. This is not simply because I have forced the question of whether Johnson’s

argument is skeptical. It is rather that, with this minimally skeptical threshold in view, one might be inclined to accept that Johnson's kick is indeed skeptical but refuse to accept that Johnson's kick is an *argument*. That is, the answer to the question, "Is Johnson's argument skeptical?" would more likely be "Sure" than "Yes." The low threshold required to meet this weaker sense of "skeptical" is too permissive to be revealing, too vague to be interesting. Moreover, at this level, Johnson's doubt looks suspiciously hot: in this case, a passionate disbelief that reaches the pitch of outrage and generates enough hostility towards its adversary so as to make it impossible to take that adversary seriously. Viewed from the outside, this hot doubt looks *prima facie* more reactionary than reasonable, more illegitimate than legitimate, and therefore philosophically uninteresting. Hot doubt might be justified and sincere, but it could just as well be irrational or cynical. A lack of clarity about the doubt's source makes it suspect. And the fact that hot doubt does not bother performing the cooler argumentative labor a stronger skeptical method might perform in order to clarify these grounds and represent them as rational and legitimate means hot doubt does not necessarily demand the kind of serious attention such a labor might implicitly claim as its right. Hot doubt does not necessarily address Skepticism on recognizably serious terms.

As such, to achieve a firm "Yes" and to make the claim that Johnson's kick is skeptical in some strong, archetypal sense distinct from epistemological Skepticism, we will have to seek a higher level of definition. To do so, I want to push beyond this weak and inclusive definition of form and propose that Johnson's argument is skeptical in form in some stronger sense: that is, Johnson's argument is not just minimally skeptical but actually invokes a fuller skeptical machinery and completes something like a full and proper skeptical performance. To be sure, Johnson's disbelief makes him initially and finally hostile towards Berkeley. This basic continuity suggests that the kick lands as a joke before it lands as an argument and is finally more humorous than serious. And we will eventually have to contend with why Johnson might want to foreground this hostility, even at the risk of making his skepticism look more reactionary than reasonable and more dismissive than engaged. It is as if, from within the perspective of hot doubt, a claim can be too absurd to merit a serious response, and that responding seriously would already amount to conceding too much. A silly claim demands a silly response.

Yet, Johnson does not dismiss Berkeley's sophistry outright on the basis of a predetermined conviction or without a clear reason (as, say, Boswell appears to do). Rather,

Johnson does offer Berkeley a response, with a complex of skeptical reasons so concentrated in Johnson's wit that they emerge as more instinctive and intuitive than rational or discursive: they only minimally rise to the level of language. Boswell's parable deftly highlights this intuitive and instinctive character: it is not simply Johnson's answer that Boswell will never forget but "the *alacrity* with which Johnson answered," how effortlessly Johnson's response comes and how fully formed it arrives. Johnson is improvising in methodological skepticism, he is doing it in the distinctly conversational setting in which skepticism is so often improvised and summoned, and he delivers what turns out to be an impromptu performance meant to test Berkeley's claim, one which is skeptical in a much stronger, more engaged, and better defined sense than Johnson's initial disbelief. We know this because it takes place on Berkeley's terms. The kick suggests that Johnson temporarily suspends his disbelief to inhabit Berkeley's doubt. This willing inhabitation implies a concomitant shift in disposition. Boswell's detail about the kick's "mighty force" works as more than narrative flourish in this regard. The mighty kick is surely meant at some level to figure Johnson's mighty disdain for Berkeley's ingenious sophistry. But the kick's intensity cannot be traced, at least initially or exclusively, to the strength of Johnson's prior anti-Skeptical convictions. Were that the case, wouldn't Johnson's abiding assurance of the stone's real presence cause him to ease up as his foot approached it? Why risk stubbing a toe over something so absurd? Rather, Boswell's detail registers Johnson's temporary but full investment in Berkeley's skeptical premise and, by extension, Johnson's intellectual resolve, his willingness and even eagerness to doubt along with Berkeley *despite* and *against* his strong realist convictions.

So Johnson's argument seems to incorporate a skeptical experiment as an inner frame, and this skeptical experiment imposes a distinct affective disposition of its own, a show of blind resolve and courage. This disposition must be distinct from the more hostile skeptical disposition that precedes the experiment, since Johnson's initial skeptical disposition would anticipate the experiment's outcome in a manner that would compromise its integrity or, more precisely, render its sacrifice pointless. Again, why risk stubbing a toe? Johnson's initial disbelief, an emanation of Johnson's deeper conviction in the real, must somehow be *suspended* or actively discarded for a more disinterested, almost sacrificial state of doubt appropriate to the skeptical experiment. Hot doubt must be converted to cold doubt, and in this case that means Johnson must surrender his assurance of material reality at the expense of his physical well-being. The kick's might signifies

the total character of that surrender, and Johnson's eventual act of self-violence confirms it. Viewed from within the frame of the experiment, the contact with the stone must come as a surprise, a painful one no less. It is only outside of this skeptical frame that the stone arrives as expected as a kind of material proof by contradiction.

So, even if Johnson's argument is a joke at Berkeley's expense, it is properly a *practical* joke, an elaborate affair involving a good deal of confusion and misdirection. It is relevant that any insight into Johnson's intent only arrives as hindsight, all at once, as the joke's punch line. Initially, Johnson's kick does not signify anything at all. It is the joke's setup, intentionally inexplicable and absurd. Only upon Johnson's exclamation is the confusion surrounding his kick resolved, and his seemingly meaningless behavior is revealed to have been meaningful all along. What we might expect to be Johnson's inarticulate cry of pain comes out as an articulate argument: "I refute it thus!" Johnson's apparent absurdity turns out to be a deftly orchestrated moral lesson on the Skeptic's more profound absurdity. The scene strikes me as too neo-classical and stoic to mention the pain of contact. But like the kick this pain is doubly significant: within the skeptical frame, the pain is just deserts for the Skeptic's foolishness; outside the frame, it is the skeptical sacrifice Johnson has to make to confirm his convictions.

Understanding Johnson's pain in this double sense — not simply the Skeptic's comeuppance but as itself a kind of skeptical sacrifice — clarifies Johnson's deeper investment in and respect for skepticism as a formal procedure. Despite all appearances, Johnson's kick is not a crude pantomime of skepticism but a studied distillation of skepticism as form and performance. If Johnson's argument is a joke, it is not just a practical joke. It is also an *inside* joke. Indeed, Johnson's kick appears to enact a methodological skepticism similar to that which Descartes develops in his *Meditations*. Descartes, like Johnson, puts his skepticism to anti-Skeptical ends. He attempts to doubt everything, but only with the express intention of using his skeptical cut to reveal a firmer philosophical bedrock incapable of being doubted, and only in light of his confident expectation that such a bedrock exists. Descartes's methodological skepticism is in this sense constructive: it aims to tear down knowledge so that it may be rebuilt on certain ground. Johnson's kick cleverly literalizes this constructive skeptical quest for bedrock, even as Johnson turns his constructive skepticism to a different anti-skeptical

conclusion than Descartes.⁵⁸ In the light of this constructive spirit, Johnson's skeptical experiment could be said to prove his own position through skepticism as much as it refutes or ridicules Berkeley's Skepticism. Johnson's kick has two faces: one sincere and one satirical. His kick is a loving sendup, a folly about the excesses of Skepticism.

If the affinities Johnson's kick has with Descartes's constructive skepticism clarify Johnson's sincere appreciation for skepticism, a closer look at where and how Johnson swerves from Descartes's methodological skepticism – or, better, where Descartes's methodological skepticism seems to swerve from Johnson's moral skepticism — affords a more nuanced description of Johnson's satire. It also clarifies that this satire emerges from Johnson's own constructive skeptical commitments, as an attempt to drive out epistemological Skepticism as a kind of theoretical excess. As philosophers studying Descartes have long observed, it is Descartes' unique commitment to theoretical purity that seems to dislodge his methodological skepticism from the kinds of moral skepticism characteristic of nearly all forms of skepticism that had preceded it. The philosopher M.F. Burnyeat has notably suggested that the difference is that, unlike ancient skepticism, which remained “serious” because distinctly concerned with “practical” action in the world, Descartes's innovation was that his skepticism was “not serious” but “strictly a methodological affair,” which “enabled him to take the doubt far enough to raise in absolutely general terms the problem of the existence of the external world” (Burnyeat 31). Michael Williams similarly suggests that “Descartes feels free to traffic in skepticism because he believes he has an ace up his sleeve: an account of the true nature of human knowledge that will place various fundamental truths beyond the sceptic's reach” (Williams 2). But for Johnson this kind of trafficking undercuts the very stock of methodological skepticism. It divorces skepticism from the practical, moral context in which it gains its value. Descartes's radical doubt is finally not cool or cautious in the way Descartes tries to frame it but a form of recklessness. It willfully violates the principle of sufficient reason that establishes the limits of moral skepticism: as Johnson writes, constructive skepticism must be relinquished for “moral certainty” when there “remains no sufficient Reason to doubt of the Truth” (Johnson *Elements* 75). Descartes's skeptical sacrifice is finally only virtual and feigned, not costly at all or at least not in the way

⁵⁸ Even Berkeley's idealism could be shown to instrumentalize a similarly constructive skepticism, though Berkeley wishes to disabuse his readers of their false belief in material reality so that they will realize that God's ideal mind is the proper ontological foundation for all perception.

Descartes imagines. This is why Johnson's skeptical pain is also his comfort. It clarifies the legitimacy of his skeptical procedure while also confirming the soundness of his realist convictions.⁵⁹

This analysis of Johnson's kick thus yields up three possible answers to my question in the Introduction: no, sure, and yes. Reviewing them in condensed form will help clarify and reinforce the theoretical distinctions I have tried to generate before I start to apply them more broadly to a set of historical and theoretical problems that makes Johnson's argument a relevant focal point. So, the first: "No, Johnson's argument is not skeptical, because it rejects Berkeley's argument, and Berkeley's argument is properly Skeptical. In this sense, Johnson's argument is properly anti-Skeptical." This answer would obviously turn on a preference for viewing skepticism as Skepticism: once again, a strong, exclusive, content-based definition of skepticism defined on the paradigmatic problem of modern epistemological skepticism. The second: "Sure, even though Johnson's argument might be anti-Skeptical in some sense relevant to the disciplinary history of philosophy, his anti-Skepticism is skeptical in character. Then again, this doesn't say all that much. The kick is a skeptical gesture, but it stands in place of an actual argument. It is joke because by simply turning and kicking a stone, Johnson illustrates how patently absurd he finds Berkeley's skeptical claim to be on its face." This interpretation would overlook a strong, exclusive definition of Skepticism for a view of Johnson's argument as skeptical in a weaker formal sense. And third: "Yes, Johnson's argument is distinctly and even strongly skeptical in form. Johnson's kick should be seen as a distinctly skeptical performance. Even though this performance is satirical, it is not exclusively satirical, but also in some sense sincere: its formal critique comes from *within* skepticism and is more therapeutic than polemic. The way the performance blends the satirical with the sincere does not dismiss skepticism outright but proposes how methodological skepticism, properly applied, alleviates the excesses that result from its misapplication. Thus, Johnson's kick finally reflects Johnson's deeper investment in skepticism as a formal method, not to mention an appreciation for how this form might be mobilized against Skepticism as content." This last interpretation would amount to a higher-definition account of Johnson's argument as a skeptical performance. This extra definition makes the case against reading Johnson's kick as exclusively "hot," hostile, and

⁵⁹ This appeal to costliness is resonant with Johnson's well-known rebuke of sensibility: "You will find these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They *pay* you by *feeling*" (Boswell I:422).

dismissive of Berkeley. On this view, the skeptical performance at the center of Johnson's argument demonstrates Johnson's willingness to suspend his passionate disbelief and to take up the skeptic's fearless dispassion, to trade hot for cold doubt. Even if Johnson's argument is irreducibly rhetorical and finally dismissive, this cold doubt reveals, if not that Johnson is willing to take Berkeley seriously, at least that Johnson knows that doing so is a necessary component for any stronger skeptical rebuttal and that performing such seriousness involves willingly taking up a cold and potentially costly doubt.

If we grant a basic integrity to this analysis of Johnson's kick, Carlyle's claim that Johnson's hostility should be traced back, ultimately, to his failure to understand skepticism hardly seems tenable. Johnson's kick is a masterful, if also parodic, performance of skepticism. It reveals a close attention to skepticism *as* a particular rhetorical and narrative performance, with distinct movements executed with an affect of disinterest and sacrificial resolve, and in which the performer's claim to thoroughgoing doubt must be achieved by some considerable sleight-of-hand. The argumentative force of Johnson's kick is bound up in his total control of this performance, even at the level of its temporary ambiguities. He is one skeptic schooling another. One doubts, for instance, that Johnson's argument would have been nearly as convincing had he unexpectedly struck another rock during his backswing, even as doing so would be ontologically equivalent to kicking the stone in front of him. Johnson's skepticism is not about perception, but persuasion.

In this sense, Johnson's response reflects a firm control of the field of rhetoric that accrues within and around the skeptical performance. In the introduction, we saw Carlyle characterize Johnson as a "scholar" rather than a "thinker" in order to dismiss Johnson's intellectual disposition as embarrassingly slavish and unoriginal. But Johnson may very well be a scholar of skepticism in a more favorable sense. His responses to skepticism do not seem naïve but studied. At the very least, Johnson's responses mobilize skepticism against itself in a manner sophisticated enough to make them more interesting than simple dogmatic reflexes. Indeed, his responses seem to target the most vulnerable aspects of epistemological skepticism, where the defense of its project is arguably the weakest. "Milking the bull" attacks the rationale behind radical skepticism's willed departure from the action-oriented framework in which practical belief naturally occurs for an alternative, theoretical account by definition detached from these conditions. "Milking the bull" asks: if this everyday framework operates well enough without

this epistemological account – if, as you admit, these theoretical considerations are immaterial – isn't this theoretical account simply excessive? It may be ingenious, but how is it essential or insightful in the sphere of practical belief and action?

Johnson's kick raises a similar question, but in a more specified form. It singles out the Skeptic's central justification for pursuing "total doubt" — that is, the Skeptic's account of its significance and description of what Skepticism achieves — for more intense scrutiny. In his careful, comprehensive survey of modern approaches to skepticism, Michael Williams proposes that the question of Skepticism's significance turns largely on how to interpret what Williams calls the "extreme context sensitivity" (xix) and "consequent instability" (10) of the Skeptic's doubt. Drawing on Hume, Williams argues:

As Hume saw, although sceptical arguments can often strike us as irrefutable, the conviction they command is not easily detached from the special context of philosophical reflection...Hume brings to light things that any worthwhile account of scepticism must come to terms with. Why are sceptical doubts and everyday certainties so strikingly context-bound? How can the conclusion of a philosophical argument seem to embody an extraordinary and undeniable discovery and yet be incapable of commanding stable assent? (xix, 10)

The controversy turns on what to make of this context sensitivity: the way what seems irresistible in the Skeptic's study appears incredible outside it. The question is: what, if any, practical value could Skepticism have? This obviously opens up to a more general question of the relationship of philosophy to common life.

For Williams, the strongest argument against the significance of Skepticism comes "*from the standpoint of common life*" (author's emphasis, 7). From this commonsense perspective, Skepticism obviously distorts more than it clarifies. Skepticism is a delusion endemic to the philosopher's Study — a kind of occupational hazard that Reid calls a "metaphysical lunacy" (Reid *Common Sense* 482). For Reid (as well as Hume), such a disease may prevail in the study, but it is cured by a return "into society" where "Common Sense recovers her authority" (482-83). Pursuing a total detachment from everyday commitments is not only practically impossible. Claiming to have achieved such a total detachment is incredible enough to compromise one's basic credibility or claim to reasonableness. From this perspective, Sceptical doubts are more unnatural than natural, more excessive than essential.

From a Sceptical perspective, on the other hand, even as Skepticism is obviously a kind of distortion, the irresistibility of its conclusions demonstrates that it is a *productive* distortion.

Radical skepticism justifies its high context sensitivity by arguing that its departure achieves a new, revealing perspective on that framework itself: its essential groundlessness and radical subjectivity – even as this perspective is not attainable or workable within an action-oriented framework. Skepticism gains its privileged perspective into these deep aspects of knowledge by successfully detaching itself from the various context-dependent determinants that inform everyday belief. In this philosophical view, everyday belief is the true distortion because it is conditioned and circumscribed by the practical necessity of action: it operates according to a principle of sufficient reason rather than some stronger logic of necessity. For the Skeptic, these contextual constraints, however constitutive of everyday reasoning, distract from the purer, more exacting considerations made available by Skepticism. As Williams writes, “[E]veryday existence masks the potential for a sceptical breakdown of belief because, in common life, our attention is gripped by particular objects and narrow interests. By contrast, when we philosophize, we forget particulars” (6). Skepticism claims to offer an undistorted, minimal, subtractive — not to mention challenging — picture of things. This is finally a difference between viewing radical epistemological skepticism as a kind of excess or as a kind of essence.

The trouble for the Skeptic is that he must square the case for viewing Skepticism as more essential than excessive with a baseline commonsense awareness that Skepticism is a form of excess: Skepticism is obviously excessive and distorted because it is obviously impracticable and theoretical. At a certain point, abandoning your faith in the robust soundness of commonsense for the exactness of the critical risks compromising a more basic credibility. Over-investing in the critical risks a disqualifying and disorienting detachment from commonsense, i.e. good sense and proportion. It opens Hume up to the charge of excess and idiosyncrasy, as we saw with Johnson’s “milking the bull.”

But it should be clear that by dismissing these excesses, Johnson is *not* abandoning skepticism: rather, he takes himself to be clarifying it. For the anti-Skeptic, the Skeptic’s study is certainly a real place, and anyone can go there with enough will, effort, or rhetorical ingenuity. Boswell, for instance, refers to Berkeley’s “sophistry” and even admits that it is “impossible to refute.” But Boswell rejects Berkeley’s argument because talk — especially Academics talk — comes cheap. I would suggest that for eighteenth-century anti-Skeptics like Johnson and Boswell, the Skeptic’s study is worth the visit because “moral knowledge” of the world is unquestionably and irreducibly uncertain in the manner the Skeptic observes, and a proper

education requires at least one early, painful, but temporary visit to learn these hard lessons about rhetoric and probability so as to inoculate oneself against any enthusiastic, superstitious, dogmatic, or intolerant pretenses. However, anxiously worrying over uncertainty for too long comes at the cost of good sense and credibility. Lingering too long in the Skeptic's study is a sign of arrested development and speaks to a perverse obstinacy. Claiming to have discovered new and better ways of looking at these ancient problems of rhetoric and probability smacks of "milking the bull." And, as Johnson's kick seems to argue, trying to carry any new radically Skeptical insights beyond the Skeptic's study only gets you a stubbed toe. Putting these Skeptical insights into practice results in a different, unexpected kind of pain that will illuminate the utter painlessness of dreaming them up. From Johnson's perspective, skeptical insights are so cheap as to make them too costly to entertain. This is arguably why Johnson's kick must land as a joke before an argument.

2.3 Two Senses of Irreligious, Revisited

Johnson's kick seems to offer a representative argument against Skepticism as a form of "Idiocy" as I have defined it in the introduction. But I would suggest that, by the eighteenth century, even Hume's critics could understand his Skepticism as Heroic and meaningful in a qualified sense. At most, they would have been inclined to see Hume as a bad influence on others who, for whatever reason, did not have the intellectual wherewithal or fortitude to comprehend or encounter his insights appropriately. They would have been inclined to dismiss or correct those who saw his valid epistemological insights as a threat, to clarify the fundamentally uncontroversial nature of his Skepticism, which generally entailed clarifying its "irreligious" character.⁶⁰

As in Chapter One, the two senses of irreligious are helpful because this basic impulse to clarify the "uncontroversial" status of Hume's epistemology would have essentially united two

⁶⁰Schey's earlier description that Hume is "customarily figured as a 'draw shadow' or 'threat'" (180) turns out to be especially insightful here. Schey distances himself from these negative characterizations of Hume not necessarily because he doubts their historical integrity (as I do) but because he intends to recover a more positive aspect on Hume's skepticism as it informs a Romantic "poetics of sufficiency." In other words, Schey is objecting to the distinctly negative cast Hume has received in this neo-Kantian picture: he is clarifying Hume's positive, therapeutic, and corrective contributions to philosophy and to poetry. But this line of objection seems to miss the rhetorical and strategic function of radical Hume in the neo-Kantian tradition. Hume's threat is almost exclusively imposed on others, not embraced as one's own: a neo-Kantian understands and absorbs Hume's skepticism and thus clarifies its uncontroversial status. As such, Schey's position is arguably much closer to the Romantics who did take Hume seriously than any literary history premised on Hume's threat would suggest.

very different approaches to Hume: 1) more hostilely irreligious applications of Humean skepticism such as Shelley's pointedly irreverent Humean "demonstration" in *The Necessity of Atheism* and 2) more neutrally irreligious applications such as the commonsense philosopher Dugald Stewart's intermittent attempts to clarify that Hume's insights pertained only to natural philosophic enquiry, *not* theological or moral inquiry. Shelley obviously doesn't sense Hume as a threat: he's parading what he sees as Hume's indisputable and therefore uncontroversial description of belief before those he takes to be threatened by Hume. Shelley's demonstration suggests that it is only worth exacerbating Hume's threat once someone's resistance to Hume appears illegitimate and incorrigible. Shelley is trolling Hume's critics, and getting kicked out of school for it.⁶¹ But what licenses this irreverence in the first place is that, from Shelley's perspective, it is therapeutic and therefore not irreverent at all, or only helpfully so: Hume's philosophy is irreligious in a neutral sense *before* it is irreligious in a hostile sense. From Shelley's Skeptical perspective, it appears to gain this second sense honestly, through disenchantment. For Shelley, Hume is simply telling it like it is, without theological or metaphysical preoccupations.⁶² Taylor's subtraction story is hard at work.⁶³

But even a conservative Christian commonsense philosopher like Stewart would not see Hume as an intellectual threat because Stewart would have had too assured a picture of where Hume's Skepticism went right and where it went wrong. Stewart, like his mentor Reid, deeply respects Hume's critical penchant. Someone like Stewart simply works to keep an appropriate, qualified interpretation of Hume's Skepticism in focus for others who might try to illegitimately import Hume's phenomenalism into theological or moral territory. Though Stewart's deep religious convictions might have generated his hostility towards Hume, in his philosophy, Stewart's corrections of Hume come from a distinctly *empiricist* perspective — or even a qualified Skeptical perspective. The principal evidence for this claim is that Stewart's corrections are directed at both *atheistic and theistic* misinterpretations of Hume. Like Kant and Hume,

⁶¹ And, as Colin Jager recently suggests, Shelley started to distance himself from this younger irreverence as an immature orientation: Shelley finally looks "beyond" atheism to a nobler to perform "a critique not of organized religion but of the discourses, especially the radical Enlightenment and the French Revolution, that have made organized religion their primary target" (*Unquiet Things* 19).

⁶² Shelley's reconstruction of Hume's testimonial argument against miracles as a geometrical demonstration is parodic, because Hume's argument against miracles is more properly a probable or "moral" one.

⁶³ Wasserman and Abrams would also likely be inclined to Shelley's position, though, as we have seen, their literary histories manage to soften Shelley's irreverence by injecting a modern sense of irony into the crisis, reframing this loss of metaphysical preoccupations as bittersweet.

Stewart sees himself as helping rid critical philosophical discourse of its moral, theological, psychological and political pretensions. He's starting with Hume's: "In consequence of the inferences which Mr. Hume has deduced from his doctrine concerning cause and effect, some later writers have been led to dispute its truth; *not perceiving, that the fallacy of this part of his system does not lie in his premises, but in the conclusion which he draws from them*" (323). Stewart finds Hume's initial premises about causation not only legitimate and uncontroversial, but unoriginal: "[M]any writers *before* Mr. Hume had remarked, that 'the object of the physical inquirer is not to trace necessary connexions, or to ascertain the efficient causes of phenomena;' and that, till the publication of Mr. Hume's writing, no person, so far as I know, ever suspected this proposition to have a dangerous tendency" (323). Stewart accepts the heuristic, practical, and fictional status of efficient causation as unproblematic. Only Hume's (and others') attempt to draw theological conclusions from these empirical and epistemological premises are idiosyncratic and therefore illegitimate. From Stewart's perspective, natural philosophy only has a claim to *neutrally* irreligious territory, and only as a curb to *any* unlicensed metaphysical speculation. Only atheistic reactionaries would try to carry Hume into more hostile and unwarranted irreligious territory. But importantly, on the other side, only *theistic* reactionaries would try to wield Hume's atheistic conclusions to discredit legitimate applications of his premises within natural philosophy.⁶⁴

What finally differentiates Stewart from Shelley is that Stewart does not try to earn a hostile sense of *irreligious* through a neutral one. Rather, Stewart's natural theological perspective allows him to see religion *beyond* or even *through* epistemology, precisely because of epistemology's silence on theological or moral considerations. In other words, *pace* Kant's critique of commonsense, a commonsense philosopher like Stewart obviously subscribes to a distinction between epistemological and moral – or philosophical and practical – matters, even as he understands this distinction in empiricist rather than idealist terms. The only difference is that Stewart's commitment to empiricism causes him to lean into natural theology – to deploy an uncharacteristic enthusiasm around design in his otherwise reserved critical philosophy –

⁶⁴ Stewart's policing of theistic interpretations of Hume is best illustrated in Stewart's defense of John Leslie's Humean speculations on heat against charges of heresy in *A Short Statement of Some Important Facts, Relative to the Late Election of a Mathematical Professor in the University of Edinburgh* (1805). Stewart finds the hostility of Leslie's adversaries to be indefensible and ultimately political bad faith. Despite his theism, Stewart's embrace of Humean empiricism commits him to a mitigated version of Taylor's subtraction story.

whereas Kant's firmer foundationalism and idealism makes him more suspect of the reality of the phenomenon natural theology observed, and saw the interpretive lens of natural theological *design* to be more "regulative" than "constitutive:" more subjective than objective in character, but still no less a constitutive gift from God to Reason.⁶⁵ In fact, Stewart's empiricist commitments arguably make him more vigilant about interpreting Hume correctly than Kant feels he needs to be. Kant's foundationalism lets him see God's hand in another, stronger way than empirically and probabilistically through natural theology and commonsense. Kant is inclined to overestimate his distance from a commonsense philosopher like Stewart by downplaying this critical investment of Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Indeed, in retrospect and *pace* Kant, Kant's foundationalist commitments seem finally to place him on much less critical ground than Stewart's empiricism.⁶⁶

In short, any critically inclined person — even Hume's Common Sense critics like Reid and Stewart — would have been willing and even happy to draw some version of the distinction between moral and epistemological justification Kant puts forth in the *Prolegomena*. Any critically inclined person, atheist or theist, would have been happy and even felt *compelled* to embrace some instrumental version of epistemological skepticism. This is not only because of the "moral aura" that accrues around "epistemological belief" but because of what Daston likewise identifies as the characteristic critical interest in "diagnosis of error" that unites intellectual history since the seventeenth-century rise of the new science. In the context of the new science, epistemology's profound scientific and even practical significance and its potent corrective potential become increasingly legible and self-evident. Daston argues that, by the nineteenth century, "epistemology ceases to be an exclusively philosophical worry" but rather "enters the practice of the sciences with the diagnosis of error" (4). Epistemological inquiry does not appear threatening but therapeutic if not panacean. It becomes an essential means of diagnosing "what kinds of error are most likely and most dangerous to the growth of scientific knowledge" and "what precautions must be taken to avoid them" (4). Stewart (as well as Reid) would both have had enough of a critical penchant to appreciate the value of Hume's Skepticism

⁶⁵ See for instance Stewart's enthusiastic remarks on arguments from design in *Elements* II.404-425.

⁶⁶From my perspective, Kant's deeper moral conservatism — on full display in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and more readily in the routinely overlooked second section of Kant's famous essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" (1794) — is a major reason he believes Hume never places practical or moral certainty in doubt. Reid and Stewart's more thorough empiricism flattens the moral and the epistemological onto the same *a posteriori* plane in ways that make Hume's inquiries more precarious.

as it corrects and disciplines misguided speculation in natural philosophic practice. Indeed, Reid and Stewart mobilize a qualified Humean epistemology to construct the first programmatic critique of Anglophone philosophy of mind in an attempt to purge Lockean associationist psychology of its materialistic metaphors (discussed at more length in Chapter Four). This is all to say that Reid and Stewart's problem with Hume is not a matter of incomprehension or even a lack of appreciation, but some deeper moral objection to what they perceive as Hume's attempt to use epistemology to arbitrate or dismiss moral and theological matters.⁶⁷

2.4 The Real Crisis: Practical Rationality, Constructive Skepticism, and the Problem of Assent

At this point, it should be clear that the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis does not offer a reliable description of the range of historical responses to Hume. My analysis of Johnson's kick in 2.2 should clarify that it is an especially disingenuous interpretation of Johnson's anti-Skeptical hostility. However, the central issue with the neo-Kantian *topos* is not its implausibility as a description of different orientations towards Hume but its inaccuracy as a description of the problematic that a long-eighteenth-century thinker would have perceived to be at the heart of "epistemology." Its central distortion may be traced to the mistaken neo-Kantian assumption that Enlightenment epistemology would have been preoccupied with the same sort of problematic

⁶⁷ In *A Secular Age*, Taylor persuasively demonstrates how, within the subtraction story of secular humanism, these two senses of irreligious are easily run together, as they were with William K. Clifford, Herbert Spencer and other late Victorian non-believers at the turn of the nineteenth century and as they continue to be for contemporary militant atheists like Richard Dawkins (362-65, 539-593). As such, the deceptive potential of this professed *indifference* to religion was not lost on nineteenth-century fideists like Cardinal Newman who remained suspicious of how that indifference conveniently managed to devalue and restrict the purview of religious and moral perspectives through differentiation. Taylor's thesis follows Newman's suspicions and even proves them well-founded. And I will be similarly suspicious of epistemology's professed indifference to morals, as it followed from epistemology's professed difference from them. Still, I would suggest that, as a general principle, this neo-Kantian perspective only recommends engaging religious or moral perspectives when they appear to have overreached, for instance, by discussing epistemological and therefore non-religious things in moral or creedal and therefore non-epistemological and even dogmatic terms: by dressing up values as facts. As my discussion of Lawrence-Abernethy debate in Chapter Four will show, a neo-Kantian perspective generally recommended policing the distinction between final causation as a moral or theological matter and efficient causation as properly epistemological and positivistic one. But it also generally recommended tolerating the sovereignty of moral and theological views of final causation. It even tolerates moral and theological views that explicitly draw on epistemological facts as primary evidence, as most reasonable natural theological arguments from design were taken to do. These evidentiary practices simply increase the intellectual stock of epistemology by implicitly reinforcing the sense that epistemology stands *before* and *apart* from the moral. As such, simply policing this distinction does substantial ideological work in the nineteenth-century, especially in light of the rapidly increasing disciplinarity. But the strategy recommends *ignoring* religious and moral perspectives before it does *engaging* and *dispelling* them. Indeed, this is still essentially the same strategic encouraged today for responding to natural theological arguments from design, which is to say not responding at all.

that neo-Kantian intellectual history is, or that it would have described this problematic in the same terms that neo-Kantian intellectual history cultivates. Here I follow Daston and Galison's observation that "[T]he philosophical vocabulary of mental life prior to Kant is...notably different from that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (*Objectivity* 33) and, therefore, we must "read [epistemologists like Bacon and Descartes] in their own terms, rather than tacitly to translate, with inevitable distortion, their unfamiliar preoccupations into our familiar ones" (33).

Again, I'll use neo-Kantian Romanticism as my point of entry to this distortion. A mid-century neo-Kantian Romantic prefers to describe the effects of epistemology in the terms of neo-Kantian intellectual history, as a feeling of alienation and disenchantment that results from absorbing the hard distinction between fact and value. Wasserman begins his influential "Nature Moralized," for example, with a summary of the traumatic effect of the split of fact and value in a "post-Baconian world:"

When Bacon wrote that poetry subjects the shows of things to the desires of the mind, whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things, he was assenting to that divorce of head and heart, of object and value, that accompanied the approaching end of the Renaissance; the same divorce that the Romantics would later struggle to repair by once again wedding outward thing and inward meaning...the first task of the Romantic was to attain a world-view that again related subject and object; having lost faith in the older synthese, he had to take the world of things, which science had shorn of all but objective existence, and had to invest it with values through his own understanding of its structure and meaning. ("Nature Moralized" 39-40)

On this view, Romanticism emerges as a therapeutic response to the traumatic progression from what Charles Taylor calls a "cosmos" to a "universe." Disenchantment is also essential to Abrams's conception of the Romantic response in *Natural Supernaturalism*, though Abrams relaxes the epistemological focus for a more general account of modern disenchantment:

The individual...has become radically split in three main aspects. He is divided within himself, he is divided from other men, and he is divided from his environment; his only hope for recovery (for those writers who hold out hope) is to find the way to a reintegration which will restore his unity with himself, his community with his fellow men, and his companionability with an alien and hostile outer world. (146)

I want to argue that this neo-Kantian split — read loosely off the "divorce between object and value" — was hardly firmed up by the Romantic period. As such, this entire neo-Kantian problematic amounts to a presentist projection of neo-Kantian intellectual historical

preoccupations. This traumatic split may indeed have been available for observation from the early nineteenth-century on. It may have even been the cumulative or dominant effect of the Enlightenment project of intellectual reform itself. But it is only through neo-Kantian intellectual history that this description gains its visibility, definition, and its reality. Simply put, neo-Kantian intellectual history only defines and reifies this distinction by continually observing it. However, in the long eighteenth century, the problem of uncertainty would have been observed in a much different manner, through a much different set of theoretical distinctions. Recovering these older distinctions displaced by neo-Kantian intellectual history will help us locate an alternative candidate for what Abrams calls Wordsworth and Coleridge's "cardinal concern" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 145).

The distinction repeatedly observed and rehearsed in Enlightenment epistemology is not that between "objective fact" and "subjective value" (or the slightly different, more elite Kantian distinction of *noumena* and *phenomena*). As Daston and Galison observe, in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistemology the terms "objective" and "subjective" were largely inert, "invoked only occasionally, as technical terms, by metaphysicians and logicians" (31). Instead, the epistemological distinction widely observed is one between two classes of knowledge — "demonstrative" and "probable" — and the different types of certainty these types of knowledge afford. In this scheme, "demonstrative knowledge" entailed propositions that could be proved by *a priori* logical demonstration and, thus, produced an "absolute" or "demonstrative" certainty that not only warranted but *necessitated* assent. Probable knowledge, on the other hand, comprised all knowledge acquired *a posteriori* or through experience. In *The Elements of Philosophy*, for instance, Samuel Johnson describes moral knowledge or "opinion" as "physical truths which related to created Natures" and "all political and historical Truths" (Johnson 75). Moral knowledge, unlike demonstrative knowledge, was taken to be incapable of absolute certainty or demonstration. For someone like Johnson or Hume, this irreducible uncertainty is understood as a natural consequence of the "contingent" nature of probable knowledge. Unlike demonstration, probable knowledge is not undergirded by any kind of logical "necessity." Probable truths could always have been otherwise: their "non-existence implies no Absurdity" (75). Therefore, they cannot be reasoned about in a purely *a priori* manner; one must "experience" a probable fact to understand it.

Moral knowledge is not only an irreducibly uncertain sort of knowledge; it is inherently social sort of knowledge: a matter of both individual and communal evaluation. Attaining probable belief was taken to be a matter of ascending a graduated scale of belief ranging from absolute doubt or disbelief up to opinion and, finally, to the full confidence of “moral certainty” based on varying degrees of moral evidence.⁶⁸ According to Johnson, for instance, belief in probable knowledge remains an interminable calculation of “Doubts and Probabilities” of which “there are endlessly various Degrees, according to the various Numbers and Weight of the Reasons for or against them” (77). Even subjective estimations of these Degrees of Probabilities are taken to be variable: any kind of moral knowledge may “appear more or less probable or doubtful to different Persons, according as the Persons have more or less Capacity or Opportunity to examine them, and according as they give their Attention more or less to the Consideration of them” (77-78). As such, this epistemological scheme does not recognize any firm distinction between “fact” and “value.” Physical facts and personal beliefs are indistinguishable members of this class of moral knowledge. Before the early nineteenth century, there is simply not the kind of “divorce” separating object and value that Wasserman attributes to Bacon.

The reason that there is no such distinction *within* probable knowledge is because, in the earliest versions of this epistemology, the entire class of probable knowledge looks equally problematic and inferior against the more perfect standard of demonstrative knowledge. But, as Ian Hacking observes at length in *The Emergence of Probability* (1975, 2006), this starts to change as a result of the perceived achievements of natural philosophy in the seventeenth century. The rising currency of the “new science” generates a new interest in the usefulness of probable knowledge coupled with an increasing confidence in the reliability of probable reasoning. The total effect of this re-estimation is to upend the older Scholastic hierarchy between *scientia* and *opinio* that preceded the categories of demonstrative and probable knowledge, respectively. In that older hierarchy, *opinio* or probable knowledge was regarded as

⁶⁸Consider George Campbell’s variation: “In moral reasoning, we ascend from possibility, by an insensible graduation, to probability, and thence, in the same manner, to the summit of moral certainty” (66). Bailey’s remarks in *Essay on the Formation and Publication of Opinions* (1821) are also representative: “All the various degrees of belief and disbelief, from the fullest conviction to doubt, and from doubt to absolute incredulity, correspond to the degree of evidence, or to the nature of the considerations of the present to the mind” (10). Incidentally, the terminology used to describe the various degrees of certainty lacks stability. The term *presumption*, for instance, can mean the highest or lowest degree of certainty, depending on the context, as can the term *persuasion*. But the graduated scale itself remains constant.

inferior because it lacked the “demonstrative” purity offered by *scientia*: *opinio* remained the purview of “lower” kind of evidence characteristic of alchemy, geology, astrology, and medicine. As Hacking writes, because the high sciences of Scholasticism “still lusted after demonstration,” they could “scorn *opinio*” (Hacking *Probability* 35). However, in light of a new appreciation for its practical value, probable knowledge gradually receives a more favorable assessment. And, from a new practical perspective, probable knowledge increasingly starts to appear more valuable than *scientia*, which starts to look inert, disengaged, or overly formal. Knowledge itself comes to be regarded as more “active” than “contemplative.”

What occurs, then, is a kind of epistemic leveling, which elevates what was once regarded as an inferior kind of practical, moral reasoning into a “science” of probability. Locke offers a rich portrait of this epistemic leveling in Book IV of the *Essay*:

Tell a country gentlewoman that the wind is south-west, and the weather lowering, and like to rain, and she will easily understand it is not safe for her to go abroad thin clad in such a day, after a fever: she clearly sees the probable connotation of all these, viz. south-west wind, and clouds, rain, wetting, taking cold, relapse, and danger of death, without tying them together in those artificial and cumbersome fetters of several syllogisms, that clog and hinder the mind, which proceeds from one part to another quicker and clearer without them: and the probability which she easily perceives in things thus in their native state would be quite lost, if this argument were managed learnedly, and proposed in mode and figure. For it very often confounds the connexion. (Locke *Essay* 627)

Here the formalism of the Scholastic syllogism is not only extraneous but inhibiting to the gentlewoman’s probabilistic calculations: they “clog and hinder the mind” preventing her from gathering what she would “easily understand” without them. Perhaps more importantly, the gentlewoman’s probabilistic calculations concern distinctly practical and everyday considerations (whether or not to go out given the forecast).

It is possible to see Locke’s entire epistemological program as motivated by this project of epistemic leveling. Consider how Locke pursues a genial, even folksy figure of “agreement” to describe the interaction of ideas largely in an effort to combat not only the unnatural, still formality of syllogism but, more generally, the false pretenses of “innate ideas.”⁶⁹ For Locke, the

⁶⁹Consider also the practical, leveling thrust of this early programmatic passage from Locke’s *Essay*: “It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced Readers of the falseness of this Supposition [about innate ideas], if I should only shew . . . how Men, barely by the Use of their natural Faculties, may attain to all the Knowledge they have, without the help of any innate Impressions; and may arrive at Certainty, without any such Original Notions or Principles” (48).

syllogism, however lauded as a normative model for right reasoning, has little value as a description of mental operations: “But however [syllogism] be in Knowledge, I think I may truly say, it is of *far* less, or *no use* at all *in Probabilities*. For the Assent there, being to be determined by the preponderancy, after a due weighing of all the Proofs, with all the Circumstances on both sides, nothing is so unfit to assist the Mind in that, as Syllogism” (*Essay* 672). And, with this new emphasis on practical knowledge in view, Locke’s program may be situated within a program of “practical rationality,” committed to propagating what Daston describes as “more modest reasonableness that solved everyday dilemmas on the basis of incomplete knowledge, in contrast to the traditional rationality of demonstrative certainty” (Daston *Classical Probability* xi).

If Locke’s philosophy exhibits the new interest and confidence in probable knowledge that characterizes “practical rationality,” it also exhibits the edifying and reformatory impulse of this program of practical rationality, which, as Daston writes, not only “raised the threshold of the credible” (Daston “Scientific Error” 3) but changed the very concept of belief. Under the sign of practical rationality, knowledge not only became more active than contemplative. Belief became increasingly conceptualized as a matter of “voluntary assent” instead of an “involuntary” gift from God (3). As such, the problem of assent was given a new moral urgency and, by the early eighteenth century, “the insistence that belief be ‘warranted’ became and remains a philosophical dogma” (4). “In the whole conduct of the understanding,” writes Locke in his educational manual *The Conduct of Understanding*, “there is nothing of more moment than to know when, and where, and how far to give assent, and possibly there is nothing harder” (Locke *Conduct* 74). For Locke, the gap between theory and practice is yawning: “It is very easily said, and no body questions it, that giving and withholding our assent, and the degrees of it, should be regulated by the evidence which things carry with them; and yet we see men are not the better for this rule; some firmly embrace doctrines upon slight grounds, some upon no grounds, and some contrary to appearance. Some admit of certainty, and are not to be moved in what they hold: others waver in every thing, and there want not those that reject all as uncertain” (74).

With this problem of voluntary assent, we are getting closer to the way long-eighteenth-century thinkers would have approached the problem of uncertainty and conceived of the enterprise of epistemology more generally. We can add definition to this picture by considering the philosophy of constructive skepticism that would have set the parameters for responding to this problem. As Richard H. Popkin, van Leeuwen, and Ferreira have observed, this program of

“constructive skepticism” has its origins in the probabilistic epistemologies of the late-seventeenth century philosophers John Tillotson, John Wilkins, and to some extent, John Locke.⁷⁰ The program is “skeptical” in the sense that it acknowledges the fact of epistemological uncertainty and “constructive” in the sense that it rejects that this basic fact should have any radical implications regarding our ability to arrive at degrees of “moral certainty” sufficient to justify practical action and judgment (Ferreira 2–4). Put another way, while constructive skepticism accepts the skeptical premise that we are unable to attain certain knowledge about matters of fact, it also accepts that the careful application of skeptical and rational procedures constitutes a sufficient response to the problem of uncertainty and, further, a viable method for “constructing” actionable, if still uncertain, knowledge about the world. An important aspect of the constructive skeptical education was the constant observance of the irreducibly uncertain nature of probable knowledge, the impossibility of complete or demonstrative certainty in the probable realm. Constructive skepticism worked to condition and internalize two responses towards this irreducible uncertainty: first, it recommended “withholding” assent by actively cultivating and searching for doubts around a proposition; but, second, it demanded an acquiescent posture to sufficient reason.⁷¹ Since probable knowledge could never admit of this level of demonstrative certainty, the evidentiary standards for proof in probable knowledge had to be adjusted to reflect the intuition that one can and must gain sufficient, if incomplete, degrees

⁷⁰ Van Leeuwen offers the most extensive account of constructive skepticism in *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought: 1630-90*, though van Leeuwen traces the first use of the term to Popkin’s *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1961). Popkin describes the positive turn of constructive skepticism in this manner: “This skeptical conclusion is turned positive by pointing out that the moral sciences can then have the same sort of precision and exactitude as the natural sciences, and the same kind of certainty. All the skeptical questions notwithstanding, we are able to know with certainty about the empirical study of nature and of man and society, provided we accept that nature and man will act uniformly” (“Eighteenth-Century” 26).

⁷¹ While I’ll be looking primarily at this Anglophone interpretation of constructive skepticism, we can also look to German philosophy and find a similar emphasis on the necessary interplay between commonsense and the critical. In *The Philosophy of Life and Philosophy of Language in a Course of Lectures*, Friedrich Schlegel demonstrates how doubt could be easily absorbed in the process of attaining knowledge as a “crisis” through which we “respond” by arriving at a “determinate judgment of profound certainty and unwavering conviction, or at least to a rigorous distinction between that which is certain and that which must forever remain uncertain” (426). Doubt, rightly understood, is thus “wholesome co-operative power of knowledge” (527) distinguished from “universal skepticism” as a pessimistic stance which forsakes the principle of doubt by “question[ing] the hope and the end of truth itself” and “giv[ing] up that inward search after knowledge, of which it is really designed to serve as the organ.” For Schlegel, universal skepticism

...falls into a tone of unconditional decision, which involves an assumption of complete certainty, and, consequently, of a perfect, though negative knowledge, totally inconsistent with its true character. It thereby undermines its own foundation (527-8).

Schlegel’s is only one of many proposed rationales for distinguishing and dismissing radical doubt in an effort to preserve a more instrumental version of doubt.

of certainty to justify practical action. Locke works in both constructive skeptical directions in the *Essay*: on one hand, he insists that “most of the Propositions we think, reason, discourse, nay act upon, are such, as we cannot have undoubted Knowledge of their Truth” (*Essay* 655). But he also insists that “some of them border so near upon Certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them; but *assent* to them as firmly, and act, according to that Assent, as resolutely, as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our Knowledge of them was perfect and certain” (655).

How does one attain this resolute level of certainty despite the irreducible uncertainty of probable knowledge? Locke and others imagined probable knowledge as a matter of ascending a graduated scale of belief ranging from absolute doubt or disbelief up to opinion and, finally, to the full confidence of “moral certainty” on the basis of degrees of “moral evidence.”⁷² The degree of “moral certainty” at the top of this evidentiary hierarchy was defined negatively: morally certain propositions were propositions that would be unreasonable to doubt regardless of any theoretical level of uncertainty. As Barbara Shapiro writes, moral certainty was founded on the premise that “reasonable men, employing their senses and rational faculties, could derive truths that they would have no reason to doubt” (*Beyond Reasonable Doubt* 7).⁷³ One can be “said to have a moral Certainty,” writes Johnson, when a proposition is supported with “all the Reasons it is, in the Nature of it, capable of” and there “remains no sufficient Reason to doubt of the Truth of it” (Johnson *Elements* 75). In one sense, this is a matter of voluntary acquiescence: Johnson sees the practice as an “honest[] endeavor” to “as much as possible...divest ourselves of all sinister views and prejudices in favor of any vulgar Opinions, pre-conceived Schemes, or worldly Interests, and guard ourselves against every untoward Appetite or Passion, that may darken or bypass our Minds” (90). But there is also an aspiration that this final acquiescence is somehow more involuntary than voluntary. It arrives *despite* any and all voluntary skeptical resistance: Johnson concludes, “In all Cases, the Criterion or Test of Evidence and Certainty, is, when we have it *not in our Power to with-hold* our Assent or Acquiescence. This is called *Science*, which Term is however, by some, restrained to those Truth which are necessary and immutable” (my emphasis, 77).

⁷² Bailey’s remarks in *Essay on the Formation and Publication of Opinions* (1821) are representative: “All the various degrees of belief and disbelief, from the fullest conviction to doubt, and from doubt to absolute incredulity, correspond to the degree of evidence, or to the nature of the considerations of the present to the mind” (10)

⁷³ In his recent work, Rob Mitchell has developed a concept of a “variable regulative standard,” not stated positively but “read blindly and negatively through the actions of others” (lecture) that applies well to this “reasonable doubt” standard.

This strange mix of voluntary procedures and involuntary compulsions illustrate that this Enlightenment understanding of assent differs significantly from the contemporary (and somewhat technical) philosophical concept of “rational assent,” which designates acquiescence to a proposition upon recognizing it is “true and justified.” The eighteenth-century concept is much broader, more uncertain in designation.⁷⁴ Eighteenth-century theories of assent amount to quasi-normative accounts of belief. The normative appeal of assent was thought to be grounded in natural mental propensities or laws of belief. At least initially, rationality appeared unified and co-terminus with normal (i.e. not perverse) everyday intuitions. In the early eighteenth century, there was no firm distinction between logic and psychology. Locke effectively develops his associationist theory of psychology to confirm his intuition that his normative account of assent *must* also amount to a descriptive account. Daston observes that “this rationality depended crucially on the connection between objective (both qualitative and quantitative) evidence and subjective belief or ‘assent’ to an opinion. Locke’s initial epistemological treatment of probability spelled out how the two *should* be linked; his later psychology of association explained how they *must* be” (196). On Daston’s view, associationism is Locke’s mechanism to “explain why constant experience should produce conviction” (196). Similarly, in his elaboration of Locke’s associationist theory, David Hartley contends that the “foundation of assent” is embedded in “the fixed immutable laws of our frame” (206).⁷⁵

Up to this point, I have only considered how a new appreciation for probable knowledge increasingly upsets the older Scholastic hierarchy between *scientia* and *opinio*. But this reconfiguration also generates a new hierarchy *within* probable knowledge, and this new hierarchy will be important for understanding the origins of the divorce of fact and value neo-Kantian intellectual history observes. This internal shift can best be observed in the shifting meaning of the word *probability* itself. In the older Scholastic designation (which survives well

⁷⁴ The concept of individual assent seems to be developed from a narrower political and monarchical concept of “royal assent,” which is to say the king’s seal of approval. I suspect it became attractive as a term to designate individual rational assent because of the kind of autocratic authority it implied. But the nature of its translation from this political to this philosophical or epistemological sense was not quite complete or clear. For instance, assent still contained a hint of arbitrary power which Thomas Jefferson exploits rhetorically in the *Declaration of Independence* by contrasting how the king would not give his “assent” despite the people’s “consent.” consent presumably tracing back to a more attractive, democratic, and legitimate kind of communal consensus. This lingering monarchical sense is perhaps why it fell out of favor in commonsense political and moral discourse.

⁷⁵ Although Hartley’s concept of assent is notably and strangely contentless: “whatever be meant by [the] phrase” of “obligation to assent” merely signals the “close association of the ideas suggested by the proposition, with the idea, or internal feeling, belonging to the word truth” (206).

into the eighteenth century), the term *probability* would have referred almost exclusively to a kind of reliable human testimony. As Hacking notes, remarking on the “probability” of a proposition would have been more evaluative than descriptive. It would have registered the “approvability of an opinion” (Hacking *Probability* 23), the extent to which a proposition had been vouchsafed by a trustworthy or “probable” authority. This older signification remains available through the eighteenth century, but it is increasingly displaced by a new, aleatory concept of probability. In Locke’s gentewoman passage, for instance, Locke’s use of probability notably departs from this older Scholastic signification. Locke is talking about observing the “probable connexion” of the natural events *themselves*: he refers to “the probability [the country gentewoman] perceives in things” *directly*, what Hacking calls probability as “internal evidence” — the signs given by the probable connection of the “circumstances” themselves — rather than probability as testimony or “external evidence.”

Under the Scholastic system, the appeal to a more authoritative opinion would have represented the best response to believing in an uncertain world.⁷⁶ But under the new intellectual order, probability was best observed firsthand. “Internal evidence” is increasingly privileged over “external evidence.” The Royal Society’s motto, *nullius in verba*, captures this new intellectual imperative towards direct, unmediated observation. As Alexander Welsh observes, this new order privileges the “strong representations” of internal evidence because of the way such “direct” testimony of the senses appears to eschew the problematic aspects of human testimony, which comes with the obvious threat of misperception and manipulation (Welsh 8). As Welsh notes, the elevation of “internal evidence” — or, alternatively, “presumptive proof” and “circumstantial evidence” — is an increasing conviction that the “circumstances cannot lie” in ways that humans obviously can.

What makes Locke’s country gentewoman passage especially rich — and relevant for my purposes — is that it nicely (if inadvertently) demonstrates how this emerging distinction between “internal” and “external” evidence never quite escapes the older concept of testimony. Locke certainly subscribes to direct and unimpeded observation of probable circumstances as the best manner of judging probable belief. To what method, Locke asks in the educational primer,

⁷⁶ As Jager notes, following Taylor, belief under this Scholastic system would have “presuppos[ed] a relationship and a certain posture or orientation — commitment, cherishing — toward that relationship, something partly captured in the Latin *credo*, also often translated as ‘believe.’ Consequently, to lose one’s belief was a moral and emotional failing more than an epistemological one” (33-34)

Conduct of the Understanding, can “a novice, an enquirer, a stranger” finally appeal to determine whether to grant or withhold his belief?: “I answer, use his eyes. There is a correspondence of things, and agreement and disagreement in ideas, discernible in very different degrees, and there are eyes in men to see them if they please” (74). Yet, in the country gentlewoman passage above, the country gentlewoman is still being *told* the relevant details. Her sense of the probable connections is mediated by this telling. In this way, the new ideal of an “internal evidence” is largely aspirational and, ultimately, mystifying. As John Bender and David Wellbery have observed, Enlightenment thinkers attempt to “contravene[]” the older rhetorical model of testimony by developing a “mode of discourse conceived as neutral, non-positional, and transparent” (Bender and Wellbery 7) and defined by a stylistic commitment to perspicacity. Jules David Law likewise observes that this rhetoric of empiricism “constant[ly] analogi[z]es” between the “optical sensations and verbal language in terms of one another” (23). There seems to be a clear line from this rhetoric to the emergence of the “modern fact” that Mary Poovey surveys as “the story of how description came to seem separate from interpretation or theoretical analysis” and how one kind of “epistemological unit” “came to seem immune from theory or interpretation” (Poovey *Modern Fact* xii).

It seems accurate to regard this gradual elevation of a privileged kind of probable “fact” as a prehistory to the fact-value split that neo-Kantian intellectual history observes. This continuity, I would argue, is what has ensured the neo-Kantian account to be a tolerable enough approximation to retain. However, the trouble with the neo-Kantian narrative — especially as it plays out in neo-Kantian Romanticism — is that it must necessarily embrace this kind of mystification and posit the *successful* break of fact and value in order to pursue Romanticism’s therapeutic response. As we have seen, neo-Kantian Romanticism posits the success of this break less on the basis of its descriptive accuracy (though its misreading *a la Bloom* is not necessarily inaccurate so much as distorted, partial) than on the basis of its reformative and generative (read: secularizing, modernizing) potential. Yet, if we can entertain Latour’s constant refrain that “we have never been modern” and appreciate how incomplete and tenuous these distinctions between fact and value were (and always have been), we can appreciate the ways in which Romantic literature might work *against* rather than *within* them. Rather than reading Romantic literature as taking “the world of things, which science had shorn of all but objective existence” and reinvesting it with “values through...[an] understanding of its structure and meaning” (“Nature

Moralized” 39-40), I want to read Romantic literature as it questions whether the world of things — that is, of appearances and circumstances — were ever thoroughly shorn of acts of valuation, perception, and interpretation in the manner that the fact-value dogma implies.

2.5 Moral Evidence as the “Province of Rhetoric”

As I suggested in my introduction, one way to resist the pull of these neo-Kantian distinctions is to recover and examine their rhetorical aspect. The same procedure can be performed on the distinctions offered by Enlightenment epistemology. Consider Locke’s claim that we assent to some probable propositions “*as if* they were infallibly demonstrated.” The claim should appear almost self-defeating given that Locke’s larger goal is ostensibly to assert the *difference* between moral and demonstrative certainty. And it certainly indicates that, however much estimations of probable knowledge were changing, demonstrative knowledge never quite lost its intellectual cachet. As we will see, this is especially true of Euclidean geometry in England, which was the first “queen of the sciences” before (and even after) the nineteenth-century embrace of Kantian epistemology. But Locke’s “as if” illustrates the fundamental instability and indeterminacy surrounding the distinction between probable and demonstrative knowledge in the period: that is to say, the essentially hermeneutic and empty quality of the distinction, and the rhetorical play that occurred at the line of demonstrative and moral knowledge. The sense is that no one knew quite what to do with the distinction beyond the routine that constructive skepticism recommended: that is, asserting the irreducible uncertainty of moral knowledge as well as the necessity to act despite this. While, in epistemological treatises, intuitions about the sufficiency of moral certainty were developed with reference to widely-observed and fairly uncontroversial natural regularities (e.g., the rising and setting of the sun or the ebb and flow of the tides) or to widely attested historical or geographical facts (e.g., that there was a historical figure named Julius Caesar or that a city called Rome existed), many had little reservations about applying the label of moral certainty to less regular, more controversial facts and wielding this constructive skeptical routine in less than forthright ways.

This is all to say that appeals to any kind of certainty, moral or demonstrative, could seem suspiciously rhetorical. Although the promise of the uncontroversial nature of “internal evidence” as a species of probable knowledge led many to minimize or efface the presence of rhetoric and controversy, an increasing appreciation for the possibility of psychological error

(figured by memory) led others to emphasize the probable and therefore rhetorical and controversial character of *all* knowledge. The new currency of probable knowledge led many to question whether demonstrative knowledge ever deserved privileged status. Since all demonstrative knowledge had to be communicated as probable knowledge, it seemed distinctly possible that moral certainty was the highest standard we could *ever* gain, and that the previous esteem for demonstrative knowledge was not only misplaced but misguided since it did not properly factor in how all knowledge much be experienced as probability *before* one could clarify any further epistemic distinctions.⁷⁷

Scottish New Rhetoric, for instance, can be viewed along both axes. In one sense, New Rhetoric unapologetically elevates and promotes the stylistics of perspicuity that define the unmarked rhetoric of empiricism that Law, Bender, and Wellbery observe. The New Rhetoric was, in this respect, most markedly a turn away from the older vertical, hierarchical relations that dictated the formality of classical rhetoric towards a new horizontal relation of what Bender and Wellbery call “rhetoricity.” As James Engell nicely summarizes, New Rhetoric “subordinates [the] formal division, long lists of terms, and rote strategies” promoted by classical rhetoric “in favor of a robust psychological approach, natural style, and a firm linguistic and grammatological foundation” (218).⁷⁸ But the New Rhetoric’s distinct emphasis on psychology (as clarified by the newly privileged discourse of epistemology) also motivated a strong psychological realism in addition to its fairly uncritical embrace of a grounding concept of experience. In his influential *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), for instance, George Campbell attacks the “pride of mathesis” by noting that “*the possibility of error attends the most complete demonstration*” (158) and that “no demonstration whatever can produce, or reasonably ought to produce, a higher degree of certainty than that which results from the vivid representations of

⁷⁷In *Observations on Man* (1749), David Hartley pursues an extensive case for the “value of dependent and independent or concurrent evidence, and the probability of general conclusions formed by induction and analogy” (209). Hartley makes this case by showing that this kind of probable reasoning undergirds many more fields than one might expect. For Hartley (himself a mathematician), the recursive procedures involved in Newton’s differential method (say, of working from set points to discover the curve which organize them) looks a lot like reasoning from induction and analogy. For Hartley, the “parallel” is “pertinent and instructive” since it indicates that even a “mathematical conclusion” formed “in a way that is strictly just” and with “the greatest possible probability in its favour” is “however, liable to the same uncertainties, both in kind and degree, as the general maxims of natural philosophy drawn from natural history, experiments, &c” (214).

⁷⁸Adam Smith inaugurates and epitomizes this turn from classical rhetoric with his often quoted comment that ancient and modern systems of rhetoric devoted to these kind of distinctions amount to “a very silly set of books and not at all instructive” (Smith *Lectures* 26).

memory, on which the other is obliged to lean” (158). For Campbell, this observation clarifies the “natural subordination” of demonstrative knowledge to the probable. With “reasonably ought to produce,” Campbell is appealing to a stricter kind of error reduction than any naive faith in demonstration would recommend, one that is more attuned to the irreducible error and uncertainty which threatens even the communication of demonstrative knowledge.

Campbell forwards this case against demonstration as a part of his larger case for the indispensable value of a rhetorical education in light of these imperfect epistemological conditions. Campbell asserts that “moral evidence” or “all decisions concerning fact, and things without us” remains the “province of rhetoric” (65). The rule of Demonstration may be “despotic,” but its sphere is “narrow” (68). Demonstration’s “rival,” rhetoric, “hath less power, but wider empire...the whole world is comprised in her dominions” (68). Campbell is offering a philosophy of rhetoric: a rhetoric written through and for philosophy, in light of the conditions of knowledge that epistemology discovers.⁷⁹ The most important aspect of these conditions is the irreducible uncertainty of probable knowledge. For Campbell, if memory’s fallibility undercuts demonstrative knowledge, it is even more consequential in moral reasoning: there is “implicit faith in the clear representations of that faculty” without which “we could not advance a step in the acquisition of experimental knowledge” (80). This for Campbell reflects “an irremediable imbecility in the very foundation of moral reasoning” (80). More importantly, Campbell looks to stress the irreducibly rhetorical, controversial, and even oppositional nature of all probable knowledge. If there is a “manifest contradiction” in demonstrative knowledge, we can expect that one side “must be fallacious and sophistical” (67). But, with “moral evidence,” barring a “few singular instances” (i.e. direct evidence of experience), “there is always real, not apparent evidence on both sides” of any question: there are “contrary experiences, contrary presumptions, contrary testimonies, to balance against one another” (67). For this reason, Campbell notes, we

⁷⁹ Framed in this manner, it seems possible to use New Rhetoric to correct the traditional narrative of the “death of rhetoric” put forth, for instance, by Paul Riceour in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975). Riceour’s history draws a strong contrast between Aristotelian rhetoric and its transformation within Western rhetorical education. From Riceour’s perspective, that Western tradition “sever[s]” rhetoric from “philosophy” which robs rhetoric of its motivating problematic and turns it into a process of taxonomizing “figures of speech” (10). For Riceour, Aristotle’s rhetoric was “far more embracing,” “solidly bound to philosophy by the theory of argumentation” and committed “harness[ing] [rhetoric’s] dangerous power by means of a special technique” (10). New Rhetoric would constitute an important break in this long historical trend of rhetoric as taxonomy, one that reactivates the line between philosophy and rhetoric.

must assess probability based on “the proportion which the evidence on the side that preponderates bears to its opposite” (67).

From my perspective, what Campbell’s *New Rhetoric* clarifies is that probable knowledge — as an uncertain, social knowledge — can be conceived in distinctly rhetorical terms in the Enlightenment: terms that I believe have been lost with the rise of both Kantian epistemology and a viable notion of objectivity. This is true even for the class of “experience” that Campbell elevates as beyond this kind of controversy. Consider the example Campbell offers by way of illustrating the thrust of such morally certain facts:

Many cases might be supposed of belief, founded only on moral evidence, which it would be impossible to shake. A man of known probity and good sense, and (if you think it makes an addition of any moment in this case) an astronomer and philosopher, bids you look at the sun as it goes down, and tells you, with a serious countenance, that the sun which sets to-day will never rise again upon the earth. What would be the effect of this declaration? Would it create in you any doubts? I believe it might, as to the soundness of the man’s intellect, but not as to the truth of what he said. Thus, if we regard only the effect, demonstration itself doth not always produce such immovable certainty as is sometimes consequent on merely moral evidence. (82).

In this example, it is social exchange — the “telling” — that is foregrounded, even more so than in Locke’s *gentlewoman* passage. Here Campbell seems to be attacking a certain kind of seriousness and formality: “expert declaration” of the astronomer and philosopher stands in for a kind of excessive speculation concerning the contingency and irreducible uncertainty of the sun’s rising and setting. Incidentally, for Campbell, the logic goes the other way: moral certainty seems to account, in part, for the stability of certain kinds of demonstrative knowledge:

And if there are, on the other hand, some well-known demonstrations, of so great authority that it would equally look like lunacy to impugn, it may deserve the attention of the curious to inquire how far, with respect to the bulk of mankind, these circumstances, their having stood the test of ages, their having obtained the universal suffrage of those who are qualified to examine them, things purely of the nature of moral evidence, have contributed to that unshaken faith which they are received. (82-3).

In this scenario, Campbell not only speaks to the persistence of the older sense of probability — the “universal suffrage of those who are qualified to examine them” (82) — as it emerges as

“expert” opinion. He also identifies demonstration and the expertise which identifies and attests to demonstration as “purely of the nature of moral evidence” (82).⁸⁰

With these passages in view, it should be clear that, even as Campbell’s New Rhetoric subscribes to the rhetoric of empiricism, his distinctly social account of moral evidence notably cuts against that rhetoric’s tendency to obscure what Shapin has famously called the “social history of truth” and what Paul Wood glosses as “the fact that much of what we count as knowledge about people and things comes to us secondhand, through reports, testimonies, and writings of others” (Wood 355). In this second account especially, Campbell also seems to observe (and to bring to the “attention of the curious”) what Shapin calls the “massive mismatch between dominant characterizations of the sources of our factual knowledge and the ways we actually secure it” (Shapin *Social History* xxv). As Shapin shows, the discourse of epistemology generates this kind of distortion well before it was exacerbated by neo-Kantian intellectual history in the way Rorty and Latour observe.

I will explore Hume’s similar investments in this social account of “moral evidence” as it grounds a definition of moral reasonableness in the next chapter. And, indeed, Campbell’s speculations seems to be inspired, largely, by Hume’s revisionary account of moral evidence in *The Treatise*. But, to end this survey, I want to return to the constructive skeptical procedure for sifting through moral evidence in search of moral certainty and present this as a non-Kantian candidate for Wordsworth and Coleridge’s “cardinal” philosophical (or epistemological) concern.

2.6 Johnson’s Science

Over the last three sections, I have pursued a rough sketch of the broader program of practical rationality that informed long-eighteenth century epistemology. I have offered this sketch in an attempt to recover the original terms of that program since displaced by those of the familiar neo-Kantian epistemology. Now we are in a position to ask: what bearing, if any, might

⁸⁰With his appeal to the primacy of moral evidence, Campbell anticipates Cardinal John Newman’s later observations about the primacy of other forms of authority as they structure belief: “Supposing a boy cannot make his answer to some arithmetical or algebraical question tally with the book, need he at once distrust the book? Does his trust in it fall down a certain number of degrees, according to the force of his difficulty? On the contrary, he keeps to the principle, implicit but present in his mind...that the book is more likely to be right than he is; and this mere preponderance of probability is sufficient to make him faithful to his belief in its correctness, till its correctness is actually proved” (Newman *Grammar of Assent* 170-71).

this epistemological program of practical rationality — addressed to the problem “moral certainty” — have had on Romantic literary authors?

To propose an answer, I’d like to return to Johnson’s description of constructive skeptical procedures as a kind of “Science.” Again, Johnson writes, “In all Cases, the Criterion or Test of Evidence and Certainty, is, when we have it not in our Power to with-hold our Assent or Acquiescence. This is called *Science*, which Term is however, by some, restrained to those Truth which are necessary and immutable” (77). How should we interpret Johnson’s use of *science*? First, it should be evident that Johnson is offering this definition explicitly against the older Scholastic concept of *scientia*. That Scholastic sense still obviously has currency, but it seems secondary: Johnson, ever the Scholar, is trying to be comprehensive. Johnson’s acceptance of this new designation as primary suggests that he has experienced the epistemic leveling ushered in by practical rationality — so much so that he is willing to forward a definition of knowledge in constructive skeptical terms. Though the antecedent of *this* is ambiguous, Johnson seems to intend science to denote the dynamic constructive skeptical procedure (“criterion” or “test”) more than the knowledge than results from it: process over product, form over content. Johnson forwards this constructive skeptical definition even as Johnson elsewhere in this account of “assent” grants demonstrative certainty a clear superiority to moral certainty.⁸¹

Johnson’s science is surely closer to our contemporary understanding of science than it is to *scientia*, but I want to suggest that it is more unfamiliar than familiar, and even quite specific to the eighteenth-century theory of assent. If its “moral” or uncertain character clearly separates it from *scientia*, its generalized character seems to distinguish it from any technical, specialized, or disciplinary account of science. Hoyt Trowbridge’s observation several decades ago that, when discussing “opinion” (in the technical sense), Johnson can often “assume[] — as a writer today surely could not assume — that his readers are familiar with the technical or semi-technical vocabulary of logic” (1) seems pertinent, as does Trowbridge’s conjecture from this fact that “a branch of logic, particularly concerned with the kind of empirical reasoning which gropes toward truth, sometimes attaining a fair approximation to it but never full intellectual clarity and certainty must have been quite well known to the educated reading public of Johnson’s day”

⁸¹Johnson, like Locke, is more inclined to resolve moral certainty into a kind of apodictic “intuition” that looks a lot like demonstration (Johnson calls this “the free arbitrary Will of the Deity, and Matters of meer Intuition” (75)).

(Trowbridge 1). This sense of science, then, is more semi-technical than technical, more general than specialized, though historically-specific.⁸²

In the past two decades, there have been numerous excellent studies of the interrelation of scientific and literary practice in the Romantic period. But these studies have often pertained to technical scientific concepts emerging out of specific disciplines: most recently (and perennially for that matter), the life sciences.⁸³ Here I want to use Johnson's science to think about how Romantic authors would have absorbed or responded to eighteenth-century epistemology. I believe it is the generalized character of this definition that especially recommends it as a context for Romantic authors. Simply put, this would have been the most widely available, non-specialized treatment of epistemology: one that would have been widely rehearsed, and readily accessible both to adopt and critique.

Johnson's science seems very close, for instance, to the science Coleridge invokes in his psychological criticism of Hamlet. For Coleridge, Shakespeare's construction of Hamlet demonstrates his "deep and accurate science in mental philosophy" (*my emphasis*, 136). Explaining this claim, Coleridge proposes that one of Shakespeare's common procedures is to inhabit some intellectual faculty and distort it so as to bring its operation into focus. For Coleridge, Shakespeare's "mode" of creation is experimental: Shakespeare "conceive[s] any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess" (136) and then "place[s] himself...mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances" (136). With Hamlet, Coleridge continues, Shakespeare seems to "have wished to exemplify the *moral necessity* of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our sense, and our meditations on the workings of our minds" (*my emphasis*,

⁸² The *OED* offers this specialized definition (5b) dated to the late eighteenth century: "The intellectual and practical activity encompassing those branches of study related to the phenomena of the physical universe and their laws, sometimes with the implied exclusion of pure mathematics." ("science, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, www.oed.com/view/Entry/172672. Accessed 14 September 2017.)

⁸³ For a recent treatment of Romantic literary engagements with materialism, see Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2017; with concepts of auto- and epi-genesis, Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism*; with science of mind, Alan Richardson, *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010; with geology, Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. See also Richard Sha, *Perverse Romanticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008; Rob Mitchell, *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science & Literature*. In a recent essay on "model systems" in literary criticism, Mary Poovey provocatively suggests that "the trope of the organic whole continues to organize most of the strains of criticism that now dominate U.S. practice...[and] simultaneously makes contemporary criticism resemble a romantic lyric and converts its analytic objects into lyriclike organic wholes" ("Model System" 432) — although in her forthcoming "Ideas of Order: A Field Report," Marjorie Levinson has notably raised questions about the accuracy of Poovey's account and, more particularly, its application and relevance to contemporary — as opposed to bygone — literary critical practices.

137). For Coleridge, Hamlet's example is a negative one. Hamlet's inaction demonstrates how an "overbalance" in the "contemplative faculty" causes an individual to become "the creature of mere meditation" and to "lose his natural power of action" (137). Hamlet's "almost enormous intellectual activity" breeds a "proportionate aversion to real action" (137) and results in Hamlet's inability to respond to "circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment" (137). Coleridge's mental philosophy is distinctly action-oriented. It is centered on illustrating principles of "moral necessity" and the "obligation to action." Both would have been constructive skeptical imperatives.⁸⁴

William Wordsworth disowns a similar kind of paralysis caused by the "morbid excess" of the intellect in the final books of the *Prelude*. Under a new oppressive desire for certainty and justification, Wordsworth subjects all "passions notions, shapes of faith" to trial and "suspiciously/Calling the mind to establish in plain day/Her titles and her honours" (X.890-1) and "demanding *proof*/And seeking it in everything" (X.896-7). As a result of this Skeptical critical violence — which ostensibly discovers the lack of a clear "ground/Of moral obligation" (X.894-5) — he "yielded up moral questions in despair" (X.900) and "turned towards mathematics, and their clear/And solid evidence" (X.903-4). What Wordsworth narrates is a way out of these "speculations" and "reasonings/False from the beginning" (X.883-84), "misguiding and misguided" (X.888).

In his reading of this moment in the *Prelude*, Abrams suggests that Wordsworth "makes a desperate attempt to reestablish on abstract premises and by logical analysis and reasoning, what had originally been his spontaneous confidence in life and his hope for man" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 108). Instead, Abrams writes, "the attempt leads only to utter perplexity about 'right and wrong, the ground/Of moral obligation,' until [Wordsworth] breaks down completely" (108). But I want to suggest we can read this differently with the tradition of constructive skepticism in view. Wordsworth appears to draw on a constructive skeptical developmental narrative here which represents this demand for pure or absolute certainty as something which every maturing intellect must *encounter* and *overcome*. Consider, for instance, how James Gambier narrates this transition in his popular textbook on moral evidence, *Introduction to the Study of Moral Evidence* (1806). Gambier considers how a matter of fact can be assumed to "rise so high as to exclude all reasonable doubt" while "fall[ing] short of absolute certainty" (5).

⁸⁴Remark about Francois' *Open Secrets*?

While he concedes that “we are often apt to expect stronger evidence, than the nature of the thing [i.e. probable knowledge] admits; and, thence, to feel dissatisfied, though the point be fairly proved,” he urges that we should nonetheless “accustom ourselves to yield our assent” if “such evidence be produced in a sufficient degree to counterbalance all that can be fairly urged against it” (Gambier 93). Gambier continues:

. . . [I]f in studying the evidence on any question of fact, we employ ourselves in examining whether there be not a possibility that it may be false, instead of considering whether there be not a sufficient probability that it is true, we shall certainly raise strong doubts in our minds. But, then, we should not study the subject rationally. Demonstration is the only species of reasoning, which, if even conducted correctly, can exclude the possibility of error. But facts do not admit of demonstration. They admit of moral evidence alone. The examining, therefore, into the possibility of error is inconsistent with the nature of the subject, and an absurd practice. (93–94)

I want to say that Gambier is rehearsing a fairly standard constructive skeptical developmental narrative. The drama of this narrative turns on the proper absorption of the irreducibly uncertain nature of moral evidence. Gambier’s assertion regarding the “irrationality,” “inconsistency,” and “absurdity” of fixating on the “possibility of error” with respect to moral evidence was a common refrain within eighteenth-century epistemology. The desire to attain degrees of certainty thought to exceed “reasonable doubt” was generally treated in this manner as an intellectual error, a refusal to accept the basic epistemic conditions governing the evaluation of matters of fact—what Gambier refers to as the “nature of the thing.” Importantly, Gambier takes the high-level of certainty promised by demonstration to be part of the problem. It threatens to encourage a kind of pathological obsession for certainty that, thwarted by the uncertainty of worldly affairs, is seen to collapse in skepticism. For Gambier, a “mind that has been accustomed to yield its assent to demonstration only generally finds great difficulty in being satisfied with a lower species of evidence.” It is from this epistemological letdown that “arises that tendency to scepticism, which has been imputed to the study of mathematics” (Gambier vi-vii).

Returning to the *Prelude* with the constructive skeptical developmental narrative in view, I would be inclined to say that it is Wordsworth’s first encounter with rationality which dislodges him from this spontaneous confidence in the world. Wordsworth is trying to leaven this severe and unworkable rationality with a new moral confidence to generate a practical rationality. Indeed, even as Wordsworth aims to rework its narrow conception of rationality and mend the

violence it has committed on his perception of moral truth, Wordsworth finally prefers this new critical consciousness. Wordsworth's turn to mathematics is not a failed attempt at therapy; it is form of evasion. This is what makes it morally reprehensible enough to warrant the severe critique Wordsworth brings to it.

These two examples are evidence that Wordsworth and Coleridge's understanding of epistemology is largely trained in the constructive skeptical project of practical rationality. Recognizing these constructive skeptical investments opens up a way of seeing Romantic authors working within the Enlightenment rationality rather than outside it.⁸⁵ This might sound somewhat questionable since the British Romantic poets are traditionally seen as programmatically (and generatively) rejecting the narrow critical dictates of Enlightenment rationality. In *Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), for instance, Abrams argues that "romantic poets faced...the charge that, by the all-comprehensive criterion of science, the passions are deceptive and the products of imagination illusory, hence that poetry is false not only in its parts, but in its entirety" (Abrams *Mirror* 297). The demand for a "literal and mathematically plain discourse in science and sermons" (286) led "poets and critics to re-examine and to redefine the permissible limits of metaphor in the language of a poem" (286) and finally to employ "symbolism, animism, and mythopoeia" with "an inventive freedom, vitality, and puissance unprecedented in literature" (295). In *Poetic Madness* (1996), Frederick Burwick builds upon this foundational narrative to argue that the Romantics understood the necessity of "establishing [Art's] claims to intellectual integrity" on critical — even explicitly philosophical, epistemological, or skeptical — grounds. The philosophical discourse of aesthetics threatened to "relegate[]" Art to "the so-called 'lower faculties'" (Burwick 144) as irrational and therefore in some regard compromised, disqualified as a viable site of knowledge. For Burwick, this generates a paradox: poetry must establish its legitimacy as a form of reasonableness even as, for Burwick, the "truth of art...is an unreasonable truth" and "[a]rt, by its very nature, opposes the rational judgment of orthodoxy" (145).

In his account, Burwick sees Romantic poetry as overcoming this paradox by rejecting any claim to rationality and embracing its unreasonableness. As this canonical literary history has

⁸⁵ In this regard, I would want to translate Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert's recent claim that Early-German-Romanticism" was committed to a "rational anti-foundationalism" that worked to continue an Enlightenment project of rationality more than it depart from it. That anti-foundationalism constituted "an attempt to capture the inherent incompleteness of philosophy and knowledge" which would put "philosophy...in contact with aesthetic experience and poetry" (154-55). See Millan-Zaibert, "Romantic Rationality" *PLI* 10 (2000):141-155.

it, then, Romanticism relinquishes any claim to mimetic representation of the world to pursue, first, subjective expressionism and, eventually, an autonomous and unfettered logic, art for art's sake: art pursues what Wasserman calls "subtler language" and what Charles Taylor, recently resuscitating Wasserman, associates with a kind of implicit, non-creedal, post-Durkheimian discourse.⁸⁶ This freeing of art is generally — and understandably — celebrated. But given the Romantics' evident embrace of critique (for the second generation, explicitly as embodied by Hume), and the wider cultural hegemony epistemology had achieved by the Romantic period (especially following the reception of Kant's Copernican response to Hume), stressing Romanticism's generative departure from rationality strikes me as somewhat disingenuous, especially if one wants to claim that the "threat" of Hume's epistemological skepticism somehow effects the Romantics' transformative turn by finally breaking a hobbling metaphysics (which, on Wasserman's account, the reigning aesthetic and intellectual orders of the eighteenth century were simply trying to prop up).⁸⁷

Rather than framing Romanticism as a willing and empowering departure from Enlightenment rationality, it seems more accurate to say that poetry was being systematically diminished under the sign of epistemology and increasingly perceived as radically subjective and even primitive, thus increasingly undesirable and dispensable in the modern era. In this regard, the poet and essayist Thomas Alfred Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), while certainly more comic than serious, paints a more honest picture of the sad fate of poetry under epistemology (not to mention sobering and prophetic in its own right): the speculative procedures of Peacock's

⁸⁶ See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 353-363. Taylor glosses Wasserman's thesis this way: "Earl Wasserman has shown how the decline of the old order with its established background of meanings made necessary the development of new poetic languages in the Romantic period" (353).

⁸⁷ Again, it's worth correcting the neo-Kantian account of the Romantic uptake of Hume. Although Wordsworth and Coleridge would have shared this critical *ethos* with Hume, it is unlikely that either Coleridge or Wordsworth would have absorbed this critical *ethos* from Hume. It was cultivated in a much wider project of intellectual reform which began in mid-seventeenth century and which Hume was only a later, if also influential, contributor. I would argue it is really only in the second generation Romantics that one can detect any real absorption of Hume at the level of style or substance. But, again, like Carlyle, Shelley and Byron would have seen Hume's Skepticism as a boon, not a threat: a further corrective to both a constricting moralism *and* overbearing rationality. This is arguably why the second generation's reactions to the first generation seem to be equal parts rejection and exacerbation of Coleridge and Wordsworth's qualified rationality. The "Preface" of Shelley's *Alastor*, for instance, appears to invoke a Wordsworthian critique of judgment to the overly critical *Alastor*. But its Wordsworthian call to the sufficiency and stability of moral truth unspools into a dizzying Humean interrogation of subjectivity and exhausts itself in the protagonist's unapologetic and annihilating pursuit for the ideal. Keats develops the concept of "negative capability" explicitly as an indictment of what he saw as Coleridge's overweening demand for certainty (Keats 492).

conjectural history appear to construct a more or less accurate picture of the fate of contemporary poetry at the institutional level. Peacock writes that in the eighteenth century

[e]nquiry was roused, the activity of the intellect was excited, and poetry came in for its share of the general result. The changes had been rung on lovely maid and sylvan shade, summer heat and green retreat, waving trees and sighing breeze, gentle swains and amorous pains, by versifiers who took them on trust, as meaning something very soft and tender, without much caring what: but with this general activity of intellect came a necessity for even poets to appear to know something of what they professed to talk of. (Peacock 13)

For Peacock, philosophy has goaded poetry into a new and unprecedented intellectual discipline and descriptive integrity. The initial shock is invigorating and focusing, but poetry is constitutionally doomed under the new sign of enquiry. An unadorned scientific rhetoric has effected even deeper changes that finally prove more fatal than therapeutic to poetry's dependence on figure and artifice: for Peacock, it was always in some sense evident that "reason and understanding are best addressed in the simplest and most unvarnished phrase" while "feeling and passion are best painted in, and roused by, ornamental and figurative language" (Peacock 9). For this reason, "pure reason and dispassionate truth" would be "perfectly ridiculous in verse, as we may judge by versifying one of Euclid's demonstrations" (9). The newer, harder fact of the new intellectual regime is that "this will be found true of all dispassionate reasoning whatever, and all reasoning that requires comprehensive views and enlarged combinations" (9). Perspicuity is a total, unremitting discipline. By the end of its course, plain speak should be a mentalese, a kind of mental clarity and force.

This new, more exacting discipline immediately reduces poetry's domain to only the most obvious and "tangible points of morality" which "command assent at once, those which have a mirror in every mind, and in which the severity of reason is warmed and rendered palatable by being mixed up with feeling and imagination, that are applicable even to what is called moral poetry" (9). Legitimate forms of feeling and imagination must be aligned with — not against — rationality, and self-evidently so. In the end, the scientific approach will finally be so total and desirable that poetry will lose even this narrow function: "as the sciences of morals and of mind advance towards perfection," Peacock writes, "as they become more enlarged and comprehensive in their views, as reason gains the ascendancy in them over imagination and feeling, poetry can no longer accompany, them in their progress, but drops into the back ground, and leaves them to advance alone: Thus the empire of thought is withdrawn from poetry, as the

empire of facts had been before” (9). Peacock’s vision, in this way, looks a lot like Leslie Stephen’s early neo-Kantian intellectual historical vision.

For Peacock and Shelley alike — and finally for most critically inclined Romantics and neo-Kantian Romantic literary critics, *pace* Burwick — poetry seems to have to earn its legitimacy by going *through* or *over* philosophy, not *away from* or *around* it, by presenting poetry as instrumental and therapeutic to philosophy or even finally more philosophical than philosophy, *ur-philosophical*. At any rate, poetry must be an enterprise which philosophy ignores at its own peril. Poetry’s critique of rationality must finally seem accommodating and complementary: philosophy is simply too prestigious and already inclined to see poetry as problematic, in need of differentiation and quarantine. Philosophy is already too happy to place poetry on the periphery, or to grant poetry its own sovereignty, as it does theology. This prestige only grows through neo-Kantian intellectual history and, from my perspective, this cultural prestige not only explains the mid-twentieth century turn to neo-Kantian Romanticism but also the kind of narratives it constructs in which poetry outperforms philosophy somehow on philosophy’s own terms.

Thus while Wordsworth’s dissatisfaction with the constrictions of Enlightenment rationality — and, similarly, with neoclassical poetic artifice — may inspire his purported “return” to nature to common language, Wordsworth does not reject Enlightenment rationality outright. Rather, he works to redefine and widen what constitutes rationality: returning to the terms of the *Prelude*, he aims to recover the “exactness of a comprehensive mind” which has been “sacrificed” for “scrupulous and microscopic views” “placed beyond/The limits of experience and truth” (X.849). He wants to use poetry to recover a “grand and simple Reason” obscured by the narrow picture of rationality abstracted from that “...humbler power/Which carries on its no inglorious work/By logic and minute analysis” (XI.124-6). “Logic and minute analysis” is a fine gateway to Reason. Even here, amidst a full-blown critique, Wordsworth can only speak of it with praise (“no inglorious”). But this constricted picture of rationality is finally “of all Idols that which pleases most/The growing mind...” (XI.127-8). It must be abandoned for a more comprehensive science of moral reasoning, one that philosophy, with its uncompromising critical penchant, simply cannot construct. This return to moral reasoning is framed in distinctly constructive skeptical terms, as a recommitment to moral certainty.

In the *Prelude* and, more programmatically, in the “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth not only declares poetry’s special claim to moral reasoning but insists that the current picture of moral reasoning is wholly inadequate because it has yet to be articulated by poetry. Wordsworth’s sense of the “comprehensive” mind far exceeds Peacock’s more computational vision. Yet, in other respects, Wordsworth is hardly that far from Peacock. Wordsworth appears to conceive of poetry as *one* of Peacock’s “sciences of morals and of mind” (9). In his 1800 Note to *The Thorn*, Wordsworth characterizes poetry as the “history and science of the feelings” (594). I believe we should see Wordsworth and Peacock’s invocations sciences as looking backwards and forwards, respectively: Wordsworth to Johnson’s Science and Peacock to Leslie Stephen’s. But, as many of the recent studies of Romantic engagements with the emerging disciplinary sciences show, we should also see Wordsworth situating poetry within the new intellectual and scientific order Peacock and Stephen project. 1802 “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth calls his lyrical ballads “experiments” and insists that the Poet must remain an indispensable handmaiden to the “Man of Science” (606), “at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the object of the Science itself” (606). It is as if Wordsworth must assert the standing of the Poet by emphasizing the Poet’s indispensable role within (but also beside) this new intellectual order. But it is also poetry finally exists above it, cultivating the irreducible subjectivity that pursues the “object of the Science itself” (606).

What’s remarkable about Peacock’s reception of Wordsworth is that he takes Wordsworth and Romanticism to have made a defiant swerve *away* from this intellectual imperative, towards an irremediable and anti-intellectual metaphysics, a move that is sure to hasten poetry’s demise. “While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge,” Peacock writes, “the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age” (Peacock 15). The Romantic poet is “remaining studiously ignorant of history, society, and human nature, cultivated the phantasy only at the expence of the memory and the reason” (14). Wordsworth can hit the right moral and descriptive notes, but for some reason “cannot describe a scene under his own eyes without putting into it the shadow of a Danish boy or the living ghost of Lucy Gray, or some similar phantastical parturition of the moods of his own mind” (15). But I would argue that, from Wordsworth’s perspective, embracing and exacerbating these superstitions is what poetry offers: it places them under a new kind of observation, one that, at its

best, is radically sympathetic and responsive, inclined or even insistent on taking them seriously, on suspending the act of dismissal as long as possible to perceive the wide and mysterious arc on which these superstitions emerge as rational and to glimpse “grand and simple Reason” beyond the false image the Enlightenment constructs of it. As Deborah E. White nicely puts it (speaking more generally of Romantic poetry), this new poetic observation works to reveal “the very concept of superstition as, itself, superstitious — the ideological imposition of a modernity unwilling to interrogate the superstitious or ‘fanciful’ foundations of its own presuppositions” (White 12).

CHAPTER THREE

There Was No Radical Hume

3.1 Neo-Kantian Romanticism Misreads Hume

The preceding chapter should clarify that reading a broader *topos* of crisis from the hostility of Hume's critics is largely disingenuous; it finally reads more content into that hostility than it does from it. It is certainly possible and viable to construct a radically skeptical Hume from the most concentrated, anxious moments of his prose: for instance, Hume's shipwreck imagery at the end of Book I of the *Treatise*. Numerous philosophers and literary scholars have pursued such an interpretation of Hume credibly and generatively, and there is no doubt that these passages are stylistically stunning, and achieve a wholly original pitch, even taking into account the distinctly melodramatic character of most skeptical performances since at least Descartes. Hume's skeptical moments are profoundly serious, open-ended, and suggestive, especially in the provocative, honest, and searching prose of the *Treatise*. But reading Hume as a radical skeptic also takes some will and effort. One has to turn a blind eye to Hume's frequent vacillations regarding the legitimacy of radical skepticism, not to mention Hume's evident drift from the darker, more radical skepticism of the *Treatise on Human Nature* to the more matter-of-fact, mitigated skepticism of *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*. Embracing and exacerbating the *Treatise's* anxious register risks doing considerable violence to the tenor of Hume's philosophy, given that Hume himself steadily worked to dampen or even extinguish it.

It's worth surveying how neo-Kantians have critics have justified pursuing Hume as radical skeptic despite these facts. A thoroughly committed neo-Kantian Skeptic like Leslie Stephen simply dismisses Hume's vacillations as temporary (if sustained) relapses into fideism. He even presents them as superficial and personal rather than philosophical or even theological. Stephen explains that, while Hume "unlike Berkeley and Locke" held no "theological prepossessions" and "alone, amongst contemporary thinkers, followed logic wherever it led him," still "Hume, indeed, may be accused of some divergence from the straight path under the influence of literary vanity. To that cause we must partly attribute his singular attempt to

extinguish his early and most complete work” (43). “Literary vanity” refers to Hume’s desire for a positive public reception. The “straight path” is the strict ethos of doubt that nineteenth-century intellectuals like Stephen and J.S. Mill adopted under the neo-Kantian sign of critique.⁸⁸ With this version of the straight and narrow in view, Hume’s divergences from Skepticism do not look like a regained sense of proportion, but intellectual and moral incontinence.

Another more forgiving and more credible approach to Hume’s vacillations sees them not as primarily personal in nature but rather responses to a central, intractable problem endemic to skepticism. In his treatment of Hume’s ambivalence, for instance, Pulos brings into focus what he calls the “positive” side of skepticism, the inescapable fact that every skeptic must finally “reconcile[] doubt and the inevitability of entertaining opinions.”⁸⁹ Pulos’ survey of attempted responses is instructive:

The sceptical tradition, it should be remembered, has its positive as well as its negative side. The ancient Pyrrhonists reconciled doubt and the inevitability of entertaining opinions by relying on custom, the New Academy by expounding a doctrine of probability — the doctrine that, while no knowledge is certain, propositions differ in the degree to which they have the ‘appearance’ of truth. Most Renaissance sceptics recommended faith as a solution to doubt. Hume, in a manner of speaking, returned to the probabilism of the New Academy. His probabilism however, took two forms, profoundly different in effect if not in principle. (38-9)

Pulos resolves Hume’s ambivalence by splitting Hume’s response to this central problematic in two. From Pulos’ perspective, Hume pursues a weaker probabilism which only accepts a positivistic and non-metaphysical “world of appearance” and a stronger one which purports to observe the “ultimate nature of reality.” This bifurcation allows Pulos to embrace the weaker (more thoroughly skeptical) probabilism as privileged and philosophical while rejecting Hume’s

⁸⁸This *ethos* of doubt is epitomized in William K. Clifford’s uncompromising “ethics of belief:” “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone,” writes Clifford, “to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (Clifford 295). Stephen and Clifford’s respective appeal to this ethos exemplifies the currency of Polanyi’s “doctrine of doubt,” especially within late nineteenth-century intellectual culture, when its stock was arguably at its highest. Remarkably on J.S. Mill’s adoption of this ethos, Polanyi notes, “popular thought in the nineteenth century was dominated by writers who, with an eye on the natural sciences, declared with complete assurance that they accepted no belief whatever that had not passed the test of unrestricted doubt” (Polanyi 270).

⁸⁹ To be fair, Stephen does acknowledge this inevitability. But he seems inclined to read Hume’s recantation of his doubts not as a commonsense return but as a sign that he has been irreparably damaged by his skeptical excursion, so as to abandon effort altogether. It is as if Hume simply doubts doubting. Glossing Hume’s performance, Stephen writes, “We have reached, it is plain, the fullest expression of scepticism, and are not surprised when Hume admits that his doubts disappear when he leaves his study. The old bonds which held things together have been completely dissolved. Hume can see no way to replace them, and Hume, therefore is a systematic sceptic” (Stephen 82).

stronger (and more fideist) probabilism as problematic and preoccupied. They can and somehow must be kept apart despite their basic philosophical continuity.

More recent interpretations of Hume from within neo-Kantian Romanticism still follow Pulos' basic tactic of privileging Hume's skeptical tendencies and problematizing his fideistic ones. And some Romantics — most notably Terrence Hoagwood — do this by deftly engaging with the “positive side” of skepticism.⁹⁰ A post-structuralist penchant for the radically skeptic Hume has more often recommended bypassing this “positive side” altogether, taking Hume's radical epistemological skepticism for granted, and wielding its anxious register against the suspect confidence of Hume's ethics: by observing, for instance, an apparent incoherence in Hume's unqualified embrace of an ethics of sympathy given his epistemological misgivings about resemblance. Abstracting almost exclusively from Hume, Nancy Yousef writes, “Skepticism and sympathy are thus bound in a strangely complementary structure in eighteenth-century philosophical discourse, whereby the first generates an excessive anxiety about the accuracy and reliability of our apprehension of things and the second presumes an improbable confidence about our intimacy with other persons” (Yousef 7). Following Yousef, Schey writes that analogy functions as a “fault line through Hume's own philosophical project:” “One the one hand, Hume makes conspicuous the limits of analogy in his skeptical writings on human

⁹⁰While offering some subtler treatments of skepticism in Romantic literary criticism, even Hoagwood demonstrates a clear prejudice for radical negotiations of this problem, and a unwillingness to entertain the same question pursued from an anti-Skeptical perspective. In *Skepticism and Ideology*, for instance, Hoagwood patiently and sympathetically develops the concept of *facticity* to explain how the skeptic might “formulate imperatives” and “engage in materially efficacious action, without any of the dogmatism, even tentative or provisional, that skepticism has already undermined” (57-8). This negotiation is possible because “where dualism (the mind-matter dogma) and materialism can only warrant that advice by hypostatizing fictional externalities, the skeptic notices that the real distinction is between perceptions that are subject to voluntary power and those that are not” (58). But, in *Byron's Dialectic*, Hoagwood is decidedly more suspicious of more anti-skeptical treatments of “context-sensitivity:” “The appeal to ‘practical’ exigencies that set aside merely abstract doubts is simply an announcement that one prefers the unreflective credulity of animals (I am thinking of Santayana's concept of ‘animal faith’)” (96). From the skeptic's side, the problem can be addressed as a legitimate but only apparent one, which can be carefully explained away through sophisticated theoretical distinctions. But, when the same issue is raised from an anti-skeptical orientation, it appears much less legitimate, amounting to a credal preference for “unreflective credulity” (96). The point is not necessarily that such sophistication is unpersuasive; it is simply that Hoagwood does not demonstrate nearly the same generosity when treating one rather than the other. And this is because Hoagwood refuses to accept the possibility that the skeptic cannot resolve this problem in any satisfactory manner. And, since he takes his account of the “fictionality” of externalities (elsewhere “practical exigencies”) to be ontologically accurate, he does not need to entertain this possibility. This is why such externalities are merely “hypostatized” rather than really observed in some other manner. But how is such an anti-realist assertion not itself dogmatic? And how is the commonsense appeal to “practical exigencies” finally more voluntary than involuntary? Or why should a claim to the “involuntary” nature of these practical exigencies be perceived as more suspect than the “involuntary” perceptions finally and necessarily admitted by the skeptic?

knowledge, rendering uncertain the relations that make all inference possible; on the other hand, he develops the first robust account of sympathetic identification in his writings on morals and the passions, treating as unproblematic the analogies that structure interpersonal relations” (6).

This strategy of pitting Hume’s radical epistemology against his conservative ethics or politics — and appealing explicitly to Hume’s affective registers as its warrant — is more or less unique to contemporary post-structuralist readings of Hume. Its critical thrust is radically different, for instance, from how Hume’s Skepticism would have been historically deployed. The interpretation is still essentially neo-Kantian in that it accepts the significance of Skepticism. It is evidently indebted to mid-century neo-Kantian Romanticism because it understands Hume’s Skepticism to be predominantly therapeutic in value. But it invokes a post-structuralist specter of crisis that effectively upends the standard logic of these neo-Kantian commitments. The tension it observes between Hume’s ethics and his epistemology amounts to a site of ideological contradiction. It is “strangely complementary” because self-evidently contradictory, i.e. ripe for Romantic critique via a Levinasian critique of identity. Hume’s skeptical anxiety is first symptomatic: it is a displacement of the anxiety he should have about sympathy. It is only latently therapeutic. The interpretation must notice this strange “fault line” and transport Hume’s appropriate skeptical anxiety to upset his suspect confidence: it is as if Hume’s skepticism simply did not — could not — reach far enough into his ethics and politics or, alternatively, displaced other ethical or political crises at the center of these fields. In this way, it adopts a New Historicist approach. However, as we have seen, Kant and even Stewart sought to *separate* Hume’s epistemology from his ethics: to Kant, Hume does not doubt the moral certainty of causation, and *rightly* not *wrongly* so. In other words, this post-structuralist interpretation reverses the original neo-Kantian program: it asserts the fundamental *interrelation* between ethics and epistemology where Kant and Stewart were at pains to keep them separate. In this way, it is more aligned with Shelley, Stephen, and Pulos: more enthusiastic about pushing the “irreligious” character of Skepticism into controversial moral territory.⁹¹ The subtraction story is still at work as we push towards a more authentic ethics instructed by radical epistemological skepticism.

⁹¹ Consider how William Jewett uses Pulos’ Hume to argue that Shelley’s *Cenci* represents a “dramatic application of identical arguments Hume had made in *extending* the epistemological critique of his *Treatise* to moral and cultural problems” (my emphasis, 146). Extend to critique and correct.

Of course, Yousef's departure from the historical neo-Kantian program is hardly damning in itself. It is clear that the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis does more to enable than stifle Yousef's critical resourcefulness and creativity, and this is what makes the *topos* so endlessly appealing and generative: its emptiness is what gives it its fullness, functionality as a cipher. Here we can also see how a baseline post-structuralist hermeneutics of suspicion renders the *topos* of crisis especially potent because of the way it recommends searching for ostensibly quiet and stable cultural sites (i.e. sympathy) and disrupting their apparent calm with some latent or displaced crisis. It's not even that Yousef's interpretation is even incorrect or unsound, either historically or theoretically. William Hazlitt and Percy Shelley would both pursue different ethical interpretations of Humean epistemology. But I would suggest that Hazlitt and Shelley do so against the grain and idiosyncratically, askew to Hume. I also ultimately want to follow Yousef and read the way Romantic literature at once embraces and interrogate an improbable confidence that propels Enlightenment philosophy. But I would argue that this confidence — this sense of assured calm and stability — is finally a confidence about the power of skeptical critique to construct or undo forms of certainty: the ability, for instance, of "reasonable doubt" to manage, correct, and resolve irreducible error and uncertainty or, as Yousef would have it, to disrupt and discredit with problematic intuitions and ideological mystifications — again, the "moral aura" around Daston's "ur-belief." It seems no coincidence that, in Yousef's generalization above, the symptomatic bent of critical close reading plays unwittingly into the suspect logic of metonymy embraced within neo-Kantian intellectual history. Hume's epistemology is definitively skeptical and anxious. A tension between skepticism and sympathy does not simply obtain in Hume but *all* of eighteenth-century philosophical discourse. In both cases, what recommends this improbably neat, almost synecdochal alignment is a distinct optimism about the instrumentality of Skepticism, its ability generate crisis around problematic assumptions. Critique sets them up to knock them down.⁹² Yousef calls this Skeptical anxiety "excessive," but this excess in fact essential to the critical procedure. It establishes the differential flow from Hume's epistemology to his ethics. But, as Wittgenstein argues in *On Certainty*, "doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt:" that is, doubt can only generate instability against stability. And here the stable, privileged structure is skepticism itself: its self-evident meaningfulness. To upset the calm I want

⁹² As Simon During notes: "modern critique...most often deploys a particular scalar structure: a discrete and small thing (a text, an image, an event) is examined as an example of or portal into larger structure" and must work to "make this scalar leap persuasive" (74).

to here, we will need to question rather than embrace the privileged role afforded Skepticism, and entertain that Skepticism — not to mention the moral aura that surrounds it — can distort as much as it clarifies, or even mystify as much as it deconstructs: in other words we will have to accept that Skepticism can be excessive, and not instrumentally so. As Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude*, while Critique is unquestionably empowering, it threatens to make you an “enemy of falsehood” rather than a “friend of truth.” This leads Wordsworth to try and find a way to preserve the value of critique while rejecting its excesses. And I believe his solution, much like Hume’s, is to open himself up to a kind of moral confidence that will shore up an excessive epistemological anxiety, not the other way around. From Wordsworth and Hume’s perspective, only a hermeneutics of reconciliation can recover the legitimacy of the kinds of moral reasoning critique mistakenly aims to diminish or suppress as problematic — as metaphysical excess or ideological contradiction — at the expense of understanding or even embracing moral reasoning.

3.1.1 Kemp Smith’s Hume

Contemporary philosophical discussions of Hume’s philosophy provide a helpful way out of this neo-Kantian investment in Skepticism because, while philosophers still widely adopt a Skeptical perspective and routinely pursue interpretations of Hume as a radical Skeptic, they pursue this interpretation in an entirely different and, from my perspective, more credible manner. This difference in approach reflects the widespread absorption of Norman Kemp Smith’s field-altering case against Hume’s radical skepticism in favor of a “naturalist” interpretation of Hume.⁹³ In Kemp Smith’s view, the epistemology of Book One of the *Treatise* is not strangely sealed off from the ethics of Book Two and Three; rather, it amounts to a “preliminary” study intended to demonstrate that our broader knowledge of the world has the same fundamental character as our sympathetic and passionate knowledge of other people.⁹⁴ Kemp Smith thus

⁹³ Kemp Smith began in a series of early twentieth century essays and completed in his 1941 study *The Philosophy of David Hume*. His most programmatic statement of this approach: “I shall endeavour, in the course of this volume, to establish the contention that Hume’s philosophy can be more adequately described as naturalistic than as sceptical, and that its main governing principle is the thorough subordination — *by right*, if not always in actual fact — of reason to the feelings and instincts, i.e. to the ‘impressions’ of sensation and reflexion. These, as constituting our human nature, are the foundation upon which — to quote Hume’s own words — “we in effect propose [to erect] a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security” (84-86).

⁹⁴As Paul Russell glosses Kemp Smith, to the extent that Hume wants to apply naturalism to epistemology and metaphysics, “Hume’s morals and metaphysics are all of one piece” (Russell 5). Karl Shafer’s remarks are also pertinent: “Thus, for Hume, probable inference shares many important characteristics with certain patterns of

warns against the distinct risks of reading Book One without an appreciation for this broader naturalist project: “when taken by themselves,” the first sections “give a very misleading impression, alike in regard to Hume’s ultimate purposes and in regard to the bearing of the conclusions to which they more immediately lead” (14). As such, Kemp Smith imagines interaction between Hume’s registers in exactly a reverse manner as Pulos or Yousef. Hume’s confident ethics of sympathy finally disciplines and soothes his anxious epistemology.

In his polemic against interpretations of Hume as a radical skeptic, Kemp Smith argues that the “sheerly negative” (5) interpretation of Hume he saw dominating the field at the end of the nineteenth century was largely a rhetorical construction uncritically inherited from *Hume’s critics*, one meant to discredit Hume by exacerbating Hume’s skeptical register. Kemp Smith calls this the “Reid-Beattie interpretation” since it “first gained general currency through the writings of Thomas Reid, Beattie and Dugald Stewart” only to be “later accepted, almost without question, by James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Bain” (80). What motivates Kemp Smith’s revisionist critique is his reception, among other things, of Leslie Stephen’s neo-Kantian treatment of Hume. From Kemp Smith’s perspective, it is forgivable that Hume’s nineteenth-century critics would adopt this “polemical” picture. But he is struck by “its surprising reappearance, almost unmodified in Leslie Stephen” (81). For Kemp Smith, this reappearance is both surprising and objectionable because Stephen’s aims are purportedly “historical” not polemical. For Kemp Smith, Stephen should obviously be *correcting* this polemic picture of Hume’s skepticism, not *reproducing* it.

A detailed look at Hume’s reception in the nineteenth century shows that Kemp Smith’s critique merely echoes and systematizes frequent, intermittent laments from nineteenth-century philosophers about the largely negative, anxious, and radical picture of Hume as a “systematic skeptic” that had united the commonsense *and* neo-Kantian reception of Hume. “Everybody knows that Hume was a sceptic,” writes the Scottish philosopher James McCosh in 1875, but “[i]t is not so generally known that he has developed a full system of the human mind. Students of philosophy should make themselves acquainted with it” (126). “Hume was not lost in the quagmire of subjective idealism” (80), writes the Hegelian William Wallace in 1894: as such, “Kant’s Hume is therefore a somewhat imaginary being” (80). What Kemp Smith’s revisionist

passionate response—something that leads Hume to repeatedly stress the analogies between his account of probable reasoning and his account of these passionate responses” (Shafer 193).

history does not adequately capture is that, while this radically skeptical interpretation of Hume remains constant, its polarity and character progressively shifts from negative to positive, from suspicion to sympathy.⁹⁵ Much of this has to do with its convenient fit with a variety of modern projects and intellectual historical narratives that emphasized its break from Enlightenment projects. Within philosophy, for instance, Hume's skeptical critique of induction accorded well with the project of logical positivism which, in addition to its aim to reformulate logic outside of natural language, also sought to establish knowledge on more solid, rigorous grounds than "intuition." As such, by the early twentieth century, Hume's skepticism looks much less like a threat to the philosophical tradition and more like early articulation of the rising critique of Enlightenment, a foundation of modern thought.⁹⁶

From this perspective, Kemp Smith's reading of Stephen seems somewhat imprecise, and correcting it introduces yet another wrinkle in this narrative of the neo-Kantian provenance of radical Hume. Kemp Smith laments that Stephen reproduces this polemical version of radical Hume in his historical text, but as we have seen, Stephen's text is more accurately "intellectual historical" than "historical:" it is inclined to a stylized, symbolic treatment of Hume's role in history. Or, at least, Stephen's text emanates from a different historical-specific concept of

⁹⁵ Consider Anthony Gottlieb's recent claim in *The Dream of Enlightenment* (2016): "Some writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries regarded Hume's work as primarily mischievous and destructive; but from the early twentieth century onwards, it has generally been viewed in a warmer light. Instead of being seen as perplexing in a bad way, his arguments are now usually seen as challenging in a good way" (Gottlieb 196). In a recent popular piece, Simon Blackburn points to this new emphasis on Hume's naturalism (and a characteristic "discrediting" of Hume's skepticism to "a cultural need prompting philosophers to separate themselves as far as possible from the unwashed skeptics, nihilist, relativists or ironists of postmodernism" which he associates with the "late Richard Rorty" but which he argues have "infiltrated many humanities departments" (np). A movement like Maurizio Ferraris' New Realism targets precisely this sort of "overcorrection" that postmodernism makes in the spirit of Hume's radical skepticism.

⁹⁶ This intellectual-historical Hume is captured nicely in Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945). Russell argues that Hume's skepticism, whether "true or false, represents the bankruptcy of eighteenth-century reasonableness" ("History" 672) itself. For Russell, Hume's skepticism is not the impulsive result of one man's perverse thought but simply the "logical conclusion" (659) of pursuing the "the empirical philosophy of Locke and Berkeley" (659) with a "better intellect than Locke, a great acuteness in analysis, and a smaller capacity for accepting comfortable inconsistencies" (672). At the same time, Russell's estimation of Hume is not that high. He argues that "when Hume achieves some degree of consistency he is wildly paradoxical" even as "no one has yet succeeded in inventing a philosophy at once credible and self-consistent" (612-13). Russell sees "the growth of unreason" since Hume to be a "natural sequel to Hume's destruction of empiricism" (611). He writes, "For my part, I find none of their refutations convincing; nevertheless, I cannot but hope that something less sceptical than Hume's system may be discoverable" (659). And finally Russell sees Hume's assessment of probability working for his skepticism rather than his naturalism: "The analysis of such "probable" knowledge led Hume to certain sceptical conclusions, which are equally difficult to refute and to accept. The result was a challenge to philosophers, which, in my opinion, has still not been adequately met" (663).

history⁹⁷. From my perspective, this intellectual historical impulse suggests that Stephen would not simply or uncritically absorb the Reid-Beattie interpretation of Hume. Rather, it seems more plausible to say that Stephen *actively embraces* this negative picture of Hume, reappropriates it for his neo-Kantian intellectual history, and turns its threat back on Hume's critics — or, as John Bicknell notes, to metaphysically preoccupied and retrograde Victorian contemporaries (“Tract” 112-13). Stephen takes what was arguably intended as a moral-individual indictment of Hume and repurposes a negative Hume of world-historical proportions fit to generate the crisis of modernity he wishes to observe. Much as the post-structuralists did with the mid-century critic's unabashed neo-Kantian Romanticism, it is as if Stephen preferred to retain this controversial version of Hume and wield it to his own ends, even as *he* finally took Hume to be more enlightening than threatening.

While philosophers have taken issues with its particulars, Kemp Smith's revisionist account of Hume's naturalism has effectively made an exclusively or radically skeptical view of Hume — or even a monotonic, definitive view of Hume's epistemology — more controversial than self-evident, not to mention *prima facie* more incredible than credible. In short, Kemp Smith's study fundamentally reframes this dichotomy between skepticism and fideism to one between skepticism and naturalism, and demands engaging Hume's naturalism in newly sympathetic, and in any case, more rigorous terms.⁹⁸ Kemp Smith's influence has resulted a much more robust and sympathetic (though still contentious) picture of Hume's “positive response” (in Pulos' phrase), or his “naturalism” (in Kemp Smith's). Treating Hume's positive response reductively and dismissively as fideist seems now largely unpalatable; grounding

⁹⁷ This suggests that either Kemp Smith does not recognize this genre of neo-Kantian intellectual history at all or recognizes it too well. Kemp Smith's final insistence on the differences between Reid and Kant's responses to Hume despite their similarities suggests the latter: “The parallel between Reid and Kant is to this extent only partial, and may easily prove misleading. Both were awakened by Hume to the insufficiency of principles upon which they had been relying. Both also drew from Hume's teaching conclusions opposite to those drawn by Hume himself. But in all further respects the parallel ceases to hold. Kant continued in the view that the content of knowledge comes by way of ‘ideas’; it was not until much later in the course of developing his own Critical principles that he began to question the sufficiency of this part of his own and of Hume's teaching. Also, he was aware of other important lessons which he had learned from Hume; and in all his references to Hume speaks of him with profound respect as showing how, in the hands of so supreme a master, the sceptical type of philosophy can be fruitful and beneficent” (8). In his retrospective Loeb independently observes the distorting effects Kemp Smith's “idealist sympathies” have on his account of Hume's naturalism (253).

⁹⁸ As Louis Loeb observes in a recent retrospective assessment of Kemp Smith, the dichotomy of naturalism and skepticism has “framed the terms of debate in the study of Hume for sixty-plus years” and “almost every significant piece of work on Hume has Kemp Smith in the rear-view mirror” (245).

Hume's skepticism in his either the content or the dominant affective disposition of Book One of the *Treatise* likewise seems unviable⁹⁹, and even actively discouraged.¹⁰⁰

3.1.2 The Skeptic's Study and Context Sensitivity

Transforming this skeptical picture of Hume into a more faithful dialectic has not simply led to a more refined picture of Hume's own thought; it has generated more sophisticated descriptions of the "positive side" of Skepticism itself and more searching interrogations of the significance of Skepticism. For my purposes, what distinguishes contemporary philosophical approaches to Skepticism from those adopted within neo-Kantian Romanticism following Pulos is the way these approaches suspend (at least ostensibly) their unquestioned appreciation for the significance of Skepticism: they way they are willing to put the significance of Skepticism in play as an open question, in ways that neo-Kantian Romanticism simply cannot. They accept that Skepticism's significance cannot be taken for granted — and must be pursued at length. More importantly, they accept that a case for Skepticism's insignificance not only remains credible but in some manner fundamentally persuasive and, in any case, necessary because instructive. They accept the controversy around the question to be generative rather than incomprehensible. They are still guided by an anticipatory confidence — an intuition — regarding the significance of

⁹⁹ We can see this impact in the way Michael Williams has recently handled Hume's progressive drift to a less anxious picture of skepticism. Williams, like Yousef, accepts the credibility of seeing Hume's philosophy as finally skeptical. In this way Williams works against Kemp Smith. But unlike Yousef, he does not find it credible to build this argument from the anxious register of Hume's skepticism, or to accept that register to be dominantly and consistently anxious. Instead, he feels compelled to dismiss Hume's shift in affective registers as *superficial*, not essential, far from the key to Hume's skepticism. Williams acknowledges that in the *Enquiry* the "fright and despair [of the *Treatise*] give way to 'momentary amazement,' and the human condition is not so much dark as 'whimsical'" but nonetheless affirms that "the underlying philosophical view has not changed, only its affective coloration...Hume may have made his peace with the groundlessness of our believing: he has not changed his mind about it" (5). From Williams' view, if you are reading affective shifts as essential, it is much harder to argue that Hume's philosophical view of skepticism remains unchanged. The burden is demonstrating Hume's sustained belief in the significance of radical skepticism *despite* affective evidence to the contrary.

¹⁰⁰ David and Mary Fate Norton's edition of Hume begins with a *caveat* that basically standardizes Kemp Smith's interpretation, filing off its more contentious aspects: "Hume was openly sceptical about many important aspects of religious belief. As a consequence, many of his contemporaries were motivated to denounce him as a dangerous infidel and to characterize all his philosophy as essentially destructive. These negative assessments have since been repeated by those who have failed, as many still do, to read Hume with care. Whatever we may suppose accounts for this long-standing view that Hume is simply a destructive skeptic, the view is not supported by the text of the *Treatise*" (113). In her 2010 dissertation, Elizabeth Goodnick suggests that "Before the pioneering work of Norman Kemp Smith, most Hume scholars read him as a thoroughgoing skeptic. The dominant view today is that, for Hume, 'natural beliefs'—paradigmatically, beliefs based on induction—are warranted in virtue of features of the psychological mechanisms that produce them; moreover, Hume would endorse a suitable naturalistic theory of warrant to sustain this position" (vii). See Goodnick's dissertation for a comprehensive survey of the four major approaches to Hume's naturalism.

Skepticism, but this enthusiasm sustains the interrogation rather than compromising it.¹⁰¹ They simply accept the credibility of anti-Skepticism as it sustains the productive controversy around Skepticism itself, as it keeps the question of Skepticism's significance live, its evidential context open-ended.

In "Johnson's Kick Revisited," we have already seen that the evidential context of Skepticism may be reframed as a question about what Michael Williams calls the "high-context sensitivity" of the Skeptic's study: whether or not we should view the Skeptic as a Hero or an Idiot, and Skeptical insights as a kind of essence or a kind of excess, a productive or an unproductive distortion. Here I want to follow Williams' description of Hume's approach to this problem, as a way into observing the "mitigated" or qualified nature of Hume's skepticism: that is, how Hume's skepticism is not only conditioned and checked by his naturalism, but is only valuable insofar as it emerges *from* it.

Williams proposes that the trouble for a Skeptic like Hume is that he must square the case for viewing Skepticism as more essential than excessive with a baseline commonsense awareness that Skepticism amounts a form of excess: Skepticism is self-evident excessive and distorted because it is obviously impracticable and theoretical. Hume must find a way to square his investment in critique as it corrects bad commonsense with his more basic allegiance to commonsense as it tethers and orients critique. From Williams' perspective, the only way Hume can negotiate this is by accepting that attaining a Skeptical perspective takes *minimal* effort and becomes intelligible and accessible upon "slight reflection." Indeed, elsewhere, we have seen this is what amounts to a *therapeutic* estimation of the problem of Skepticism: the sense of its minimally theoretic or even non-theoretic nature of its problem. Taken from another direction, Hume has to believe that it does not require an overly refined theoretical or idiosyncratic apparatus to observe the distorted nature of commonsense concepts; rather, that problematic status becomes immediately apparent under any critical scrutiny. Likewise, he has to believe the inclination to Skeptical scrutiny arises more *naturally* than artificially. In this way, Williams argues, Hume finds Skepticism "deeply embedded" as a naturalistic tendency, not an

¹⁰¹ Similar considerations lead Barry Stroud admits in his influential *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* (1984) that there is something that finally smacks of bad faith in the entire Skeptical enterprise. In the *Claim to Reason*, Stanley Cavell describes Skepticism as a kind of inhumanity (26). Stroud, Cavell, and many others, generally present these reservations even as they choose not to renounce their faith in a Skeptical perspective.

idiosyncrasy: this is “why scepticism tells us something about the condition of mankind, not just about the consequences of some particular philosophical ideas” (5).

3.1.3 Hume’s General Rules

Williams actually presents Hume’s negotiation of Skepticism’s “context sensitivity” in generalized terms, as the only credible negotiation of the evidential context of Skepticism. Williams is only incidentally interested in Hume as a kind of arch-Skeptic; Hume offers what Williams sees as the most viable of many different approaches for preserving the significance of Skepticism (though Williams admittedly rejects the legitimacy of this “subtractive logic” on rhetorical grounds which I will want to explore). But there are two good reasons to believe that Hume would have had his eye fixed on this dialectic relation between the critical and the commonsense, and more generally on the dialectic between philosophical and everyday reasoning. The first is historical. As Robin Valenza observes in *The Intellectual Disciplines in Britain* (2009), eighteenth-century intellectual culture was still largely divided on whether to pursue more generalized “commonsense” accounts or more specialized critical and technical discourses. Valenza writes

...[T]he growing distance between expert and the reader...was a signal preoccupation of the eighteenth century. The public perception of intellectual specialization created a crisis of relevance. Critics of specialization pointed out that if disciplines became narrower in their focus, it would no longer be clear how their research pertained to the daily lives of individuals, or to the political life of the state. (3).

Of course, in retrospect, it is evident that critics of specialization (Valenza points to Johnson as an example) could not prevent the increasing intellectual stratification, specialization, and isolation which they feared (19). And the long eighteenth century would have been defined more generally by the which transformed the “the Renaissance ideal of a disciplinary system in which a single person participated in many fields of knowledge to the modern one in which an individual primarily belongs to a single discipline” (19) But in the eighteenth century critics of specialization would have occupied an advantageous position because, as Valenza notes, the a distinct anti-Scholastic bent of English thought (as we will see, inspired largely by Locke) would have been inclined to see the disciplinary specialist as recapitulating the “fault of the medieval scholar:” namely, that “his researchers bore not at all on the world outside his study” (3). Indeed,

Valenza notes that our current “disciplinary blinkers make this a difficult problem to see” (27). In any case, Valenza persuasively argues, we should see the “efforts to create a *lingua communis* to describe a common knowledge, or to appeal to common sense” which are “so often seen as characteristic of the eighteenth century” to have “their origins in the need to build bridges between the difficulty of learned writing and the abilities of an often ill-educated body of readers” (4). So there would have been a distinct imperative to justify the “practical results and public benefits” of any specialized field: and specialists “both announced and defended their own expertise even while closing it off from general access” (4).

The second good reason has to do with Hume’s own evident epistemic preferences for studying “general” phenomena. Hume offers a thorough meta-theory of evidence at the beginning “Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences.” Hume begins the essay clarifying the importance of a sound distinction between chance and causation:

Nothing requires greater nicety, in our enquiries concerning human affairs, than to distinguish exactly what is owing to chance, and what proceeds from causes; nor is there any subject, in which an author is more liable to deceive himself by false subtleties and refinements. (58)

Interestingly, Hume sees “nicety” is a standard of accuracy explicitly defined *against* subtlety and refinement: an accuracy grounded in an orienting sense of proportion. In one sense, this seems alien as a positive standard, since one might be more inclined to value subtlety as a kind of nicety. But Hume seems to be drawing on a shared pejorative sense of the term as well as “over-refinement” still available today. In any case, Hume sees the problem as one of working between two extremes. On the one hand, ascribing everything to chance or seeing everything as arbitrary prematurely forecloses what may prove to be a fruitful inquiry and “leaves the writer in the same state of ignorance with the rest of mankind” (58). Intellectual inquiry demands some kind of individual boldness, some sort of departure from *doxa* to achieve a new illuminating insight. It demands some pursuit of causation. Yet, once you embrace the possibility of detecting causation, it immediately opens you up to an excessive confidence in the ability to detect and describe causes. Hume imagines it as an kind of intellectual vanity: supposing an event “to proceed from certain and stable causes,” an author “may then display his ingenuity, in assigning these causes.” And, for Hume, this is not a particularly hard or special thing to do: indeed, “a man of any subtlety can never be at a loss in this particular” and “he has thereby an opportunity

of swelling his volumes, and discovering his profound knowledge, in observing what escapes the vulgar and the ignorant” (58).

It should be clear here that Hume has a very different idea of intellectual vanity than the kind a neo-Kantian like Leslie Stephen accuses Hume of flattering. From Stephen’s perspective (not to mention Pulos), Hume’s deference to common opinion is a kind of intellectual incontinence. Hume’s desire for widespread acceptance causes him to shrink from his bold Skeptical vision. But from Hume’s perspective, this deference is what tethers one’s reasoning. Hume’s critique targets the critical persona’s condescending elitism. Of course, Stephen clearly shares some attenuated version of Hume’s deference to commonsense: this is what demands that Stephen make Hume a “representative” figure and encourages him to see Hume’s negative influence despite a confessed lack of material evidence. But Stephen is effectively trying to negotiate how to embrace Hume not only *despite* but *because* of the singularity of his reasoning. Hume emerges as uniquely disciplined and logical — as Stephen says, Hume was “absolutely free from theological prepossessions” (43).

This problematic motivates Hume to develop a “general rule” to determine the distinction between chance and cause which is remarkably probabilistic but which effectively conflates chance with idiosyncrasy and cause with generality. As Hume writes, “*What depends on a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance, or secret and unknown causes: What arises from a great number, may often be account for by determinate and known causes*” (emphasis in text, 58). This broader rule is in turn recommended from “two natural reasons” (58), which amount to probabilistic principles, one quantitative and qualitative. Hume develops the first, quantitative reason by considering biased dice. If you throw biased dice a few times, Hume reasons, this bias may or may not disclose itself. But, over many throws, the bias will “certainly prevail in a great number, and will cast the balance entirely to that side” (58). “In like manner,” reasons Hume,

When any causes beget a particular inclination or passion, at a certain time, and among a certain people; though many individuals escape the contagion, and be ruled by passions peculiar to themselves; yet the multitude will certainly be seized by the common affection, and be governed by it in all their actions. (58-59)

Here we might note Hume’s frequent use of “certain,” which he appears to earn by pursuing an appropriately uncontroversial level of abstraction. Hume values the uncontroversial, and he values this kind of binary thinking for establishing the extremes of the inquiry and outlining the

flexible middle space, which amounts to the problematic between common sense and criticism itself. And we can notice here that peculiarity is not simply a methodological error but a stochastic principle. This is what recommends such a strong though ultimately heuristic conflation. The same kind of reasoning informs Hume's second, more qualitative reason. For we find that the "nature" of the principles or causes that are "fitted to operate on a multitude" (59) are themselves "always of a grosser and more stubborn nature, less subject to accidents, and less influenced by whim and private fancy, than those which operate on a few only" (59). The problem with refined sorts of phenomena is that they are

commonly so delicate and refined, that the smallest incident in the health, education, or fortune of a particular person, is sufficient to divert their course, and retard their operation; nor is it possible to reduce them to any general maxims or observations. Their influence at one time will never assure us concerning their influence at another; even though all the general circumstances should be the same in both cases (59).

This is all to say that, despite the nature of his early skeptical interrogations, Hume has little taste for highly technical lucubrations: they are simply too hard to confirm and it is too easy to delude oneself about them.

3.1.4 Hume's Mitigated Skepticism

Accepting the plausibility of Williams' account helps explain why Hume would work towards a more staid, matter-of-fact register in the *Enquiry*. The salience of Skepticism's excess would arguably make it finally more important to downplay any anxiety around it than to exacerbate it, especially if you wanted anyone to remain persuaded by your analysis. At a certain point, abandoning your faith in the robust soundness of commonsense for the exactness of the critical risks compromising a more basic credibility. Over-investing in the critical risks a disqualifying and disorienting detachment from commonsense, i.e. good sense and proportion. It opens Hume up to the charge of excess and idiosyncrasy, as we saw with Johnson's "milking the bull." At a certain heightened pitch, the Skeptic simply looks like an Idiot. From this perspective, we can see Hume's shipwreck scene as indulging in this trope of "rudderlessness," precariously trying to reverse its moral charge. The young Hume seems almost to relish this terrifying disorientation. It has the existential *frisson* of a rollercoaster ride or a bungee jump. Young Hume works to make Skepticism look not idiotic but heroic: to redefine intellectual courage as

unmooring oneself in this most painfully Skeptical way.¹⁰² And from a neo-Kantian perspective, Skepticism does decidedly look heroic, and Hume's Skepticism even prophetic. But in the eighteenth century it would have more likely looked Idiocy for anyone who believed criticism to be the handmaiden to commonsense. Beattie's reaction to Hume is representative in its hostility to Idiocy: "Those unnatural productions, the vile effusion of a hard heart, that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genius, and its own captiousness for sagacity of understanding, may, like other monsters, please a while by their singularity; but the charm is soon over" (444-5). And Reid writes, "If a man pretends to be a sceptic with regard to the informations [*sic*] of sense, and yet prudently keeps out of harm's way as other men do, he must excuse my suspicion, that he either acts the hypocrite, or imposes upon himself" (373).

Yet, Hume himself — who even from the *Treatise* sought to correct critical philosophy by "communicat[ing]" a "gross earthy mixture" of commonsense as much as he sought to correct commonsense with a healthy dose of critical skepticism — seems capable of a similar hostility, and he gives it the last word — or at least the last chapter — in the *Enquiry*.¹⁰³ Hume argues that commonsense finally disciplines an immature *excessive* skepticism into a "mitigated" skepticism. Hume writes: "There is, indeed, a more *mitigated* skepticism or *academical* philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this Pyrrhonism, or *excessive* skepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection" (161, *Hume's emphasis*). Excessive skepticism lacks the appropriate definition: it is overly generalized when it should be specified, targeted, and constructive. Excessive skepticism is vague and metastatic when it should be more clearly defined and locally applied. Excessive skepticism is finally more disorienting than clarifying since it underappreciates its irreducible instrumentality, its need to be "durable and useful" for commonsense and action, to be more stabilizing than destabilizing. Foregoing this

¹⁰² Sarah Tindal Kareem has persuasively argued along these lines that Hume "gothicizes" induction and scepticism (162-3) and "characterizes...belief...in terms of romance's apparitional effects" (153). See "Lost in the Castle of Scepticism" in

¹⁰³ Kemp Smith remarks that "Hume was no less ready than Reid and Beattie to agree that a philosophy stands self-condemned if it forbids us to indulge in [common sense principles]. Any attempt to displace them either by other beliefs or by a sheerly sceptical refusal to entertain any beliefs whatsoever is, Hume has insisted, bound to be self-defeating. If the choice be only between them and a philosophy which denies them, it is common sense that must be held to" (8). Consider Stephen Boulter's recent articulation of this commonsense imperative in *The Rediscovery of Commonsense Philosophy*: "There must be such a distinctive and legitimate contribution philosophy makes in [a wider educational context] if it is to avoid redundancy or the fate of all hermetically sealed endeavours, namely, a lingering death due to its irrelevance to the wider context" (7).

instrumentality to exacerbate an excessive instability is idiotic: and finally self-defeating because undermined by the inevitable return of commonsense stability. Again Hume: “The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of scepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life” (159). Excessive skepticism must finally answer to its significance on moral and commonsense grounds: “For here is the chief and most confounding objection to *excessive* scepticism, that no durable good can every result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour” (159). The final crucible is not philosophical but rhetorical and moral: “We need only ask such a sceptic, *What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches?*” (159). For Hume, the question about Skepticism’s significance is for commonsense, not critique, to answer. For Hume, excessive skepticism is “subverted” by “action, and employment, and the occupations of common life;” it is disciplined into mitigated skepticism by something like Booth’s rhetoric of reasonableness.

3.2 Hume Misreading Locke

In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, 1777), Hume introduces his discussion of “probability” with a short critique of the inadequacies of Lockean probability:

Mr. Locke divides all arguments into demonstrative and probable. In this view, we must say, that it is only probable all men must die, or that the sun will rise tomorrow. But to conform our language more to common use, we ought to divide into demonstrations, proofs, and probabilities. By proofs meaning such argument from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition. (56)

This criticism of Locke’s failure to register these nuances with the realm of probability in the *Enquiry* resumes similar critiques Hume levies in *The Treatise* against insufficient philosophical attention to the nuances of probable knowledge. In the *Abstract* to the *Treatise*, Hume echoes Leibnitz’s observations that philosophers, while “very copious when they explain the operations of the understanding in the forming of demonstrations” (408), are “too concise when they treat of probabilities, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action entirely depend, and which are our guides even in most of our philosophical speculations” (408).

A moment in the *Treatise* again identifies the major consequence of this general neglect to be an insufficient attention to the different degrees of certainty afforded by probable knowledge. The problem, for Hume, is illustrated concisely by observing the distance between philosophical and popular uses of the term *probable*. Philosophers use *probability* to designate

the entire class of knowledge related to contingent “matter of facts” and distinguish this class from the more traditional, *a priori* class of demonstrative knowledge related to “relations of ideas.” Popular usage, on the other hand, reserve *probability* as a subjective assessment of the moderate degree of belief warranted by specific probable facts or arguments. Although Hume accepts the importance of philosophy’s distinction between demonstrative and probable knowledge, he also felt that the popular usage of the term illustrated how this foundational distinction could not tell us much about the nature of probable knowledge and how we use it and, more preciously, tended to flatten the class of probable facts in a way that ignored how many facts — though theoretically probable — were far from merely probable in the common sense. He ultimately adopts the philosophical distinction but objects that

...’tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv’d as a superior kind of evidence. One wou’d appear ridiculous, who wou’d say, that ’tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye; tho’ ’tis plain we have no farther assurance of the facts, than what experience affords us. (86)

To remedy this defect, Hume again recommends — as we saw in the *Inquiry* — designating a class of “proof” within probability which might distinguish “those [probable] arguments, which are deriv’d from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty” (86).

There are many aspects of this critique which are consistent with and even representative of Hume’s skeptical philosophy. For instance, it exhibits a general skepticism towards misleading philosophical constructions, particularly those which are promoted as clarifying. It also features Hume’s characteristic appeal to common sense and common language as a corrective to bad philosophical constructions which, for Hume, were the result of conducting philosophical investigations without sufficient attention to the way people actually live. As it often does, Hume’s skepticism turns common speech into its crucible, curbing the errors of philosophy by reading those errors back to it: showing that what may seem sensible in philosophy can sound “ridiculous” in any other context. But what I want to focus on is how this skeptical moment is inconsistent with the interpretation of Hume as arch-skeptic.

Though Hume deploys skepticism to motivate and justify his complaint, the force of Hume complaint here is not skeptical but naturalistic: in short, deploys skepticism to recommend against any doubts about our ability to attain practical certainty which the distinction between

demonstrative and probable knowledge might seem to encourage. Unlike the more searching, anxious plunges into radical skepticism in the *Treatise*, Hume here offers a constructive skepticism: a positive skepticism meant to reconstruct knowledge on the ground cleared by negative skepticism. Hume is not agonizing over the irreducible uncertainties that attend probable knowledge (which demands its distinction from demonstration in the first place). Rather, he is dismissing the relevance of this irreducible uncertainty with respect to everyday life and action. He is not worrying about the prospect of missing the importance of irreducible theoretical uncertainty, but of missing this crucial categorical distinction that shows the practical limits of uncertainty: how certain probable inferences might be “entirely free from doubt and uncertainty” (86). Common sense, for Hume, grounds out negatively in what *cannot* be doubted.

These observations are perhaps sufficient evidence that the version of Hume-as-radical-skeptic popular in neo-Kantian Romanticism, at the least, fails to capture the whole picture of Hume’s philosophy — most importantly, how his negative skepticism functions largely in the service of his positive, constructive naturalism. Or, if this claim seems too strong, at the least how his skepticism is informed and inflected by his naturalism. And it is perhaps no small irony that the version of Hume-as-radical-skeptic might be said to reproduce a similar sort of oversight Hume pins to Locke. Where Hume argues that Locke’s two-class epistemology overlooks the crucial third category of “proof”, one could argue the Hume-as-radical-skeptic approach overlooks the philosophical implications of Hume’s abiding interest in this third category. Moreover, this oversight arises from the way the Hume- as-radical-skeptic approach privileges Hume’s more widely known skeptical engagements with the two broader categories of demonstrative and probable knowledge — most notably, his critique of “necessary connection.”

Of course, there are good reasons for emphasizing Hume’s many skeptical interventions, not the least of which being that Hume himself tends to promote them as his major philosophical achievements. There is a section of the *Inquiry* entitled “The Idea of Necessary Connection” but no section titled “The Importance of the Category of Proof.” However, there are also good reasons to believe that Hume’s skepticism works in the service of his naturalism.

Consider, for instance, how Hume’s complaint about Locke appears to more or less a willful misreading of Locke’s account of probability which, *pace* Hume, does appear to observe something like Hume’s category of proof or practical certainty. In his treatment of probability in the *Essay*, for instance, Locke concedes that while “most of the Propositions we think, reason,

discourse, may act upon, are such, as we cannot have undoubted Knowledge of their Truth” it is also evident that “...yet some of them border so near upon Certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them; but *assent* to them as firmly, and act, according to that Assent, as resolutely, as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our Knowledge of them was perfect and certain” (IV.XV.2).

To be sure, there are ways to create space between Locke and Hume here. Locke and Hume are obviously in pursuit of a similar sort of practical certainty within probability based, in large part, on observing the same set of natural regularities (e.g. the sun will rise tomorrow, all humans die). But Locke and Hume theorize practical certainty in very different ways, and I will eventually want to consider that difference since it affords insight into other foundational differences, most notably, their differing assessments of the ultimate relation between demonstrative and probable knowledge (i.e. whether and how these two continents of knowledge connect back up somewhere below the evident gulf). But for the moment I would like to work from the assumption that Locke’s qualification here sufficiently accounts for the distinction Hume wants to make and that, in this sense, Hume either misses or misreads Locke on this point.

If Hume misreads Locke in this way, how should we interpret this misreading? The philosopher M. Jamie Ferreira proposes one promising approach in *Skepticism and Reasonable Doubt* (1982). Leaving aside the question of “whether or not Hume was correct in attributing this failure to Locke,” Ferreira concentrates on the fact that Hume saw this reading of Locke as “unproblematic” (1). For Ferreira, this fact only makes sense if we understand Hume to be judging Locke’s failure relative to the more thorough emphasis placed on this category of proof in the anti-skeptical tradition founded by Locke’s contemporaries, Tillotson, Wilkins, and Chillingworth, but ultimately eclipsed by Locke’s popularity. That tradition established a “constructive skeptical” program which absorbed skeptical objections about the fundamental uncertainty of probable knowledge but, in the face of these objections, pursued a category of “moral certainty” which, they argued, *pace* the skeptic, was sufficient to guide belief and action and not subject to doubt. As such, Ferreira argues that Hume’s naturalism should be seen as participating in a mid-eighteenth-century revival of this tradition initiated by Joseph Butler’s probability-based apologetics, continues in Thomas Reid’s common sense philosophy, and culminates in Cardinal John Newman’s theory of assent in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ferreira's argument seems historically illuminating and plausible enough. Yet, by ultimately sidestepping (though conceding) the more direct question of misreading, Ferreira's relatively conservative case for Hume's naturalism fails to capitalize on the interpretive potential of this moment: something I want to pursue here as evidence against what I have called the neo-Kantian misreading of Humean skepticism. For one, Ferreira does not adequately capture Hume's preoccupation with the category. First, we see that Hume was actively searching for the category of proof in Locke but still did not find it. And, second, we see that Hume sustained this reading from the *Treatise* to the *Inquiry*. It was there in the *Treatise*, and thus not some conservative addition made to the polished, evenhanded *Inquiry* or, alternatively, some errant juvenilia cut from the raw *Treatise*. More to my purposes, it does not do enough to combat the view of Hume as arch-skeptic and to expose that view as a form of misreading itself.

Indeed, I believe Hume's misreading implies more than simply an objection to Locke's relatively insufficient attention. Rather, it has the character of Harold Bloom's poetic misprision or "strong misreading." As in the Introduction, I am not particularly interested in translating all of Bloom's claims about the poetic tradition and applying them to this philosophical tradition. But, at the least, approaching Hume's engagement with Locke through Bloomean misreading supports a stronger interpretation of Hume's engagement with Locke and, as such, a stronger case for Hume's naturalism than Ferreira gives. After all, we do have a young philosopher (in his mid-twenties when he published the *Treatise*) trying to situate himself within a crowded tradition. And this negotiation involves, notably, an idiosyncratic re-appropriation of aspects of Locke's philosophy: not simply the category of "proof" but even the concept of "proof" which, for Locke, refers more precisely to the mediate ideas that form the chain of "agreement" between two relatively distant ideas. But, more importantly, Bloom's *misprision* allows us to assert the special weight Hume wants to place on this category of proof and signals the special emphasis we should place on his naturalism. Bloom, of course, understood such misreading to be the primary means of engagement with the poetic tradition, more telling than any explicit criticisms of professions of allegiance a poet might make. In our case, we might say whatever skeptical aspects of his philosophy Hume promoted as his major achievements, here we have compelling evidence for his preoccupation with and investment in this particular naturalist intervention and, as such, further evidence that the version of Hume-as-radical-skeptic constitutes its own form of misreading.

We can approach this same question through a third theory of misreading Mary Poovey develops in *A History of the Modern Fact* (2001) to register the rapidly shifting ground of eighteenth-century epistemology. Poovey's approach predicts that a philosopher like Hume, when reading backwards to a predecessor such as Locke for his own epistemology, will inevitably generate a "misreading" of the early theory that fails, in some way, to reproduce the "author's intentions" or the precise "political, philosophical, and semantic contexts in which the text was produced" (21) and, as such, which can be used to measure "changing configurations of knowledge" (21). Poovey calls these configurations "ensembles" as sees them as integrated, consistent systems organized in "hierarchies of kinds of knowledge, whose individual members may change definition and whose internal order may change too" (21). For Poovey, as these ensembles evolve with "some ways of knowing acquir[ing] enhanced prestige while others fall in status," questions that "once made sense to an intellectual community become problematic" (21). In this sense, misreadings often take the form of reversing the direction or poles of inquiry: misreadings appear as "solution[s] to a problem that was never posed in the terms in which the solution is being offered" or as answers which "transform what was initially a statement into a question, which the answer now addresses" (22).

Poovey's approach to misreading allows us to draw out the distance between Locke and Hume's understanding of practical certainty. I bypassed these differences earlier, in part, to follow out the assumption that Hume's critique of Locke amounts to a "strong misreading" in Bloom's sense and its implications for the significance of Hume's naturalism. But I also bypassed them because registering those differences requires understanding the different ways Locke and Hume imagine this category of practical certainty to fit *within* the hierarchy of probable knowledge and *in relation to* demonstration. We will now have to pursue these differences here to give a more precise account of the character of Hume's misreading of Locke's third category, which I will argue is representative of how Hume's naturalism (mis)reads Locke's naturalism more generally.

Let's begin to sketch this hierarchy of knowledge by returning to Locke's *Essay* and observing how Locke constructs his account of probable certainty through an analogy with demonstrative certainty. For Locke, we assent to these practical certain propositions "*as if* they were infallibly demonstrated:" our knowledge of them is "perfect and certain." He applies a similar analogical formation elsewhere, at one point describing the same class of probability

which “though it never amounts to Knowledge, no not to that which is the lowest degree of it: yet sometimes the intermediate *Ideas* tie the Extremes so firmly together, and the Probability is so clear and strong, that Assent as necessarily follows it, as Knowledge does Demonstration” (IV.XVII.16). Quite obviously, Locke’s analogy only makes sense if we accept a vertical, hierarchical relation obtaining between demonstrative and probable knowledge. The analogy *elevates* a species of probability to the *higher* realm of demonstration.

This analogical description is pervasive in empiricist epistemologies developing out of Locke. It is also the common way Tillotson, Wilkins, and others in the constructivist tradition preceding Locke describe the category of “moral certainty.” It is unclear if Hume also subscribed to this vertical scheme, even as he does accept that demonstration affords an absolute degree of certainty probability does not allow. But when Hume describes the certainty afforded by probable “proof,” he notably *avoids* analogizing practical certainty with demonstrative certainty as Locke does. Instead, as we have seen, he measures that certainty against the good sense exhibited in ordinary language (“one wou’d appear ridiculous, who wou’d say, that ’tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye”). I believe Hume’s resistance to this kind of analogizing is exceptional in this sense, and we are in a position to ask if Hume intentionally avoids this analogy, and why.

There are good reasons for assuming Hume would have wanted to avoid this analogy. For one, Hume was interested in preserving a firm distinction between probability and demonstration, and this particular analogy conspicuously undermines it. Positing a practical equivalence between the two classes of knowledge undercuts the more basic claims about their incommensurability. It turns a self-evident distinction into a hermeneutic problem: or, to hijack Poovey’s critical terms for a moment, it turns that distinction into a question rather than an answer. The analogy traffics in the same fuzzy, wishful thinking Hume sees as responsible for the mistaken “idea of necessary connection,” a central target of his skepticism. To Hume, the concept of logical necessity is, rightly understood, valid only in “reasoning about ideas” and has only been illegitimately and hazily imported into the probable realm to describe the “feeling” of necessity that causal reasoning about matters of fact typically inspires. But, for Hume, this feeling of necessity is psychological not logical. Logical necessity requires a systematic principle of non-contradiction like the one that obtains in demonstrative reasoning. In “matters of fact” — where associative relations are always contingent and could always possibly have been otherwise

— *necessity* in this binding, logical sense never holds. For Hume, this stronger, metaphysical idea of necessary connection assumes a fundamental unity between demonstrative and probable realm that not only contradicts claims of their incommensurability but fundamentally distorts our account of probability. Probable reasoning is not rational in any logical sense but rather imaginative, associative, and “practically” rational.

The desire to describe this system of practical rationality — the kind of rules and mechanisms that govern it — propels Hume’s skepticism. Likewise, this skepticism is generally directed at incursions from demonstration which threaten the integrity of this account of practical rationality. And so, in this sense, it seems quite reasonable that Hume would have viewed the analogy comparing moral certainty with demonstrative certainty as perilous and misguided.

As it happens, for Locke, the analogy between probable and demonstrative reasoning goes much deeper than a heuristic comparison of “moral” with “demonstrative” certainty. As David Owen argues, Locke’s view of the structure of probable reasoning is “strictly analogous” to his view of demonstrative reasoning: both involve “a chain of ideas” and differ only in the sense that “connexion[s] between each link” (148) vary in degrees of certainty. Intervening or mediating relations of ideas — the connections Locke idiosyncratically calls “proofs” — are “absolutely certain” in demonstration but only true “for the most part” in probability. Locke also understands probable and demonstrative knowledge to both be grounded in a more immediate, sensual (often visual) perception of truth as “agreement,” which Locke calls *intuition* (*Essay* 531). Lockean intuition makes the distinction between probable and demonstrative somehow both a matter of kind and a matter of degree. Again, like the heuristic analogy, it obscures the nature of this distinction. It’s no surprise that Hume responds to Lockean intuition as he does “necessary connection.” Though he accepts a form of intuitive, immediate perception similar to Lockean intuition, Hume confines it to “immediate” “reasoning about ideas” (as opposed to demonstrative chains of reasoning, which were “mediated”) and bars it from his account of probable reasoning about “matters of fact.” Insofar as this analogy is enabled by this mode of intuition, we have even stronger independent evidence that Hume would have been avoiding the analogy.

These various objections — to necessity, to intuition, and to any kind of traffic between demonstrative and probable knowledge — illustrate how Hume’s naturalism demands a rejection of any analogy, heuristic or otherwise, of probable proof with demonstrative. But, as Poovey’s

model of misreading would anticipate, Hume's objections against the irrelevance of demonstration to his naturalist project entails a more fundamental reconfiguration of the hierarchy of knowledge, one that inverts the vertical hierarchy we have already encountered. That hierarchy was organized by theoretical degrees of certainty, but this naturalistic hierarchy is organized by practical utility: in this scheme, practical "proof" constitutes the highest certainty in the field of probability, and probability more generally *supplants* demonstration as an infinitely more valuable and practical guide to everyday judgment. However certain demonstration may be, it is of little practical value.

Though Hume's philosophy perhaps more thoroughly internalizes this second, revised hierarchy, it is also central to Locke's philosophy. Hume finds Lockean intuition interfering with the pursuit of a naturalist account of probability, but Locke's unifying concept of intuition seems in some way an effect of Locke's own naturalist intervention in the scholastic tradition that preceded him. I have been describing Locke's epistemology in the terms Hume provides, probable and demonstrative knowledge. But Locke's philosophy more accurately appropriates and radically revises the older scholastic distinctions of "knowledge" and "opinion" that I described in Chapter Two. In the same way Hume rejected the practical relevance of the logical necessity of demonstrative reasoning, Locke rejects the practical value of the syllogistic logic and *a priori* demonstrative reasoning of scholastic "knowledge." Locke's demonstrative "knowledge," though "certain" in some sense like scholastic "knowledge," is grounded in a more naturalistic intuition and governed by a non-formal rationality. He levels the older version of knowledge — once seen as the only legitimate form of knowledge compared to the illegitimate, low "opinion" ("probability" in the older scholastic sense of "approved" by some authoritative figure) — and relocates it on the same epistemological ground, if slightly higher than, a more capacious concept of "probability."

I have been pursuing the possibility that Hume observed Locke's account of practical certainty and "misread" it in a way that was, against appearances, not simply youthful insouciance, *a la* Bloom, but doing some significant critical and corrective work, *a la* Poovey — even if that work might be powered more by the differential between the knowledge "ensembles" engulfing Locke and Hume than any differential between Locke and Hume. On this supposition, I observed that Hume avoids analogizing practical proof with demonstration the way Locke does, and then considered some plausible reasons to assume that Hume intentionally avoids this

analogy, motivated by his desire to pursue an undistorted and autonomous description of probability. I then made the case that Locke's analogy between demonstration and probability, though viewed suspiciously by Hume, is an effect of Locke's own naturalistic intervention in scholastic philosophy. In which case, Hume's misreading of Locke's analogy in the name of naturalism potentially obscures their shared commitment to reorganizing knowledge in the name of common sense and practical utility. So from here we'd have something like this progression: Locke's individual intuition establishes a naturalistic unity of mind that flattens the scholastic division of knowledge and opinion. Hume, in turn, recoils from the way this unity licenses communication between probability and demonstration and, as such, reasserts a firm break between demonstration and probability. In this way, Hume's naturalism is propelled by a global misreading of Locke's naturalism. The local misreading Hume makes of Locke would then be symptomatic of this more general misreading.¹⁰⁴

Now, I believe this is a sufficiently persuasive account of character of Hume's naturalism.¹⁰⁵ And I submit this as evidence against a radical Hume since it suggests, against the neo-Kantian misreading of Hume, that, if anything, Hume would have been so invested in moral certainty that he would have been inclined to misread Locke in this *naturalistic* direction: to believe that Locke had in some way left this high degree of probabilistic certainty out of the accounting. But as it stands, this reading still only gives us a negative of picture of the methods Hume refuses to employ to construct his category of proof. It does not provide a sense of the methods he does use to build it. Likewise, insofar as this account stresses Hume's rejection of Locke's analogy between probability and demonstration, it obscures how Hume's construction of proof still draws heavily and even *analogously* from the structure exhibited by demonstrative reasoning. Hume's search for the limits of his third category of proof is organized as a search for sufficient "analogues" to the rules of demonstrative reasoning which might apply in "proof." Indeed, his use of proof here seems to be a kind of *catachresis*. In any case, this heuristic, predictive approach to analogy is central to the way Hume builds his epistemology and his

¹⁰⁴ Compare with Ian Hacking's claim that "Hume completed that historical transformation by which the signs of the low sciences [i.e. internal evidence] became identical with the causes of the high" (*Probability* 183).

¹⁰⁵ Compare Owen's account of Hume's correction of Locke: with his theory of probable reasoning "Hume had Locke, or a Lockean theory, very much in mind. And both Locke and Hume thought that conformity with past experience was a ground of probability...But Locke thought that opinion based on probability was grounded in reason and the understanding every bit as much as demonstrative knowledge. Hume's argument concerning probable reasoning is an attack on this Lockean thought. Of course, Hume then goes on to give his own account of the nature and basis of probable reasoning..." (Owen 152)

ethics. I will discuss Hume's approach to analogy at length in the next two sections, but it is worth introducing here in this context as a way of wrapping up this misreading a la Poovey.

To observe this analogical method, I want to look at the way Hume grounds the certainty of "proof" negatively as that which it would be ridiculous to doubt or assume to be otherwise. In the *Treatise*, for instance, Hume's claim that "'tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability" is supported by the observation that "One wou'd appear ridiculous" to say otherwise. Another intermittent discussion of probability *Enquiry*, offers a similarly negative formulation: "Nor does any man ever entertain a doubt, where he sees a piece of iron, that it will have weight and cohesion of parts; as in all other instances, which have ever fallen under his observation" (*Enquiry* 104). And here I will suggest that these formulations — which center on the *absurdity* of imagining otherwise — are organized with the principle of non-contradiction that governs demonstrative knowledge. Indeed, Hume is preoccupied with the absence of this principle in probable knowledge. He sees its absence as the primary reason probable reasoning operates differently than demonstrative reasoning. Hume, like his contemporaries, understood a "contradiction" explicitly as "absurd" in a more specialized sense of wholly "unintelligible" or incapable of being imagined or conceived (e.g. $2+2=4=5$):

Whatever is absurd is unintelligible; nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration. But as in reasonings from causation, and concerning matters of fact, this absolute necessity cannot take place, and the imagination is free to conceive both sides of the question, I still ask, Wherein consists the deference betwixt incredulity and belief? (66)

Hume ultimately struggles to find a satisfactory difference between incredulity and belief, simply admitting that belief is "something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination" (66). But I want to suggest the feeling of absurdity – the ridiculousness of imagining otherwise – functions as a probable analogue to the "absurdity" of contradiction, as a negative feeling motivating Hume's grasps at a positive description of the feeling of belief — the "different feeling I endeavor to explain by calling it a superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness" (68)).

Hume seems to finally ground his account of moral certainty not only on this psychological concept of "stability" but on a social desire to not appear and act in ways that are credible and not absurd. Much like Campbell, he foregrounds the older concept of "probability"

as the basis of moral evidence. But Hume's concept of probability is motivated by a shared aversion to looking absurd or incredible:

Now moral evidence is nothing but a conclusion concerning the actions of men, deriv'd from a consideration of their motives, temper and situation. Thus when we see certain characters or figures *describ'd upon paper*, we infer that the success of Augustus, the cruelty of Nero; and remembering many *other concurrent testimonies* we conclude, that those facts were once really existent, and that so many men, without any interest, *wou'd never conspire to deceive us*; especially since they must, in the attempt, expose themselves to the derision of all their contemporaries, when these facts were asserted to be recent and universally known. The same kind of reasoning runs thro' politics, war, commerce, oeconomy, and indeed mixes itself so entirely in human life, that 'tis impossible to act or subsist a moment without having recourse to it. (my emphasis, 260)

Hume's emphasis is on moral facts as they socially and historically exchanged and verified. The veracity and stability of these moral facts is underwritten by a distinctly social and psychological aversion of being "exposed...to the derision of all their contemporaries" (260). Rationality and reliable knowledge emerges as an imperative to appear and act credible. And a mutual confidence in this shared aversion is absolutely necessary to common life: for Hume, this kind of necessity gives the lie to the concept of free will and liberty: "as nothing more nearly interests us than our own actions and those of others, the greatest part of our reasonings is employ'd in judgments concerning them" and "whoever reasons after this manner, does *ipso facto* believe the actions of the will to arise from necessity, and that he knows not what he means, when he denies it" (260). For Hume, this kind of moral reasoning is not only universal, it is also *indistinguishable* from the kind of probabilistic reasoning about "natural" or physical facts: "indeed, when we consider how aptly *natural* and *moral* evidence cement together, and form only one chain of argument betwixt them, we shall make no scruple to allow, that they are of the same nature, and deriv'd from the same principles" (261). Here, we see how thoroughly Hume's ethics and his epistemology align and intersect in a philosophy of action.

3.3 What Crisis of Analogy?

The previous two sections should clarify that the radically skeptical interpretation of Hume pursued by neo-Kantian Romanticism risks severely distorting Hume's philosophy by diminishing or ignoring its naturalistic thrust. Hume's remarks on mitigated skepticism should make it clear that Hume finds skepticism to be valuable only insofar as it remains conditioned

and corrected by commonsense. They should also clarify that Hume not only acknowledged the tension between his naturalism and his skepticism but understood this tension to be a productive dialectic. In this light, characterizing Hume's varying orientations towards skepticism as some sort of ideological contradiction that Hume somehow elides — for instance, as a fault line between Humean ethics and epistemology rather than a dialectic play between Hume's commonsense and critical investments— is misleading. Yet neo-Kantian Romanticism simply prefers emphasizing a radical Humean epistemology to a more proportional or representative picture of his philosophy. Moreover, it prefers to take this radical skeptical epistemology to be somehow representative of Enlightenment skepticism more broadly and as such to amplify the supposed anxiety around Humean skepticism to generate a wider crisis of belief. Neo-Kantian intellectual history prefers a metastatic picture of generalized doubt. Positing this wider “generalized” doubt produced by Humean skepticism, in turn, enables different “rise of Romanticism” narratives as this generalized doubt about accessing objective truth becomes a precondition of the Romantic turn to subjectivity. But privileging Hume's skepticism at the expense of Hume's naturalism not only misrepresents the character of Hume's philosophy; it also overlooks what makes Hume's philosophy representative of the broader tenor of Anglophone skepticism. In short, no eighteenth-century Anglophone philosopher, including Hume, could embrace radical skepticism in an unqualified manner. To be sure, skepticism had to be thorough and even total to be an effective intellectual discipline. But it also had to remain constructive and instrumental; the commonsense and the practical had to remain in focus.

This neo-Kantian distortion is most evident and problematic in the way neo-Kantian Romanticism has approached Hume's thinking about analogy, largely because of how neo-Kantian Romanticism must enlist Hume's more trenchant skeptical critiques of analogical reasoning — most notably, Hume's critique of natural theological arguments from design in his posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) — to generate a broader ontological “crisis” of analogy which, according to one influential tradition of neo-Kantian literary history, initiates the rise of Romantic poetics. In terms of our microcosm, we can review the conscription of Humean skepticism in this narrative as illustrative of neo-Kantian intellectual history's remarkable flexibility and ingenuity as a hermeneutic: the way the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis can effortlessly detached or abstracted from this specific philosophical context to lend a meaningful shape for any number of accounts of the rise of modernity; or, put another way, the

way neo-Kantian intellectual history enables tracing a wide variety of phenomena back to the rise of epistemological skepticism.

In Wasserman's variant of the crisis of analogy thesis (arguably the most influential and complete), the rise of epistemological skepticism places increasing pressure the ontological system of correspondences inherited from the Renaissance that undergirds this neo-classical poetics of analogy.¹⁰⁶ Wasserman refers to this system as the "divine analogy."¹⁰⁷ With the rise of epistemological skepticism, philosophers and poets alike began "[n]o longer thinking analogically but consciously thinking about thinking analogically" (71). Hume's *Dialogues* in particular "threw a dark shadow of doubt over the *entire* subject" ("Nature Moralized" 57). As a result of this widespread critique of analogy, analogy loses its ontological status and falls into the irreducibly and problematically subjective fields of rhetoric and associationist psychology. For Wasserman, this widespread "loss of faith" in the divine analogy has important consequences within poetics. While the divine analogy once provided the Elizabethan poet with a generative set of recognizable correspondences, once it was "brought out of the mist of faith" and "examined for a rationale," this enervated framework becomes more constricting than enabling. The eighteenth-century poet "became timid lest his analogies be reckless, more limited to only small fragments of the total analogical pattern, and less confident of its ontological validity" (41). What results is a "poetry of hobbling simile, rather than symbol" (22), one that merely "dodges" the neo-Kantian project of reconciliation: as Wasserman writes, "The resort to analogy only dodges the problem, since it both pretends to a relation between subject and object and yet keeps them categorically apart" (21). It is only once the divine analogy finally "collapse[s] through over-much probing" that Romanticism's neo-Kantian task becomes apparent: it becomes "obvious to the Romantic that his first task was to put the two worlds together again" ("Nature Moralized" 41). Romanticism relinquishes any investment in mimetic correspondence, liberates itself from the strictures of rationality, and confidently and heroically embraces a mythopoetic symbolism and a radically subjective expressionism.

¹⁰⁶ See Wasserman, "Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century" (1950), *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems* (1959), and "The English Romantics: Grounds of Knowledge" (1964).

¹⁰⁷ Abrams refers to it as "Renaissance vitalism;" Foucault the Renaissance *episteme*; A.O. Lovejoy's examines its logic of degrees of being as "great chain of being."

Wasserman's history of the collapse of neo-classical analogy and the rise of the Romantic symbol has undergone several substantial critiques since its mid-century articulation. But, in keeping with the patterns I have outlined above, most Romantic scholars have remained unwilling to contest the basic credibility of either its description of analogy's "crisis" or of the Romantic's distinctly neo-Kantian response to this crisis. In his influential polemic against this literary history, for instance, Paul de Man questions Wasserman and Abrams' shared enthusiasm for Romantic's neo-Kantian ambitions, their shared conviction that Romantic symbolism achieves what it set out to do, and even their shared sense that Romantic symbolism somehow departs substantively from analogy.¹⁰⁸ But de Man conspicuously does not reject the crisis of analogy itself. As Schey nicely observes, this creates a situation where de Man, Abrams, and Wasserman *all* reject analogy but for different, even seemingly contradictory, reasons: "From the deManian perspective of allegory, analogy appears to be a device of mystification that hides difference under an illusion of ontological identity" while "from the Wassermanian and Abramsian perspective of the Romantic symbol...analogy appears *too demystified*, too obviously rhetorical, and not at all ontologically secure" (183). Schey suggests that the symbol-allegory debate amounts to a "displaced symptom" of a "tension intrinsic to analogical thought" (184). I would say that de Man and Wasserman simply end up on two sides of the same neo-Kantian coin, and that this shared neo-Kantianism interferes with both de Man and Wasserman's analyses of eighteenth-century analogy more than it points up any trans-historical aspect of analogy. Once again, it is the *topos* of crisis that proves the invariant, distorting core of neo-Kantian Romanticism.

It has only been within the last decade that critics have started to put more thorough pressure on Wasserman and Abrams' description of the crisis of analogy itself. In *The Book of God* (2007), Colin Jager offers one of the earliest and strongest cases to date against this neo-Kantian literary history and its conspicuously progressive picture of analogy's collapse. Jager observes:

[I]n the writings of Abrams and Wasserman, analogy keeps showing up as the poetic habit that romanticism kicked... Within this progressive narrative analogy is a kind of

¹⁰⁸ For de Man, Romantic symbolism "certainly never abandoned" analogy as "an epistemological pattern" (159); rather, it mystifies analogy through a commitment to organicism in order to obscure the instability of analogy exposed by Enlightenment critique. On these ideological grounds de Man notoriously rejects Romantic symbolism and embraces neo-classical allegory (via Rousseau) as a demystified alternative which foregrounds its own constructedness.

regression, a refusal or inability to face up to the new day that is breaking in all around. Analogy seems to lack both rigor and originality; it makes nothing happen; it is the province of second-rate poets and derivative thinkers. (Jager 49-50)

In one sense, Jager argues, “the romantic overcoming of analogy” functions as “just...an example of secularization” that signaled “the romantic’s willingness to strike out on their own rather than rely upon the traditions of the past” (Jager 49). But, in another sense, given analogy’s strong metaphysical and theological associations, Romanticism’s ostensible rejection of analogy provides “an argument for construing romanticism as that which overcomes or secularizes an entrenched religious tradition” (51). As such, Jager sees the mid-century “crisis” of analogy thesis as conforming to (and confirming) a secularization thesis in which “Romanticism rescues belief — a true or sincere relationship between internal and external — while jettisoning its metaphysical content” (Jager 50).¹⁰⁹ Put another way, the crisis of analogy thesis would seem to identify Pulos’ “tendency” of Romanticism *as* secularization: it makes a case for defining Romanticism as secularization and even secularization as Romanticism¹¹⁰ — a case, I would argue, this is only plausible under the sign of neo-Kantian intellectual history.

Indeed, returning to Wasserman’s early articulations of this literary history leaves little question about the strong effect of Wasserman’s progressive secularism. In “The Grounds of Knowledge,” for instance, Wasserman suggests that it is “unnecessary to examine the manner in which science, skepticism, and rationalistic deism shattered the Christian myth” and “scripture became fiction, or allegory, or metaphor — anything but literal truth” (“Grounds” 40). To be sure, in an earlier essay, “Nature Moralized,” Wasserman offers a comprehensive survey of eighteenth-century theological negotiations of analogy to support this claim. But Wasserman approaches these theological negotiations from a position of condescension which, to my mind, severely constricts his investigation. Throughout, he is quick to observe and dismiss these theological negotiations on the grounds of logical contradiction and inconsistency. Only Hume

¹⁰⁹ This pattern of crisis-and-reconciliation is also reflected in Wimsatt’s “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery” (1954). Both Wimsatt and Wasserman’s accounts of the relation between neo-classical and Romantic poetics is to establish a progressive narrative underwriting the superiority of Romantic poetics — with its principles of organic unity — through a contrast with the inferior poetic practice of eighteenth-century. Wimsatt’s negative estimation of eighteenth-century poetry is so evident that, by the end of his essay, neoclassical poetics has nearly dropped out of his discussion of poetic structure altogether: what begins, presumably, as a comparative analysis of neo-classical and Romantic structures ends as a validation of the metaphysical and Romantic structure.

¹¹⁰ Jager also notes de Man’s embrace of this secularization narrative: “The force of [de Man’s] distinction between symbol and allegory makes it difficult to see that he shares with his humanist opponents a belief in the necessity of secularization” (54)

holds the appropriate critical orientation towards analogy; everyone else in Wasserman's survey either misses, resists, or evades the writing on the wall with bad faith or rationalization.¹¹¹

Wasserman's use of "unnecessary" should clarify that he does not see find this interpretation controversial; rather he sees himself performing a kind of neo-Kantian normal science: dotting *i*'s and crossing *t*'s. Neither his description of this collapse or of Romanticism's neo-Kantian response are breaking new ground: they are simply providing a finer and more convincing clarification of what we already know to be true. This doctrinal attitude likewise inspires Wasserman's claim that it was "*obvious* to the Romantic that his first task was to put the two worlds together again" (my emphasis, "Nature Moralized" 41). From Wasserman's mid-century neo-Kantian perspective, it is simply self-evident and uncontroversial to define Romanticism in neo-Kantian terms. At one point, Wasserman describes the divine analogy as "the master key to the total scheme of creation" (41). And it does not seem too much of a stretch to suggest that Wasserman approaches the neo-Kantian project of reconciliation as a similar kind of hermeneutical master key.

To be sure, there are some aspects of this neo-Kantian literary history that remain compelling, especially as they are outlined in Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism*. There is little doubt, for instance, that there was a broader reformative project centered on displacing this analogical scheme with rational and critical forms of analogy more suitable to a new Baconian view of science. And there is also little question that this project of critical reform placed a new attention on distinguishing legitimate forms of "philosophical" analogy from illegitimate forms of "poetic" or "rhetorical" analogy. But the progressivism inherent to literary historical narrative encourages it to overestimate the extent and the efficacy of this critical project. And its narrow emphasis on the collapse of divine analogy easily gives the false impression that this critical project (though certainly momentous) was more impactful than it finally was, especially in the eighteenth century. And in this respect Jager's critique is again instructive. While Jager ultimately accepts the bulk of this neo-Kantian literary history, his central innovation is to reject its selective emphasis on the "static scaffolding" of the neo-Platonic divine analogy (arguably encouraged by its secularizing aims) and to recover a more flexible, dynamic line of analogical

¹¹¹For example, of one early eighteenth century divine, Wasserman writes, "At heart he is grasping after a vanishing faith in a divine scheme, while he secretly suspects it is man-made and that the correspondence is only an imperfect make-shift of the mind to realize its own abstractions. Finally, he knows too well other contemporary analyses of the foundations of analogy, and they have raised more questions than he can answer" (52).

thinking cultivated within natural theology obscured by Wasserman's conflation of all theological approaches to analogy with this neo-Platonic structure (113). Teasing out this natural theological approach to analogy, Jager demonstrates how natural theological arguments from design not only remained immune to Enlightenment critique but also became instrumental in grounding Romantic notions of the “designedness” of aesthetic objects and informing contemporary theorizations of the intentionality of literary texts. Unsurprisingly, Jager achieves his distance from Wasserman and Abrams in part pursuing a more sensitive reading of Hume’s *Dialogues* that resists the tendency to collapse the *Dialogues* into a straightforward critique of arguments from design and instead embraces the indeterminacy introduced by its literary form. Jager argues, for instance, that “the primary contribution” of the *Dialogues* is “not its powerful critique of design’s philosophical worthiness but rather its acknowledgement that the habits of mind and the structures of sociability associated with design can triumph *over* intellectual critique” (37). In other words, even as Jager seems to accept the force of Hume’s critique of analogy, Jager rejects Hume’s easy identification with the skeptical character Philo. And in this way departs from Wasserman’s intellectualist interpretation of Hume’s skeptical critique of analogy as maximally efficacious and definitive to register Hume’s ambivalence about the corrective power of critique when set against the habitual and commonsense.

Other literary scholars have attempted to complicate this neo-Kantian account of analogy’s crisis by recovering the wider range and complexity of eighteenth-century orientations towards analogy: though most, like Jager, have remained deferential to this neo-Kantian literary history, often surprisingly so given the radically different portraits of analogy these more comprehensive analyses paint.¹¹² In any case, as Jager’s example nicely illustrates, this broader re-estimation of analogy in the Enlightenment has generally followed from rejecting a radically skeptical Hume and pursuing a more detailed attention to Hume’s naturalistic and optimistic reasonings about analogy. As Susan Manning cautions in her recent attempt to recover a more

¹¹² Devin Griffiths’ recent monograph, *The Age of Analogy* (2016), accepts the validity of the eighteenth-century crisis of analogy as a prehistory to its robust and otherwise whiggish description of nineteenth-century analogical practices in literature and science (70). Marilyn Samuels’ unpublished 1974 dissertation by the same title ultimately defers to Abrams and Wasserman’s thesis even though her extensive analysis of eighteenth-century traditions of analogy leads her to protest that “too often...the major departures [of Romantic poetics] are looked on as a complete break with the analogy of Art and Nature, instead of a practically inevitable outgrowth of it” (151). From my perspective, both Samuels and Griffiths are in strong positions to contest this narrative more radically and, in any case, invoke it only peripherally. The crisis looks especially out-of-place and inactive in Griffiths’ otherwise whiggish history of science.

robust eighteenth-century discourse of analogy, “Though he disputed fideist conclusions derived from such reasoning, David Hume’s sceptical epistemology established empirical understanding of the world on principles of correspondence and analogy” (xi).¹¹³ To be sure, Hume does adopt a critical orientation towards analogy, but that critical approach is largely conditioned by Hume’s naturalistic embrace of analogy. Hume’s deeper faith in the reliability of analogy makes Hume’s critical orientation towards analogical reasoning far more complicated than neo-Kantian Romanticism wants to allow given its desire to enlist Hume’s skepticism in a neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis.

When neo-Kantian Romanticism draws a line between Hume’s approaches to analogy, it tends to do so between Hume’s sympathetic ethics and his skeptical epistemology. This line is drawn in the spirit of privileging Humean skepticism over Humean naturalism and with the intent of using one to critique the other. While I reject the credibility of this way of dividing up Hume’s approach to analogy, I believe it is possible and necessary to draw some line. However, I want to argue that we should draw it between what I will call Hume’s *commonsense* and *critical* orientations towards analogy. I will hold off on defining these orientations in full until the next chapter, when I introduce a fuller analytic to contextualize Hume’s thinking about analogy within a wider set of orientations towards analogy in the long eighteenth century. But here I simply want to suggest that both orientations are underwritten by Hume’s more basic confidence in both a) the basic legitimacy and stability of many forms of analogical inference and b) in the ability to *assess* the precise scope and force of any analogy by appealing to a formal theory of analogy. In this sense, Hume adopts what I will call a *strong* orientation towards analogy. *Strong* thus aims to capture a) Hume’s confidence that formal criteria for analogy are not only desirable but discernible and b) the critical impulse to discipline and judge analogy that follows from this confidence. So we can say that Hume holds a *strong commonsense* and a *strong critical* view of analogy, depending on the context, where *commonsense* and *critical* aim to capture Hume’s vacillating sense of how strict, technical, theoretical, or counterintuitive those formal criteria for analogy should be.

¹¹³ Likewise, Schey recently observes that “[i]f Hume demolishes the argument from design in his *Dialogues*,” Hume also “concludes in his writings that ‘All our reasonings concerning matter of fact are founded on a species of Analogy’ (Hume *Enquiry* 104). Following Deleuze, Schey takes Hume to have established the “first great logic of *relations*” (180). And for this reason, Schey is inclined to accept the picture of “generalized doubt” offered by Wasserman despite his dissatisfaction with both Wasserman and de Man’s negotiation of the question of analogy. In this sense, I would argue, Schey remains within the neo-Kantian Romantic paradigm.

Highlighting this underlying confidence that must be present for a critical reform of analogy to even look viable should give us a sense of what's wrong with Wasserman's predominantly anxious picture. Anyone who adopted a *strong* orientation would have been motivated not by a loss in faith in analogy but by deeper *confidence* in the possibility of disciplining analogy into a reliable tool for both everyday and philosophical reasoning. Indeed, this renewed critical attention to analogy follows from the wider positive re-estimation of the value of probable knowledge discussed in the previous, one which began in the mid-seventeenth century following the remarkable advances of natural philosophy and the consequent reconceptualization of "science" as active, practical, and worldly rather than contemplative, philosophical, and ethereal. I will diagnose and correct this problem with neo-Kantian Romantic approaches to analogy more thoroughly in the next chapter. But at the moment want to consider how these *strong* orientations play out in Hume's *Dialogues*.

3.4 Commonsense and Critical Analogy in Hume's *Dialogues*

A strong orientation towards analogical reasoning can be especially inhibiting when approaching Hume's complicated treatment of analogy in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). As Martin Warner observes in *Philosophical Finesse* (1989), many critics have been ill-served by approaching *Dialogues* as a clear-cut philosophical argument against natural theology merely wrapped in literary form. Martin Bell likewise rejects any so-called "camouflage" approach that assumes "it is possible to strip out the philosophical message from the historically determined literary form" or that "dialogue form is...merely a cover that modern readers need to remove" (Bell 229). As Bell, Warner, and others have noted, this approach to the *Dialogues*' literary form unhelpfully flattens the text's interpretive complexity and extinguishes what Jonathan Dancy has nicely referred to as the "shimmering" produced by its more difficult indeterminacy. As Warner observes, *Dialogues* is "designed to be read hermeneutically" (352), its dialogic form informed by the distinctly rhetorical principles of Ciceronian controversy (352), which Warner glosses in this way:

[p]hilosophy should properly be carried on by means of cross-examination with an eye to revealing the probable; this will only be adequately done if each position is expounded at length so that each school's opinion on a particular matter can be seen in its larger context, and its conceptual framework seen in relation to those of its rivals; as demonstrative certainty is impossible here, the persuasive force of such controversy in revealing what is most plausible has much in common with

that of the best rhetoric; the philosopher, therefore, should be ‘versed in rhetoric’, and the orator in the Academic ‘system of Philosophy.’ (63)

Warner offers up this framework on the grounds of *Dialogues* obvious debts to Ciceronian dialogue. But the broader philosophical landscape I have sketched around Hume’s philosophy also recommends this rhetorical picture. Like Ciceronian controversy, that landscape — typified by Campbell’s *New Rhetoric* — constantly observes a similar inability to generate “demonstrative” proof for any set of propositions and, thus, the irreducibly controversial, rhetorical, and probable nature of all “moral” knowledge: probable here itself modeled on testimony.

One of the disadvantages of a strong orientation towards analogy is that, much like Skepticism, it tends to close down the this fuller, controversial rhetorical situation the *Dialogues* works to create. From a modern perspective, Philo’s Skeptical perspective is simply too superior to admit the credibility of Cleanthes’ deistic or Demea’s theistic perspective. And this argumentative superiority has long encouraged critics not only to identify Philo as the unquestionable “hero” of the dialogue but to identify Hume directly with Philo. A critical, secular perspective makes this kind of reading almost imperative, as a guard against the persistent seduction of natural theological reasoning. And some combination of these perspectives has led even literary critics to fairly unconvincing treatments of the more difficult aspects of its literary form and to mobilize irony in order to explain away the difficult facts that Cleanthes appears to win the argument, or that Philo appears to recant his line of Skeptical reasoning, or that Philo pursues two arguments rather than one. Again, on the “camouflage” interpretation, these difficulties are simply so many winks in the Skeptical, secular reader’s direction: in the most common version, Cleanthes only ostensibly wins, and Philo only gives his assent to Cleanthes’ God after he evacuates its content so thoroughly as to make this assent meaningless.

But this secular bias for Philo’s critique can mask how serious and difficult Hume intends these formal aspects to be. And it also struggles to register how speculative, provisional, and finally inconclusive I believe Hume finds (or at least anticipates the contemporary reader to find) Philo’s more critical lines of argument against Cleanthes’s argument from analogy to be or how natural and intuitive the deistic concept of design would have felt prior to Darwin’s theory of evolution. When pursuing Philo’s more extreme speculative positions, Hume seems to be

interrogating his own understanding of analogy as much as he is interrogating Cleanthes's natural theological use of analogy. From a modern perspective, Hume's attempt to undermine Cleanthes' argument from design may seem definitive and irresistible; but I want to suggest that it leaves Hume questioning the possibility of a critical theory of analogy altogether or, at least, a satisfactory critical explanation or rebuttal of the persuasive appeal of natural theology. And this is to say that we still do not have an appreciation of how Hume's commonsense investments limit his critical ones in *Dialogue*.

To be sure, while we should reject any easy identification of Philo with Hume, I believe there is little question that Hume ultimately feels more intellectually equipped to develop Philo's Skeptical case. Indeed, in a frequently anthologized letter to Gilbert Elliot, Hume appears to grapple with how his critical, formal bias makes it difficult to inhabit or appreciate Cleanthes' position:¹¹⁴

[Philo] I could [sic] wish that Cleanthes' Argument could be so analys'd, as to be render'd quite formal & regular. The Propensity of the Mind towards it, unless that Propensity were as strong & universal as that to believe in our Sense & Experience, will still, I am afraid, be esteem'd a suspicious Foundation. 'Tis here I wish for your Assistance. We must endeavour to prove that this Propensity is somewhat different from our Inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds, our Face in the Moon, our Passions & Sentiments even in inanimate Matter. Such an Inclination may, & ought to be controul'd, & can never be a legitimate Ground of Assent. (Hume "Letter" 26)

As a preparation for approaching the *Dialogues*, I would like to pursue the normative theory of analogy implicit in this passage. If we take his word for it, Hume finds Cleanthes' argument difficult to inhabit because his preference for a normative, formal approach to analogy makes him not only inclined to view Cleanthes' argument from analogy as irregular but to view its irregularity with a baseline suspicion. Cleanthes' position is suspect because, without this clearer formal articulation, it appears indistinguishable from another kind of analogizing Hume finds demonstrably suspect and worth abandoning, which Hume figures as a form of prosopopoeia. It is only this lower "Inclination" that Hume explicitly chastises, but the implication seems clear: the burden is on the natural theologian to clarify what elevates this natural theological Propensity to see design and distinguishes it from this errant psychological compulsion which "may" and

¹¹⁴ Hume imagines the "best way of composing a Dialogue" would have been to do so jointly, with someone "of different Opinions" so that "that vulgar error" of "putting nothing but Nonsense into the Mouth of the Adversary" (25).

“ought to be controul’d” and makes it worthy of a “legitimate Ground of Assent” (“Letter” 26). Hume has trouble seeing the distinction, and is perhaps even inclined to believe one does not exist. And Hume even seems inclined to generalize his own suspicion with the passive “will still...be esteem’d.” But he also seems willing to entertain that his own thinking on the Propensity is somehow inadequate, limited by his Skeptical inclinations. And entertaining this inadequacy keeps the question of the illegitimacy of the Propensity open. He concedes, if not that this Propensity could be proven legitimate, that there are others who find it more convincing than himself.

One important question here is what Hume believes a “legitimate Ground of Assent” to look like. In his letter to Elliot, Hume seems to propose a positive and a negative standard. A legitimate ground of assent must produce a degree conviction “as strong & universal” as that propensity “to believe in our Sense & Experience” (“Letter” 26). Negatively and perhaps more importantly given the Enlightenment emphasis on error reduction, a legitimate ground of assent must be in some sense be so involuntary as to be out of our control; only an illegitimate ground seems capable of disciplining (“may be policed”). And, being involuntary in this manner, a legitimate ground of assent must be so unobjectionable and even profitable to be worth cultivating rather than eradicating; only an illegitimate ground “ought to be policed”. With a legitimate ground of assent, Hume is looking for something that is truly — almost mechanically — irresistible, compulsive in a legitimate rather than an illegitimate way.

Importantly, for Hume, while there may be a way to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate propensities, or even manage illegitimate propensities, there is no way to extinguish bad mental propensities *entirely*. One simply gains a better handle on them, detects them sooner, and voluntarily rejects them when they arise. So a better question here is what procedures Hume believes one might use to confirm the legitimacy of a good propensity or “control” a bad one — and, moving from the reflective and voluntary to the instinctive and involuntary, what mechanisms produce legitimate belief and which illegitimate. Louise Loeb argues persuasively that “[Hume’s] assessments of justification depend upon the properties of kinds of belief-forming mechanisms, rather than features of individual beliefs” (Loeb *Stability* 13).

As many critics have observed to varying degrees, the basic mechanism belief for Hume is more a function of the imagination than reason. It is more physiological and psychological than logical. Reason — as reflection — arises only after these processes have occurred to

examine their reliability. In the *Treatise*, Hume can do is to identify a few of the more evident lines of “unphilosophical probability,” and propose “general rules” that might be summoned as reliable evidentiary procedures or epistemic ideals. Indeed, one of Hume’s principal rules cautions against an uncritical faith in resemblance. Since, Hume writes, an “imperfection” of resemblance as a reliable form of knowledge is “very sensible in every single instance” and “still increases by experience and observation” we might “form a *general rule* against the reposing any assurance in those momentary glimpses of light, which arise in the imagination from a feign’d resemblance and contiguity” (*Treatise* 76). Here this issue is the illusory insight of resemblance, which is itself incapable of being suppressed.

Of course, Hume is quick to admit that this uncompromising rule against resemblance is only aspirational and largely unworkable. Hume concedes that without “some degree of resemblance, as well as union” no reasoning ever would occur” (*Treatise* 97). The inescapability of resemblance thus recommends a different approach to assessing the reliability of a resemblance, one based on assessing the degree of resemblance. Whereas Hume’s letter seems to gesture towards a kind of taxonomy of mental propensities, in the *Treatise* Hume adopts what I want to call a principle of verisimilitude which correlates degrees of apparent likeness with likelihood: something like the New Academic probabilism that Pulos ascribes to Hume as his “positive” response to Skepticism. For Hume, since “resemblance admits of many different degrees,” the validity of analogy reasoning “becomes proportionally more or less firm and certain” (97) based on the degree of resemblance. Hume formalizes this principle into a “rule of analogy.” In the *Treatise*, this law of analogy seems to pertain exclusively to resemblance, and to be in some sense separate from causation and contiguity. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume seems to elevate this structure to all probable knowledge. Hume asserts there that all “probable reasoning regarding matters of fact” amounts to a “species of Analogy” in which inferences about unfamiliar events are formed on the basis of perceived similarity with familiar events. And, in this general context, the soundness of any probable inference may be reliably correlated with the perceived degree of likeness. “When the causes are entirely similar,” Hume observes, “the analogy is perfect, and the inference, drawn from it, is regarded as certain and conclusive.” And this is true even as probable knowledge itself is categorically and irreducibly uncertain. Even where “the analogy is less perfect, and the inference is less conclusive,” a probable inference still has “force in proportion to the degree of similarity and

resemblance” (*Enquiry* 104). In the section of the *Enquiry* devoted to probability, the logic amounts to an intuitive, zero-sum game of subjective assessment: “There is certainly a probability which arises from a superiority of chances on any side; and according as this superiority encreases [*sic*], and surpasses the opposite chances, the probability receives a proportionate encrease, and begets still a higher degree of belief or assent to that side, in which we discover the superiority” (Hume *Enquiry* 56).

The class of “perfect” analogies fills out the class of “proofs” discussed in “Hume Misreading Locke.” This class is generated itself by the Propensity — or to use Loeb’s language, mechanism — that Hume associates in his letter with organizing “Sense & Experience.” Again, from Hume’s naturalistic perspective, this analogical inference is only perfect and reliable because it is finally more involuntary than voluntary, more instinctive than reflective — and, from a normative perspective, more beneficial than erroneous. As Lorraine Daston notes, Hume’s sense of these pre-theoretical, naturalistic calculations is statistical and remarkably precise.¹¹⁵ And, in general, we should regard a naturalistic confidence in the reliability of analogical inference as the rule in Hume’s philosophy rather than the exception. And this naturalistic confidence is underwritten, in large part, by Hume’s confidence in his own ability to *assess* the validity of any perceptual analogy through critical reflection. Again, Loeb offers the appropriate naturalistic correction to Hume’s occasional skepticism: “For all Hume claims in Part III of Book I, causal inference based on perfect experience, probability based on infrequent experience or contrary causes, and analogy provide justified belief. In sum, far from claiming that there is a skeptical problem of induction that obliterates distinctions between good and bad non-demonstrative arguments, Hume is committed in Part III to a number of such distinctions” (47).

The important thing to note here is that Hume’s theory of verisimilitude is not all that critical. Indeed, its operative correlation of degrees of likeness with degrees of likelihood seems meant to be not only “regular” but intuitive, natural. Hume tends to confine this confident commonsense approach to analogy to everyday perceptions of and inferences about sense

¹¹⁵ Hume writes, for instance, that the “mind can judge of” the “minute differences” of “large probabilities” so accurately that “when the chances or experiments on one side amount to ten thousand, and on the other to ten thousand and one, the judgment gives the preference to the latter, upon account of that superiority” (96). And this is true even though “’tis plainly impossible for the mind to run over every particular view” (96). In other words, this calculation is not a matter of reflection but of instinct, intuition, and imagination.

impressions.¹¹⁶ But there are moments where Hume freely extends this evidentiary principle of analogy beyond the sensible, and wields it in a more heuristic and speculative capacity. Most notable here is the opaque “great analogy” that Hume perceives between his hypothesis of causation and his lesser known hypothesis of “the double relation of impressions and ideas” (*Treatise* 193). For Hume, this analogy “must be allow’d to be no despicable proof of both hypotheses” (190). Therefore, for Hume, if you perceive an analogy, it seems to be naturally significant, especially if you can specify and articulate its partial similarities. The question is how significant it should be, what degree of credence it demands. The special problem with the perception of resemblance is that it emerges as “intuition” — as “momentary glimpses of light” which then must be retrospectively assessed and adjusted. But they cannot be prevented, and their unbidden emergence and their basic intelligibility makes them meaningful. So even if Hume’s letter makes it seem like the burden is on Cleanthes’s natural theology, it should be clear that — even on Hume’s looser, commonsense theory of analogy — if the perception of analogy emerges, it is *prima facie* more credible than incredible, pending investigation of the ground of the resemblance. In the passage from his letter to Elliott above, this admission is captured in Hume’s benefit of the doubt about the argument from design. But Hume also addresses his perplexity with the intuitive appeal of design more explicitly in the letter’s *post scriptum*:

If you’ll be persuaded to assist me in supporting Cleanthes, I fancy you need not take Matters any higher than Part 3. He allows, indeed, in Part 2, that all our Inference is founded on the Similitude of the Works of Nature to the usual Effects of Mind. Otherwise they must appear a mere Chaos. The only Difficulty is, why the other Dissimiltudes do not weaken the Argument. And indeed it woud [*sic*] seem from Experience & Feeling, that they do not weaken it so much as we might naturally expect. A Theory to solve this woud be very acceptable. (Hume “Letter” 28)

Elliott need not read past Part 3 because that is where Cleanthes offers his central case against Philo, one which Philo will spend the remainder of the *Dialogues* trying to discredit before, somewhat unexpectedly, conceding defeat in Part 12. What I want to focus on is how this synopsis of the crux of the argument differs from how this difficulty is actually figured in *Dialogues*: how the central “Difficulty” Hume identifies here is *not* ever figured explicitly or

¹¹⁶ For Hume, the mechanism of analogy generates our imaginative perception of cause and effect, as well as our own consistent identity. Both fictions are only reinforced and underwritten by the constant recurrence of impressions: and these impressions, while distinct, are experienced as identities in a manner that produces an illusory but irresistible sense of continuity or of causation.

precisely in these terms. We can track the distance the synopsis achieves from the form itself in the way the voice shifts from sentence to sentence. “He” in the second sentence refers to Cleanthes. But the articulation of the “Difficulty” seems to come from Philo: it is the burden that Philo presents to Cleanthes: what are we to make of the evident dissimilarities? But with “it would [*sic*] seem from Experience & Feeling,” Hume appears to abandon Philo or Cleanthes’s voices entirely, to register both his own experience and feeling and his dissatisfaction with his representation of this disparity between his “experience and feeling” of design and what his method of verisimilitude would “naturally” suggest.

Philo seems to confront the same basic problem as Hume. And we know this because Philo frames his central objections to Cleanthes’ analogy with a similar appeal to the theory of verisimilitude. For Philo, there are some *a posteriori* arguments which are “most certain and irrefragable” (“That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity”). But, as we have already seen in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, the certainty of these proofs depends on “the exact similarity of the cases” which “gives us a perfect assurance of a similar event” (*Dialogue* 46). But, Philo argues, “wherever you depart, in the least, from the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionably [*sic*] the evidence; and may at last bring it to a very weak *analogy*, which is confessedly liable to error and uncertainty” (46). From Philo’s perspective, “Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon.” Likewise, “every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event” (49). From this general reasoning Philo asserts:

If we see a house, Cleanthes, we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder; because this is precisely that species of effect, which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy here is entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause. (46)

I will want to return to both Philo’s concept of “weak analogy” and the low “presumption concerning a similar cause” that Philo grants it in the next chapter, since both will be important to understanding what I will want to call the “weak orientation” towards analogy that would have been available as an alternative to the “strong” orientation Philo and Hume exhibit here. But for the moment I want to see how Philo responds to these “striking” dissimilitudes with Hume’s “Difficulty” in mind. For we do not see Philo meet this “Difficulty” in the same general terms as

Hume does in his synopsis. Rather, we see Philo¹¹⁷ construct what Cleanthes calls “illustrations, examples, and instances” meant to emphasize and exacerbate those dissimilarities so as to weaken the argument from design, to demonstrate its non-intuitive, theoretical and problematic nature. And, as such, he develops a number of analogies which highlight the theoretical assumptions that Cleanthes’ analogy of design must introduce.

Philo’s objections center on two theoretical procedures which, in his view, Cleanthes fails to justify. The first amounts to the rationale for selecting the human mind as the model for the entire universe. As Philo puts it, “What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call thought, that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe?” (50). And elsewhere: “[W]hat priority can we assign it for the original cause of all things?” (50). The second has to do with how the sheer singularity of the universe’s creation seems to thwart any attempt at an argument from experience, which depends on recurrence and resemblance: “But how [an argument from experience] have place, where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain” (51). Here I only want to focus on how Philo articulates the first objection through a number of analogical illustrations meant to clarify the fundamentally *arbitrary* and *unwarranted* nature of the initial comparison.

Philo compares Cleanthes’s act to a peasant who takes his “narrow views” of his “domestic oeconomy” and makes it the “rule for the government of kingdoms” (50). This is merely one of a number of analogies Philo forwards against any attempt to “transfer[]” a “conclusion” from “parts to the whole” in the face of a “great disproportion” (49) or unevenness between phenomenon:

From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn anything concerning the generation of man? Would the manner of a leaf’s blowing, even though perfectly known, afford us any instruction concerning the vegetation of a tree...But allowing that we were to take the operations of one part of nature upon another for the foundation of our judgment concerning the origin of the whole...why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle as the reason and design of animals...found to be upon this planet? (51)

For Philo, though the proximity and familiarity of reason and design — not to mention our “partiality in our own favor” (50) — may offer them up as sound candidates for such a model of

¹¹⁷ Loeb, for instance, observes, “[T]here is strong reason to think that Hume’s early endorsement of causal inference is pre-theoretical in the sense that it is in place independently of any theory of justification” (13)

the universe, but “sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion” that such limited examples could dictate or reproduce general terms of the universe (50).

What are we to make of Philo’s abandonment of his formal theory of verisimilitude for these analogical illustrations? Stephen Barker has argued that Philo’s turn discovers something essentially non-formal and contextual about *all* analogical reasoning: “in deciding what judgments to make in this area we cannot let ourselves be wholly guided by the mechanical application of formal rules. That is, we do not have available any ‘decision procedure’ to guide us, any routine consisting of a prescribed sequence of unproblematic formal operations...Judgments about the strength of an inductive argument by analogy cannot be made in that mechanical way” (Barker 177). I certainly agree with Barker’s claim in principle, but I do not believe it adequately captures how the *Dialogues* reads Philo’s turn. Warner suggests that Philo’s turn demonstrates his recognition that Cleanthes’s “irregular argument needs to be matched with ‘irregular’ argument” (263). From Warner’s perspective, these analogical illustrations — in concert with Philo’s other counterfactual speculations about the origin of the universe — are designed merely to present the “availability of alternative visions.” Put another way, Philo performs something like a “theoretical” diagnosis of Cleanthes’ argument similar to the one Williams and Reid tries to perform on Skepticism. Once these alternatives are “imaginatively grasped,” Warner argues, Cleanthes’ (and Hume’s for that matter) “appeal to ‘feeling’ is correspondingly weakened, and the thought that ‘common sense’ may be no more than a function of education and habituation rendered a live issue” (263).¹¹⁸

These are certainly credible interpretations of the effect of Philo’s ingenious analogizing (especially on the contemporary reader), but they also are quite optimistic. They do not seem to capture either Hume’s lingering dissatisfaction with the inefficacy of these appeals to dissimilitude that we saw in the *post scriptum*, where “feeling” does seem to still prevail. More importantly, they fail to adequately appreciate the credibility the *Dialogues* grant Cleanthes’ skeptical response to Philo’s analogical turn. For Cleanthes, the problem with Philo’s exercises is that they are themselves marked by its own irregularity: it is marked by its own *theoretical* character. Cleanthes can easily dismiss Philo’s analogical illustrations as unserious, as “cavils of the philosophers” (54). Cleanthes can elect to meet Philo’s “carelessness” not with “serious

¹¹⁸Jager offers a similar reading of the total effect of the *Dialogues* in terms of habituation: for Jager, “truth of the world is not that its designer can be glimpsed through its phenomena, but that those phenomena appear to us only as the result of an idea [i.e. design] produced by its iteration and reiteration” (72).

argument and philosophy” but “in the same manner, by illustrations, examples, and instances” (54). Indeed, in Part III, Cleanthes offers his own fanciful illustrations in favor of his case: “an articulate voice...heard in the clouds” (54) and “books as natural productions” (55). He also offers a reinterpretation of an episode from the history of astronomy Philo offers up to Cleanthes as a parable from which he tells Cleanthes to read “your own condemnation” and “that the subject in which you are engaged exceeds all human reason and enquiry” (53). And the point of these unserious exercises is to demonstrate that they exist on equal argumentative footing to the more searching analogizing that Philo must pursue once Philo’s intuitive appeal to verisimilitude fails.

From this perspective, it seems possible to imagine that Cleanthes has a stronger case for the non-theoretical and non-argumentative status of his position: that is to say, that Cleanthes can occupy the *same* rhetorical ground that Williams takes the Skeptic to occupy. As Jager has noted, Cleanthes’s central case is not “an argument at all” but “more like an assertion” (110), or what Jager calls an “argument from perception” (110): “Because belief in design strikes us with extraordinary force every time we consider the eye, Cleanthes seems to argue, it is natural and instinctual to accept this belief. In fact, to reject design is effectively to close our eyes to the truth, obscuring, as he says, our ‘natural good sense by a profusion of unnecessary scruples and objections’” (110). Similarly, Warner observes that “the reader is encouraged to suppose that Cleanthes’ argumentative weakness masks a deeper strength — the power of authentic feeling. That appeal to this touchstone marks something of a retreat from the presentation of a ‘formal and regular’ argument operating according to ‘all the rules of analogy’ is indicated by Cleanthes himself” (257). On this view, Philo’s acceptance of the basic intelligibility of the similitude of design *despite* its irregularity ultimately places Philo in a version of the “epistemological dilemma.” By accepting this basic intelligibility, he has already conceded too much ground to the natural theologian. Even as Philo’s critical approach to analogy appears to discover its illegitimacy, the intuitive aspect of design undermines the very value of this kind of criticism. It turns it into an unreasonable form of skepticism, compromised by its “careless” departure from common sense. As Cleanthes writes:

The declared profession of every reasonable sceptic is only to reject abstruse, remote and refined arguments; to adhere to common sense and the plain instincts of nature: and to assent, wherever any reasons strike him with so full a force, that he cannot, without the greatest violence prevent it. Now the arguments for natural

religion are plainly of this kind; and nothing but the most perverse, obstinate metaphysics can reject them...The most obvious conclusion surely is in favour of design; and it requires time, reflection and study, to summon up those frivolous, though abstruse, objections, which can support infidelity. (56).

After this speech, Pamphilus the narrator remarks that “Philo was a little embarrassed and confounded” (57). And in his letter to Eliott, Hume contends that “the Confusion in which I represent the Sceptic seems natural” (26). I take this instance of “natural” to be at odds with Hume’s claim in the *post scriptum* that observing the many dissimilarities is not as disqualifying as “we naturally expect” (28) from verisimilitude. And, from this perspective, the theory of verisimilitude is Philo (and Hume’s) best effort to appeal to an intuitive, commonsense route against design. But once this intuitive ground is abandoned, and Philo pursues his more critical line, that critical line (however insightful we now find it) is marked in the *Dialogues* as problematically discursive, theoretical, and counterintuitive.

CHAPTER FOUR

Making (Common) Sense of Analogy

4.1 Bad Analogies: Two Perspectives on Formal Analogy

When Richard Price presented Thomas Bayes' unpublished "Essay towards solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances" in late 1763, Price framed one of Bayes' major contributions to be its "clear account" of "the strength of analogical or inductive reasoning" (Bayes 2). For Price, Bayes' speculations advanced what had been a woefully incomplete account of the "force" of analogical reasoning, which

...at present, we seem to know little more than that it does sometimes in fact convince us, and at other times not; and that, as it is the means of acquainting us with many truths, of which otherwise we must have been ignorant [*sic*]; so it is, in all probability, the source of many errors, which perhaps might in some measure be avoided, if the force that this sort of reasoning ought to have with us were more distinctly and clearly understood. (Bayes 2)

Price has clearly registered the fact that not all analogies are reliable. And this sense of analogy's mixed character comes not from rational reflection but direct experience and introspection. Some analogies convince us, others do not. However, rationalizing from this description of analogy's mixed character leads Price to suspect that the descriptive and the normative accounts of analogy may not be identical: analogical reasoning may "in all probability" be the source of many errors. "In all probability" here appeals to a higher imperative of error control that attends all probable knowledge; it is a kind of due diligence that is more speculative and pessimistic than his experience of analogy affords. Whatever he thinks about the presence of bad analogies, Price seems to have basic confidence in his ability to discriminate a good from a bad one. He is more familiar with analogy as that which "acquaints us with many truths...of which otherwise we must have been ignorant" (2). Though he speculates that unreliable analogies may not only exist but escape detection, it still seems likely that a formal theory of analogy is not only discoverable but would do something to improve the situation: that "errors" of analogy "might in some measure be avoided, if the force that this sort of reasoning ought to have with us were more

distinctly and clearly understood” (2). A strong orientation unites these beliefs in a) the basic legitimacy and stability of many forms of analogical inference, b) the possibility of arriving at a formal or general theory of analogy and c) of applying a general formal theory of analogy to *assess* the precise scope and force of any particular analogy.

Price’s strong orientation towards analogy may be regarded as representative of the general spirit of the critical program of analogy in practice since at least Bacon. By this spirit, I mean not only the cautious orientation towards what Schey calls the “duplicitous” character of analogy, or the general acceptance of the inescapability of analogy, but a certain confidence in a critical program that might discipline analogy¹¹⁹ through formalization. As John Norton explains, the “natural response” to the mixed character of analogy has historically been to develop “more elaborate formal templates” and “embellished schema” capable of “discriminat[ing] more finely” between good and bad analogies (1). Though this strong orientation would have united a broad swath of critical-minded eighteenth-century thinkers otherwise at odds — say, Hume, Price, and Reid — this strong orientation was not the only or even most representative orientation towards analogical reasoning in the long eighteenth century. And we can contrast it productively to the *weak* orientation towards analogy espoused by Joseph Butler in his popular physio-theological account, *Analogy of Religion* (1736).

Where Price welcomes a formal theory of analogy, Butler refuses to “enquire further into the Nature, the Foundation, and Measure of Probability; or whence it proceeds that *Likeness* should beget that Presumption, Opinion, and full Conviction, which the human Mind is formed to receive from it” in order to “guard against the Errors, to which Reasoning from Analogy is liable” (v). He likewise refuses to “say, how far the Extent, Compass, and Force, of analogical Reasoning, can be reduced to general Heads and Rules” (v). Butler dismisses this kind of critical scrutiny because, for Butler, no amount of critical scrutiny would affect our basic perception of the value and appeal of analogical reasoning since “we may be, as we unquestionably are, assured, that Analogy is of Weight, in various Degrees, towards determining our Judgment, and our Practice” (vi). It seems that Butler, like Price, accepts that analogical reasoning comes in

¹¹⁹Ellen Spolsky has commented on the “promiscuity” of metaphors, which “...breed promiscuously in the brain, producing analogies among unconnected or incommensurable ideas. These analogies are not only illimitable in number; they cannot, in principle, be restrained semantically... Given the impossibility of regulating breeding, and the uncontrollability of the results, it is not surprising that metaphors are sometimes perceived as threatening” (Ellen Spolsky “Cognitive Literary Historicism” 161).

different degrees of reliability and relevance. And, from one perspective, Butler's weak orientation seems to make him *more* confident than Price about analogical judgment: more confident not only in his own ability to detect good and bad analogical reasoning, but in the basic reliability of analogy itself. On this view, Butler does not pursue a formal theory of analogy because he doubts it would improve on his own "natural, just, and conclusive" sense of analogy.

But this line of thought is somewhat misleading, and from a different perspective, it would appear that Butler has a much *less* optimistic picture of analogy than Price. This counterintuitive claim is supported by the broad but finally weak manner in which Butler uses analogy in his apologetic argument. Butler famously pursues systematic analogy between the natural and revealed orders, or "that System of Things and Dispensation of Providence, which Experience together with Reason informs us of, i.e. the known Course of Nature" and "that System of Things and Dispensation of Providence, which Revelation informs us of" (vii). And he does so in what, in hindsight, many critics have noticed to be a fairly reckless and unsound manner. From a strong perspective, this is just bad faith analogizing, but I want to suggest that Butler's low estimation of analogy is what recommends this strategy.

According to Butler, some elaborations of analogy will inevitably appear more persuasive than others, but analogic proof is importantly concurrent and accumulative, not discursive. A good elaboration of systematic analogy may improve the case for his broader systematic analogy, but no particular bad analogy will compromise its integrity. This is because Butler develops his systematic analogy not to be conclusive but only to afford a minimal "presumption" that both systems "have the same Author and Cause" (vii). The key term here is presumption, and it's worth saying something about the profound instability of this term in the long eighteenth century. We have seen Johnson use presumption to refer to the highest degree of evidence (equivalent to "persuasion" and "moral certainty"). Others will frequently use "presumptive proof" as a synonym for circumstantial evidence, and in this context it could denote a high degree of probable evidence though it increasingly earns its current, more suspect status by the early nineteenth century, especially in legal contexts. However, for Butler, presumption denotes the lowest kind of probable evidence,¹²⁰ and Butler's argument attempts to exploit analogy's lowly and uncertain status. The fact that analogy is incapable of complete or certain proof or

¹²⁰ "Probable Knowledge," as Butler writes, "is essentially distinguished from demonstrative by this, that it admits of Degrees; and of all Variety of them, from the highest moral Certainty, to the very lowest Presumption" (i).

demonstration allows Butler to pursue a much lower bar: he simply needs the systematic analogy, by virtue of its presentation, to appear more plausible than not. Because probable knowledge is a matter of competing degrees, as long as there is “Weight on the side of Religion” in *any degree*, then “this Argument from Analogy is in general, unanswerable.” And this is true “notwithstanding the Objections which may seem to lie against it, and the real Ground which there may be for Difference of Opinion, as to the particular Degree of Weight which is to be laid upon it” (xv-xvi). So Butler’s insistence that analogy is “of Weight, in various Degrees” (vi) is more a concession than a dogma. From this perspective, Butler doesn’t pursue a formal theory of analogy because he doubts one would even be possible, and, in any case, his case is all the better for it.

Of course, Butler’s concession is also convenient and strategic. If Butler’s one-sided, accumulate logic of analogy — in which good analogies improve a case, but bad ones do not detract from it — seems suspicious, this is because we are far more inclined to adopt Price’s stronger orientation towards analogy and to reject this kind of loose analogical argumentation as deceptive and illegitimate. As we have seen with Hume, a strong orientation recommends little to no tolerance for this kind of looser, minimal application of analogy: as Hume writes, these propensities “can & should” be controlled. These particular “bad” uses not only depart from the normative criteria; they threaten to compromise the integrity of that formal theory by masquerading as arguments more forceful than they are.

More generally, we can think about the distinction between strong and weak orientations as a question about what makes a bad analogy bad. From the strong perspective, we would measure a particular bad analogy against a normative standard that would articulate the problematic status of a bad analogy and, in the process, preserve the value of sound analogical reasoning. Some analogies may fail dismally, but this formal theory provides the justification for a high degree of confidence in at least *some* analogies, especially if the limits of their heuristic value are sufficiently clarified. The strong orientation of analogy is not initiated by a loss of faith in analogy but by a renewed interest in and desire to remake analogy so that it may be legitimately used in philosophy, to preserve it, so to speak, from illegitimate uses. Analogy moves from being a “naïve” hermeneutic for analysis to being *a hermeneutic object demanding analysis itself*, but philosophers only pursue it as an object of analysis because of its acknowledged importance in a world marked by inferential, probabilistic reasoning.

From the weak perspective, on the other hand, a particular bad analogy speaks less to a bad individual application of analogy than it does to the more basic epistemic unreliability of analogy in general. From a weak perspective, analogy is simply too twilit, provisional, and contextual a practice to be expected to conform to normative criteria. No formal criteria could be mobilized to assess a particular use of analogy as good or bad. More importantly, no individual use of analogy — good or bad — does much to impact this general estimation of analogy. Even a good analogy, however persuasive, would be subject to the basic limits of analogizing itself. And even if a formal theory of analogy were possible, it would arguably not be superior to our naturally calibrated intuitions about analogy. On the weak orientation, we simply live in analogies and perceive a particular analogy as reliable or unreliable, relevant or irrelevant, loose or strict, good or bad, based on a practical, proportional, and contextual common sense judgment. Each particular analogy has to be judged on its own merit, in context, according to past personal experiences with it and, more importantly, its wider currency and acceptance.

4.2 Weak Analogies in *Tristram Shandy*

I have said that a strong orientation would be more inclined to discipline a loose use of analogy than a weak orientation. And that discipline would identify the weak orientation's lack of rational discretion as problematic. However, a weak orientation is not entirely indifferent in this matter and could pursue anti-rationalist critique of the strong orientation's confidence in the ability to judge correctly and rationally between good and bad analogies. A weak orientation would find any attempt to have analogy do anything more than provisional argumentative work comical, if not absurd. From the weak perspective, this entire critical project of analogy seems wholly misguided: confidence in the critical or rational abilities to discipline analogy seems wholly misplaced. By way of illustration, consider this short but rich episode from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*:

Every thing in this world, continued my father, (filling a fresh pipe) —every thing in this earthly world, my dear brother Toby, has two handles; —not always, quoth my uncle Toby; — at least, replied my father, every one has two hands,—which comes to the same thing. —Now, if a man was to sit down coolly, and consider within himself the make, the shape, the construction, com-at-ability, and convenience of all the parts which constitute the whole of that animal, call'd Woman, and compare them analogically — I never understood rightly the meaning of that word, — quoth my uncle Toby. —ANALOGY, replied my father, is the certain relation and agreement, which different — Here a Devil of a rap at

the door snapp'd my father's definition (like his tobacco-pipe) in two, — and, at the same time, crushed the head of as notable and curious a dissertation as ever was engendered in the womb of speculation. (79)

In this episode, Walter Shandy invokes analogy as a hermeneutic lens only to have Toby raise a question about its status as a hermeneutic: to redirect attention back onto the tool. Walter interprets Toby's interruption not as an indication that there may not be a "rightly understood" meaning of analogy, but as a request for a definition, which Walter seems to have at hand. And reading this turn to the general definition to clarify the particular application, we might say that Walter holds a strong orientation towards analogy. Likewise, we might say that Toby holds a weak orientation: a frequent sense of confusion regarding what analogy entails. But, while Toby appears to be the student and not the master, the episode's comedy comes at the expense of Walter's strong orientation. The farce turns not simply on Walter's idiosyncratic use of analogy but on Walter's undeterred confidence in his grasp of analogy despite Toby's confusion. The knock at the door interrupts Walter's formal definition of analogy, but the boldly idiosyncratic nature of Walter's application of analogy suggests it would in fact clarify little. Toby's initial corrections to Walter's overzealous generalization likewise clarify this. Walter wants to say something analogical about "every thing in this earthly world." But, as Toby makes him concede, he is only speaking about the manner in which humans "grasp" the world, i.e. with hands, by the handles. And finally, Walter is only speaking about grasping women. In this way, the interruption invites conflating Walter's "dissertation" with his "definition": Walter's general definition of analogy achieves no distance from his particular application of analogy; the definition simply obscures Walter's idiosyncratic definition with the impoverished formal definition circulating through eighteenth-century philosophical treatises. The definition, like the dissertation, is simply another example of Walter's overzealous desire to generalize. Consider the rich ambiguity of Tristram's comparison between Walter's definition of analogy and his tobacco-pipe: "my father's definition" is not only "snapp'd" like his tobacco-pipe but is itself "like his tobacco-pipe" because no less a personal possession of Walter's.¹²¹ Again, from the weak perspective, attempting a general definition of analogy seems misguided, almost comical.

¹²¹ The satire aims well beyond the discourse of analogy and, like Walter's character as a whole, directs itself to the broader generalizing tendencies of Enlightenment philosophy. The intimate, ranging, and bizarre conversations between Walter and Toby taken together seem intended to model the general reading circuit relationship between author and reader. Walter is the characteristic speculative philosopher — part "natural" and "moral" philosopher (78), hamstrung by his over seriousness and self-defeating commitment to system — but also marked by an

At a crucial moment in *The Subtler Language*, Wasserman turns to *Tristram Shandy* to make a broader case about the collapse of the communal networks that the divine analogy once held together:

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the literate had shared a constellation of synthesizing myths by means of which man could grasp relationships that gave significant pattern to otherwise discrete things and experiences. These systems transformed man and his world into a lexicon of symbols and integrated the symbols by meaningful cross references. But by the end of the eighteenth century these communally accepted patterns had almost completely disappeared — each man now rode his own hobby-horse...In Tristram's world, meaning had become a function of each person's private, subjective concerns, which alone remained as an interpretive organization...What is more, in this completely individualistic world none of these private principles ever succeeds in organizing life, and chaos is forever breaking in. The facts of the world — the squeaking of a door-hinge, Mrs. Shandy's inability to ask a question, the falling of a window — frustrate and dissipate Walter's grandiose theories, just as the worldly routine of winding a clock frustrates his homunculi. (170)

I would agree with almost everything in Wasserman's exceptional reading except the somber tone in which it is delivered. The problem in *Tristram Shandy* is not the fact that everyone has a hobby-horse: it is that some people are inclined to regard their hobby-horse as something more.

Walter's misguided theorizing is comic, not tragic: it is forgivable and endearing, illustrative of the folly of reason. And yet, critics have often followed Wasserman by reading farce as something more tragic than comic. Stephen Werner writes that "*Tristram Shandy*" is a "work of scepticism and arabesque" in which [a]nalogy functions as "a kind of infinite mode" where "anything can be compared with anything else." From Werner's (neo-Kantian, Skeptical) perspective, Walter is a "sceptic" who "retreats from the chaos of everyday experience into a world of private mythology (what Sterne calls 'analogy' — 'everything in the world has two handles')" (Werner 36-7). In his careful 1982 study of analogy in *Tristram Shandy*, however, Mark Loveridge objects to this skeptical reading of *Tristram Shandy* as an "embodiment of

irreducible idiosyncrasy. Walter is Sterne's loving, parodic treatment of excessive and self-defeating preoccupations of the eighteenth-century speculative philosopher:

Whether this was the case of the singularity of my father's notions, — or that his judgment, at length, became the dupe of his wite; — or how far, in many of his notions, he might, tho' odd, be absolutely right — the reader, as he comes at them, shall decide...he was serious — he was all uniformity; — he was systematical, and, like all systematick reasoners, he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature to support his hypothesis. In a word, I repeat it over again; — he was serious... (41)

Walter's noble but quixotic attempts at rigor and comprehensiveness, whose reductive opening salvos and initial confidence in the task make for non-starters, are fundamentally inadequate.

demonic analogy" on the grounds that "when an argument of this kind is advanced...the commentator tends to conclude that *Tristram Shandy* is no more than sceptical whimsy, utter relativity, and with no absolute standards whatsoever" (39). Against this reading, Loveridge proposes that Sterne's text interrogates "the process of analogy becoming demonic in the thought of the eighteenth and late seventeenth centuries" (39) and "establishes and uses analogy — analogy between arts, between things which exist on the same level — to examine and satirise the use of analogy between different levels, between absolute standards and the relative standards which prevail in the human world" (Loveridge 108). In other words, Loveridge correctly reads the episode as commenting *from* a weak orientation, in which analogy is conceived *horizontally*, about *strong* attempts to have analogy work vertically, formally, from general to particular. Indeed, for Loveridge, Sterne's critique is not centered on unjustified theological uses of analogy like natural theology so much as on bad natural philosophical applications of analogy.

This episode with *Tristram Shandy* helps us diagnosis a central problem with a neo-Kantian perspective on eighteenth-century analogy. The neo-Kantian literary history seems to speak from within a *strong* orientation towards analogy in a way that simply fails to account for both the existence and the currency of the kind of weak orientation towards analogy that, I would argue, would have had a wide currency in the eighteenth century. From a neo-Kantian, Skeptical perspective, this weak orientation looks benighted, not properly critical. Yet, with an eye to the fundamentally ironic and mythopoetic structures of symbolism that neo-Kantian Romantics finally promote (and locate in Shelley), it also seems possible to say that the neo-Kantian literary history itself forwards a newly weak orientation towards analogy that differentiates itself from both the strong (read: rational) project of critical reform and the earlier weak (read: uncritical, metaphysical) orientation recommended by divine analogy: neo-Kantian literary history promotes an orientation that is both *anti-metaphysical* and *anti-rational*. Put another way, it outlines a Romantic orientation towards analogy that differs in kind both from the weak orientation recommended by the neo-Platonic scheme of divine analogy, typified by metaphysical poetry, and from the strong, rationalist approach to analogy, typified by neo-classical poetics of wit or of moralizing topographical poetry. Moreover, the neo-Kantian position fetishizes the earlier weak orientation of neo-Platonic divine analogy as the enchanted counterpart to Romanticism's disenchanting symbolism.

A basic alignment between these “weak” orientations, while debatable, seem credible enough. But, from my perspective, where neo-Kantian literary history goes off track is how it represents the interaction between the weak neo-Platonic and strong rational orientations towards analogy. Neo-Kantian Romanticism misreads the new strong orientation towards rational analogy as an anxious attempt to *shore up* an enervated neo-Platonic system collapsing under the new intellectualist reform. But the critique of analogy was marked by a distinct *confidence* and *enthusiasm* about the value of analogy in natural philosophical practice once it had been cleansed of these older, unphilosophical and poetic relations. Likewise, neo-Kantian Romanticism misreads as a kind of *anxious* response what is essentially a confident *anti-rationalism* adopted by the weak orientation towards the rational critique of analogy. The mistake is that neo-Kantian Romanticism simply cannot see this anti-rationalist thrust of the weak orientation on its own terms: it takes Romantic anti-rationalism (which is also an organicism) as the only authentic kind. But while a preacher like Sterne seems to adopt a similarly pessimistic view of analogy, Sterne’s orientation is more likely traceable to his general sense of the fallenness of human knowledge, not his absorption of any rationalist critique of analogy. From Sterne’s perspective, one would be foolish to think analogy did anything other than pretend to offer a final accounting of things, and a rational approach to analogy only exacerbates this pretension.

4.3 Commonsense and Critical Orientations

In the last section, I have argued that neo-Kantian Romanticism provides an insufficient account of the “weak” orientation towards analogy available in the long eighteenth century. This is, in part, because the anti-metaphysical anti-rationalism it reads off Romantic symbolism makes it hard to see the more fideistic anti-rationalism that informs this weak orientation. From my perspective, this fideistic anti-rationalism would have inoculated the weak perspective from any rational critique. Indeed, it makes that rational critique seem somewhat misguided, overconfident in analogy itself and, by extension, overconfident in human Reason. Despite these important differences, these two weak orientations *do* share a pessimism about rational analogy. And this makes it worth thinking about them together. However, to appreciate the distance between these two weak orientations, we will need to introduce another axis of consideration in this analytic of analogy.

In addition to the basic distinctions between strong and weak orientations I have outlined above, I want to suggest both strong and weak orientations have a *commonsense* and a *critical* variant. *Commonsense* and *critical* have slightly different inflections as they are applied to weak and strong. While I want to get to the weak orientation, it is best to start by thinking about how these distinctions play out in the strong orientation, since we have already in some sense encountered this in Hume. In the strong orientation, the difference in a commonsense and a critical orientation amounts to different estimations of how complicated or technical a normative account of analogy should be. A *strong commonsense* orientation expects that this formal rule will be relatively legible and subject to an adequately intuitive and minimally theoretical description. This is what recommends *verisimilitude* to Hume in the *Treatise*, the *Enquiry*, and the first line of argument Philo pursues against Cleanthes. This is what Philo uses to undercut the natural theologian's claim to intuitive analogy by claiming this rule of *verisimilitude* to be not only the more rational but the more *intuitive* rule from which natural theological arguments from design obviously depart.

A *strong critical* orientation, on the other hand, anticipates that the normative criteria of analogy must be more theoretical and counterintuitive than intuitive.¹²² This *strong critical* orientation is best typified by the second line of argument Philo pursues. That argument centers on clarifying the *non-intuitive* and theoretical status of the natural theologian's analogy, which, from this strong critical perspective, has left two important and contestable assumptions unaddressed. From a strong critical perspective, examples like natural theology illustrate that the normative rules of analogy must depart significantly from our looser psychological propensity to analogy, that intuitive analogies are more likely to be distorting than clarifying, that a proper analogical perception must be cultivated and expertly applied. And that a proper theory of analogy will likely be counterintuitive, only minimally reflective of these natural propensities. Despite these important differences, both strong perspectives are still united in important ways: both are suspicious enough of analogy to question its reliability but confident enough in

¹²² For examples of strong critical approaches, see John Maynard Keynes, *A Treatise on Probability*. London: St. Martin's Street, 1921: 215-277; Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970 and "On Defining Analogy." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series 60 (1959-60): 79-100; for a dominant cognitive-scientific approach to formal analogy, see Dedre Gentner, "Structure-Mapping: A Theoretical Framework for Analogy." *Cognitive Science* 7 (1983): 155-70 and Dedre Gentner and Arthur B. Markman, "Defining Structural Similarity." *Journal of Cognitive Science* 6 (2005): 1-20; for a recent, comprehensive philosophical approach, see Paul Bartha, *By Parallel Reasoning: The Construction and Evaluation of Analogical Arguments*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

analogy's force to pursue its conditioning through formalization (or are at least aware of its inevitable, if problematic, appeal) and optimistic enough about the existence of a normative criteria of analogy to find it worth pursuing.

In the weak orientation, the difference between common sense and critical approaches amounts to a difference in the source of a shared skepticism about analogy's basic credibility. From a *weak commonsense* perspective, this skepticism has to do with analogy's lowly epistemic status — its worldliness as figured by its prominent role as the imperfect but sufficient kind of reasoning God has provided for understanding our twilight and probative situation. Again, this is what Reid calls the “way of analogy.” It is more attributable to the fallibility of human Reason itself than any perverse application of reason. It is the best we can do — at times magnificent, but also subject to all kinds of errors and intolerable when used in ways that are not elevating and instructive but idiosyncratic. Analogies are sufficient as guides to reflection, but to take them too seriously is to forget the instrumental and secondary nature of the analogical image itself, which was meant to look upward, towards God — not downward or inward.¹²³ For a *weak critical*

¹²³ . I keep leaning into these theological terms because, when I try to imagine this orientation towards analogy, I think of the ease and to-handness with which an eighteenth-century clergyman — or for that matter, any poet — might draw upon and quickly dispense with an analogical figure. In *Observations on Man*, David Hartley, a clergyman, describes analogy as

...that resemblance, in some cases sameness, of the parts, properties, functions, uses, &c. any or all, of A to B, whereby our knowledge concerning A, and the language expressing this knowledge, may be applied in the whole, or in part, to B, without any sensible, or at least, any important practical error. (127)

Even Hartley has a critical impulse and reserves the right to reject an analogy. But this does not suspend his confidence in even a loose application with the right import. An analogy can exhibit a “sensible” error but not a “practical one.” Hartley continues:

Now, analogies, in this [looser] sense of the word, some more exact and extensive, some less so, present themselves to us every where in natural and artificial things; and thus whole groups of figurative phrases, which seem at first only to answer the purposes of convenience or affording names to new objects, and of pleasing the fancy...pass into analogical reasoning, and become a guide in the search after truth, and an evidence for it in some degree. (127).

Hartley follows this with an astounding miscellany of “instances of analogies of various degrees and kinds” (127). The payoff of these analogies is how, once pursued, they begin to sink in and structure one's thinking. For Hartley, this licenses the pursuit of artificial analogies such as “[s]imiles, fables, parables, allegories &c” to highlight and clarify “instances of natural analogies” (131). What these artificial forms achieve is that they “insensibly” transfer the “properties, beauties, perfections, desires, or defects and aversions, which adhere by association to the simile, parable, or emblem of any kind” upon “the thing represented” (131). Analogies offer an orienting figure. And through them “the passions are moved to good or to evil, speculation is turned into practice, and either some important truth felt and realized, or some error and vice gilded over and recommended” (131). What makes an analogy good or bad from Hartley's weak perspective is not how formally precise the analogy is. Rather what matters is whether or not you employ the rhetoric of analogy appropriately as a “guide in the search after truth” (127).

In his illuminating analysis of the appeal of natural theological arguments of design, Jager notes that what attracts a person like William Paley to analogy is that it is a “source of possibility: it allows [Paley] to see likenesses everywhere, and to confer likeness through the power of language itself” (120). With this last line, Jager captures the urgency that would have recommended pursuing elevating analogies at length: for Jager, Paley also

perspective, on the other hand, this pessimism arises from the perceived *failure* of any kind of strong formal theory of analogy to emerge. The critical perspective takes it for granted that, were analogy to be philosophical at all, it would need to demonstrate some kind of formal or logical regularities. The evident lack of a satisfactory formal or regular account recommends abandoning analogy altogether as a philosophical practice.¹²⁴ From a weak critical perspective, the absence of a readily available formal theory — critical or commonsense — recommends abandoning the search for one altogether. Furthermore, the more elaborate the formal theory grows, the more unrealistic it is.¹²⁵ Analogy may be useful and indispensable in contextual, commonsense, or everyday situations, but analogy will always distort more than it clarifies when applied philosophically. We are better served pursuing different kinds of argumentation. Holding out for the possibility of a formal theory of analogy is simply misguided: it gives analogy more credit than it deserves and allows its distortions and seductions to continue.

Another way to think about the difference between *weak commonsense* and *weak critical* is to think about the source of each orientation's anti-rationalist objections to "strong" orientations of analogy. A weak commonsense anti-rationalism comes from a more thorough distrust of *all* intellectual ambitions, which from its more fideist perspective looks like so much

"acknowledg[es] that the rhetoric of analogy itself confers designedness upon the objects of the world" (120). The weak practice of analogy is clarifying, elevating, and conditioning activity. This orientation is slightly different than Butler's because Paley does not see himself as elaborating some complicated concurrence of analogy. But it embraces the epistemic weakness of analogy in the same way. As Jager notes, Paley simply finds a way to dispense with the necessity of situating each elaboration of analogy into a broader systematic analogy. Each object is a self-enclosed evidence of design. Paley turns design into a specialized hermeneutic itself, to show how the intuition of design can unlock any object in the world, and makes it so that every object in turn testifies to reliability of this intuition of design and clarifies the capacious, weak character of the concept of design in ways that makes Cleanthes' emphasis on human design seem less controversial because more figurative than ontological. This is why Philo can't gain any traction by pointing out how the analogy introduces more definition than can be justified. Cleanthes accepts that the analogy is distorted, especially when elaborated to high levels of specific definition. Held to a strict enough standard, *any* analogy — even an analogy between natural events — will break down and stop serving its useful purpose. We are humans, so we access this principle through human design. But the perception of design is what matters: an analogy assists in this "search after truth" and provides "evidence for it in some degree" (127).

¹²⁴ The analytic philosopher Nelson Goodman illustrates this orientation in his influential "Seven Strictures on Similarity" (1974): "...I submit, is insidious...a pretender, an impostor, a quack. It has, indeed, its place and its uses, but it is more often found where it does not belong, professing powers it does not possess" (Goodman "Seven Strictures on Similarity" 437). This weak critical orientation makes the analytic philosopher Goodman an improbable bedfellow of a deconstructive critic like Paul de Man, who calls tropes like analogy "not just travellers" but "smugglers and probably smugglers of stolen goods at that" ("Epistemology of Metaphor" 17) and of a cognitive metaphorist like George Lakoff, who worries over the problematic naturalization of certain embodied metaphors even as he celebrates their indispensable role in structuring complex abstractions.

¹²⁵ As Paul Norton writes of Bartha's sophisticated new normative model: "if an account this complicated is what is needed for a successful formal treatment of analogy, we surely have reason to wonder if a formal analysis is the right approach" (12)

intellectual vanity. A weak critical perspective, on the other hand, retains a faith in the efficacy of reason and logic but simply resists an attempt to dress up the hopelessly *psychological* phenomena of analogy in formal terms of logic. Both analogy and logic lose something in the bargain. The following diagram offers a way of visualizing these orientations:

ORIENTATIONS TOWARDS ANALOGICAL ARGUMENT

<p>Weak Critical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demands formal theory but skeptical about possibility of normative criteria • skeptical about analogy because it is never properly philosophical, more deceptive or distorting than illuminating, not worth risk • skeptical, intolerant of ALL "philosophical" applications, tolerant of loose applications 	<p>Weak Common Sense</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indifferent or skeptical towards formal theory • optimistic but qualified estimation of the force or value of analogy • some analogies may be deceptive or unreliable, but some may be illuminating, elevating • worth the risk because monitored by "naturally calibrated" good sense
<p>Strong Critical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demands formal theory and optimistic about normative criteria • anticipates formal criteria will be counterintuitive, highly theoretic • high estimation of force of legitimate argumentative uses of analogy • deceptive but worth but unavoidable and useful if subject to stricter discipline, constructive skepticism • intolerant of <i>weak</i> applications 	<p>Strong Common Sense</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demands formal theory and optimistic about normative criteria • anticipates formal criteria will be intuitive, minimally theoretic • high estimation of force of legitimate argumentative uses of analogy • analogy deceptive but unavoidable and useful if disciplined by good sense and minimal reflection, constructive skepticism • intolerant of <i>weak</i> applications

In the rest of this chapter, I want to explore various interactions among these orientations — how they coexist with and speak to each other. But here I want to make a few general remarks about these orientations.

First, I want to clarify that these orientations are not meant to be definitive but heuristic. The analytic attempts to draw distinctions in fairly obvious, uncontroversial, but also approximate ways — not to mention ways that I think are essential to understanding orientations towards analogy in the long eighteenth century which, unlike contemporary orientations, are not

captured by either “strong” or “critical” approaches but which remain fairly fluid. These orientations are also not mutually exclusive, and — as we have already seen with Hume — one thinker can adopt different orientations in different contexts. More importantly, *all* four orientations should be seen as coming *through* a *weak commonsense* orientation or inhabiting some version of it as a baseline. This is to say that, pace neo-Kantian Romanticism, *no one would have had a naive or particularly fragile view of analogy*. All orientations fundamentally accept that analogy is of lesser ontological stability, subject to irreducible uncertainty, and in need of monitoring and even altogether eradicating in certain instances. It is simply that some prefer an optimistic or confident belief in their ability to distinguish between good and bad analogies. And in any case, all four orientations accept that bad analogies are unavoidable, instinctive, and not just a matter of rhetoric but psychology. And all think of this badness as a kind of unavoidable and therefore forgivable mistake up to a point which, in certain critical contexts, becomes a punishable intellectual offense.

Finally, I want to say something about the general historical progression of these orientations towards the critical project of analogy. As Paul Bartha recently and persuasively demonstrates, early critical theories of analogy almost invariably reflect a *strong commonsense* orientation until at least the mid-nineteenth century. The theory of verisimilitude Hume himself adopts and gives to Philo was widely embraced as a sufficient, and potentially very accurate, estimate of analogy. Its logic was intuitive, intelligible, plausible, and additive in a way that accorded nicely with the degree-based structure of probable knowledge more generally. The more similarities one could detect, the more probable and reliable an analogy would be, and any dissimilarity perceived would obviously be seen as decreasing the probability of the analogy. There was not really a strong inclination to designate some elaborations of an analogy as more structurally relevant than others until after J.S. Mill’s *Logic*. Every elaboration of an analogy was seen as equivalent — one point in favor or one strike against an analogy — much in the same way as they were with Butler (and indeed Butler’s approach to analogy would have been foundational to someone like Reid or Hume’s strong commonsense picture). The difference, however, is that where Butler tends to resist the merit of a disanalogy, Hume and Reid’s strong commonsense orientations perceive these disparities as probable indicators of error.

Though the theory of analogy was almost exclusively strong commonsense in the long eighteenth century, this should not be taken as an accurate reflection of how analogy was applied

in natural philosophical practice, which was far more liberal and variegated than any formal theory of analogy could capture. Strong critical approaches are available as early as Boyle¹²⁶ in scientific practice, and more specialized technical approaches to analogy are increasingly fostered and regulated within nearly every disciplinary practice from the early nineteenth century onward, even as these practices are still justified or explained through a strong commonsense theory. In this way, Hume's analogical investigations in the *Dialogues* should be regarded as uncharacteristically speculative and critical — a critical exception to the commonsense rule, not only more attentive to the workings of analogy but to the role of affective orientation and desire in ways that his more mechanistic account of analogy in the *Treatise* simply is not. This perhaps is the great payoff of the hermeneutic character of the *Dialogues*. An over-appreciation for the soundness of Hume's reasoning obscures how exploratory and inconclusive that reasoning was for Hume (though he obviously was partial to it). Indeed, weak critical orientations towards analogy do not become prominent or explicit until the late nineteenth century onwards. As Devin Griffiths has nicely observed, this pessimistic orientation becomes more pronounced as the theological or speculative connotations of analogy become more suspicious. And it is only possible because nineteenth-century scientists find a way to retain the speculative practices of analogy by redescribing them as expert acts of “comparative analysis,” with its modern designation as an analytic mode that coordinates *similarity* and *contrast*. Under a critical regime, analogy is displaced by — or, alternatively, rehabilitated as — the modern comparative method.

4.4 Disciplining Playfair's Analogies: The Persistence of *Scientia*

So far, I have distinguished between two weak orientations, but there remains one more important, older weak orientation that needs clarification. And I want to pursue this one by considering a case study from late eighteenth-century mathematics: Robert Woodhouse's cold reception of John Playfair's use of analogy to explain the significance of imaginary numbers¹²⁷ through abstract geometry. I'll leave the details of Playfair's approach aside, and focus on

¹²⁶ Boyle serves as an early and crucial example for D. Gentner's strong critical approach. See Gentner and Jeziorki, “The Shift from Metaphor to Analogy in Western Science.” *Metaphor and Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 447-80.

¹²⁷ *By Parallel Reasoning* (2010), Paul Bartha draws on Playfair's analogies to generalize his “articulation” theory of analogy, a strong critical approach. Bartha's interest in this example supports my claim that strong critical (i.e. provisional, heuristic but technical, specialized) practices would have been practiced in the eighteenth century in ways that are not captured by the largely commonsense theory of analogy promoted in the period.

Woodhouse's rationale for rejecting analogy. In his response, Woodhouse works to "shew that the principle of analogy ought to be abandoned" altogether in geometry. Woodhouse's more formal treatment of Playfair's looser speculative approach is meant "to discipline a vague, perilous, and irregular analogy, into a strict, sure, and formal demonstration" (92).

Woodhouse here seems to represent the "weak critical" position but would actually be better placed in the "weak common sense" position because his negative orientation to analogy comes from his continued esteem for demonstrative knowledge, *not* from his desire to condition analogy for formal practice. Woodhouse, in other words, is one of the people who Johnson mentions who still see *Scientia* as functioning in the older way. He is not a part of the contingent of natural philosophers who are promoting the limited viability of analogy — or at least, the inevitability of it — as a justification for its careful use in disciplinary or critical practice. To Woodhouse, "disciplining" analogy means dispensing with it *altogether*, not shoring it up. Woodhouse provides an example of how a "weak common sense" orientation can look almost indistinguishable from a "weak critical" one. In both cases, there is something fundamentally diminished about the status of analogy at a formal level: its lack of clarity as a hermeneutic, or its own distorting hermeneutic status and unruly dynamism, makes it *prima facie* suspicious. But in Woodhouse's case it is more about the fact that analogy cannot lay claim to *science* at all. It is a matter of policing the boundary *between* the *a priori* theoretical from the *a posteriori* empirical.

Woodhouse's orientation illustrates the continued appeal of this foundationalist model of knowledge, which, as Martin Warner notes, elevated Euclidean geometry as both an archetypal instance and model of perfect knowledge. As Joan Richards has beautifully shown, this foundationalist picture of knowledge was uniquely dominant in British intellectual culture, enlisted by the broader conservatism of Oxford and Cambridge.¹²⁸ Philosophers of science such as Whewell imagined geometry to be methodologically significant as a kind of strict intellectual discipline, a primer to good reflective practice (again, think of Wordsworth here acknowledging the developmental role of logic before the need to abandon it for a more capacious view of things): it is a training ground, but one that also unquestionably crowns knowledge, establishing the highest, unquestionable standard of a formal system, especially as it aligns perfectly with the

¹²⁸See Richards, *Mathematical Visions: The Pursuit of Geometry in Victorian England*. New York: Academic Books, 1988.

natural space.¹²⁹ Richards measures this orientation by the unique resistance that English intellectuals put up to the discovery of non-Euclidean geometry, which seemed wholly uncontroversial to Continental intellectuals.¹³⁰ This orientation also notably inflects the British reception of Kant, since Kant had licensed, in some sense, this conservative picture by designating our knowledge of space as *synthetic a priori*, which, regardless of how Kant saw it, looked to most English intellectuals (all the way through George Lewes) as the apodictic knowledge that formed the linchpin between the theoretical and the empirical.¹³¹

In this light, Woodhouse's reaction might be read as an overreaction to analogy's perceived colonization of all knowledge (typified by Campbell or Hume's attacks on demonstration) and its threat to the claim to "necessary truth" that made mathematics – and particularly geometry – the archetypal model of knowledge. This is supported by Charles Babbage's rebuttal to Woodhouse's position in his 1817 lecture, "Observations on the Analogy which subsists between the Calculus of Functions and other branches of Analysis." Babbage offers a qualified but confident defense of analogy's application in mathematics:

It is my intention in the following Paper to offer...some remarks on the utility of analogical reasoning in mathematical subjects...The employment of such an instrument may, perhaps, create surprise in those who have been accustomed to view this science as one which is founded on the most perfect demonstration, and it may be imagined that the vagueness and errors which analogy, when unskillfully employed, has sometimes introduced in other sciences, would be transferred to this. (197).

Babbage's orientation is strong critical. The emphasis here is on "skillful" employment of analogy as "a guide to point out the road to discovery" for which purpose "it is admirably adapted" (197). From this perspective, a carefully developed analogy can be exploratory and

¹²⁹Whewell writes of geometry: "This science is one of indispensable use and constant reference to every student of the laws of nature; for the relations of space and number are the alphabet in which those laws are written. But besides this interest and importance of this kind which geometry possesses, it has a great and peculiar value for all who wish to understand the foundations of human knowledge, and the methods by which it is acquired. For the student of geometry acquires, with a degree of insight and clearness which the unmathematical reader can but feebly imagine, a conviction that there are necessary truths, many of them of a very complex and striking character" (Whewell 97).

¹³⁰See H. Helmholtz, "The Origin and Meaning of Geometrical Axioms." *Mind* 1.3 (1876): 301-21 and "The Origin and Meaning of Geometrical Axioms." *Mind* 3.10 (1878): 212-25. For summaries of this debate, see Joan Richards, "The Evolution of Empiricism: Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Geometry." *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 28.3 (1977): 235-53; David Hyder. *The Determinate World: Kant and Helmholtz on the Physical Meaning of Geometry*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

¹³¹Bertrand Russell still treats the rise of non-Euclidean geometry in Britain these Kantian terms in his dissertation. *Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897.

even revelatory despite its risks. James Clerk Maxwell puts forth a similar position in his essay on how to interpret Michael Faraday's speculations about electrical "lines of force."¹³² By way of explaining the value of Faraday's conceptualization of electricity in terms of force, Maxwell notes that "the first process...in the effectual study of the [electrical] science, must be one of simplification and reduction" of prior investigations to "a form in which the mind can grasp them" (155). While "purely mathematical formula" can provide this kind of digestion, such formulae risk "entirely los[ing] sight of the phenomena to be explained" (155). Likewise, adopting a "physical hypothesis" lacks the appropriately illuminating level of abstraction and risks "see[ing] the phenomena only through a medium" (155). For Maxwell, there is a need for "a method of investigation" that allows "a clear physical conception, without being committed to any theory founded on the physical science from which that conception is borrowed" (156). And to achieve this requires that we "make ourselves familiar with the existence of physical analogies" or "partial similarit[ies] between the laws of one science and those of another which makes each of them illustrate the other" (156). Both Maxwell and Babbage stress thoroughly the constructed, fictional, and formal character of these disciplinary analogies and tie their production to a certain kind of disciplinary expertise, which had thoroughly absorbed both this fictionality (anti-metaphysical, positivistic) and also had become thoroughly acquainted to all the relevant facts (empiricist) to make these analogical intuitions sound. "By the method which I adopt," writes Maxwell, "I hope to render it evident that I am *not attempting* to establish any physical theory" about electricity but "to shew how, by a strict application of the ideas and methods of Faraday, the connexion of the very different orders of phenomena which he has discovered may be clearly placed before the mathematical mind" (157-8). This is analogy as modeling and visualization.

4.5 Analogy as Presumption: The Lawrence-Abernethy Debate

I have said that a strong orientation is typically intolerant of any weak applications of analogy, since it holds out for the promise of a more rigorous, formalized analogy. A strong orientation generally attributes any weak application of analogy to metaphysical preoccupations;

¹³² By way of explaining the value of Faraday's conceptualization of electricity in terms of force, Maxwell notes that "the first process...in the effectual study of the [electrical] science, must be one of simplification and reduction" of prior investigations to "a form in which the mind can grasp them" (155). While "purely mathematical formula" can provide this kind of digestion, such formulae risk "entirely los[ing] sight of the phenomena to be explained" (155).

compares it, unfavorably, to poetic practice; and generally dismisses it as unphilosophical. For a rich example of this kind of policing in emerging disciplinary, critical milieu of the early nineteenth century, we can turn to the Romantic-era debate between the physiologist John Abernethy and his student, William Lawrence.

In his 1814 Hunterian Oration before the Royal College of Surgeons, Abernethy delivered two lectures in defense of a vitalist theory of life. Vitalism, which rejects the reduction of life to a matter of material organization alone and posits instead that life must be the result of some vital principle superadded to matter, had recently come under attack from French physiologists after having enjoyed pre-eminence in the eighteenth century. Accepting that no certain or definitive proof of the vitalist principle does or likely will ever exist, Abernethy concentrates on establishing the *plausibility* of a vitalist hypothesis, a sufficient warrant for believing in a vital force in the absence of direct proof. Abernethy deploys a number of argumentative strategies to this effect. For instance, he appeals to the authority of the Oration's namesake, John Hunter, who ascribed to a variant of the vitalist theory. But the rhetorical strategy I want to focus on here is a contentious analogy Abernethy draws between life and electricity to establish what Abernethy calls the "probability" of the vital principle.

"The phaenomena of electricity and of life correspond," Abernethy asserts. Just as electricity requires a material conduit, so life adheres in and courses through vegetable and animal substances; just as electrical force may dissipate or be annulled over time, so life can have its powers "lost by degrees" or "annulled" in death; just as electrical motions are swift and vibratory, so too are the vital motions of irritability. In light of these correspondences, Abernethy asks his audience to consider the possibility that life, like electricity, may be attributable to a similarly "quick and mobile" substance: "When therefore we perceive in the universe at large, a cause of rapid and powerful motions of masses of inert matter, may we not naturally conclude that the inert molecules of vegetable and animal matter may be made to move in a similar manner, by a similar cause?" (Abernethy "An Enquiry" 50) or that "it is probable that a similar substance pervades organized bodies, and produces similar effects in them[?]" (51).

Abernethy's 1814 case for the "probability" and "rationality" of a vitalist theory of life would elicit a strong rebuttal from his student, William Lawrence, and set off a series of lectures

from 1814-18 now collectively known as the “vitality” debate.¹³³ In his response, Lawrence objects to Abernethy’s vitalist theory on a number of grounds, but Lawrence takes special pains to discredit Abernethy’s application of analogy as wildly subjective, speculative, and undisciplined and even devotes considerable attention in his own lectures to formulating a normative theory of analogy suitable for guiding comparative anatomical and physiological inquiry. For our purposes, the debate affords an excellent look at the way a strong critical orientation approaches a weak commonsense orientation and, in turn, the cultural process of “differentiation” that defined the emergence of disciplines like comparative anatomy.

Scholars who have treated the debate have tended to see Abernethy’s analogy between life and electricity as largely idiosyncratic or, like his embrace of vitalism itself, a thinly-veiled justification for his conservative political and theological commitments.¹³⁴ This line of ideological critique has its merits. And the fact that Abernethy’s analogy was so poorly received,

¹³³The Lawrence-Abernethy debate perhaps received its most thorough critical treatment in philosophy and history of science in the 1960s, where it became a foundational case study exhibiting the merits of broadening critical inquiries beyond “internal” or “endogenous” scientific concerns and to consider cultural and political influences. Karl Figlio asserts that the debate should be read as “the expression of wider and deeper interests through the scientific format and language” (29); likewise, Owsei Temkin agrees that the primary interest of the debate lies in the “intricate interdependence” of its scientific, theological, and political concerns. In his treatment of the debate, L.S. Jacyna elevates it an argument that history of science

should not rest content with an abstract description of intellectual productions but seek[] to lodge them in the nexus of events where they originated and with which their meaning is inextricably bound. From this vantage point, many of the boundaries conventionally drawn between the histories of science, political theory, and political actions are revealed as artificial positions of what should be a unified field of study. (329).

Recent literary critical interest in this debate seems to begin with Marilyn Butler’s treatment of it as a direct influence on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. More recently, Sharon Ruston and Denise Gigante have considered the debate as an important intertext for P.B. Shelley’s poetic representations of life. In a recent dissertation, Jeffrey Johnson also suggests the debate’s influence on Coleridge’s theory of life.

¹³⁴ One exception to this rule is June Goodfield-Toulmin’s early analysis of the debate. Goodfield-Toulmin offers two important contexts appreciating Abernethy’s analogy between life and electricity. First, Goodfield-Toulmin considers the general effect of the recent discovery of electricity, which would have amounted to a revolutionary moment in the science of the period that afforded grounds for speculation about the plausibility of other forms of invisible phenomena: “...the status of this ‘subtile’ mobile matter was highly ambiguous, but so too was the status of electricity” (294). Second, Goodfield-Toulmin considers Abernethy’s explicit appeal to the authority of Newton and locates several “extraordinarily close analogies” between the form of Abernethy’s speculative vital principle and Newton’s theory of gravitation. As Goodfield-Toulmin explains, the vital principle could be regarded, like gravitation, as an “ultimate fact” since

by the very same processes of thought which force us to regard gravity as an ultimate fact...[w]e see genuine and real properties and relate these back to the existence of an inherent principle. That there should be an unexplained mechanism here does not surprise these men, since they have, they believe, an excellent precedent in the unexplained mechanism of gravity, and so far in physiology no other explanation seems to be comprehensive (292).

This accounts, in her view, why Abernethy’s language seems to draw explicitly on Newton’s hypothesis regarding “a most subtle spirit, which pervades and lies hid in all gross bodies, by the force and attraction of which spirit, all particles of bodies attract one another and all sensation is excited” (286).

even by those were ultimately sympathetic to Abernethy's vitalism, makes it plausible that Abernethy was doing something unrecognizable. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was purported to have attended Abernethy's 1814 lecture, dismisses it in "Theory of Life" as "a mere diagram on [Abernethy's] slate, for the purpose of fixing the attention on the intellectual conception" ("An Enquiry" 66). Coleridge here reaches for a weak commonsense interpretation to save Abernethy's argument from analogy — one with a distinctly theological thrust — and his response is more or less representative of Abernethy's sympathizers. They, like Coleridge, took the analogy to be largely unconvincing and even counterproductive because of the way Abernethy likened the vital principle to a material phenomenon and at times nearly identified the vital principle with electricity itself.

Like Coleridge, I also take Abernethy's analogy to be working within a weak commonsense framework. But I want to suggest that Abernethy's approach to analogy is in some sense more formulaic than idiosyncratic in the eighteenth century and, thus, the fact that it was perceived as idiosyncratic in the early nineteenth century is suggestive. I do not primarily mean that Abernethy would have learned this loose practice of analogizing widely between different natural forces for illustrative and speculative ends from eighteenth-century natural philosophy, although — as examples from George Berkeley to Joseph Priestley would show, and as Loveridge and other critics have long observed — this was the rule, not the exception. Instead, I want to highlight Abernethy's indebtedness to a model of argument from analogy promoted within George Campbell's influential "new rhetoric," a model that I want to suggest was abstracted from the kind of weak argumentative approach Butler adopts in *The Analogy of Religion* (1736) on the basis of its perceived success as an apologetic and especial sensitivity to contemporary epistemology.

I'll need to first say something about the reception of Butler's text. Hardly anyone outside of theology reads Butler now, but it is difficult to overestimate the intellectual impact of Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Several dozen editions of the *Analogy* were published through the eighteenth century, with translations into French, German, Greek, Italian, and Welsh available. Dozens more appeared in the nineteenth century, along with countless articles and book-length commentaries concerning the practical and theoretical influence of Butler's text. His impact seems to have been especially pronounced in Scottish intellectual culture. Reid attempts a full chapter-by-chapter synopsis of Butler

(though he gives up halfway). Hume was so impressed by Butler's reasoning that he actively pursued Butler as a first reader, a fact which many scholars since have used to explain the conspicuous absence of Hume's major critiques against religion. By the middle of the nineteenth century, when Butler's influence was arguably at its height, every significant divine following Butler felt compelled to comment on Butler's work. Several of these took the form of personal accounts of the practical influence of Butler's treatise on a divine's own conversion or faith. But the majority of these publications took the form of commentaries and interpretations of Butler's argument itself, either as popularizations that attempted to provide a simplified account of its subtler or esoteric points or as authoritative commentaries produced to assess the argument's efficacy as an apologetic, to provide a measure of what George Chalmers refers to as "the precise argumentative force of [Butler's] peculiar reasoning." Butler's argument felt peculiar but powerful and therefore worthy of extensive study and commentary.

In the section of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1772) on "analogical evidence," Campbell describes Butler's work as an "excellent treatise" which "hath shown us how useful the mode of reasoning may be rendered...for refuting the cavils of infidelity" (78). This looks like a case for analogy's profound force. But, for Campbell, what Butler discovers is the strength in analogy's epistemic weakness. Campbell describes "analogical evidence" as "at best but a feeble support...hardly ever honoured with the name of proof" (75). But, he continues,

Nevertheless, when the analogies are numerous, and the subject admits not evidence of another kind, it doth not want its efficacy. It must be owned, however, that it is generally more successful in silencing objections than in evincing truth, and on this account may more properly be styled the defensive arms of the orator than the offensive. (75-6).

I believe this is the context we should use to assess Abernethy's intent. Indeed, Abernethy appears to follow Campbell's recommendation almost to the word. He finds himself in an apologetic situation, defending vitalism from what he perceives as its materialist adversaries. In the absence of direct observational proof, he pursues a multi-faceted analogy that will lend credence to his vitalist hypothesis: these are "defensive" not "offensive" arms. Perhaps most importantly, Abernethy is looking not at the strength of his analogy but at its weakness — that is, the limited obligation the analogy places on its audience to accept the plausibility of his argument. The purpose of Abernethy's analogy with electricity is not meant to prove the existence of the vital principle. He wants to link this existence with a known (and admittedly

strange) natural phenomenon similar to the hypothesized vital principle. Doing so does not prove the existence of this vital principle. It simply makes it harder to discredit or dismiss such a principle as unserious. Reformulating this analysis in Butler's terminology, Abernethy uses the analogy to establish a "presumption," or minimally sufficient evidence, for entertaining the vitalist hypothesis.

Abernethy's appeal to presumption provokes a fairly hostile reaction from Lawrence, which suggests that by 1814 natural philosophic practice had undergone a change that makes Abernethy's analogizing intolerable. Most saliently, Lawrence rejects the accumulative or accretive logic that informs Abernethy's deployment of analogy: that is, the idea that any and all perceptible analogies might be cited in support of an argument, even as these analogies could be said to vary in persuasiveness. Instead, Lawrence installs a distinction between "superficial" and "relevant" analogies and argues that the problem with Abernethy's analogy between life and electricity is that it proceeds by falsely "select[ing] one or two minor points [of similarity], to the neglect of all the important features" so that "a distant similarity [between life and electricity] may be made out; and this...only in appearance" ("Two Lectures" 170).

At this level, Lawrence's response looks like it could be strong commonsense: it appeals to a logic of verisimilitude. But Lawrence's approach is properly strong critical. Lawrence does not dismiss the scientific use of analogy altogether and has a very optimistic estimation of its value. Indeed, Lawrence seems to conceive of the entire practice of comparative anatomy in terms of analogy: in comparative anatomy, writes Lawrence, one "proceed[s] on the observation of facts, of their order and connexion... notice[s] the analogies between them; and deduce[s] the general law, to which they are subject" ("Two Lectures" 165). For Lawrence, analogy may be the only legitimate empirical manner of achieving these general laws. But Lawrence also assumes that our natural propensity to analogize exists in excess of these orders and, as such, contributes largely to our tendency to distort or confuse them. And legitimate analogizing only comes with sufficient expertise and more severe discipline.¹³⁵ For Lawrence, the problem with Abernethy's

¹³⁵ Addressing the major problem of defining speciation in his later, controversial *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man Delivered at The Royal College of Surgeons* (1822), Lawrence follows the German anatomist Johanne Blumenbach by asserting that "we must resort at last to the criterion" of "draw[ing] our notions of species and zoology from analogy and probability" (Lawrence *Natural History of Man* 183). For Blumenbach, this is a hard but honest realization: "To assist us in forming a determination in such cases, there are no rules applicable in practice but those drawn from analogy; the proposal of Ray, Buffon, and others, to fix the character of a species by the possibility of producing fruitful progeny, is uncertain and inadequate to the object proposed" (*Manual* 15-16).

superficial comparison is that it is not sufficiently disciplined and is therefore more likely attributable to illegitimate, poetic analogical propensities than legitimate, scientific ones. Lawrence compares Abernethy to the character of Polonius in *Hamlet* searching for formal resemblances in the passing clouds: “To make the matter more intelligible, this vital principle is compared to magnetism, to electricity, and to galvanism; or it is roundly stated to be oxygen. ’Tis like a camel, or like a whale, or like what you please” (“Two Lectures” 169).

It’s important to think about what Lawrence is *not* policing here, for it will help correct some frequent misinterpretations of the central thrust of Lawrence’s critique, not to mention provide a better picture of the process of differentiation Lawrence is performing here. Many critics, for instance, are inclined to take Abernethy’s characterization of Lawrence’s position as materialist at face value, and to accept that the debate is one between materialism and vitalism. But Lawrence is himself a vitalist of a different stripe. And this comes through when we consider how Lawrence generalizes the kind of endemic analogical procedure he sees working within comparative anatomy as an organizing principle for all disciplines. For Lawrence, disciplinary boundaries respect and reflect *real* ontological distinctions between autonomous natural orders. Their autonomous structure means that while analogizing can take place within them, analogizing cannot occur across them. For this reason

[t]he science of organized bodies should...be treated in a manner entirely different from those, which have inorganic matter for their object...the peculiar phenomena [of organized bodies] present no analogy to those which are treated in chemistry, mechanics, and other physical sciences: the reference therefore to [other orders] can only serve to perpetuate false notions in physiology. (“Two Lectures” 161)

Lawrence’s autonomous disciplines could be said to be analogously structured orders, each organized around the same practice of scientific generalization through the perception of analogies among facts endemic to each. And this means that Lawrence imagines something like an autonomous set of “vital” principles that must be discovered in their own right. This reflects the kind of logic of specialization that Valenza and Flanagan identify.

A second thing to note is that Lawrence’s strong critical response does not read Abernethy’s error primarily as *rhetorical* but as *psychological*. To be sure, the problem seems to be in some sense Abernethy’s specious rhetorical act of “comparison” (“Two Lectures” 169). But, for Lawrence, this rhetorical maneuver plays to a deeper psychological weakness. This is in

part the import of Lawrence's rhetorical use of vitalism. As Robert Mitchell has recently noted, the term vitalism was more polemical than descriptive. It functioned largely as a "gatekeeping term" that is "designed to serve both as a warning and to encourage self-monitoring, for...the vitalist's collapse into the irrational prehistory of biology is the result of some psychological failing" (Mitchell *Experimental Life* 5). For Lawrence, Abernethy's vitalism involves a fundamental misinterpretation of the sorts of conclusions analogical reasoning can support within comparative anatomical inquiry, and this has resulted from Abernethy's lack of discipline, which has caused him to forward unjustified speculative claims.

For Lawrence, there is no doubt about the existence of vital properties: simple observation of the special nature of life "led[s us] to admit the vital properties [i.e. irritability and sensibility], already spoken of, as causes of the various phenomena" (Lawrence "Two Lectures" 165). But the problem with Abernethy's naive vitalism is that it assumes that these "vital properties" observed through analogical comparison — or the term *life* that generalizes them — must indicate a special essence, not simply a process. For Lawrence, while positivist inquiry can select out these vital phenomena for observation, it should never "profess to explain *how* the living forces...exert their agency" ("Two Lectures" 65). But, for Lawrence

...some are not content to stop at this point; they wish to draw aside the veil from nature, to display the very essence of the vital properties, and penetrate to their first causes; to shew, independently of the phenomena, what is life, and how irritability and sensibility execute those purposes, which so justly excite our imagination. ("Two Lectures" 165-66)

For Lawrence, Abernethy and others make this invalid inference because of a weak psychological disposition, a will to believe that exceeds scientific warrant and compromises what should be the impartial, agnostic orientation of the scientist.¹³⁶ For Lawrence, naive vitalism itself is a form of superstition: this "hypothesis or fiction of a subtle invisible matter" is "only an example" of a more general "propensity in the human mind" that "has led men at all times to account for those phenomena, of which the causes are not obvious, by the mysterious aid of

¹³⁶ Here Lawrence also seems to be following Blumenbach: "I trust that it is unnecessary to inform the greater part of my readers, that the term *Formative Impulse*, like the names applied to every other kind of vital power, of itself, explains nothing; it serves merely to designate a peculiar power formed by the combination of the mechanical principle with that which is susceptible of modification; a power, the constant agency of which we ascertain by experience, whilst its cause, like that of all other generally recognized natural powers, still remains, in the strictest sense of the word—'qualitas occulta.' This, however, in no way prevents us from endeavoring, by means of observation, to trace and explain the effects, and to reduce them to general principles" (Blumenbach *Manual* 12)

higher and imaginary beings” (“Two Lectures” 175). Lawrence identifies this propensity most closely with “poetry” (176) and “personification,” or “our disposition to clothe all surrounding objects with our own sentiments and passions, to animate the dead matter around us with human intellect and expression” (176). “The fictitious beings of poetry are generally interesting in themselves and are brought forwards to answer some useful purpose; but the genii and spirits of physiology are awkward and clumsy, and do nothing at last which could not be accomplished just as well without them: they literally encumber us with their help” (*Natural History of Man* 72-3). With this “poetic ground of physiology,” we “quit the path of observation, and wander into the regions of imagination and conjecture” (72). So Lawrence’s problem with Abernethy’s analogy is not that far from Hume’s problem with natural theology. It plays to propensities that can and should be moderated.

Then again, Lawrence’s problem is not Hume’s because it is decidedly *not* with natural theology. In fact, for Lawrence, one of the greatest payoffs for the emerging field of comparative anatomy is that it so thoroughly confirms the validity of natural theological arguments from design: “[t]he gradations of organization, and the final purposes contemplated by Nature in the construction of her living machines... receive their only clear illustration and incontrovertible evidence from comparative anatomy” (*Natural History of Man* 42): for Lawrence, “[w]e must take refuge either in verbal quibbles, or in an exaggerated and unreasonable scepticism, if we refuse to recognize in the relation between peculiarity of structure and function those designs and adaptations of exalted power and wisdom, in testimony of which all nature cries aloud through all her works” (*Natural History of Man* 46-7). This should clarify, contrary to many critical treatments, that Lawrence’s objections to Abernethy are not atheistic (or crypto-atheistic) but agnostic. And they are agnostic only *within* the positivistic, empirical contexts of physiology and comparative anatomy. His objections are about keeping the question at hand at the forefront, undistorted by moral or metaphysical preoccupations:

You must bring to this physiological question a sincere and earnest love of truth; dismissing from your minds all the prejudices and alarms which have been so industriously connected with it. If you enter on the inquiry in the spirit of the bigot and partisan, suffering a cloud of fears and hopes, desires and aversion, to hang round your understandings, you will never discern objects clearly; their colours, shapes, dimensions, will be confused, distorted, and obscured by the intellectual mist. Our business is, to inquire what is true; not what is the finest theory; not what will supply the best topics of pretty composition and eloquent declamation, addressed to the prejudices, the passions, and the ignorance of our

hearers... Truth is like a native rustic beauty; most lovely when unadorned, and seen in the open light of day. (*Natural History of Man* 92)

We should see Lawrence making a patently “epistemological” move here: he is establishing the primacy of comparative anatomy as it affords a separate “basis” for valid moral and theological reasoning. And he is doing this by establishing the proper conditions in which analogy can be employed *within* the discipline. This is more defensive than offensive: it establishes the autonomy of the disciplinary practice, but it does not dictate how its purer epistemological facts might be used outside beyond the discipline of comparative anatomy. This is the first sense of “irreligious” before it is the second. But Lawrence does not venture a positive vision for the prejudices. Rather he frames the negotiation as a matter of disciplinary boundaries. The theologian and the physiologist pose different questions that only they can answer. Lawrence writes,

“...[T]he theological doctrine of the soul, and its separate existence, has nothing to do with this physiological question [of life], but rests on a species of proof altogether different. These sublime dogmas could never have been brought to light by the labour of the anatomist and physiologist. An immaterial and spiritual being could not have been discovered amid the blood and filth of the dissecting-room” (*Natural History of Man* 7)

Lawrence attributes the belief that science might be able to legislate such doctrinal questions to a misguided “*esprit de metier*” that might cause overreach in either direction: not only the theologian but the *physiologist* can illegitimately cross disciplinary boundaries. And Lawrence’s job is simply to police incursions into his territory.¹³⁷

4.6 Rhetoric and Psychology

I want to continue to press on Lawrence’s choice to see Abernethy’s error as *psychological* first — a kind of superstitious atavism — and rhetorical second. And I want to suggest that this has to do with the way Lawrence does not see analogy in rhetorical terms, but rather in cognitive ones: or the way he doesn’t really see his analogical practice as trafficking in rhetoric and, therefore, prefers to see Abernethy’s approach as more continuous with his own

¹³⁷L.S. Jacyna also asserts that “[Lawrence] was concerned, he claimed, to amend the current cultural status of physiological discourse — to assert its autonomy of and immunity from such exogenous claims on its attention. Above all, Lawrence insisted that evidence drawn from physiology was irrelevant to the question of the existence of the soul” (312)

practice of analogy. The question is how continuous Abernethy's approach actually is with Lawrence's at this psychological level (however obviously it is not at the disciplinary level).

In some sense, accepting a continuity between Abernethy and Lawrence's views of analogy seems sound because Abernethy seems to be drawing on Campbell who, as a new rhetorician, presents analogy in more psychological terms than rhetorical terms — or, rather, Campbell sees the rhetorical account of analogy following directly and naturally from an epistemological account (and further, from a naturalized psychology). Importantly, Campbell's low estimation of analogy derives not from analogy's problematic rhetorical status. Instead, it reflects analogy's relatively low status on the hierarchy of evidence adapted by the New Rhetoric from contemporary epistemology as a part of its reformulation of the rhetorical tradition. As a form of moral evidence ranked below the privileged direct observational experience, analogy has little argumentative purchase except in the absence of direct experience itself (i.e. "evidence of another kind") or, alternatively, as analogy more closely approximates experience itself (i.e. "when the analogies are numerous").

Campbell's view of analogy is so thoroughly epistemological that, from my perspective, he offers one of the more sophisticated accounts of the intuitive appeal of the logic of *verisimilitude* (again, the standard grounding strong commonsense approaches to analogy). Campbell finds the rule of verisimilitude satisfying because he understands the rule itself to emerge naturally and inductively through associationist psychology. Put another way, verisimilitude is a "second-order" rule that arises out the natural working of analogy. Just as early associations of ideas may be loose and confused only to become tighter and more accurate through experience, so our ability to "assess" the merit of similarity starts out poor but becomes increasingly refined in a way that produces the rule of verisimilitude itself. Campbell explains it this way:

I have learned from experience that like effects sometimes proceed from objects which faintly resemble, but not near so frequently as from objects which have a more perfect likeness. By this experience, I am enabled to determine the degrees of probability from the degrees of similarity, in different cases. It is presumable that the former of these ways has the earliest influence, when the mind, unaccustomed to reflection, forms a weak association, and consequently, but a weak expectation of a similar event from a weak resemblance. The latter seems more the result of thought and is better adapted to the ordinary forms of reasoning. (75)

Campbell offers a speculative metatheory of analogy. He is interested in analogy as a universal psychological mechanism that spontaneously (and reliably) generates its own (consistent) rule. In this way, Campbell is not too far from Hume's naturalistic picture of analogy, and arguably doing a better job of accounting for how it generates its graduated structure of degrees than Hume does.

Campbell's engagement with epistemological accounts of analogy challenges what Susan Manning has described as the received view that "eighteenth-century poets and rhetoricians regarded figurative language as an embellishment rather than a constituent of meaning, and that the cognitive properties of metre, rhyme, and trope were 'discovered' and debated by Romantics, notably Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley" (Manning 41). Of course, this received view (at least as it relates to "tropes" of symbolism) originates largely in neo-Kantian Romanticism; it aligns perfectly with the kind of literary revolution it wants to narrate. But, as Manning writes, this separation does not capture how invested eighteenth-century rhetoricians were in the cognitive properties of metaphor and the problems of "how to manage figures of speech" and "distinguish distracting adornment from a compression that would be functional in communication and comparison" (41). It likewise does not capture the New Rhetorical interest in analogies as "relational modes of perception and understanding" (8).

Indeed, while poetic approaches to analogy no doubt shift over the long eighteenth century, neo-Kantian Romanticism does a poor job describing this shift because of its preoccupation with break. The distinction between rhetorical and cognitive (read: philosophical) treatments of metaphors used to differentiate between eighteenth-century and Romantic metaphor is arguably more obscuring than clarifying. And the same is true of an oversimplified conflation between eighteenth-century "rhetorical" and "psychological" accounts of analogy that a neo-Kantian like Wasserman pursues, for instance, on the supposed basis of their shared problematic subjective status in relation to the communal analogies offered by the neo-Platonic analogy. Both approaches are too simplified and schematic to capture the difficult relation between rhetoric and philosophy in the period. Importantly, a new rhetorician like Campbell sees his epistemological account of analogy simultaneously as *departing* from traditional rhetorical accounts, *investing* in philosophy, and *elaborating* from philosophy into a new kind of rhetoric.¹³⁸ As Devin Griffiths observes, while "the classical rhetorician Quintilian had worked

¹³⁸Adam Smith inaugurates this turn from classical rhetoric with his often-quoted comment that ancient and modern systems of rhetoric devoted to these kind of distinctions amount to "a very silly set of books and not at all instructive" (Smith *Lectures* 23).

hard to restrict the definition of analogy to a perception of a linguistic pattern,” Campbell explicitly “criticizes that restriction, arguing [analogy] should equally apply to tropes of similitude” (14). Against Quintilian, Campbell objects, “But what are rhetorical comparisons, when brought to illustrate any point inculcated on the hearers (what are they, I say), but arguments from analogy?” (Campbell 193). With this maneuver, Griffiths suggests that Campbell “overwrites a long-held distinction between rhetorical tropes and modes of philosophical thought¹³⁹” (14).

All this is to say that Lawrence seems right, in one sense, to interpret Abernethy’s error as psychological before it is rhetorical. The aim of Abernethy’s argument from analogy is in some sense to visualize an immaterial, spiritual, and therefore morally gratifying principle of life, and this weak commonsense application of analogy would have been recommended by Campbell and Hartley alike. Indeed, while Lawrence (not to mention current critics) finds Abernethy’s moral investments immaterial and embarrassing to the disciplinary context, Abernethy is not embarrassed to admit them¹⁴⁰. But where we can start to see the difference between Abernethy

¹³⁹ In Griffiths’ recent eighteenth-century prehistory of comparative method, Campbell’s flattening of rhetoric into philosophy affords the grounds for the nineteenth-century rehabilitation of analogy as more philosophical than rhetorical or theological. But, from my perspective, Campbell is not innovating here but merely elaborating on Butler’s interesting reinterpretation of Quintilian’s use of analogy. Butler’s interpretation of analogy represents a significant departure from other apologetics of the period; for instance, Peter Browne’s *Divine Analogy* (1733) or Samuel Clarke’s *On the Being and Attributes of God* (1706) also grounded their methods in analogy but approached the question of analogy and its apologetic value along traditional Thomistic lines. A central question within this Thomistic tradition concerned the extent to which one might form a valid conception of the nature and attributes of God — for instance, God’s wisdom — by reasoning from analogy with the attributes of man. Butler’s justification of the value of analogy largely sidesteps these scholastic concerns and, instead, appeals to the authority granted analogical reasoning within the emerging account of probable knowledge, appropriating it for what appears to be a wholly original interpretation of analogical argumentation. As evidence of this originality, we might consider the relation of Butler’s argumentative strategy to the guidelines for the rhetorical use of analogy presented by the *Analogy*’s epigraph, which comes from Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*. In its original context, Quintilian recommends analogy as a response to the linguistic problem of determining case inflections for unfamiliar words. In such a case, one properly reasons by establishing an analogy with similar, more familiar words: “What [analogy] requires is that a writer or speaker should compare whatever is at all doubtful with something similar concerning which there is no doubt, so as to prove the uncertain by the certain” (np). Butler effectively converts this method of linguistic inquiry through analogical comparison to an argumentative method.

¹⁴⁰ That is, Abernethy has no problem admitting that he is simply trying to counteract a “sceptical disposition...disinclined to believe anything that was not directly an object of their senses” (54-55). For Abernethy, the doubt or suspension of belief recommended by this disposition is “so fatiguing to the human mind, by keeping it in continued action, that it will and must rest somewhere.” The formation of opinions being inevitable, Abernethy recommends that “our enquiry ought to be where it may rest most securely and comfortably to itself, and with most advantage to others” since “in the uncertainty of opinions, wisdom would counsel us to adopt those which have a tendency to produce beneficial actions” (93). In other words, Abernethy justifies his vitalism as an appeal to the practical value of certain forms of speculative belief, if and when they promote action that might be regarded as beneficial (92-95). But practical here means something much different than it does for Lawrence, who would perceive it in more physiological, active terms.

and Campbell's approaches to analogy, on one hand, and Lawrence's, on the other, is when we consider what their respective epistemological inquiries recommend. From Campbell's weaker, commonsense orientation, once one "descends" from "experimental reasoning" to the "analogical," one comes "upon a common to which reason and fancy have an equal claim" (96-7). For Campbell, analogy *departs* from experience in a manner that makes it *prima facie* imaginative, speculative, and unreliable in all situations. This is what recommends such a low rhetorical estimation of analogy: this, for Campbell, is what Butler discovered about analogy. It is hardly reliable but is a sufficient vehicle to image and therefore preserve the truth. For Lawrence, on the other hand, the perception of analogy is less a kind of argument loosely affiliated but ultimately discontinuous with experience (Campbell refers to analogy as a "more indirect form of experience"). Rather, analogy is *itself* a kind of experience or form of perception. And, for Lawrence, this recommends not a low general estimation or loose rhetorical application of analogy, but an even more severe disciplining of analogy. And this is in part because analogy is more *indispensable* to Lawrence's comparative anatomical practice than it is to Abernethy or Campbell, and therefore in need of a more serious and cautious treatment.

In one sense, the general unintelligibility of Abernethy's approach in 1814 reveals how conditioned Campbell's account was by his special investment in analogy as it was deployed by eighteenth-century Christian apologetics and the limitations of what a New Rhetorician like Campbell would have assumed to be a general, descriptive account of analogy's persuasiveness, well grounded in the associationist psychology emerging out of Lockean epistemology. But from another perspective, this unintelligibility seems somewhat strategic on Lawrence's part, an

For Abernethy, establishing the probable grounds of the vital principle has a direct moral appeal. The vital principle, with its dualist implications, constitutes a morally edifying physiological belief that fits comfortably with the Christian doctrine of the soul. Abernethy perceives his arguments as providing a safe and sufficient warrant for holding a belief that is at once scientifically sound, morally productive, and (as almost a side-effect) natural even as it is uncertain. "I am visionary enough," Abernethy writes,

to imagine that if these opinions should become so established as to be generally admitted by philosophers, that if they once saw reason to believe that life was something of an invisible and active nature superadded to organization; they would then see equal reason to believe that mind might be superadded to life, as life is to structure...Thus even would physiological researches enforce the belief which I may say is natural to man; that in addition to his bodily frame, he possesses a sensitive, intelligent, and independent mind: an opinion which tends in an eminent degree to produce virtuous honorable, and useful actions. (94-5).

On the other hand, he writes in his 1817 lecture, "to exchange opinions for other opinions [i.e. materialism], as in this case seems required of us, when the barter is so disadvantageous, would be the highest absurdity. We should give up that which is in every respect, and in the greatest degree, useful and dignifying, and what experience has proved to be durable, for that which is pernicious and derogatory, and which evidently cannot last" (51-52). Here we see something like the logic of Johnson's kick. Abernethy puts forth a weak analogy because it is not worth the cost of engaging materialism in a more thorough manner. It would cost too much.

expression of Lawrence's discomfort with respecting the explicitly rhetorical terms of presumption Abernethy proposes. Curiously, when Lawrence returns to analogical reasoning in his later *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man* (1822), he writes that the unreliability of analogical argument recommends one *foregrounding* an argument from analogy's rhetorical and heuristic status: although "arguments from analogy are of great service in physiology and other departments of natural history" they "should rather be resorted to for illustration than relied on for direct proof" (*Natural History* 78). Of course, Abernethy's aim is illustrative and suggestive, not conclusive or direct. And Lawrence even explicitly recognizes that Abernethy's analogy is meant to "make the matter more intelligible" (169). But Lawrence prefers to see Abernethy's attempt at illustration as more illegitimate than legitimate, even as Abernethy is obviously not seeking anything like "direct proof" of vitalism. Lawrence does this by tracing Abernethy's rhetoric back to its illegitimate psychological grounds and taking Abernethy to be pursuing a stronger kind of proof than he is. Lawrence seems to know that Abernethy is using rhetoric, but he prefers to see this rhetoric as exploiting a bad psychological disposition.

Lawrence's negotiation of Abernethy illustrates a broader problem that the strong critical *ethos* has articulating the differences of its own formalized analogical practices and the analogical practices it dismisses as superstitious and illegitimate. While experts like Blumenbach and Lawrence largely work to maintain the integrity and autonomy of their own critical disciplines from analogical invasions (from natural theology or other disciplines), they have a distinct enthusiasm for legitimate applications of analogy within their respective disciplines. By the mid-nineteenth century, the strong critical confidence in the difference between scientific and theological uses of analogy starts to look particularly conspicuous. In his massive *Analogy, Considered as a Guide to Truth, and Applied as an Aid to Faith* (1864), the theologian James Buchanan aims to show that "Analogy, as applied to Religion, is neither less legitimate nor less valid than when it is applied to any other department of human knowledge; and that in Science, as well as in common life, it asserts its prerogative, as a law of human thought, and a ground of rational belief" (Buchanan 6-7). It is arguably in response to objections like Buchanan's that scientific disciplines work to divest themselves of the term analogy. In general, rather than mounting any specific justification or distinction between religious and scientific applications of analogy, scientists in the period seem inclined to remain equivocal about how or why one is

different than the other. In an 1856 speech, “Are There Real Analogies in Nature?” for instance, Maxwell takes a meta-theoretical turn to interrogate what such a claim could or would have to mean and to offer a kind of preliminary, but ultimately inconclusive, sketch of the ontological conditions that would have to apply.¹⁴¹

4.7 Common Sense, For and Against Analogy

In the last section, I tried to complicate the received view regarding the eighteenth-century approaches to analogy by performing some differentiating work between “rhetorical” and “psychological” accounts of analogy. In this section, I want to pursue this differentiation further by considering how, from a certain perspective, rhetorical approaches to analogy seem to disappear altogether with the rise of strong orientations in epistemology and are displaced by a more thoroughly psychological attention to analogy. The best way to capture this is to say that, as the distinction between internal and external evidence of probable knowledge gains currency, analogies are increasingly treated less as rhetorical constructions and more as natural appearances that impose themselves upon the mind. More precisely, the *disciplinary* rhetoric around analogy shifts from an indictment of the moral (or philosophic) character of those who use analogy (as apparent in Bacon and Locke) to an indictment of analogy’s duplicitous character itself. Analogy is treated less as a rhetorical problem and more as a psychological one, and it is treated much more seriously.

For Bacon, for instance, bad acts of analogy are almost wholly rhetorical. He only prescribes

[c]onformable and Analogous Instances which indicate (as I said at the beginning) Physical Resemblances; that is, real and substantial resemblances; resemblances grounded in nature, not *accidental* or *merely apparent*; much less *superstitious* or *curious* resemblances, such as the writers on natural magic (very frivolous persons, hardly to be named in connexion with such serious matters as we are now about) are everywhere parading; similitudes and sympathies of things that have no reality, which they describe and sometimes invent with great vanity and folly. (*Novum Organum* 176)

Bacon obviously doesn’t deny the existence of physical instances of analogy or the natural philosophical value of pursuing them. Indeed, he imagines his elusive and tantalizingly

¹⁴¹See Maxwell, “Are There Real Analogies in Nature?” in *The Life of James Clerk Maxwell*, eds Campell and Garnett, 235-44. For a contemporary analysis of this speech along these lines, see Henderson, “The Physics and Poetry of Analogy.”

underdeveloped *prima philosophia* as the complete articulation of what Katherine Park describes as “the real correspondences and similitudes stretching from object to object” (Park 294) that Bacon took to structure the universe. Bacon notes that these deeper resemblances are not “only similitudes, as men of narrow observation may conceive them to be, but the same footsteps of nature, treading or printing upon several subjects or matters” (*Advancement* 91). Powerful analogies are everywhere in nature, and people don’t take them seriously enough. They are not a mere matter of rhetorical “similitude.” Bad analogies, on the other hand, are distinctly a matter of rhetoric. The blame is laid not on analogy itself but on the bad natural philosopher who picks up and amplifies a superficial analogy or claims it is grounded in nature when it is in fact grounded in everything else *but* “nature” — attributable to the “writers” who are themselves “very frivolous persons” who “parad[e]” and “describe” and “invent with great vanity and folly” (2.27). The psychological act of analogizing is not itself in question; instead, it is the distortion and amplification of bad analogies by “frivolous persons” who are “hardly to be named in connexion with such serious matters as we are now about” (2.27). Analogical perception is not itself a serious problem for the true natural philosopher since it is so obviously different from these bad analogical acts. Bacon does not see the perceptual act of analogy as itself a mysterious or duplicitous aspect of *nature* that must be placed under investigation: he is confident in his own analogizing. He has a strong commonsense orientation, and he takes his own proper analogical perception to align deeply with nature, even as idols of the mind constantly threaten that alignment with “folly” and “vanity.” An alchemist has to work up and dress up natural analogy to create a bad one. It is an act of rhetorical idleness.

In contrast to Bacon, someone like Lawrence is more sympathetic to the error of analogical perception itself. Lawrence is still inclined to accuse Abernethy of superstition, but he is also more inclined to see superstition as something to which he himself could also succumb and against which he must arm himself. Good natural analogies do not sort themselves out from superficial ones as evidently as Bacon imagines. The threat of a lapse into a party spirit or superstition is constant. That’s what makes Abernethy’s rhetoric of analogy more serious and worth disciplining than idle and worth ridiculing. For Lawrence, this kind of analogizing is much more exploitative and therefore much more egregious. Vulgar passions are not idiosyncratic but common and difficult to resist, especially when they are aided by a compelling figure. And, for Lawrence, the risk of error occurs at the analogical perception of life, as a misreading of its

mysterious, hermeneutic character. That misreading sees a content and substance where it should see form and process. Analogy contributes to this misreading because it so thoroughly identifies that form and process as a kind of unity that analogy threatens to substantialize it. The difference between Lawrence's reflective vitalism and Abernethy's naive vitalism is finally that Lawrence knows how to read the force of the analogical perception of life in an agnostic, skeptical, and positivistic way, which is, finally, future-oriented and risk-averse, and this discipline must be maintained against his enthusiastic and baffled observation of the mysterious properties of life and the mysterious power analogy has in revealing them.

Of course, this is not to say that someone like Hartley or Campbell would not understand how the power of analogy might be harnessed and amplified through the art of rhetoric. And the distinction between rhetoric and "real" analogies remained a viable and important distinction within theological discussions of analogy from the deistic controversies of the early eighteenth century to Buchanan in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴² But, for Hartley and Campbell, as long as an act of figuration serves truth, it is not marked as rhetoric. Rhetoric only emerges *against* more righteous acts of analogical perception, and it is not the primary view of analogy itself, which is seen as a potent force for good as much as a dark art.

To gain some more definition between Bacon and Lawrence, I want to return to Reid's critique of Lockean epistemology discussed in the first chapter. As we have seen, this distinction between the "way of analogy" and the "way of reflection." Reid employs a distinction between "way of analogy" and the "way of reflection." In his theoretical response to Hume. Reid's objections to this line of thought can be regarded as strong commonsense: he is pointing to the inapplicability of commonsense figures within the critical realm. For Reid, a bad analogy between mental and material phenomena has distorted this entire line of thinking about the mind, and this analogy needs to be abandoned entirely to gain a clear picture. So Reid here is not that far from Lawrence.

¹⁴²Drawing on his survey of these early eighteenth-century theological approaches, Buchanan observes a distinction between "such analogies as may be employed for the purposes of proof, and such as are applicable only in the way of illustration. The latter may possess great power in the hands of the poet or the rhetorician, as a method of conveying to the minds of others a vivid idea of his meaning" but "the former only belong to the province of the reasoner" (62). And "real analogies" entail a "real resemblance between the two objects which are *directly* compared with each other, — as when knowledge, wisdom, power, justice, and goodness, as they exist in man, are say to be *analogous* to similar, but infinitely higher, perfections of God" (70). For all these appeals, the qualifying feature seems to be the relation of the image insofar as it figures that which cannot be represented (i.e. God).

The crucial question is how Reid thinks this bad analogy originates, since this question helps clarify why Reid feels the analogy must be policed. Reid sees the error as primarily *psychological*, not rhetorical. That is, Reid takes this bad analogy to have been illegitimately transferred from the practical “way of analogy” into the “way of reflection.” The problem is not that the analogy is bad in itself. It is valuable, indispensable, and even miraculous — God-given, instinctive, and available to everyone. The problem is that it is a weed in the garden of reflection. Analogy has no place in a theory of mind because Reid is distinctly optimistic about the possibility of an autonomous language fit to describe mental phenomena themselves. Indeed, Reid is one of the first philosophers to pursue what Michael Kearns, following Owen Flanagan, describes as an “autonomy thesis:” the idea that psychology should “frame its laws and principles in terms of its own specialized, autonomous vocabulary without trying to force translations into the vocabulary of any already existing natural science” (Kearns 4). Reid views this language as *unmarked* — non-rhetorical and observational — in a way that makes it an example of what Law describes as the “rhetoric of empiricism.”

Reid’s student, Dugald Stewart, would develop this critique in a more systematic, less stylized manner that fleshes out what he takes to be the psychological origins of this analogy. The error, for Stewart, is developmental. He writes in *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*:

In consequence of [an] early familiarity with the phenomena of the material world, they appear to us less mysterious than those of mind; and we are apt to think that we have advanced one step in explaining the latter, when we can point out some analogy between them and the former. It is owing to the same circumstance, that we have scarcely appropriated language with respect to mind, and that the words which express its different operations, are almost all borrowed from the objects of our senses. (Stewart *Elements* I.20)

So Stewart understands how the bad analogy arose, and he sees the clearest evidence of these origins in what Berkeley calls the “general analogy of language:” “Such transferences can hardly be ascribed to accident, but may be considered as proofs that the analogies which the philosopher afterwards points out between the objects which are distinguished by the same name, had been perceived by the inventors of language, although it is more probable that they never expressed them in words, nor could even have explained them if they had been questioned on the subject” (I.115-6). What is incomprehensible is how persistent and widespread this error has been in philosophic practice. Tracking down all of the thinkers that have succumbed to this bad analogy,

Stewart finds himself amazed at how persistent it has been despite its obvious inaccuracy, how thoroughly it has “retard[ed] the progress of the philosophy of mind” (I.19). How has it managed to impose itself on so many different thinkers? For Stewart, it is so obviously mistaken: “It must, however, appear manifest, upon a very little reflection, that as the two subjects are essentially distinct, and as each of them has its peculiar laws, the analogies we are pleased to fancy between them, can be of no use in illustrating either” (I.20). Stewart prescribes Reid’s autonomy thesis as a cure for this error.

Scholars have situated Reid and Stewart’s programmatic critique in illuminating but slightly misleading ways. Paul Hamilton, for instance, persuasively locates Reid and Stewart’s critique within a broader philosophical reaction to the problematic conflation of knowledge and vision installed by “empiricist metaphors for how we acquire knowledge” (28). But Hamilton’s account of the significance of this critique is suspiciously neo-Kantian. For Hamilton, Reid and Stewart are reacting against the constrictions this empiricist model places on epistemology. Reid and Stewart do this by revealing the basis of these metaphors to be psychological and rhetorical, not philosophical (read also: distorting not clarifying). For Hamilton, the *Common Sense* critique correctly observes that the “activity of imagination produc[es] the analogical character of language” (28) and, thus, these kinds of suspicious analogies. In other words, Reid and Stewart deconstruct this bad analogy by tracing it back to its imaginative (read: irrational) origins that empiricism “so ably rationalized” (40).

However, as we might expect, this critique has its limits in Hamilton’s neo-Kantian literary history. According to Hamilton, while *Common Sense* philosophy could diagnose the problem of empiricism in this manner, its “linguistic conservatism was not capable of providing a radical alternative to empiricism” (40). From Hamilton’s perspective, Reid and Stewart could not locate a non-analogical ground from which to levy its critique: *Common Sense*’s “appeal to the authority of ordinary language over the analogical language of philosophers could be a clear and precise way of dealing with misleading philosophical theories but for one thing: the problem is that Reid admits that the common language with which we describe acts of the mind is of course equally analogical and metaphorical” (38). This refusal to relinquish analogy simply exacerbates the empiricist regime. For Hamilton, “[w]hat was needed was an innovatory attitude quite opposed to the conservative temper of common-sense philosophy — new metaphors and analogies opposing those which empiricism so ably rationalized” (40). On this view, a Romantic

like Coleridge might have gathered a sense of the problem from Common Sense philosophy but would have had to turn to “German aesthetic theories, especially from those of Kant and Schiller” (39) to solve it.

I will take a look at Coleridge’s actual uptake of Common Sense analogy in the next chapter, but for the moment, we can find grounds for a non-Kantian interpretation by examining Hamilton’s account of how this empiricist metaphor gained its ascendancy in Locke and Hume. Hamilton speculates that the metaphor “may first have been conceived of as a useful tool for dealing with a highly abstract relation.” But the problem, for Hamilton, is that the metaphor “eventually...assume[s] control of the investigation which employed it” (28) and starts to obfuscate the relation it initially aimed to clarify: namely, the “nature of the correspondence between the basic items of knowledge and the basic particulars of experience” (28). I am persuaded by Hamilton’s claim that Locke and Hume might have first adopted this metaphor as an instructive kind of rhetoric. However, with this interpretive line, Hamilton departs significantly from Reid’s more naturalistic diagnosis of the problem in illuminating ways. Again, for Reid and Stewart, this analogy may be *linguistic* but it is *not* rhetorical: it is rather more psychological and developmental, a kind of superstition whose roots have been effaced. The nature of Reid’s critique is not that analogy itself is unnatural. He is not trying to imagine a way out of analogy; it is that *this* analogy — however natural and good in the world — is no good for philosophy. Philosophers should be *studying* it as linguistic phenomenon and evidence for commonsense, not *applying* it to construct models of mind which cannot honor the uniqueness of mental phenomena.

Simply put, we should view Reid and Stewart’s critique as emerging from their new optimism about an autonomous discourse of psychology that would not depend on these models, a discourse achieved through the empirical act of introspection. What is important is that, from this new perspective, even if Locke and Hume were employing this metaphor functionally, Reid would see it as a deeper psychological error. For Reid and Stewart, the mistake is embarrassingly psychological and unphilosophical, and it is because of its strange alignment with this psychological tendency that the analogy has been undetected and reified. But this seems like a newly optimistic way of viewing language’s representational capacities. Someone like Locke would have taken up his figurations fairly unapologetically, since he would have had a more pessimistic orientation towards language’s representative capacities than Reid or Stewart.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke seems to banish rhetoric from natural philosophical enquiry:

I confess, in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from [Wit and Fancy], can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat [and] they are certainly, in all Discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided. (Locke 508)

As de Man noted long ago, Locke's theory of mind is thoroughly metaphorical. De Man suggests that Locke "would have been the last man in the world to realize and to acknowledge" (16) this dependence, but I would argue that Locke was certainly aware of his figurative tendencies, and simply tolerated them because he had a more pessimistic sense of the ability of language to clarify more than it distorts as a medium. Wilbur Marshall Urban proposed nearly a century ago that "scepticism of the word is the underlying assumption of all periods of empiricism" (23). I would agree, but I would suggest that Locke and Reid's empiricism recommend different kinds of skepticism. Locke may have a low estimation of rhetoric and may see bad analogies as rhetorical problems, but, whatever Locke says about the "Art of Rhetoric" generally, he finds his own figures to be unproblematic because they are in the service of "order and clearness" (508). They lead judgment instead of misleading it. And Locke is putting them to skeptical, therapeutic uses: he is offering a less dogmatic picture of the way the mind works. This noble function means his figures are not marked as rhetoric.¹⁴³ However, for Reid and Stewart, this is not the case. Such metaphors are conspicuously false because Reid and Stewart are in search of a more thoroughly autonomous discourse of mind. For Reid and Stewart, they look conspicuously like illegitimate imports from the otherwise legitimate "way of analogy." Ironically, it is less Locke's own promotion of plain rhetorical style for empirical study than the criticism Locke would receive for failing to meet his own epistemic standard which helped ensure the currency and viability of a strong critical approach to analogy. Sir William Drummond, actually speaking of Locke's specious use of analogy in his account of the mind, captures this sentiment in *Academical Questions* (1805): "Now although it be very difficult to speak of the mind, without

¹⁴³For an illuminating and refreshing re-examination of Locke's metaphorical descriptions of mind, see Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth Century Thought*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

employing figurative language, and without borrowing something from analogy; yet it is altogether un-philosophical to build an argument on a trope, or a system on a simile” (28).

Reid and Stewart certainly anticipated they could achieve a more precise, less compromised description of the mind. But, we might ask, why did Reid and Stewart demand this new level of detail? Devin Griffiths has recently argued that Reid and Stewart might have been pursuing this account in part because it implies a dualist theory of mind amenable to their religious conservatism. Griffiths writes that in their focus on analogy Reid and Stewart “double[] down on skepticism: the insufficiency of analogy served as another example of the division between thought and the physical world” (“Intuitions of Analogy” 652). From Griffiths’ perspective, policing analogy in this way is less about shoring up an autonomous discourse of psychology but guarding against an encroaching materialism. I am more inclined to accept Griffiths’ appeal to commonsense conservatism here than I am to Hamilton’s, but I believe both appeals miss the partial and qualified nature of commonsense critiques of analogy.

I believe the best way to think about Stewart and Reid’s orientation towards analogy is to see them as newly interested in *examining* analogy as a disciplinary object — as a psychological and linguistic feature and as explicit evidence in favor of a universal, physiological common sense. Although Stewart and Reid rejected this analogy’s explanatory value as a theory of mind, it is also significant that both more or less accepted its value as supporting evidence and justification for other central commitments of common sense philosophy. For Stewart, the seemingly universal presence of such analogies across natural languages appeared to confirm the common-sense belief in the existence of “constituent principles of human nature, or in the universal circumstances of the human race,” “universal circumstances” which included *the habitual disposition to resort to analogy itself*.

For our purposes, the most important problem Stewart encounters in this naturalistic interrogation of analogy has to do with the indistinguishability between analogy and experience. In short, Stewart’s investigation of analogy’s role in perception causes him to depart from the more thorough confidence in this distinction someone like Campbell exhibits and to pursue a stronger, more critical account of analogy. In the second volume of *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Stewart explicitly worries over the dependence of all “evidence of experience” upon the process of analogy. For Stewart, the issue turns on what allows him to anticipate sameness between circumstances where there is always only similarity:

My question does not relate to the soundness of this inference, but to the principle of my nature, which leads me thus not only to reason from the past to the future, but to reason from one thing to another, which in its external marks, bears a certain degree of resemblance to it. *Something more than experience*, in the strictest sense of that word, is surely necessary to explain the transition from what is identically the same, to what is only similar; and yet my inference in this instance is made with the most assured and unqualified confidence in the infallibility of the result. No inference, founded on the most direct and long-continued experience, nor, indeed, any proposition established by mathematical demonstration, could more imperiously command my assent. (II.241).

These epistemological misgivings mirror Stewart's misgivings about the "transitional" properties in language itself, what he calls the "magical influence of a common name" (II.249). They result in his questioning the philosophical use to which this distinction between analogy and experience has been put: for Stewart,

this doubt [does not] lead merely to a question concerning phraseology: it produces a hesitation which must have some effect even on the judgement of a philosopher; the maxims to which we have been accustomed, in the course of our early studies, leading us to magnify the evidence of experience as the sole test of truth; and to depreciate that of analogy, as one of the most fertile sources of error. (II.462).

For Stewart, this indistinguishability between analogy and experience makes any attempt to relegate analogy to either a solely rhetorical or a lower epistemological status not only too easy but misguided. It leaves "much room...for the operation of good sense" and "of habits of scientific research, in appreciating the justness of that authority which, in particular instances, the popular forms of speech may assign to each" (II.410). As his thought on analogy develops, Stewart begins to acknowledge the indispensability of even disciplinary analogies for representing knowledge. Instead of banishing analogy altogether, elsewhere Stewart recommends "to *vary*, from time to time, the metaphors we employ, so as to prevent any one of them from acquiring an undue ascendan[ce] over the others, either in our own minds, or in those of our readers" for "it is by the exclusive use of some favourite figure, that careless thinkers are gradually led to mistake a simile or distant analogy for a legitimate theory" (Stewart "Tendency" 173).

4.8 Analogy as Assent: Associationist Aesthetics

With the last two sections, what I have tried to capture is the extent to which one should and should not distinguish between rhetorical and psychological accounts of analogy in the eighteenth century. From one perspective, I have argued that it is misleading to insist upon too strong a distinction between rhetoric and psychology because, for someone like Campbell, a rhetoric of analogy must absorb and reflect an epistemological account of analogy. From this perspective, it is the low epistemic status of analogy that explains what for Campbell is the obviously weak rhetorical purchase of analogy. For Campbell, analogy is simply different from experience and, once we depart into analogy, we are in a kind of speculative territory only indirectly related to experience and therefore inferior. However, from another perspective, I have tried to show that a psychological or epistemological account of analogy largely eclipses or displaces an older rhetorical account. By this I mean not only that philosophers attend more thoroughly to this epistemological and naturalistic aspect of analogical reasoning, but that they begin to privilege this naturalistic side of analogy as, in a sense, *non-rhetorical*. For someone like Lawrence or Stewart, this means not only a new appreciation for the scientific value of analogy but a new imperative to discipline it in certain contexts on account of its seductive psychological appeal. Again, for Stewart, taking the distance between experience and analogy for granted only opens oneself up for error. Analogy is inescapable and bad ones are not easily detected as partisan or idiosyncratic without a severe self-discipline.

However, despite this disciplinary aspect of strong critical thinking, someone like Stewart also perceives this widespread psychological disposition to analogy as a potential ground for uncovering something like a “universal” human nature. From my perspective, is only with this context in view that we can appreciate the intuitive appeal of eighteenth-century associationist aesthetics. As Cairns Craig notes, while “almost all accounts of Romanticism” take “...associationism...to be the dead weight from which Wordsworth and Coleridge had to release themselves before they could take flight on the wings of the Kantian transcendental” (43), it is possible to view associationist aesthetics as singling out different forms of “analogy” as evidence of what Craig calls the “the bond of our common existence” and “a reassertion of our sense of a shared identity” (59). What makes these universal bonds is that they are preserved *in* analogical perceptions that seem to unite widely different subjective perspectives as intimations of a universal order. What is most striking about these analogical associations, from an associationist

perspective, is how arbitrary they *should* or *seem* to be, and yet how *universal* they end up being. Associationist aesthetics seems to trace out “exceptional” accounts of analogy that depart from the more traditional theory of verisimilitude and which, on account of their potential significance as evidence of the ground of “common sense” and “communal assent” but also their perceived “poetic” aspect, manage to largely escape the critique levied against philosophical analogies by Reid and Stewart. In the next chapter, these exceptional accounts become important for a poet like Wordsworth.

One of the most important analogical perceptions seems to be the metaphor of taste itself. As David Marshall notes in his illuminating reading of analogy in Hume’s “Essay on the Standard of Taste,” the metaphor of “taste” was widely read as evidence of the very “possibility of a standard of taste” (324).¹⁴⁴ For an associationist like Henry Home, Lord Kames, taste is bound up inextricably with the moral sense. In *The Elements of Criticism*, Kames explains that both taste and the moral sense “discover what is right and what is wrong” and “rooted in human nature, and governed by principles common to all men” (14). Kames announces the “design of the present undertaking” to “trace the objects that are naturally agreeable, as well as those that are naturally disagreeable” so as to “discover, if we can, what are the genuine principle of the fine arts” (14). His aim is to establish a “foundation for reasoning upon the taste of any individual” to determine where it is “correct” and where “incorrect, perhaps whimsical” (14). For Kames, some of the strongest evidence comes from what he calls the “natural signs of emotions” or the “wonderful uniformity” by which “each class of emotions and passions being invariably attended with an external appearance peculiar to itself” (296). This language — by which we associate a smile with happiness, a frown with sadness — is “a natural language, expressing to all beholders emotions and passions as they arise in the heart” (296), and the skill of

¹⁴⁴Marshall proposes that what is appealing about this metaphor for Hume is the way it compresses (to use Manning’s term here) so as to articulate the nature of artistic taste. Marshall observes:

By beginning his essay on taste with a discussion of tongues, by underlining the dual meaning of tongue as language and organ of taste, Hume brings together two sets of metaphors that compel us to consider what it means to “employ these terms in the literal and metaphorical sense... Hume’s argument depends on our belief in the resemblance between mental and bodily taste, our acceptance of his claim that it does not matter whether we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense. Taste in the figurative sense, he asserts, is like taste in the literal sense” (235, 330).

Marshall argues that instead of answering the question of universal taste directly, Hume prefers to establish a hermeneutic relation between the literal and metaphorical concept of taste which will “prove what no one ever saw” (330). “It is this metaphor,” writes Marshall, “that will teach us how to apply” Hume’s story about tasting wine: “arguing by analogy, resemblance will teach us how to understand likeness” (330).

“deciphering” its “plain and legible characters” as well as “dark and more delicate expressions” comes from experience. Kames is astonished not only by the *arbitrary* nature of these relations but by their “remarkable conformity or resemblance to the passions that produce them” *despite* the ostensibly subjective processes by which we discover them. It speaks to a providential order: “That we should be conscious intuitively of a passion from its external expressions, is conformable to the analogy of nature: the knowledge of that language is of too great importance for it to be left upon experience; because a foundation so uncertain and precarious, would prove a great obstacle to the formation of society. Wisely therefore it is ordered and agreeably to the system of Providence, that we should have nature for our instructor” (305-6).

Later articulations of associationist theory tend to lose this providential interest, and take a more explicitly psychological and descriptive turn.¹⁴⁵ For Archibald Alison, in contrast to Kames, the interest seems to be less in the cultivation and discernment of “right” taste than in the preservation and cultivation of certain edifying natural progressions of mind which, from Alison’s perspective, are less corrupted by experience than they are effectively disciplined out in the developmental process. For Alison, what is initially striking about these associative trains of thought are how they passively and spontaneously arise from the encounter with certain objects: as Alison writes in his “Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste,” these associations require “no labour of thought, or habits of attention” and “rise spontaneously in the mind, upon the prospect of any object to which they bear the slightest resemblance” (21). They are also remarkably stimulating, and lead the mind “almost insensibly along in a kind of bewitching reverie, through all its store of pleasing or interesting conceptions” (21-22). For Alison, aesthetic reveries differ from the “ordinary trains of thought” structured by everyday concerns of logic, utility, and interest in one important which makes them worthy of special preservation and attention. While “in our ordinary trains of thought, there seldom appears any general principle of connection among the ideas which compose them” (76), in the “trains...suggested by objects of Sublimity or Beauty, however slight the connection between individual thoughts may be,” there seems to be “always some general principle of connection which pervades the whole, and gives them some certain and definite character” (77). The benefit of these associative trains, then, is not only that they are pleasurable, or generative: they are also distinctly unifying, both at the

¹⁴⁵ As Philip Flynn observes, “Alison was not the first to admit the vagaries of personal associations,” but prior associationists “tried hard to develop some objective standard of taste” and Alison remained convinced that “individual associations” were “inevitably shaped by our personal experience and temper” (7).

level of the individual mind and, insofar as they are registered and observed widely, at the level of community. For Alison, the problem with these kinds of aesthetic trains of thought is that, however natural or passive, they can also “decay” both temporarily and permanently. As these objects are approached with more explicit logics of self-interest and utility, the “disposition...or opportunity to consider them as objects of Taste diminishes” and “gradually disappears” (105). The threat is indifference: the condition where one might come to regard “elegance” and “magnificence” with “no farther emotion” than what one receives from “common furniture” (76). As such, associationist theory puts forth an imperative to cultivate and maintain these associations — and the process, preserve and clarify them. For Alison, practicing breeds a new, edifying kind of strength and potency in feeling: “the more that are our ideas are increased, or our conceptions extended upon any subject, the greater the number of associations we connect with it, the *stronger* is the emotion of sublimity and beauty we receive from it’ (my emphasis, 36-7).

Francis Jeffrey draws heavily from Alison’s associationist theory, but Jeffrey is focused more intently the role the sensitive poet plays in drawing out analogical perceptions for recognition and sustaining them. In one sense, the poet’s ability to detect these associations is simply a difference in degree rather than in kind: “What the poet does for his readers...by his original similes and metaphors...even the dullest of those readers do in some degree, every day, for themselves” (30), and “the beauty which is perceived, when natural objects are unexpectedly vivified by the glowering fancy” of the poets is “precisely of the same kind that is felt when the closeness of the analogy enables them to force human feelings upon the recollection of all mankind” (30). The difference is that the “poet sees more of beauty in nature than ordinary mortals, just because he perceives more of these analogies and relations to social emotion, in which all beauty consists” (30).¹⁴⁶ This higher sensibility would seem to isolate the poet’s taste, but the value of a poet’s analogical perceptions must finally be weighed in their communal

¹⁴⁶Here it seems worth noting that Jeffrey draws on a discourse of analogy to describe associations in a way that Alison simply does not. Alison is inclined to use analogy methodologically and heuristically – to consider, for instance the “very strong analogy” between the “progress of musical sounds, and the progress of sounds in the human voice” (159) or between the qualities of touch and “certain qualities of mind” (e.g. harsh, gentle, delicate). But, as we have seen, Alison also sees the perception of (even slight, undetected) resemblance as undergirding the perception of unity. And this leads Alison to assert that “to reduce a number of apparently dissimilar particulars under one general law of resemblance” affords not only “one of the strongest evidences of the exertion of wisdom and design” (in keeping here with the apologetic, providential bent of Kames) but “also productive of one of the strongest emotions of beauty which design can excite” (256).

reception. Jeffrey advises the young artist with the “ambition of creating beauties for the admiration of others” to “be cautious to employ only such objects as are the *natural* signs, or the *inseparable* concomitants of emotions, of which the greater part of mankind are susceptible” (39). If, on the other hand, a poet “obtrude upon the public, as beautiful, objects that are not likely to be associated in common minds with any interesting impressions” then his taste will then deserve to be called bad and false (39). In this manner, Jeffrey’s associationist criticism seems to marry the prescriptive impulse of Kames’ associationism with the more capacious, empirical impulse of Alison’s. Good taste is refined through the poet’s individual sensibility and wide experience (as in Alison). But right taste can and must be confirmed at the level of the community (as in Kames). For this reason, Jeffrey recommends that a poet cultivate “two tastes” — one private “to enjoy” and one public “to work by:” “one founded upon universal associations, according to which they finished those performances for which they challenged universal praise — and another guided by all casual and individual associations, through which they might still look fondly upon nature, and upon the objects of their secret admiration” (39). In the next chapter, I will want to consider how tension that associationist aesthetics constructs between the private and the public associations shapes Wordsworth’s sense of his own poetic practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Romantic Analogy Reconsidered

In the previous chapter, I pursued a broad survey of Enlightenment orientations towards analogy intended correct two major distortions introduced by the critical (and secular) lens Romantic literary scholars (especially under the sign of neo-Kantian Romanticism) have often use to assess eighteenth-century analogy. First, I recovered the currency of what I called “weak” orientations towards analogy cultivated within theology and rhetoric. Those weak orientations were not narrowly limited to the neo-Platonic divine analogy but were indeed more widespread, viable, and robust than the neo-Kantian secularization narrative of analogy’s ontological collapse would suggest. This robustness is best captured, positively, in the concept of “analogy-as-presumption” critically operative in both Butler’s physio-theological apologetic and natural theological arguments from design and best captured, negatively, in the anti-rationalist, skeptical critique this weak orientation articulates against the confident, rationalist project of formal analogy. Second, I recovered the distinctly psychological character of philosophical (and especially epistemological) treatments of analogy as a corrective to neo-Kantian attempts to portray eighteenth-century approaches of analogy as narrowly rhetorical (in anticipation of Romanticism’s cognitive approaches). This new recognition of the psychological role of analogy — specifically as it emerges out of Common Sense philosophy — motivates the strong critical disciplining of seductive but illegitimate analogies and also puts pressure on the crucial distinction between analogy and experience that underwrites the principle of *verisimilitude* endorsed within a strong commonsense theory of analogy. Finally, I illustrated how this psychological and naturalistic account of analogy helps explain the appeal of associationist aesthetics. For someone like Alison, weaker analogies (slighter, less visible resemblances) are valued largely because of their irrational and inexplicably communal aspect. For someone like Jeffrey, poets are valued for their sensitive ability to perceive and communicate such weaker analogies. I capture this appeal in the concept of “analogy-as-assent.”

In this chapter, I want to draw on this survey to think about Romantic philosophical and literary engagements with Enlightenment analogy. As we have seen, in the traditional, neo-Kantian view, the Romantics' generative turn away from analogy towards symbolism is taken to reflect a dissatisfaction with the moralizing tendencies of eighteenth-century analogical poetics. However, this account has largely been distorted by a neo-Kantian desire to narrate a secular break. Here I want to think about how this new philosophical context offers a different way to think about Romantic engagement with Enlightenment analogy.

5.1 Coleridge's Dim Analogies

The strongest material evidence for the traditional neo-Kantian view is a passage from Coleridge's 1802 letter to William Sotheby, from which we can extract the traditional reading of Coleridgean organicism. The letter features Coleridge's critique of the analogizing tendencies of his eighteenth-century predecessor and minor poet, William Leslie Bowles. Coleridge writes:

[Bowles'] whole [1802] volume is woefully inferior to it's [*sic*] Predecessor. There reigns thro' all the blank verse poems such a perpetual trick of moralizing every thing — which is very well, occasionally — but never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression. Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's own, & that we are all *one Life*. A Poet's Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature — & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similes. I do not mean to exclude these formal Similes — there are moods of mind, in which they are natural — pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will often have, & sometimes express; but they are not his highest, & most appropriate moods. They are 'Sermoni propiora' which I once translated — 'Properer for a Sermon.' (*Letters* 2:864).

The passage offers one of Coleridge's earliest articulations of an aesthetics founded on a principle of organic unity that would be seen not only as a hallmark of his poetics and his theory of imagination, but as a hallmark of Romantic poetics. It is an aesthetics whose articulation relies, importantly, on a series of critical binaries: the organic form it privileges ("combined, intimately combined, & unified") is defined against a mechanical or artificially imposed form ("merely held in solution & loose mixture"). Organic and mechanic forms are aligned respectively with the unifying and combining power of the Imagination and the mere aggregating power of the Fancy. The principle of organic unity is, finally, correlated with an emphasis on

attentive observation and close description, not explicit moral interpretation, of natural phenomena. For ease of reference, I will call this practice of close description Coleridge's descriptive imperative.

From the perspective of the traditional narrative we are examining, the special significance of this passage lies in the way that Coleridge's remarks can be and have been read as Romanticism's definitive critique of the eighteenth-century loco-descriptive and didactic tradition. Furthermore, they set the *desiderata* of the mid-century critic: to provide an objective justification for Coleridge's subjective but valid intuitions regarding the inferiority of Bowles' verse. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this passage in the break with analogical narrative. Nearly every major mid-century neo-Kantian refers to it. Wasserman quotes the passage in full as corroboration of his account of the lack of aesthetic value in eighteenth-century poetry ("Grounds" 21). The most important close reading of the period, W.K. Wimsatt's "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery" (1954), does all it can to exemplify the letter's critique in practice. The essay's central comparative analysis between Bowles' sonnet "To the River Itchin" (1789) and Coleridge's later imitation of that sonnet, "To the River Otter" (1796), is obviously suggested by the letter. Furthermore, Wimsatt's evaluation of the superiority of Coleridge's sonnet closely follows the same critical principles Coleridge outlines in the passage. Where Coleridge complains of a "loose mixture" in the shape of "formal Simile," Wimsatt identifies the non-integrated and "simple association (by contiguity in time)" of Bowles' sonnet's sensibility and structure, drawing this "simpler" form of association directly back to eighteenth-century associationist psychology. Coleridge, in contrast, demonstrates a greater concern with "the more complex ontological grounds of association (the various levels of sameness, of correspondence and analogy)" (108). This interest results in more than the "flat announcement of a Hartleian association" Bowles offers. Wimsatt likewise correlates that concern with Coleridge's greater emphasis on natural description: "...the speaker has kept his eye more closely on the object. There are more details. The picture is more vivid" (108)). The result is the poem's unified metaphoric structure, where "tenor and vehicle are...wrought in a parallel process out of the same material" (109).

In *Formal Charges* (1997), Susan Wolfson revisits the disciplinary debate surrounding the legacy of Coleridgean formalism. She argues, as I have above, that the terms of the debate were such that both mid-century critics *and* their deconstructive opponents overstated the extent

to which Coleridge (and, by extension, Romanticism) was committed to the principles of unity and organicism.¹⁴⁷ Wolfson suggests that, while it is impossible to deny the prominence of organicist rhetoric in Coleridge’s literary criticism, the necessity of disentangling Coleridge from organicism becomes apparent when we take into account how Coleridge’s various critical pronouncements in favor of organic unity and against simile typically rely on the use of simile and other analogical forms. Wolfson thus explores simile in Coleridge’s poetry as “a resource for representing those very orders of thought that symbol would overcome: the tentative, the provisional, the uncertain, the ambiguous, the illusory” (73). Finally, Coleridge’s “poetics of simile” should “contest [his] title as the champion of organic form and organicist ideology” (66). With this poetics in view, Wolfson suggest that Coleridge is “more accurately a double agent, invested in the several competing theories of poetic form that descend from Romanticism” (66). I will expand on the “poetics of simile” Wolfson locates in Coleridge’s poetic practice in the next section. But, for the moment, I want to follow her suggestion that we can find Coleridge simultaneously invested in a number of poetic theories — and more specifically, competing approaches to poetic uses of simile — and that these investments complicate the narrow picture of Coleridgean organicism constructed by mid-twentieth century neo-Kantian Romanticism.

Indeed, we can find evidence for Coleridge’s investment in competing theories in the same 1802 letter to Sotheby. Immediately following the passage on Bowles quoted above, for instance, Coleridge offers a “formal Simile” to illustrate the source of Bowles’ poetic inferiority. I leave the simile in context to provide the flavor of Coleridge’s epistolary style:

The truth is — Bowles has indeed the sensibility of a poet; but he has not the Passion of a great Poet. His latter Writings all want native Passion...but he has no native Passion, because he is not a Thinker — & has probably weakened his Intellect by the haunting Fear of becoming extravagant / Young somewhere in one of his prose works remarks that there is as profound a Logic in the most daring &

¹⁴⁷Perhaps more fundamentally, the many attempts to resuscitate the dynamic potential of Coleridgean organicism seem to grant, following the post-structuralist critique, that the *locus classicus* for this mid-century interpretation of Romanticism is in fact Coleridgean organicist poetics. But, in hindsight and with a sufficient appreciation for the mid-century’s neo-Kantian investments, the *locus classicus* of this neo-Kantian current is arguably more likely Shelley’s radical epistemology, as originally and systematically elaborated by Wasserman in his influential account of Shelley’s “skeptical idealism” and carried forward by John Wright, Jeannie Hall, Jerrold Hogle, William Keach, and, most recently, Mark Bruhn. To be sure, it is not necessarily incorrect or even misguided to identify mid-century criticism with Coleridgean organicism. But in light of deconstructionist efforts to claim Shelley for their own — most notably in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979) — it also seems possible to regard this emphasis on Coleridgean organicism as a kind of strategic diversion or, at least, as an easier target. This approach, for instance, distinctly encourages reading mid-century critics like Wasserman and Abrams backwards rather than forwards — tying them, for instance, to a discredited New Criticism at the expense of exploring their affinities with post-structuralist via Shelleyan poetics.

dithyrambic parts of Pindar, as in the ___ of Aristotle — the remark is a valuable one /

Poetic Feelings, like the flexuous Boughs
Of mighty Oaks, yield homage to the Gale,
Toss in the strong winds, drive before the Gust,
Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering Leaves;
Yet all the while, self-limited, remain
Equally near the fix'd and parent Trunk
Of Truth & Nature, in the howling Blast
As in the Calm that stills the Aspen Grove. —
That this is deep in our Nature, I felt when I was on Sca' fell... (2:864)

The poetic simile is Coleridge's own; the poem from which it is drawn, "To Matilda Betham from a Stranger," was by most critical accounts drafted September 9th, 1802, just the day before he postmarked his letter to Sotheby.¹⁴⁸ The simile occupies an ambiguous position between what we have been describing as neoclassical and Romantic poetics. There are evident confluences between tenor and vehicle, for instance, that for a mid-century critic would signal an organic unity: "Feelings" replaces "Boughs" as the subject of "yield," "drive," and "remain;" the oak's trunk, as a possession of "Truth" and "Nature," is equally part of the moral and the natural order. On the other hand, the simile is highly symmetrical, its argumentative content neatly reproduced in two four-line groups in the manner that aligns it with the neoclassical model. The comparison between feeling and oak does not afford any moralizing interpretation of nature. But its argument does appear to endorse the characteristic commitments of neoclassical poetics: systematic interpretation of moral order through natural order ("Poetic Feelings, like the flexuous Boughs/Of mighty Oaks"), affective response ("giddy storm of fluttering Leaves") tempered by judgment ("self-limited") and equanimity ("equally...in howling Blast/As in the Calm"), and finally "poetic truth" supported by "truth to Nature" ("remain/Equally near the fix'd and parent Trunk/Of Truth & Nature").

The presence of this simile in the same letter as Coleridge's critique should be enough to suggest that the relation between Coleridge's organicism and its neoclassical predecessor is more complicated than Wimsatt's analysis would suggest. It also complicates the standard developmental narrative that claims that Coleridge, though "under the influence of Bowles" in his earlier *Descriptive Sketches*, had renounced that influence by 1802. Citing Coleridge's

¹⁴⁸For the date of composition, see Feldman 91.

playful, self-reflexive mockery of his own analogizing tendencies in earlier poems like “Frost at Midnight,” Wolfson suggests that Coleridge’s criticism of Bowles may in fact be a form of “self-discipline” (66). But the newly minted simile should dissuade us from relying exclusively on these developmental scenarios. Rather, it recommends that we take Coleridge’s explicit qualification of his critique of formal Simile (e.g. “I do not mean to *exclude* these formal Similes — there are moods of mind, in which they are natural”) not as *pro forma* but as meaningful critical exception and as an attempt to temper the hierarchy of these forms almost as soon as he constructs it.

A third approach to analogy occurring later in the letter presents other more difficult challenges to the aesthetic principles neo-Kantian critics have extracted from it. Coleridge’s thoughts turn from a critical distinction between Greek and Hebrew poetry, to the writings of Plato and, finally, to the poetry of John Milton. Coleridge then mulls over what he takes to be an allegorical moment within Milton’s masque, *Comus* (1634):

Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
 But of divine effect, he cull’d me out;
 The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
 But in another country, as he said,
 Bore a bright golden flow’r, but not in this soil:
 Unknown, and like esteem’d, and the dull swain
 Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon:
 And yet more med’cinal it is than that moly
 That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave;
 He call’d it haemony, and gave it me,
 And bad me keep it as of sovereign use
 ‘Gainst all enchantments, mildew, blast, or damp,
 Or ghastly furies’ apparition (629-41)

Coleridge’s interpretation of the passage as allegory centers on the figure of the “small unsightly root.” It is prompted by a recognition of an inconsistency in the poet’s (or, more precisely, the guide’s) description of a plant. The inconsistency is so obvious, Coleridge argues, Milton must have introduced it intentionally. He writes, by way of introduction,

What an unthinking & ignorant man we must have supposed Milton to be, if without any hidden meaning, he had described [the root] as growing in such abundance that the dull Swain treads on it daily — & yet as never *flowering* — Such blunders Milton, of all others, was least likely to commit (866).

Coleridge then offers a line-by-line exegesis of the passage as an “Allegory of Christianity”:

Do look at the passage — apply it as an Allegory of Christianity, or to speak more precisely of the Redemption by the Cross — every syllable is full of Light! — A small unsightly Root — to the Greeks Folly, to the Jews a stumbling Block — [‘]The leaf was darkish & had prickles on it[‘] — If in this Life only we have hope, we are of all men the most miserable / & [a] score of other Texts — [‘]But in another country, as he said, Bore a bright golden Flower[‘] — the exceeding weight of Glory prepared for us hereafter / — [‘]but [not] in this soil, unknown, & like esteem’d & the dull Swain treads on it daily with his clouted shoon[’] / The Promises of Redemption offered daily & hourly & to all, but accepted scarcely by any — [‘] He called it Haemony[’] — Now what is Haemony? — Αἷμα-οἶνος — Blood-wine. — And he took the wine & blessed it, & said — This is my Blood — / the great Symbol of the Death on the Cross (866).

Without pursuing the precise Biblical coordinates and “score of other Texts” informing Coleridge’s allegorical reading of Milton, we should be able to draw out at least two difficulties it presents to Coleridge’s assumed organicist aesthetic. For Coleridge to accept Milton’s allegorical meaning, he must not only allow for Milton’s appropriation of natural scenery for moral purposes; he must also allow that such an appropriation necessitates Milton’s departure from an accurate description of Nature. Milton’s allegorical intention only becomes visible once we notice the contradictory presentation of natural fact. Even more surprising, however, is that Coleridge’s rendering of the Haemony plant as a displaced Christological symbol implies that these departures from his descriptive imperative in fact realize his aesthetics of organic unity.¹⁴⁹

Because of the tendency to extract Coleridge’s critique from its context, critics rarely note either the neoclassical simile or the Christian allegory that follow it in the letter, much less the ways these other figures discourage or at least complicate such an extrapolation. In one of the few pieces that address Coleridge’s reading of Milton’s *Comus*, Lucy Newlyn suggests that Coleridge maintains “an implicit distinction between the Bowlesian ‘trick of *moralizing* everything’, and the power Milton has to perceive and create through symbols” (125), but her evidence for this claim is somewhat thin.¹⁵⁰ Even if Coleridge did imply such a distinction, it offers no insight into the evident conflict between Coleridge’s moral reading of Milton’s nature imagery and his descriptive imperative. A more viable explanation might be that Coleridge here,

¹⁴⁹Though the argumentative transition is not entirely clear in the letter, Coleridge presumably presents the passage from *Comus* (and its interpretation) to illustrate the commonality of Hebrew poetry, English poetry, and the writings of Plato as expressions of “*imagination*, or the *modifying*, and *co-adunating* Faculty” where “each Thing has a Life of it’s own, & yet they are all one Life” (866).

¹⁵⁰For Newlyn, the distinction is sustained and transferred through Coleridge’s earlier comparison of Greek and Hebrew poetry which implicitly maps to the poetry of Bowles and Milton, respectively. But, while Milton, as the representative of English poetic tradition, is correlated explicitly with Hebrew poetry, Bowles is not mentioned.

as in other places, amends his general critical preferences to make room for Milton's poetry.¹⁵¹ But this explanation would still support what the presence of these three approaches to analogy seems to imply: despite the prestige that Coleridge's critique of Bowles has enjoyed within twentieth-century criticism, Coleridge in his letter to Bowles fails to endorse any single categorical approach to analogy. One might argue that Coleridge does arrive at a trans-historical account of poetry as a product of the imagination, but his reading of Milton demonstrates that he is able to see the imagination at work in both moral and descriptive approaches to nature.

In addition to raising questions about Coleridge's unilateral commitment to organicism, Coleridge's allegorical reading of Milton — and its absence within the criticism — should also direct us to another major difficulty with the break-with-analogy narrative: namely, its problematic interpretation of Coleridge's descriptive imperative. Within the mid-century account, there is a distinct tendency to convert Coleridge's emphasis on description over moral interpretation into a claim about the increasingly secular quality of Romantic approaches to Nature. We can observe this secularizing tendency in Wimsatt's foundational close reading. Neither Bowles' nor Coleridge's sonnet offers any explicit religious content, but, in his final analysis of Romantic poetry, Wimsatt declares that

[t]he common feat of the romantic nature poets was to read meanings into the landscape...that meaning especially was summoned *out of the very surface of nature itself*. It was embodied imaginatively and *without the explicit religious or philosophic statements* which one will find in classical or Christian instances...or in the teleological divines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or in Paley during the same era as the romantics (110, my emphasis).

Wasserman likewise emphasizes the Romantic interest in “perception as an act of self-knowledge,” which he frames as the Romantic poet's active engagement with the epistemological questions raised in the eighteenth-century. This emphasis allows him to bracket ontological and theological concerns in Romantic poetry: “Of course epistemologies involve ontologies and can, and did, interconnect with theologies; but the epistemological problem is radical to [Romantic] poetry as poetry” (“Grounds” 22). Both Wasserman and Wimsatt are eager to demonstrate the irrelevance of traditional religious ontology or theology to Romantic poetry,

¹⁵¹Theresa Kelley has recently noted how Milton's allegorical treatment of Sin in *Paradise Lost* also presents challenges to Coleridge's more-or-less categorical dismissal of allegory in his literary critical lectures (Kelley 219). This point about critique of allegory should be made more explicitly re-Coleridge's reading of *Comus*. As things stand, a reader might think you see a consistency between allegory and organicism.

while also framing the Romantic attention to epistemology as a necessary consequence of the supposed collapse of that ontology.

From a modern, secular perspective, it may be tempting to read Coleridge's preference for "natural" over "moral" types of description or his witty gloss of the Horatian phrase *Sermoni propiora* (typically translated as "more proper for conversation") as "Properer for a Sermon" as early Romantic arguments for the separation of moral and aesthetic interest. Yet, Coleridge's reading of Milton suggests the limits of Coleridge's critique of Bowles' moralizing tendencies and raises questions about his interpretation of "Nature's proper interest." As Newlyn observes, Coleridge's ecstatic and idiosyncratic interpretation may say little about Milton's *Comus*. But it does uniquely demonstrate "how strongly Coleridge believes that poetry is 'consecrated by being emblematic of some Truth'" and "reveals, moreover, what sort of 'Truth' he has in mind... Coleridge values symbolic vision, in its sacramental sense, more highly than any other mode of perception or creation" (Newlyn 125). Coleridge may balk at the manner in which Bowles evades a fuller, more thorough engagement with Nature. But in his reading of Milton, what matters is explicitly how Milton's description *departs* from an engagement with Nature as it is. Coleridge reads this departure as not only meaningful but profound and prophetic, a gesture towards the world to come and a license to elaborate his allegorical interpretation. Here, Coleridge's allegorical reading seems guided by his theologically-inflected understanding of "analogous" language as language in which "a thing, power, or principle in a higher dignity is expressed by the same thing, power, or principle in a lower but more known form" (*Aids to Reflection* 35). Coleridge, in other words, shows a decidedly weak, theological orientation towards analogy. As a whole, these considerations support Jager's remarks about the distortions introduced by the secularizing tendencies of neo-Kantian Romanticism and Tomko's more specific objections to representing Coleridge as "enabl[ing] a secularized literary studies" (Tomko 2) at the expense of neglecting the interplay of his theological and poetic investments.

5.2 Wordsworth's Visual Analogies

In "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul de Man puzzles over the ease with which Wimsatt claims that, in Romantic poetry, "closer attention to surface engenders greater depth" ("Rhetoric" 194). In "Form and Intent in American New Criticism," de Man asks, "can we take [a] continuity between depth and surface...for granted? Is it not rather the most problematic issue with which

the theory of poetry will have to deal?” (“Form and Intent” 23). I would agree with de Man here, and I would say that Wimsatt’s elision of this difficult problem — especially as it is foregrounded in Romantic poetry — seems encouraged by Wimsatt’s preoccupation with secularizing Romantic ways of seeing: that is, with distinguishing Romantic interpretations of Nature from those offered by Christian apologetics and, more generally, with establishing a ground for Romantic meaning in the absence of theological traditions. With this imperative, Romantic attention to surface might easily register an implicit *rejection* of those traditions.

In her reading of this debate, Wolfson concurs with de Man against Wimsatt regarding the persistence and difficulty of this problematic of surface and depth. She proposes, in turn, that “the Romantics’ poetics of simile, in theory and in practice, had already posed the question” (71). For Wolfson, Coleridge “not only thought about the problem, but experienced it as a condition of his intellectual pleasures” (71). It is a specifically “intellectual” pleasure since, in Wolfson’s formalist analysis, the structure of simile itself — a structure “negotiated by likeness and difference” — “spells out the contrary impulses” of the “mind’s analytic impulses” (71). On this view, Romantic invocations of simile uniquely interrogate the “opposition” of these impulses, which gives simile “its figurative capacity to set the power of language to construct, connect, and refer against its potential exposure of absence, supplement, and difference.” In this way, Wolfson takes Romantic uses of simile to “tap[] a latency in the classical conception of representation as *verisimile*” (71).

Wolfson’s formal analysis of simile is insightful, but, with the intellectual history I have been sketching in view, one need not turn to the classical conception of *verisimile* as a means of articulating either the nature or significance of Coleridge’s intellectual interest in simile. From my perspective, Common Sense philosophy would have thoroughly elevated this problematic of verisimilitude. It would not have been latent, but salient and even ubiquitous.¹⁵² More

¹⁵² Consider the following entry from Coleridge’s *Notebooks*:

Nay, but (pops in my Man of Edinburgh or Aberdeen) we see a great number of figures more or less like each other/and then form arrange them, putting that first which all the others may follow, each according to its degree of similitude... Yet what is *Likeness*? How come we by this power of arranging things by a *Law of Likeness*? Surely, before I can perceive the likeness of some 50 or a 100 different things to each other (shades of Green, for instance) I must have some general Idea of that, in which they resemble. (*Notebooks* 4047).

What is striking is how thoroughly this appeal to the “law of likeness” is associated with Scottish philosophy. “My Man of Edinburgh or Aberdeen” seems to be not directed at any particular thinker (say, Hume) but a broadly painted caricature. Of course, if Coleridge registers a familiarity with this discourse, he also registers a clear dissatisfaction

importantly, associationist aesthetics (especially as interpreted by Jeffrey) would have articulated its relation to the more general poetic problematic of “surface and depth” in an original and robust manner, as a problem of private and public associations and, in turn, a problem of analogical perception. It is better to see a Romantic poetics of simile drawing on and interrogating this associationist framework rather than establishing a new one.¹⁵³

As many critics have noted, in his poetic theory, Wordsworth tends to elevate the perception of “similitude in dissimilitude” as a central — if not constitutive — poetic act.¹⁵⁴ In the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth describes the “pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude” as the “great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder” (610). For Wordsworth, even the structure and quality of “our taste and our moral feeling” depend themselves “upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude are perceived” (610). I want to link Wordsworth’s normative

with its overconfident (“pops”) and, from his perspective, impoverished appeal to analogy. And it leads Coleridge to posit something like a Platonic idea that exists prior to these analogical comparisons to arrange and integrate them.

Coleridge’s dissatisfaction seems to be the exception in most philosophical circles — where, as we have seen in the previous chapter, analogy was embraced as a fairly parsimonious (if also mysterious) psychological mechanism. In *Zoonomia* (1794), we find Erasmus Darwin mulling over analogy’s strange integrative function:

...[I]n our waking hours, whenever an idea occurs, which is incongruous to our former experience, we instantly dis sever the train of imagination by the power of volition, and compare the incongruous idea with our previous knowledge of nature, and reject it. This operation of the mind has not yet acquired a specific name, though it is exerted every minute of our waking hours; unless it may be termed INTUITIVE ANALOGY. It is an act of reasoning of which we are unconscious except from its effects in preserving the congruity of our ideas, and bears the same relation to the sensorial power of volition, that irritative ideas, of which we are unconscious except by their effects, do to the sensorial power of irritation; as the former is produced by volition without our attention to it, and the latter by irritation without our attention to them. (Darwin 196).

The concept of this involuntary or automatic operation appears so novel to Darwin (“not yet acquired a specific name”) that he appears to run in some conceptual confusion. Darwin qualifies intuitive analogy as an “act of reasoning” which disrupts an incongruous train is by an exertion of the “power of volition,” but he also asserts that we are “unconscious” of this activity of intuitive analogy except from its “effects” of “preserving the congruity of our ideas” (196). Finally, Darwin must figure it through another, more familiar analogy an analogy between this unconscious, involuntary process and that of “irritation” or reflexive response to outside stimulation. It is unclear how something might be “produced by volition *without* our attention to it” (196). It is also unclear how one would even be able to observe these “effects” since those effects ultimately manifest as a perceived congruity of ideas over time, that is, a perceived indistinguishability and resemblance between past and present thought. Nevertheless, Darwin’s speculation marks out what may be considered the limit of the epistemological account of analogy holding that, while we may consciously employ analogy in some context, in some way analogical reasoning must be operating in some sense outside rationality or conscious reflexion, constituting the very conditions of rationality or logic itself.

¹⁵³ With this claim about the robustness of associationist aesthetics, I follow Craigs Cairn’s call to “dispose immediately of those versions of literary and intellectual history that assume that associationism is necessarily both materialistic and mechanical” (46).

¹⁵⁴ Wolfson, for instance, describes Wordsworth as “more deeply devoted to this principle than to any other” (71).

concept of “accuracy” with his broader associationist “intention” to “illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are *associated* in a state of excitement” (my emphasis, 598). We get a sense of what Wordsworth means by “accuracy” through another associationist passage:

I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connections of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. (612)

Wordsworth’s deference to the communal and general here offers an important correction to the frequent (neo-Kantian) identification of Romantic poetic practice specifically with a kind of unapologetic pursuit of an idiosyncratic or private mythology.¹⁵⁵ Here, Wordsworth identifies idiosyncrasy as a form of error, and he describes that error in the recognizably associationist terms we saw Jeffrey employ: as a matter of presenting “particular” rather than “general” associations — or, alternatively, as a matter of “arbitrary” rather than natural connections. Admittedly, I can only speculate whether or not analogical perception — again, for Wordsworth, the “great spring of the activity of our minds” — in fact generates these associations. Yet, Wordsworth seems to acknowledge, with Jeffrey, that the validity of any perception of “similitude in dissimilitude” cannot be confirmed individually (or even immediately) but by a broader community. This is already evident in Wordsworth’s frequent and consistent use of the first-person plural: “our feelings,” “our taste,” and “our moral feeling.” The right perception of similitude in dissimilitude might shape “our taste,” but it also must be confirmed as *our* taste.

I am less interested in how Wordsworth’s associationism frames his understanding of what poetic error looks like — that is, as particular against the universal — than I am in how this associationist framework (as developed by Alison’s descriptive interpretation) allows him to conceive of this error — that is, the risk of idiosyncrasy — as *itself* a universal psychological aspect “from which no man can protect himself” (612). As Wordsworth goes on to claim, the “Reader” like the “Poet” is “exposed to the same errors” of idiosyncratic association and “perhaps in a much greater degree:” for Wordsworth, “...there can be no presumption in saying,

¹⁵⁵ In the *Mirror and the Lamp*, for instance, Abrams argues that, whereas earlier neo-classical poets’ use of figuration was bound by a kind of decorum, in Wordsworth’s poetic theory and practice, “the generic reference to the poet’s own affective state, together with that to the creative operations of the poet’s mind, are now the sole warrant for all valid poetic figures of speech” (290)

that it is not probable [the Reader] will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other” as the poet. After all, continues Wordsworth, since reader is “much less interested in the subject” he may be more prone to judge such associations “lightly and carelessly” (612).

Wordsworth thematizes this kind of error of associationism in his poetic practice as a means of viewing the imagination at work, as a means of achieving depth through surface.¹⁵⁶ Here I draw on Wolfson’s observations that Wordsworth often employs simile to figure “extreme aberration,” “illusion and error,” and, more generally, the “self-generating energies of imagination” (79). These affiliations lead Wolfson to propose that simile functions as “a rhetoric of uncertainty...underwriting the process by which a chance event gets read into significance” (74). Wolfson has Coleridge’s *Rime* specifically in view with this comment about the “rhetoric of uncertainty,” but I want to explore the role of such a rhetoric in two poems from Wordsworth, “Resolution and Independence” and “The Thorn.” My interest here will be how this rhetoric of simile is used to mark and interrogate a more general risk which Common Sense philosophy identifies as the presumptuous character of analogical reasoning: the way analogy reads or projects depth into and onto surface, or alternatively, draws together the surface of experience to generate a depth. In the last chapter, we saw Stewart grapple with problem of analogy as it “imperiously command[s]...assent” (241), but Hume is the first to identify analogy as a problem of presumption, as a kind of circularity inherent to probabilistic reasoning. For Hume, “probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have experience, and those, of which we have had none” (*Treatise* 63). But, if this is the case, “’tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability” since “the same principle cannot be both the cause and effect of another” (63). This is why, for Hume, belief must be “more properly” an act of the “sensitive” not the “cogitative” part of our nature, more imaginative and affective than rational construction. From my perspective, associationist aesthetics translates this psychological problem to an aesthetic one. The poet too must always read “general associations” through “particular ones,” depth through surface: with the poet’s pursuit of assent comes the risk of presumption. Alternatively, in associationist aesthetics the work of imagination is most salient

¹⁵⁶ It’s also worth noting in passing how thorough a probabilistic framework — e.g. presumption, probable — organizes Wordsworth’s rhetoric.

at its most presumptuous and erroneous. I take this to be Coleridge's central charge that Bowles has "no native Passion, because he is not a Thinker — & has probably weakened his Intellect by the haunting Fear of becoming extravagant" (2:864). Thought and passion are not only linked, as they are in Hume. Thought is marked by its presumptuousness.

I have specified that Wordsworth explores error in his "poetic practice" because we will have to depart, in some sense, from Wordsworth's theoretical descriptions of his poetics, largely because in these Wordsworth is more inclined to privilege the "stability" over the "fickleness" of the "relations of particular idea" and, in turn, to align this privileged term of "stability" with a privileged term of generality. In the preface to *Poems* (1815), for instance, Wordsworth figures the difference between comparisons drawn by the fancy and imagination as concerned, respectively, with "stable" and "fickle" features — or, alternatively, as superficial and deep features. Comparisons of the fancy are as "capricious as the accidents of things;" they center on "form and feature;" they offer an "unstable and transitory" effect and are "given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature" (636). In contrast, a comparison of the imagination does not necessarily "strike on the first presentation;" rather, "a sense of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows — and continues to grow — upon the mind" (636). A comparison of the imagination speaks to "inherent and internal" properties, it "incite[s]" and "support[s] the eternal" and remains conscious of an "indestructible dominion" (636).

This theoretical preference for depth over surface, stability over instability, is perhaps to be expected. And yet, in the 1815 *Preface*, when Wordsworth goes on to discuss specific examples of the imagination, his analysis of comparisons formed by the Imagination takes for granted the importance of surface similarity as the occasion for imaginative comparison: imaginative comparisons "take[] advantage of the appearances of the senses" (631) — that is, they capitalize for their cognitive effect on the contingency of sense, viewed as an entry point for encountering deeper structural relations; they "endow" objects "with properties that do not inhere in them upon an incitement from properties and qualities the existence of which is inherent and obvious" (632). The power of the analogical comparison is its ability to impose outside qualities: to *disrupt* these "inherent and internal properties" with images that "invariably modify each other" (636). Wordsworth's major example is the train of association gathering around the leech gatherer in "Resolution and Independence:"

As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie

Couched on the bald top of an eminence,
Wonder to all who do the same espy
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endowed with sense,
Like a Sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun himself.

Such seemed this Man; not all alive or dead,
Nor all asleep, in his extreme old age.
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth altogether if it move at all.

Here is Wordsworth's commentary in the Preface to *Poems* (1815):

In these images, the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination, immediately and mediately acting, are all brought into conjunction. The Stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the Sea-beast; and the Sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison. (633).

In the example prior, Wordsworth discusses an earlier line from the same poem — “Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods” (5) — and draws out the “intervention of the metaphor *broods*” which “mark[s] the manner in which the Bird reiterates and prolongs her soft note, as if herself delighting to listen to it, and participating in a still and quiet satisfaction, like that which may be supposed inseparable from the continuous process of incubation” (633). The account is not a bad description for the kind of meditative practice that the narrator of the poem performs on the old man's image, or that Wordsworth performs in his critical commentary. Indeed, the poem seems to foreground this meditative act itself (“a minute's space I guess/I watched him...” (60-61)).

The interplay I want to describe between surface and depth here can be accessed along two avenues. First, we can access it by focusing on Wordsworth's description of the stone and the man “unit[ing] and coalesc[ing] in just comparison” (633). Here, Wordsworth presumably intends *just* in one of its many normative senses. With Wordsworth's invocation of “accuracy” in the *Preface*, we can see *just* as a kind of aesthetic measure of proper agreement or proportion. On this reading, the claim might be that the comparison conforms to prior expectations about the

activity of imagination: the comparison in this manner is just because it *unites* and *coalesces* in the way Imagination should. Or, alternatively, we can see *just* as an estimation of the achievement of the comparison, its suitability for a certain end. Taken with the first interpretation of *just* (and the critical context in which Wordsworth invokes this passage as exemplification), that end would seem to be the illustration of imagination.

The difficulty with these readings of *just* as normative is that they would appear to emphasize the accuracy or precision of this comparison, whereas what is foregrounded in Wordsworth's description is its imprecision as an act of steady approximation along degrees of gradation. That imprecision is foregrounded in the open-ended phrasing "*something* of the power of life" and "*some* of its vital qualities." There are no specific aspects of comparison treated: the stone, the sea-beast, man, and cloud are taken as integrated wholes: indeed, the cloud image seems to align their immobility with their integrity. From another angle, while Wordsworth wants to emphasize the completeness of this comparison (the full "unity" of stone and man), what is consistently foregrounded in the poem is the transitional aspect of both the old man and the stone his figure invokes. The stone's perched status makes it seem "endued with sense," while the old man is "not all" dead or alive, asleep or awake. Finally, while the critical context fixes the intentionality of this comparison as a kind of illustration, this does not resolve the question of what function, if any, the comparison serves within the poem. Indeed, the critical context of the Preface abstracts the comparison in such a manner that seems to emphasize its sheer superficiality and visuality: its limited interest in "figure" and signifier ("indication") and, more generally, on "seeming" primarily as a bare kind of "seeing." With the mid-century claims that, in Romantic poetry, "meaning especially was summoned out of the very surface of nature itself" or that "perception" functions itself "as an act of self-knowledge," one gets the sense that a "just comparison" is somehow *just* — that is, simply — comparison.

This line of interpretation is one way to generate depth from surface, and this reading would seem to depend on the assumption that the poet's act of comparison (much like its critical commentary) has no explicit moral function, but rather has something of an ostensive function: it is comparison for comparison's sake. Taken in isolation in this manner, one might be able to forward such a claim about the non-moral or even anti-moral aspect of the comparison. The comparison takes a man and, through a visual analogy, "reduces" him to a stone or a sea-beast. It is hard to see how this amounts to an elevating act of comparison.

But the moralizing impulse of the poet-narrator elsewhere in the poem complicates this reading. If the leech gatherer seems like a stone or a sea-beast in this passage, the leech gatherer also did seem “like a Man from some far region sent; To give me human strength, and strong admonishment” (118-9). It is here, in other words, that we see simile arise to negotiate, as Wolfson notes, “a chance event” which is “read into significance” (118-9). The young poet-narrator has his own trick of moralizing his encounter with the leech gatherer. He consistently attempts to elevate the leech gatherer as a kind of individual moral lesson, as a “stately” figure (103, 143) who has arrived providentially to chastise the narrator. The poet-narrator surmises that the leech gatherer has arrived by some “peculiar grace” to draw him out of his own preoccupied isolation in which “up and down my fancy thus was driven” (53). In this context, de Man’s concession to Wimsatt’s reading that in Romantic poetry “...[t]he relationship with nature has been superseded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in that last analysis, is a relationship of the subject towards itself” (195-6) seems relevant, but differently so. The question turns on how privileged or problematic this self-reflexive turn should be regarded. As we have seen, the mid-century neo-Kantian critique finds it worth celebrating. But is this the unqualified conclusion the poetry offers up? To put this in the terms I have developed: is this self-reflexive turn more heroic or idiotic?

Indeed, “Resolution and Independence” seems to recapitulate this entire progression that de Man describes, as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The poet-narrator’s mediation on nature morphs into his melancholic general meditation on the occupational hazard of poetry before being interrupted by his enigmatic intersubjective, inter-personal encounter with the otherness of the leech gatherer. But, through that encounter, the narrator is also so preoccupied, so self-absorbed, that his encounter with the leech gatherer is finally an encounter with himself. He is inclined to treat the leech gatherer as his own psychological construction: “the whole Body of the man did seem/Like one whom I had met with in a dream” (117). Here again, simile occurs to mark the poet-narrator’s attempt to elevate his encounter. In this context, the narrator’s analogizing is associated with his pre-occupation. So how seriously should we take the poet-narrator’s analogizing? Is it more a sign of truth or error?

We can address the question along a second avenue by considering the figuration of stability and instability throughout the poem. Once again, it is worth moving out from the central image Wordsworth extracts in the commentary to see how the patterns there can and cannot be

extracted meaningfully from the broader progression. From within the figure, the stability and continuity of the old man's form and of the poet's "watching" generate the instability of the poet-narrator's analogical perception. It is the man's "continuing motionless" that generates the comparison with the stone. The fixity of form incites the poet-narrator to what Wordsworth calls elsewhere a "play with simile," which runs through "loose types of things." The visual play generates in turn a conceptual instability, in which the contraries of inanimate and animate — stone and man — are gradually (even mediately) brought together in "just comparison" (633). It is through this activity that the oppositions of animation and in-animation seems to be fruitfully destabilized: not only "endowed with properties that do not inhere with them" but somehow set into an open-ended relation that defies their difference. Here Schey's insight that analogy "both opens and leaves open the question of relation" (184) seems particularly apt. The entire structure is destabilizing in a generative way: just comparison is indeed *just* comparison.

Moving out from the image, however, we see that the sight of the motionless man itself temporarily arrests the narrator's instability. The poet-narrator's instability is figured by "driven" and "striven," which both suggest a kind of ambitious energy or thirst. This mental unrest is linked to his physical motion, which is also arrested upon seeing the man: "my course I stopped as soon as I espied/That Old Man in that naked wilderness." From this perspective, the poet-narrator's analogical comparison of the man and the stone marks the return of his mental unrest, his "[over]driven" fancy. And, simile appears to resurface each time the poet-narrator makes his inward turn: "now his voice to me was like a stream/Scarce heard..." (114-5). Later, the narrator-poet drifts off again "while he was talking thus" to his "mind's eye" in which the poet-narrator "seemed to see him pace/About the weary moors continually/Wandering about alone and silently" (137-39). In this reverie, the poet-narrator envisions the leech-gatherer's dissatisfaction as a kind of physical unrest and instability. The central interpretive instability for the narrator seems to be how to interpret the man's unique isolation: in short, the narrator-poet cannot decide whether the old man is a "stately" model to be emulated or a thing merely "endued with sense" to be pitied. The poet-narrator's preoccupation with this question not only inhibits his encounter with the leech gatherer. It seems to distort his relation of the leech gatherer's story. Is the line "Employment hazardous and wearisome!" (108) a faithful reiteration of the leech gatherer's remarks (as it appears) or the poet-narrator's translation and commentary of the leech gatherer's tale?

The crux of this somewhat suspicious interpretation of the poet-narrator turns on the leech gatherer's calm, consistent, and bemused reaction to the poet-narrator's excessive mental instability. The leech gatherer's stability is figured in his calm repetition of his answer to the poet's repeated question (127, 140): it is "with a smile" that the leech gatherer repeats his tale. The smile here registers the poet-narrator's unrest as a form of idiocy, one that, as the poet-narrator relates, seems to arise from his dissatisfaction with the ease and stability that marked his "whole life," which was "lived in pleasant thought" and "as if life's business were a summer mood" (37). The poet-narrator is conjuring a mistaken image of "solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" that clarifies the poet-narrator's inexperience of these hardships, his lack of mature integration into the social world, figured by his inability to sustain a mutual encounter with the leech gatherer. Indeed, it is even the narrator's own sense that these affective states are problematically Idiotic — and thus his inclination to interpret his encounter with the leech gatherer as corrective — that finally inhibits and narrows his encounter.

If the narrator of "Resolution and Independence" is marked by his false perception of integration with the social world, then the narrator of "The Thorn" is marked by a false perception of his distinction from the highland community he inhabits. But, like the narrator in "Resolution and Independence," the narrator's error is marked by his tendency to lean on analogy in the face of the uncertainty surrounding the mysterious scene he encounters. Whereas I have certainly read the error of idiocy into "Resolution and Independence" against the grain, the substantial amount of extra-textual material suggests that Wordsworth's depiction of the narrator's error is intentional and critical. In the oft-cited 1800 Note to "The Thorn," Wordsworth works to distance himself from the poem's narrator. He provides the narrator with a thorough backstory and characterizes him not only as "prone to superstition" but as a paradigmatic instance for "exhibit[ing] some of the general laws by which superstition acts on the mind" (593). Here we see Wordsworth announcing poetry's claim as "the history or science of feelings" (594). Some critics have generatively contested Wordsworth's *post facto* attempt at distancing himself, but here I'll accept it because, as many critics have observed, the appeal of this effort is the way Wordsworth's description of the narrator as "credulous" and "common" cuts against the narrator's own evident attempts to establish critical distance himself from the unsubstantiated — and often supernatural — speculation that circulates through the poem. As W.J.B. Owen observes, the "narrator continually casts doubt" (10) on the townspeople's interpretations of the

mystery at the poem's center. Similarly, the narrator foregrounds his skeptical and procedural discipline of his own investigation (and narration) of the mystery. And the question has long been how to square Wordsworth's affirmation of the narrator's superstition against the narrator's implicit rejection of that claim. Is the narrator really superstitious? And, if so, how does the narrator's superstition emerge in relation to or against his perception of the villagers, and how might seeing the narrator as superstitious modify a conception of what superstition entails?

In Chapter Two, I discussed the rise of a privileged concept of "internal evidence," which was increasingly valued over problematic "external evidence" or human testimony. I considered that one of the contradictory aspects of this new discourse around this new privileging of "facts" is that it never quite relinquishes its dependence on narrative as it shapes and constructs these facts. Here I want to suggest "The Thorn" thematizes this specific issue of empiricism. As Paul Sheats has noted, despite Wordsworth's description of the narrator as a commoner, he "behaves very much like a sceptical philosopher" who "discriminates between various degrees to which propositions can be objects of authentic knowledge" and who privileges "personal experience" over "second hand report" (97). Indeed, the narrator presumably favors a kind of circumstantial evidence over the village hearsay, and not only returns to the spot repeatedly himself but frequently enjoins the reader to do so. But the limited interpretive economy of the scene — its three elements — causes him to lean heavily on these descriptions. Moreover, his skeptical commitment to first-hand evidence blinds him to his susceptibility to the village hearsay. He may repeatedly and explicitly reject the rumors concerning Martha Ray's potential infanticide, but his uncritical absorption of these rumors comes through at the periphery of his procedural examination of the scene — most evidently, in the kinds of comparative practices he uses to describe and interpret its objects.

In line 5, for instance, the narrator describes the thorn as "Not higher than a two-years' child" (5), and this strange but as-yet-meaningful reference to a child returns with the narrator's description of the formation covered in moss next to the thorn: the heap is "Is like an infant's grave in size/As like as like can be" (52-53). Both descriptions come well before the narrator introduces Martha Ray or even explains the relevance of the scene as a potential site of matricide. What ostensibly licenses the narrator's use of these comparisons is his limited attention to measurement. But, with the second comparison, the important qualification — "like...in size" — is dispensed with in the following line, collapsing the similarity between the

heap and a grave into an identity. As Wolfson writes, the collapse “betrays the explanatory protocol of simile” (80). We see the narrator’s desire for an explanation to this mystery lead him unwittingly beyond the limitations he attempts to impose on his investigative procedure, and to color the scene with the speculative and narrative content generated by the communal rumors. It is only the similarity in size that selects out the comparison, or makes it salient. At the same time, the similarity is clearly more superficial than substantial, its relevance context-driven. One would expect an infant’s grave to be buried, not visible. And in this manner, the heap nicely figures the narrator’s inability to resist reading surface as depth. The repetition of *like* in turn registers this desire, what Wordsworth describes as a “craving in the mind” which causes a speaker to “cling to the same words, or words of the same character” (594). The formal quality of sameness aligns with the semantic content of *like* to exacerbate the effect of that desire, as repetition of sameness reproduces identity.

The emphasis on measurement in these passages links them with what have historically been the most contentious two lines of the poem. Speaking of the third and final feature of the scene — the muddy pond — the narrator writes, “I’ve measured it from side to side: ’Tis three feet long, and two feet wide” (32-3). Most critics — Coleridge especially — found the line appallingly because distinctly unpoetic. But Wordsworth resisted removing it despite a good deal of ridicule. In his sympathetic and extensive reading of the line, Sheats suggests that the line’s bathetic character amounts to a programmatic “provocation:” it attempts to “satirize the taste it offends:” on this view, the lines intentionally depart from a prior constricted definition of the poetic to redefine it: to reinforce the “essential unity of prose and poetry” (94). However, while concurring with Sheats about the line’s “unpoetic” and “bathetic” quality, I would prefer to see the line’s artlessness as an extension of the narrator’s claim to the artless — that is, unmediated, unconstructed — nature of his investigation. The narrator’s performance is more generally marked by a strange mixture of artlessness and artfulness, as well as his tendency to misassign each.

This is really the thrust of Coleridge’s extensive critique of the poem: where the narrator is psychologically accurate, he is not poetic, and vice versa. But this tension between artfulness and artlessness seems to be thematized. As we have seen, the narrator believes his interpretation of the scene to be artless while the reader recognizes it to be artful. This is best captured in the poem’s opening description of thorn. The poem opens with an existential clause, “There is a

Thorn,” whose neutrality and impoverishment may be interpreted in divergent ways: either as an untutored lack of poetic capacity; or, alternatively, as a studied suspension of rhetorical adornment and stylistic interference. Whereas Wordsworth’s characterization of the narrator works to recommend the first interpretation, the skeptical procedures of the narrator firmly recommend the second. In this way, the reader arrives at a prior linguistic construction whose history – as depth – is obscured and can only be read negatively, through its effacement. This is the problem the narrator himself encounters with the thorn, whose bare visual presence intimates a history as depth while also emphasizing its inaccessibility through its surface: The thorn “... looks so old/In truth, you’d find it hard to say/How it could have ever been young” (1-3).¹⁵⁷ It is only with “Not higher than a two-years’ child” (5) – and with the other more meticulous acts of measurement – that we glimpse the (un)imaginative work behind the narrator’s construction. Returning to Wordsworth’s remarks on “accuracy” of comparison, we see the narrator’s attempt to reduce his comparison to a matter of accurate measurements to be a distinctly inaccurate and distorted estimation of “similitude in dissimilitude.”

It should be evident that neither “Resolution and Independence” or “The Thorn” conform neatly (or at all) to the poetic program of associationist aesthetics as either Jeffrey or Wordsworth articulates it. Both, on the other hand, would seem to involve the kind of surface reading that a mid-century neo-Kantian Romantic critic like Wimsatt or Wasserman would observe. The narrator of the “The Thorn” – and thus the poem itself – even foregrounds the

¹⁵⁷The lines present a kind of riddle of inference. The narrator’s observation that the thorn is old seems impossible without a prior assumption of the thorn’s development through time. The thorn’s aged appearance makes its youth conceptually self-evident. To be old presupposes to be young, first, in a logical sense (youth is logically prior) and in a probable sense (trees don’t emerge fully formed, but must undergo ontogenesis). Consider the difference between *aged* and *ageless*. The thorn’s agedness emerges as a kind of agelessness. But ageless implies the *absence* of expected signs of age, not its overriding presence. The concept of *old*, on the other hand, implies the prior presence and subsequent loss or negation of youth. The absence of signs of youth is possible in one sense, but the utter inaccessibility of youth seems conceptually paradoxical. And yet somehow the thorn’s youth emerges as inaccessible in this way, something merely posited as a supposition on the basis of inference – whether that inference is logical in the sense that old necessarily presupposes youth or as probable inference. The thorn is, rather, a being that obscures its own becoming even as it is a being that signifies most directly and prominently *as* having-already-become. This state is posited somehow a result of the intensification of the thorn’s embodiment of *oldness*: because the thorn is *so old* — so evidently the product or effect of its history, it manages this paradoxical obstruction (perhaps parallel to the way agelessness resists or defies the appearance of oldness even as it meets its conceptual qualifications). From the perspective of probable inference, the thorn’s presence testifies to its passage-through-time without yielding any positive knowledge of its own past. That knowledge is only a reasonable surmising that, rather than achieving any positive knowledge of the past, simply exacerbates the inaccessibility of this knowledge: it produces the palpable sense of available knowledge met by a palpable lack of knowledge, a conviction of a prior past marked by the inaccessibility of that past, affording no clear sense of how the thorn’s becoming has contributed to its being.

question of epistemology in a way the neo-Kantians observe. But, as many critics have since noted, in “The Thorn,” the narrator’s epistemological preoccupation is clearly marked as problematic, a kind of moral error, a misguided response to Martha Ray’s suffering – not to mention a self-defeating procedure which, as Sheats notes, “does not further knowledge but impedes it” (98). The same can be said of the narrator’s effort to either aestheticize or moralize the presence of the leech gatherer in “Resolution and Independence:” it inhibits and distorts the social encounter. In both cases, it is the pursuit of depth against surface that is thematized. Here, I would argue, is where associationist aesthetics does emerge as relevant, since it describes the act of poetic interpretation as risking the similar kind of presumption. That risk is integral to transaction between the particularity of the poet’s vision and the general, stable, and communal vision that the poet aspires to access. The associationist poet presents its associations as public at the risk of it being private, its analogies as deep at the risk of them being superficial. In this way, whereas associationist aesthetics fails to provide an account of Wordsworth’s poetic practice, it does provide a way to describe the way Wordsworth’s narrators misread, how they misread depth into surface.

CHAPTER SIX

Disciplines of Doubt: Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*

In the Introduction, I claimed that neo-Kantian intellectual history – and more importantly the Skeptical perspective that defines it – ultimately commits two mistaken assessments of the modern history of skepticism. First, I proposed that neo-Kantian intellectual history tends to *overestimate* the broader historical significance of radical epistemological skepticism. Second, I claimed this overestimation leads neo-Kantian intellectual history to *underestimate* the continued significance of the traditions of moral, practical skepticism that a neo-Kantian, Skeptical perspective attempts to diminish or displace. Richard Rorty, Bruno Latour, Michael Polanyi, Michel Serres, and others have examined these distortions as they relate to the theory and practice of the natural sciences, where the meta-language of epistemology has tended to distort rather than faithfully reflect scientific practice. But the same general pattern can be nicely observed within modern Anglophone legal epistemology. The skeptical techniques endorsed within Anglophone legal epistemology are distinctly indebted to the constructive skeptical tradition I have tried to recover in the preceding chapters. And this fact recommends law and literature as an important initial site to reimagining the Romantic literary response to Enlightenment skepticism as more explicitly a reaction to this constructive skeptical tradition.

The impact of constructive skepticism within Anglophone legal epistemology can be seen in that tradition's progressive adoption and formalization of a rational, procedural skepticism as a means for disinterested legal judgment over the long eighteenth century. The “beyond a reasonable doubt” evidentiary standard — regarded in the American legal system as the strongest instruction given by a trial judge to a jury concerning both (1) the presumption of the innocence of a defendant and (2) the burden of proof faced by the prosecution in any criminal trial — amounts to a crystallization of the constructive skeptical *ethos* embraced by Enlightenment thinkers. The “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard is now regarded as an affirmation of the value of radical doubt in legal practice, an injunction to jurors to adopt an actively skeptical

posture that the prosecution must labor against to establish the plausibility of its case. The US Supreme Court has cited the instruction as the “prime instrument for reducing the risk of convictions resting on factual error” and for providing “concrete substance for the presumption of innocence” (*re: Winship*, 397 US 363). But, as I will explore in at length below in my reading of William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard has a distinctively conservative and practical orientation that is often occluded in modern treatments. The “reasonable doubt” instruction aims in some sense to *restrict* the legitimate role of doubt within common law practice, to establish reasonable parameters an individual jury member’s right to doubt or withhold assent in the face of uncertainty. The phrase’s endorsement of doubt is not unqualified; on the contrary, the adjective *reasonable* marks out the limits of the legitimacy of doubt, carving out a critical conceptual space between “merely possible” doubt and “plausible” doubt — between “any doubt at all” and those doubts which qualify as “reasonable.” In this sense, this specific formulation could be said to *lower* the prosecution’s burden of proof and, moreover, to guarantee conditions for the possibility of legal judgment in the absence of “absolute certainty” and against certain “unreasonable” evidentiary demands.¹⁵⁸ The standard formulation generally and explicitly cautions *against* entertaining more radical or implausible forms of skepticism. Consider, for instance, the following instruction from a 1990 case *Cage v. Louisiana*:

If you entertain a reasonable doubt as to any fact or element necessary to constitute the defendant's guilt, it is your duty to give him the benefit of that doubt and return a verdict of not guilty. Even where the evidence demonstrates a probability of guilt, if it does not establish such guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, you must acquit the accused. *This doubt, however, must be a reasonable one; that is one that is founded upon a real tangible substantial basis and not upon mere caprice and conjecture...A reasonable doubt is not a mere possible doubt. It is an actual substantial doubt. It is a doubt that a reasonable man can seriously entertain. What is required is not an absolute or mathematical certainty, but a moral certainty.* (my emphasis, 498 U.S. 39)

This formulation of the reasonable doubt can be regarded as more or less typical. Indeed, the language – which legal scholars have traced to the 1790s — has remained standardized since at

¹⁵⁸I will consider a recent legal argument along these lines at length in Section 6.3. For earlier arguments along these lines in legal scholarship, see Morano, “A Reexamination of the Reasonable Doubt Rule” (1975) and Steve Sheppard, “The Metamorphosis of Reasonable Doubt” (2003), both of which argue that the “reasonable doubt” standard replaced a more general “any doubt” standard to favor the prosecution.

least the mid-nineteenth century. Several states explicitly forbid judges from altering or elaborating the definition of reasonable doubt for fear that any attempt to explain the term effectively violates the “due process” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. From this perspective, supplementing a formalized definition of reasonable doubt is more likely to compromise the burden of the proof the standard aims to instill than to clarify it.¹⁵⁹

I have introduced *Cage v. Louisiana* (1990) here not only for its typicality but its exceptionality in the legal history of reasonable doubt. In this case, the defendant Cage did in fact make a successful appeal to the Supreme Court on the grounds of due process, and the court ultimately reversed the guilty verdict on the basis of a few extraneous qualifiers presented in the standard. In their decision, the Supreme Court judges write:

It is plain to us that the words "substantial" and "grave," as they are commonly understood, suggest a higher degree of doubt than is required for acquittal under the reasonable doubt standard. When those statements are then considered with the reference to "moral certainty," rather than evidentiary certainty, it becomes clear that a reasonable juror could have interpreted the instruction to allow a finding of guilt based on a degree of proof below that required by the Due Process Clause (498 U.S. 39, 6).

Here it seems possible to read the real – if relatively minor – impact of epistemological Skepticism in the semantic distance the court imagines between *moral* and *evidentiary* certainty. As we have already seen, in eighteenth-century epistemology the category of “moral certainty” would have functioned in a largely epistemological and technical sense. But in *Cage vs. Louisiana*, the judges take the qualifier *moral* to be *opposed* to the bare epistemological sense of evidentiary certainty. The injunction to “moral certainty” is taken to be more distorting than clarifying, to effectively lower the otherwise high standard of proof by suggesting that jurors might apply a personal (if also normative) sense of morality to bear on the evidence. As I have argued, the Skeptical tradition has effectively helped to establish this semantic distance, according to which judgment emerges as somehow preoccupied or compromised by moral commitment. On this view, moral commitments must be set aside or suspended to achieve the appropriate orientation for legal judgment.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ See Miller Shealy, “A Reasonable Doubt about ‘Reasonable Doubt’” (2013): 260, 266 for a discussion of these actual historical examples.

¹⁶⁰ It is notable that in a later case, *Victor v. Nebraska* (1994), the US Supreme Court, leaning largely on the work of the legal historian Barbara Shapiro, acknowledges the currency of this technical if “archaic” sense of “moral certainty.” In her ruling, Justice O’Connor clarifies that while the judges “do not countenance its use” in the

This sense of the impositions or distortions introduced of “moral certainty” arguably explains why the courts have not only preferred the negative formulation “beyond a reasonable doubt” – which would have been essentially synonymous and even appositional with moral certainty – but why they have preferred to keep the definition of “reasonable doubt” minimal or even in some sense implicit. “Reasonable doubt” functions as what Robert Mitchell calls a “variable regulative standard...read blindly and negatively through the actions of others” (keynote, *North American Society for the Study of Romanticism*, 2017). This negative, implicit status depends in turn on the assumption that legal rationality and practical rationality are more continuous than discontinuous, but that both are readily accessible. In this way, the judge’s legal expertise, for instance, is not taken to ensure the precision or justness of his interpretation of reasonable doubt. Rather, any elaboration or improvisation is taken to be a distortion or, at the least, a form of mediation: the juror has more immediate and thus reliable access to a standard of reasonable doubt through her own private estimation. By departing from the minimal definition, a judge is taken to cross over from the legal to the rhetorical and the political.

If the Anglophone legal theory has generally favored the variable, implicit, and minimal character of the reasonable doubt standard to be more dependable over a fixed, explicit, or maximal definition, then the works of literature I examine in the remainder of the chapter dwell upon the obvious risks of this variable standard: how one might exploit or manipulate an implicit confidence in the intellectual and moral probity of skeptical procedures to goad someone into immoral action; how a community or institution might distort or circumscribe a definition of reasonableness to encourage certain, more convenient kinds of judgment and discourage others; how individual desires condition and shape the form and intensity of doubt. In my reading of *The Borderers*, “Staging Risk in the Borderers,” I propose a new way of thinking about what William Jewett has described as the drama’s “master plot of ‘strange repetition’” as a kind of procedural and experimental rationalism. In “Victor’s Reasonable Doubt,” I focus on *Frankenstein*’s engagement with the concept of circumstantial evidence in the early trial scene and consider the difficult relation between Victor Frankenstein’s cold, constructive skepticism and his hotter but suppressed psychological turmoil. And in “Caleb’s Unreasonable Doubt,” I

evidentiary standard, they rule that the phrase “did not render the instruction given in Victor’s case unconstitutional” (511 U.S.1 (1994)). Ruth Bader Ginsburg concurred that “while not in itself so misleading as to render the instructions unconstitutional, [the term moral certainty] should be avoided as an unhelpful way of explaining what reasonable doubt means” (*ibid.*).

focus on the relation of doubt and desire in *Caleb Williams*. I consider how the novel insists on the ways desire conditions doubt and how that insistence subverts the claims to “disinterestedness” and “reasonableness” that recommend “reasonable doubt” as a legitimate and adequate response to the risks posed by judgment under uncertainty. Collectively, these works appear to raise questions about the Enlightenment’s confidence embrace of constructive skepticism and gesture towards a theory of Romantic doubt, which I develop in the chapter’s Coda, that tries to imagine the radical possibility of doubt against skepticism’s often overlooked conservatism.

6.1 Staging Risk in Wordsworth’s *The Borderers*

In his influential study, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814*, Geoffrey Hartman characterizes Wordsworth’s early, difficult play *The Borderers* as a “philosophical drama” (129). With this characterization, Hartman intends to emphasize the play’s highly stylized form and setting, which Hartman contends are designed not to be performed live or to gesture towards any specific historical content but rather to probe a central philosophical question: “[C]an the intellect yield true moral judgments?” This arguably remains the most compelling way to think about the drama’s form and even the best way to frame the play’s subtle interrogation of judgment under uncertainty. This is especially true if we take “moral” in the more technical, epistemological sense it held prior to neo-Kantian epistemology, and if we absorb Hartman’s elegant observation that the “poet’s question” is “a tragic one” which can only be “deepened, not answered” (129). The play’s tragic question deepens as its complexion and direction shifts over the course of the drama. The moral judgment at the center of the play is ostensibly Mortimer’s decision to murder the blind, aged Herbert on the basis of Rivers’ salacious accusations against him. The play follows Rivers’ persistent seduction and manipulation of Mortimer. The tragedy, in one sense, centers on Mortimer’s intellectual failure to detect and overcome Rivers’ deftly orchestrated ploy. The play heightens this tragedy by staging this failure in alternating terms of sympathy and skepticism. Mortimer’s love for Herbert’s daughter, Miranda, occasionally promises to thwart Rivers’ plot but finally fails to expose or prevent it. Likewise, Mortimer is incapable of conducting a cooler, skeptical examination of Rivers’ false accusations against Herbert, largely because Rivers so thoroughly directs and manipulates Mortimer’s procedural inquiry. The plot’s shape is distended by the incomplete development of Mortimer’s sympathetic and skeptical

urges, even as it is also prolonged by Mortimer's utter lack of interest in murdering Herbert. Rivers drags an unfocused Mortimer through his ploy, and Mortimer only murders Herbert after much vacillation and largely by accident. The tragic question at the play's center is finally "deepened" not "answered" in large part because Mortimer's reservations and sins of omission make any judgment about the nature of Mortimer's moral or intellectual failure perplexing. Mortimer's failure emerges as the compound effect of events which seem, at turns, to mitigate and exacerbate Mortimer's responsibility.

The overall effect is to confuse the role the intellect plays in Mortimer's judgment: does Mortimer's intellect primarily work to resist or facilitate Mortimer's tragic error, or both at turns? Yet, the question of judging Mortimer is only pertinent because the intellect of interest in the play is not Mortimer's but Rivers'. In this sense, Hartman's assertion that the drama's central question belongs to "the poet" seems somewhat misleading. It is more accurate to say that the "poet's question" — or some perversion of it — is posed from *within* the play by its villain, Rivers. Rivers' seduction of Mortimer amounts to a kind of moral experiment itself, one meant to confirm Rivers' own conviction that the question somehow traffics in an illusion. Rivers is at once defiant and anxious about the singularity of his critical insight. That insight seems to open up a new moral plain that is unapologetically heroic, beyond both intellect and morality as the intellect falsely conceives them. His experiment with Mortimer is an effort to confirm the validity of his insight through an approximate reproduction of the conditions he takes to have precipitated his new intuition. Rivers' problem is that the experiment seems either woefully inconclusive or compromised for reasons he cannot determine and in ways that suggest his own thinking to be not clear but perverse, not essence but excess. Indeed, the problem is finally that Rivers' still finds himself in the habit of experimenting, still anxious that a singularity cannot be known to speak beyond itself until it is reproduced, in ways that reveal him to be confined to the same kind of sympathetic thinking he understood himself to have overcome. The tragedy therefore ultimately shifts to center on Rivers' moral and intellectual perversion.

If the symbolic structure of the play does a great deal to make this philosophical drama salient, it also arguably obscures the play's more specific historical and contextual engagements. Many critics have been inclined to follow Hartman and read *The Borderers* as a kind of literary sublimation of the personal intellectual crisis Wordsworth recounts in Books X and XI in the *Prelude*. For Hartman, if the central problem of Wordsworth's crisis of judgment is the "need for

judgments of an immediate and absolute nature” — or for what Othello calls “*ocular proof*” (247) — then *The Borderers* “expos[es] the difficulty of such proof” in the context of uncertain moral judgment. For Hartman, the play’s “locale, the border region” in turn represents “the absence of the ‘blind restraints of general laws’” (X.826). Here Hartman references the kind of immutable law that Wordsworth’s “young ingenuous mind/Pleased with extremes” (X.815-6) once aspired to *overcoming* when “enflamed/With a thirst of a secure intelligence” (X.832-3). For Hartman, the play transpires in the “absence” of these general laws not only because they fail to intervene and restrain Mortimer’s tragic action, but because Rivers represents an embodiment of Wordsworth’s earlier, perverse idea of the “freedom of the individual mind:”

Which, to the blind restraint of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect. (X.826-9).

Hartman suggests that the “one guide, the light of circumstances” is “the only law [Rivers] respects” (128), and indeed Rivers repeats a version of the line in his confession to Mortimer (III.v.22-37). Hartman understands the play’s pre-modern context as an attempt to achieve a meaningful distance from any sort of formal, procedural trial. This interpretation of Rivers — and the play — both as somehow “lawless” would explain the play’s projection into a distant past that appears to precede even informal assizes. Rivers is conducting his experiment in an environment distinctly amenable to its success, where his lawless machinations, however finally misguided, may proceed without much communal restraint. And, in this sense, Rivers’ experimental failure becomes all the more tragic.

In a recent reading of the play, Victoria Myers departs from this kind of decontextualized interpretation to pursue its more direct engagement with British legal institutionality. Myers argues that the play should be read not as “an avoidance of a formal trial” but as what she calls as “emplaced trial:” the modern trial structure as it is abstracted from institutional context to reveal the purely formal structure of its procedural inquiry. For Myers, the play is shot through with the language and content of contemporary trials, and the play’s dramatic action attempts to “recreate[] the experience of epistemological shock” that comes with the “process of proving the guilt of a suspect in conditions which close him off from institutional procedural assurances” (439). By “institutional procedural assurances,” Myers means the comfort and authority of the modern courtroom itself. The play amplifies this shock because it “represents the essential

elements of the court-room trial without either the confinement or the confidence of the institutional setting” (439). Removing these formal and procedural elements out into the borderlands bares them to generate a “skepticism about the procedures of the institution.” From this perspective, the absence of the “blind restraint of general laws” at the borderland is only apparent: the setting of the borderland works to clarify the *superficiality* of the institutional comforts that prop up these formal procedures. On this view, Rivers’ machinations are themselves deeply procedural. Rivers’ masterful means of staging of Herbert’s guilt “culminate[s]” in a “fundamental assault upon the literal truth of appearances” (446). Thus, Myers’ reads the play back into the *Prelude* for the different conclusion that the play “dramatize[s] not only the effect which the perversion of approbatory procedure has exerted upon [Wordsworth], but also the deep effect of that perversion upon modes of belief within British society” (451-52).

These competing readings of the play seem to follow from different interpretations how Rivers finally deceives Mortimer. From Hartman’s perspective, Rivers lures Mortimer with his heroic vision, exploiting “the vestiges of the old ‘nature’ morality” (129). While this morality has the “positive” effect of occasionally encouraging Mortimer to resist Rivers, Rivers exploits this nature morality by “accus[ing] Herbert of the most *unnatural* of crimes: steading someone else’s daughter, keeping her in ignorant captivity, and conspiring to seal her to a debauched lord” (129). And these unnatural accusations are what finally propel Mortimer. From Myers’s perspective, it is rather Rivers’ systematic orchestration of false inferences that deceives Mortimer. Rivers’ felt “superiority” over the “blind restraint of general laws” has not so much caused him to abandon them for the “light of circumstances” as it has enticed him to toy with and turn both to his ends. From this perspective, if Rivers wants to deceive Mortimer, he does it as much *through* Mortimer’s faith in procedure as he does *against* it. If we accept Hartman’s reading, we might say that Rivers has to direct this faith so that it aligns with the nature morality he seeks to exploit. This is simply to say that Rivers sees Mortimer at the border between a nature morality and a more rational universalism. Rivers sees himself at the border of a rational universalism and a new heroic morality. And he recognizes this transition not as his estrangement from rational universalism but with a new kind of mastery over it, in which the logic of nature morality appears predictable and reproducible enough to be manipulated. As we will see, this mastery also amounts to a form of enslavement.

I find the procedural reading of Rivers that Myers offers as more advantageous than Hartman's in two ways. First, while it is true that Rivers tries to warm Mortimer up to his heroic vision — to prepare him for the communal backlash he will experience and to condition him to see it as a misunderstanding — by exploiting its affinities with the older nature morality Hartman discovers, Rivers' deception also exploits a distinctly rationalist angle. More generally, Rivers' deception effortlessly crosses the border between nature morality and universal rationalism, playing them against one another. The more striking moments of the play are when Rivers seems to exploit Mortimer's or his clansmen's faith in the "blind restraint" of colder, disinterested procedure: when River asks Mortimer to calmly reflect on his degree of certainty and disinterest. Early on, for instance, Rivers encourages Mortimer to circumspection and caution. Mortimer's act of vengeance must also be an "act of reason" (II.i.81). At one point, sensing (or rather projecting) Mortimer's reservations, Rivers feigns his regret for the absence of an institutional structure:

Now on my soul I grieve for you. The misery
Of doubt is insupportable. Pity the facts
Did not admit of stronger evidence. Twelve neighbours
Plain honest men, might set us right. Their verdict
Would fortify your spirit — end this weakness. (II.iii.188-90).

These gestures towards rather than against rationalism appeal to Mortimer's own desire for disinterest. Indeed, Mortimer says that he "should loathe the light" if he "could think one weak or partial feeling" (II.i.83-86) influenced his decision. From this perspective, Hartman's turn to the *Prelude* encourages an unhelpful opposition between "the restraint of general laws" and the "light of circumstances" which Myers' attention to the procedural logic of legal institutionality helps correct. Indeed, Rivers takes his new heroic insight to be a tragic (but also empowering) realization that the "light of circumstances" only *appears* to reflect the "blind restraint of general laws." Rivers now realizes that appearances can be far too readily and easily co-opted in the service of conspiracy. On Rivers' own account, Rivers was deceived into killing his former captain by a conspiracy orchestrated by his shipmates. They persuade Rivers that his act of mutiny would be justified — that it would be rightly interpreted as just — only to reveal their performance to have been a "...plot/To rid them of a master whom they hated" (IV.ii.73). By his account, it is upon reflecting on his strange role in this plot — at once its agent and yet also its victim — that Rivers gains his heroic insight. His victimhood somehow reveals that morality has

no universal grounding: it is instead merely a manner of social control. It is also an innervating kind of control: it constricts a more natural impulse to heroic action.

It is of interest that we gain much of this backstory during Rivers' attempts to persuade Mortimer to adopt a similar set of insights. Rivers tells Mortimer that, in resolving to murder Herbert (long before Mortimer even has resolved to do so), Mortimer has "burst through" the "flimsy superstition" of universal rationalism (III.v.106). Throughout the play, it is strongly insinuated that River constructs a similar cloud of deceit around Mortimer — a total situation which Mortimer must read as distinct from Rivers' testimony and which must function as a self-sustaining system of false inference – merely to *confirm* his own heroic insight by constructing a similar set of events around Mortimer. Rivers wants to propel Mortimer to the same insight, to dislodge him in the same manner, to have his heroic observations corroborated. Rivers uses Mortimer's dependence on and respect for procedural inquiry to frame the light of circumstances so that they have the appearance of general laws: to massage the "ocular proof," so to speak. As Myers nicely puts it, Rivers encourages Mortimer to "speculate on a more tangled web of deception than the mere evidence would bear" and to extract evidence from "appearances and suspect witness[nes]" which are then "constructed by inference into conspiracy" (446). Rivers amplifies the light of circumstance so that it is powerful enough to blind. He aims to generate "...a flash/Of truth enough to dazzle and to blind/And he is mine for ever" (II.i.10-12). The clearest evidence of Rivers' dual strategy occurs in a monologue in act III, scene 2:

This last device *must* end my work — methinks
It were a pleasant pastime to construct
A scale and table of belief — as thus —
Two columns, one for passion, one for proof,
Each rising as the other falls: and, first,
Passion a unit, and against us. —Proof!
Nay, we must travel in another path
Or we're stuck fast for ever — passion, then,
Shall be a unit for us — proof, oh no,
We'll not insult her majesty by time
And place — the where, the when, the how, and all
The dull particulars whose intrusion mars
The dignity of demonstration. (III.ii.4-16).

The passage feels distinctly anachronistic in its rationalism. The "scale" of belief should be familiar from the preceding discussions of moral evidence. The "table" of belief arguably alludes to the more extensive rationalizations of the period epitomized, for instance, in Jeremy

Bentham's "Table of the Springs of Action" or Edward Tatham's massive "Chart and Scale of Truth, by which to Find the Cause of Error" (1790). But more important here is Rivers' sense of confident ease and familiarity with the two "units" of belief, the dexterity with which he imagines himself to play one against the other.

The second advantage of Myers' procedural interpretation is that it highlights the procedural, analogical bent with which Rivers approaches his conspiracy, what I have called its experimental character. In his interpretation, Hartman observes that Rivers instigates a crime "practically identical to his own" (130). But, perhaps leaning too heavily on the comparison of Rivers with Iago, Hartman reads Rivers' pursuit of identity in psychoanalytic terms, as "deeply compulsive" (130). This leads Hartman (and many other critics following him) to read Rivers' character as a study in "repetition compulsion" (130).¹⁶¹ Against this psychoanalytic emphasis, Myers argues that Rivers' thinking is largely an effect of the "perversion of probatory procedure" (452). I take this to be slightly more nuanced than the typical association of Rivers with a perverse Godwinian rationalism and, finally, a more promising approach to what William Jewett calls the drama's "master plot of 'strange repetition'" (Jewett 82) than Hartman. With Myers' interpretation in view, I want to interpret Rivers' compulsive interest in repetition as more properly a sign of his rationalist or empiricist conditioning. Again, I take Rivers to be conducting a kind of experiment with Mortimer. Rivers perceives his transgressive murder as transformational, but he needs to confirm that his transformation is more natural than idiosyncratic via a reproducible experiment. And his objective seems to create such an overwhelmingly strong analogy between the circumstances of his case and those of Mortimer's that it will produce the *same* psychological effect in Mortimer. In this way, his strange repetitions are more calculated than compulsive.

There seem to be two unknowns that complicate Rivers' experiment, both which Rivers uses analogical constructions to address. First, Rivers is not quite sure of the best means to persuade Mortimer to commit the crime itself. Rivers' solution to this first problem, as Myers notes, is to construct, through his testimony and other means, a broad situation which Mortimer can interpret as independent "circumstances." And, from my perspective, what is notable about this strategy is the way Rivers constructs a series of analogical relations to stage Matilda's potential

¹⁶¹ Readers often support this by drawing out a proto-articulation of this Freudian concept from Wordsworth's "Essay on the Character of Rivers." See, for instance, David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790's*.

risk were Mortimer not to kill Herbert. The “flash/Of Truth enough to dazzle and blind” come from two major sites: a beggar Rivers’ has paid to pose as a Matilda’s birth mother and a “poor tenant” Clifford claims that the “villain Clifford” (II.i.16-7) once abducted and drove to madness. Meeting the beggar, Mortimer cries “when I looked upon that woman/I thought I saw a skeleton of Matilda” (II.i.32-3). And Rivers consistently stages an analogical comparison between the poor tenant’s fate and the potential of Matilda. And, afterward, Rivers works to establish a speculative timeline: “The savage debauchee/Would there perhaps have gathered the first fruits/Of this foul monster's guilt” (II.i.120-22). This construction is notably counteracted (but not overcome) in the play by a crosscurrent of resemblances centered on Matilda and Herbert’s physical likeness. Mortimer observes, “There was something in [Herbert’s] face the very counterpart of Matilda” (II.iii.272). And, again, later: “There is a vein of her voice that runs through his” (III.iii.65). These resemblances threaten (but ultimately fail) to expose Rivers’ claim that Matilda is not Herbert’s daughter but rather than Herbert has abducted her for the purposes of selling her to Clifford.¹⁶²

Second, while Rivers anticipates that his new heroic consciousness is the final effect of his earlier manipulation, Rivers is not sure which conditions of his own case amounts to the efficient cause. This problem recommends Rivers’ elaborate reproduction of the *entire* set of conditions surrounding the event. Once Rivers’ believes Mortimer has killed Herbert, he tells Mortimer his tale and implores, “[T]hink of my story — / Herbert is innocent” (IV.iii.211-12). Rivers’ intent is to dislodge Mortimer in the same manner that Rivers believes his earlier realization to have dislodged him. The problem is that, at the moment of revelation, Mortimer believes Herbert is still alive, so he fails to see the relation (in any case, Mortimer is not a very astute reader). The effect of circumstances is squandered, and it forces Rivers to dictate Mortimer’s insight to him in a different pattern of repetition: Rivers tells Mortimer that “You have taught mankind to seek the measure of justice/By diving for it in their own bosons” (III.v.24-25), you have “...seen deeper” (III.v.95). But this dictation lacks the effect of circumstance. Mortimer simply asks, “Wherefore press this on me?” (III.v.22). Later, Mortimer again asks, “Wherefore this repetition?” (III.v.43).¹⁶³ *This* here seems to gesture to both Rivers’ verbal repetition and his elaborate replication.

¹⁶² Although, as Schey observes in his reading, the play never confirms whether Herbert is Matilda’s father.

¹⁶³ In his recent reading of this play (and largely in response to the psychoanalytic readings), Schey has called into question whether or not we should take Rivers’ story at face value, “as though it were a truthful and transparently

Many scholars have read this turn to repetition as Rivers seeking to “bind” Mortimer as a double. Some have explored the homosocial and homosexual implications of this act. These seem like viable readings, but I believe it is better to regard Mortimer as Rivers’ experiment and to take this experiment to have failed on two accounts. In the first sense, we can take it as inconclusive because Mortimer does not experience the kind of transformation that Rivers hypothesizes. And this suggests that Rivers’ own heroic vision is more perverse than natural. But, as I suggested at the beginning of this section, the deeper problem is revealed by Rivers’ need to confirm his heroism through the reproduction of experiment itself. Had Rivers overcome his rationalist impulses, he would not need to replicate his condition to confirm it.¹⁶⁴ He could “magisterially adopt[]/One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed/Upon an independent intellect (X.826-9).”

6.2. Victor’s Reasonable Doubt

Much like Wordsworth’s *The Borderers*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) lends itself to critical readings that bypass the novel’s engagements with its historically specific contexts in order to focus on the novel’s more philosophical engagements with themes of justice, technology, ethics, and epistemology. Indeed, *Frankenstein* has in many ways been privileged as the most philosophical gothic novel in addition to being the most famous one, and it has served as the principal justification for pursuing a strongly “philosophical” approach to the Gothic as a genre itself. The novel’s unique ability not only to speak to these persistent philosophical themes but to speak to them at their difficult intersection points has played an important role in elevating the Gothic novel as a literary form and recovering it from its longstanding and often pejorative associations with erotic sensibility and material excess or its diminished reputation as a historical fad.

literal account of his personal history?:” “Is it not possible — indeed more than possible — that the arch-storyteller’s confession is simply another one of what he calls his ‘daring fictions?’” (“Limited Analogies” 195) For Schey, Rivers’ autobiography could amount to “the drama’s ultimate trick of manipulation” (195). I am willing to accept this reading, because it merely reinforces my account of Rivers’ attempt to stage risk: we simply see that his process of staging was more elaborate and thoroughly orchestrated than critics have assumed.

¹⁶⁴ Hartman notes a similar irony, but reads it through Rivers’ continued desire for sympathetic identification, which is also a satanic one. His reading is worth revisiting: “Oswald seeks an accomplice because he is too weak to suffer the liberty into which he was betrayed and needs Marmaduke to solace his loneliness...he cannot live without enslaving others...[T]he motive, therefore, is satanic and points to the mystery in all seduction” (130).

As necessary as this philosophical turn has been, it has often encouraged a kind of overcorrection that abstracts *Frankenstein's* philosophical engagements too far from the historical specificity that gives them their purchase, gravity, and complexity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a distinct taste for Kantian epistemology has often facilitated this purely philosophical approach. In his 1987 essay, "A Philosophical View of the Romantic Novel," for instance, Marshall Brown makes an early, important case for "revers[ing] the priorities of gothic criticism" from the material to the philosophical. Brown frames this intervention schematically as approaching "Frankenstein's monster as a thought, not a thing" (Brown 276) and, more generally, as theorizing "gothic substance" not in terms of its saturated materiality but as "a thing whose materiality has been sublimated into a freedom from all conditioning factors, making it at once madness, dream, and play" (280). Brown's deft use of "substance" points not only to his attempted reversal of gothic criticism but as a relocation and reappraisal of the gothic novel's philosophical heft. For Brown, the gothic's substance is substantially (read: significantly) insubstantial (read: philosophical). On this view, gothic novels are more generatively viewed as "pure speculative instruments that investigate the origins of experience" (280) rather than, say, literary instruments for representing or even practical instruments for experiencing a certain kind of erotic or emotional excess. For Brown, the gothic novel is fundamentally about a *lack* of conditioning, a stripping away of familiarity of habit and society. The gothic novel pursues knowledge at its impossible limits:

What would be left of a man, these novels ask, if all human society were stripped away, all customary perception, all the expected regularity of cause and effect? They ask, in other words, what man is in himself, when deprived of all the external supports that channel ordinary experience. What resources, if any, does the mind retain in isolation? What is the nature of pure consciousness? And this, in turn, is the fundamental question of Kant's epistemology. (281).

I agree with Brown's claim to the philosophical potency of the gothic novel, and the special potency of *Frankenstein*. But it should be clear that Brown's justification for this new philosophical orientation towards the gothic is explicitly neo-Kantian. These purer philosophical questions are not only made visible by Kantian epistemology; they are recommended because they have been singled out for special consideration within Kantian epistemology. Brown's orientation towards this act of purification is likewise distinctly Skeptical. Here the gothic's pursuit of the "remainder" amounts to a pursuit for a kind of essence, an attempt to access "what

man is in himself” (281) through a kind of productive distortion and subtraction. Brown’s constellation of Kantian aesthetic terms — “freedom,” “play,” and “pure” — anticipate the potential rather than the limitation of this kind of philosophical purification, and assume its clarifying rather than its distorting role.

From my perspective, this taste for Kant leads Brown down an idealist line which is distinctly unhelpful and unjustified for approaching the philosophical import of *Frankenstein*. Indeed, it seems impossible to appreciate the novel’s philosophical engagements at this level of abstraction. For *Frankenstein* seems to be a novel about not the lack of conditioning of “customary perception” and “expected regularities,” but the *necessity* and *inescapability* of such conditioning. *Frankenstein* examines the horrors that emerge as a result of such conditioning and, more specifically, of the *hubris* which posits the possibility of escaping this kind of conditioning through the act of speculation. Indeed, there seems to be no “pure” speculation in *Frankenstein*: the Creature is surely first a thought, but it is a thought that Victor’s scientific mind feels compelled to realize — to turn into a thing — in order to confirm the “cause of life” through this “effect” of realization. Once realized, Creature is a thing that pursues a life neither Victor’s thought nor the “external supports that channel ordinary experience” can successfully predict or contain. The creature represents something like the horrific issue of Victor’s own mistaken belief that his speculations on life might reproduce a life that somehow remain apart from living, that these speculations can come to fruition without answering to the fundamentally unpredictability of life as it is lived. For Victor, the creature becomes a “living monument of presumption and rash ignorance” (Shelley 1818 78) that pursues philosophical speculation without an appreciation for its practical consequences. The Creature is a figure for the kinds of uncertainty that consistently defy and frustrate any conditioning. Victor’s hubris is an unholy marriage of the technocratic expertise and philosophical idiocy.¹⁶⁵

There is no doubt that the novel is an intense examination of the singularity of Frankenstein’s creature. But that singularity emerges as distinctly problematic in the novel, and only against the kind of stabilizing or conditioning institutional structures that cannot contain or

¹⁶⁵ There have been countless readings of *Frankenstein* as a parable of the perils of technocracy. See Kim Hammond, “Monsters of Modernity: Frankenstein and Modern Environmentalism.” *Cultural Geographies* 11 (2004):181-198; K. Back, “Frankenstein and Brave New World: Two Cautionary Myths on the Boundaries of Science,” *History of European Ideas* 20 (1995): 327-32; M. Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time: The Reith Lectures 1994*. London: Vintage, 1994; L. Winner, “Frankenstein’s Problem.” *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-control as a Theme in Political Thought*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977.

even see the Creature's singularity, in large part, because of their reliance on and confidence in "expected regularity" as it organizes and conditions experience. Indeed, *Frankenstein* foregrounds scientific and legal institutionality so thoroughly that it is hard to justify the sort of ahistorical philosophical approach possible (but, as we have seen, also somewhat constricting) with *The Borderers*. Indeed, many scholars, following Marilyn Butler's important introduction to the 1818 edition, have illuminated the novel's engagement with the contentious Romantic-era scientific debates regarding the nature of life.¹⁶⁶ And this is true even as Butler has persuasively demonstrated that Mary Shelley worked to sublimate or even efface the novel's suggestive materialism in subsequent editions and reframe Victor's work as more alchemic than chemical. Here I want to focus on Shelley's evident investments in legal institutionality inspired, in large part, by her father's philosophical and literary work and to help clarify the novel's complicated engagement with contemporary legal debates. I intend to show that Shelley increasingly worked to foreground and complicate these engagements with legal institutionality in later editions, and to fold them in to Victor's horror as dissonant and difficult counter note. And I want to argue that this counter note is culled from increasing anxieties the reliability of "circumstantial evidence" — or, as it was more sympathetically called at the time, "presumptive proof." Put schematically, I want to examine how the novel sets Victor's hubristic "presumption" against this form of "presumptive" proof, which Victor seems variously critical of and complicit with: blinded by his own confidence in his ability to understand its nature or assess its reliability.

With this strong emphasis on contemporary legal contexts, I am following Bridget Marshall's recent suggestion that the "legal preoccupations of the Gothic novel" should not be treated as broad response to "nature of justice" but should rather "be traced to contemporary anxieties about the nature of justice and to specific legal challenges in the evolving Common Law system" (Marshall 2).¹⁶⁷ I am also following to some extent Marshall's stronger suggestion the Gothic novel may be fruitfully approached as "kind of legal framework" (1) itself whose various stories, "embedded letters, documents, and diaries become 'evidence' in a trial presided

¹⁶⁶ See Butler, "Introduction" in *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*. London: William Pickering, 1993: ix-li. For other treatments of the scientific contexts of the novel, see Anne Mellor's "*Frankenstein*, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril" and Liggins, "The Medical Gaze and the Female Corpse: Looking at Bodies in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*."

¹⁶⁷ For Marshall's reading of *Frankenstein* in this context, see "Questioning the Evidence of Bodies and Texts in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" in *The Transatlantic Gothic Novel and the Law, 1790-1860*: 65-90. Of *Frankenstein*, Marshall suggests that the "most compelling horror portrayed in the novel is the monster of the legal system, which is very much a real entity" (66).

over by the reader” (2). Here I will be concerned less with how this legal framework structures *Frankenstein* as a whole, but how such a framework does appear to shape the events surrounding Justine’s trial to give that episode the feel of a self-contained, pointed, but also finally complicated critique of legal institutionality. Self-contained not only because Justine’s trial seems to be in some sense preliminary and collateral to the novel’s plot but because the name “Justine” seems to announce the episode’s status as a stand-alone examination of the failure of legal justice — and, more specifically, the evils of wrongful conviction, of forced confession, and of circumstantial evidence. Pointed because the polemical and negative character of this critique seems, from one perspective, unmistakable and unqualified. But finally complicated because the critique is narrated through Victor’s compromised voice, and the cool, constructive confidence and sense of intellectual probity with which Victor offers this critique is marked as problematic, set in relief to the hotter registers of both Victor’s suppressed psychological turmoil and Elizabeth’s hotter anxiety.

The best way to observe the attention the novel devotes to this critique is to consider how Justine’s trial draws from and elaborates on an early trial scene from William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*. As many critics have noted, Godwin’s novel works as a kind of architectonic informing *Frankenstein*; Shelley even dedicates *Frankenstein* not to her father by name but to the “author of *Caleb Williams*.” *Caleb Williams* similarly centers on the wrongful conviction of working poor, the Hawkinses, for murdering a member of the leisure class, the malicious Tyrrel. Both trials turn on the damning presence of circumstantial evidence. Both scenes function formally as preliminary to the novel’s plot: they represent instance of collateral damage whose injustice is summarily discarded for the elaborate and amplifying drama, left painfully and even frustrating unresolved (especially. But, whereas *Caleb Williams* does not clarify the Hawkinses’ innocence until well into the second volume, *Frankenstein* immediately affords Victor and the reader. In *Frankenstein*, however, the reader is afforded omniscience fairly early — with access to Justine and information about her confession, with Victor’s premonitions. The wrongful verdict comes *after* and not *before* the reader gains this knowledge about Justine, as a pessimistic rejoinder not only to Victor’s professed confidence in the reliability of the legal system but also to Victor’s more thorough, passionate procedure of rational doubt (which discovered Justine’s false confession). The reader in this way occupies a critical passivity that mirrors Victor’s: the readers observe and, with Victor, ruminates philosophically on the tragic miscarriage of judgment,

without an ability to intervene significantly. Similarly, in *Caleb Williams*, the mysterious appearance of the murder weapon near the Hawkinses' farm is never completely addressed or explained, whereas in *Frankenstein* the creature presently and thoroughly explains how he planted William's locket on Justine in his first *tête-à-tête* with Victor. Finally, *Frankenstein* representation of the maliciousness of institutional structures is more pronounced than *Caleb Williams*. Rather than simply revolve around the false confidence and tragic complacency of judges, *Frankenstein* also introduces a conniving nun to force Justine's confession.

The overall effect of these formal changes is *Frankenstein*'s critique of legal institutionality a more concentrated character than *Caleb*. Even as the episode points up multiple sites of failure — the nun, the judges, but also Victor himself, these failures have a more meaningful coherence than the more dispersed, ambiguous — or at least, unarticulated — failures in *Caleb Williams*. Its distributed network of failures is traced thoroughly and convincingly by Victor's acute intellect; and this gives the critique a more complete or total character: it aims it at legal system it traces at large more than any particular actor. Even the nun's more salient maliciousness seems to be different only in degree and not in kind from the judges' complacency and oversight. All seem inspired by the same desire to bring the case to a confident resolution. This systematic critique of is not left implicit but voiced explicitly by Victor following Justine's conviction and execution. Upon returning home, Victor cynically relates to Elizabeth that "it is decided as you may have expected; all judges had rather that ten innocent should suffer, than that one guilty should escape" (1818 66). The line is an ironic inversion of the conservative common law dictum, often attributed to William Blackstone, that it is better for ten guilty to escape rather than one innocent should suffer. Here, Victor appears to mock the kind of logic of organic immunization that we have already seen espoused in Paley's political treatise and hijacked and perverted by Rivers to win the confidence of Mortimer's borderers.

The additional structure and direction of *Frankenstein*'s critique seems intended to clarify and reinforce the critique of legal institutionality implicit in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, but in some sense these gestures towards formal closure rob the critique of its energy. Where *Frankenstein* resolves the indeterminacies and ambiguities in *Caleb Williams* to put a finer point on its critique, *Caleb Williams* seems to retain and redirect them to suspenseful, narrative ends in a way that makes its critique more probing and difficult. Complicating indeterminacies are not simply left unresolved in *Caleb Williams*: they are more widely and unevenly distributed in a

way that muddies what emerge as clear moral distinctions in *Frankenstein*. In *Frankenstein*, for instance, the victim of the murder, William, as well as Justine, appear wholly and unquestionably innocent, and the nun palpably evil. Yet, in *Caleb Williams*, it is the victim of the murder, Tyrrel, who is palpably disgusting, and from the beginning the reader's loyalties lie with Tyrrel's murderer, Falkland. Indeed, Caleb's loyalties remain with Falkland not only after Caleb discovers Falkland's guilt, but even after Falkland systemically destroys Caleb's wider character and credibility. As a result of these crossed signals, *Caleb Williams* generates a more difficult and inconclusive interrogation. And, in some sense, *Frankenstein's* efforts to make its critique more immediately and definitively legible for its reader rob its critique of these more negative energies, extinguishing them by shaping them so that they arrive at a clear moral conclusion.

Then again, we can disrupt the apparent closure and legibility of the Justine episode fairly easy by interrogating Victor's problematic role as critique. We can begin this by considering the disparity between Victor's final pessimism and the initial (and misplaced) optimism in the legal institution it displaces. Upon returning to Switzerland and conducting his own conclusive review of the case, Victor conveys that he "no fear, therefore, that any circumstantial evidence could be brought forward strong enough to convict her" (78). This line remains in both editions, but what follows changes in a way that seems designed to emphasize this disparity. In the 1818 edition, his investigation gives Victor a more general peace of mind: "[I]n this assurance," he writes, "I calmed myself, expecting the trial with eagerness, but without prognosticating an evil result" (60) But, in the 1831 edition, Shelley replaces these lines with others that bring the convenience and self-interest of Victor's optimism into focus. Victor instead reads the lack of evidence against Justine to relieve him of his responsibility to relate what he knows or suspects of the case. The 1831 reads:

My tale was not one to announce publicly; its astounding horror would be looked upon as madness by the vulgar. Did any one exist, except I, the creator, who would believe, unless his senses convinced him, in the existence of the living monument of presumption and rash ignorance which I had let loose upon the world? (78).

The text cleverly elides the logical connection between this observation and the previous one concerning circumstantial evidence, but the implication is that Victor is preoccupied with the question of whether he has a responsibility to relate what he knows. The difference between these two version is difficult to assess. The 1831 edition surely registers Victor's sense of his own responsibility the 1818 edition does not. But it is unclear if this recognition finally works to

increase or decrease Victor's credibility. In either context, Victor's optimism looks not only misplaced but suspiciously convenient. Victor justifies his silence and inaction simultaneously on the basis of the incomprehensible singularity of his story *and* his confidence that legal procedure will discover and account for this singularity. But, if Victor accepts that no one could possibly believe his story, how could he also anticipate the judges to detect its irregularities? Victor's knowledge of Justine's innocence seems to come from the thoroughness of his own constructive skeptical investigation: but it could just as easily come from his special knowledge of the case which is just as singular as the Creature's existence or as idiosyncratic as his testimony about the Creature's existence would appear. During the trial, Victor notes that "several strange facts combined against her, which might have staggered any one who had not such proof of her innocence as I had" (62). These suspicions seem more justified once we learn that Victor was never all that confident in the judges' ability.

This is one, suspicious way to square Victor's early optimism about the law with his final pessimism. A second, more sympathetic reading comes from considering the novel's explicit interest in circumstantial evidence. The skepticism about circumstantial evidence that the novel projects — ironically within the narrative and tragically without — seems to be slightly anachronistic, if we take the novel to be set well within the eighteenth-century past. As Alexander Welsh notes in *Strong Representations*, though by the early nineteenth century "circumstances were no longer so readily identified with conviction" (18), in the mid-eighteenth century (and beyond) circumstantial evidence enjoyed a privileged evidentiary status: "a concurrence of well authenticated circumstances" — also known as a "violent presumption" — was seen to "compose[] a stronger ground of assurance than positive [i.e. external] testimony, unconfirmed by circumstances, usually affords" (16). Of course, the novel seems interested in dramatizing the inability of this skepticism to actually *counteract* or *correct* the risks of circumstantial evidence. But the novel seems to want to portray any confidence in the efficacy of this skepticism against these risks as itself an egregious form of presumption, one that tends to lay blame on its failure on individual actors rather than on the uncertainty of the procedure more broadly.

To see this logic, consider the critical thrust of the anonymous tract, "Theory of Presumptive Proof" (1815), which remarks on the "general prejudice, which at present prevails for circumstantial evidence" (48), in which "doctrine of circumstantial evidence [has been]

hastily applied, by loose analogies and incidents, foreign to the intrinsic conditions of the subject” (45). What is notable here is that the author does not relinquish a faith in the practice of circumstantial evidence itself or the value of the “intrinsic conditions of the subject” (45). Rather, he is confident enough in the reliability of these procedures to discipline the “hasty” *individual* application. And this is true even as the author traces this haste to a general psychological disposition which “readily supposes a greater order and conformity in things than it finds” even as “many things in nature are singular, and extremely dissimilar” (48). For the author, while this psychological disposition maybe universal, succumbing to it is only characteristic of “weak men” who are always “the first to assent and to admit of loose analogies, imperfect resemblances, and inferences without proof” (48). More disciplined minds know how to “search for discriminations in subjects nearly similar, and are slow in yielding their assent to first impressions” (48).

Victor would seem to have a disciplined enough mind to resist circumstantial evidence. And yet the effectiveness of Victor’s own constructive skeptical procedure — his own reasonable doubt — somehow causes him to overestimate the capability of others’ reasonable doubt. In this way, his confidence emerges as a different kind of “presumption and rash ignorance,” one that is mirrored in the judge’s own overconfidence in their constructive skeptical abilities. An officer of the court tells Victor that Justine’s confession was “hardly required in so glaring a case, but I am glad of it...none of our judges like to condemn a criminal upon circumstantial evidence, be it ever so decisive” (65). The officer’s unease with circumstantial evidence is ironic, for in this context Justine’s confession itself — as well as her confusion throughout the proceedings — emerges as a form of circumstantial evidence. When these precautions against circumstantial evidence fail, Victor’s own confidence makes him inclined to see the failure of justice as finally not systemic deficiency of the legal system itself or the constructive skeptical procedures it promotes, but rather the moral and intellectual failures of individual judges.

In *World at Risk*, Ulrich Beck argues that *Frankenstein* exists at the cusp of a new literary vision of “risk” in which risk is “no longer...the existential hazardous of a precarious human condition forsaken by God” but in which “modern social institutions” such as the law and scientific practice take “centre stage” (6). For Beck, this literary history of risk works in “parallel though contrasting ways” with the history of risk in the “social sciences” (6). Where the social scientific places increasing confidence in the description and rationalization of the risks these

institutions present, the literary considers how this rationalization merely foists the “impenetrability, omnipresence, and undecidedability of risk” generated by these institutions “on the individual” (6). In one sense, Beck’s observation clarifies Victor’s tendency to blame the judges rather than the institution itself. But, more interestingly, it comments on Victor’s own psychological turmoil — which seems compounded in some sense by his faith in rationalization. For Victor’s overconfidence is not different in kind than the judges. They prove too confident in its own procedural practices — not to mention to committed to a broader imperative regulate and arbitrate experience through the rule of law and the distribution of justice — to detect or manage singularity — in this case, not only the Creature’s being but Justine’s individuality (something that the 1818 version takes pain to develop with a historical sketch). Instead, the judges believe Justine’s motivation to be petty theft, an impulsiveness that cuts against any sympathetic attachments she may have with William or which discredits that sympathetic attachment suspiciously as only ostensible, conspiratorial. Her individuality is effaced by a more sinister stereotype.

The effect of the novel’s critique is not simply to dismiss the value of circumstantial evidence, but to interrogate any overconfidence in the ability to manage its risks. What differentiates Elizabeth’s response from Victor’s is, for instance, where Victor seems to have successfully internalized a healthy suspicion of circumstantial evidence, Elizabeth struggles to resist its force. In this way, Elizabeth is aligned with Victor’s father, who initially doubts Justine’s guilt until “several circumstances came out, that have almost forced conviction upon us” (59). Victor’s father and Elizabeth are responding to a different constructive skeptical imperative than Victor. These different orientations towards circumstantial evidence inform Victor and Elizabeth’s different reactions to Justine’s wrongful conviction. We can measure Victor’s constructive skeptical investments by contrasting his cooler response to Elizabeth’s more thorough anxiety about the case. While Victor’s critique reaches for indignation, Elizabeth’s skepticism reaches an existential intensity:

When I reflect...on the miserable death of Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me...Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding, and endeavoring to plunge me into the abyss. (74)

Elizabeth's cry moves well beyond doubts about the legal actors but ascends to doubts about the possibility of obtaining any assurance in an uncertain world "when falsehood can look so like the truth" (74). the novel's critique would be more accurately ethical, not epistemic: less a comment about the problem of uncertainty itself but more about the problematic ways institutions attempt to minimize the risks uncertainty poses to the ends it wants to pursue in an effort to attain those ends. As Elizabeth's quote suggests, the problem is not of epistemic but moral assurance: not how to obtain "certain" knowledge with which to make judgments — which would be impossible — but how to "assure certain happiness" that the actions we take in a fundamentally uncertain world are ethically sound. Victor, as a constructive skeptic, seems unable to raise (or at least perform) these more existential questions.

This is not to say that Victor does not experience psychological turmoil. But it's nature seems more compromised than Justine's and, in any case, it is exacerbated through misrecognition. Victor's father thinks Victor is immaturely lingering over the horror of William and Justine's deaths. He implores Victor to move on: "[I]s it not a duty to the survivors, that we should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty owed to yourself; for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for society" (72). Victor's father offers another version of constructive skeptical indignation. For Victor, the advice was "good" but "totally inapplicable to my case" (72). Again Victor's knowledge of the monster's singularity isolates him, and Victor's father's misrecognition of Victor's emotional state reinforces Victor's isolation. Elizabeth too notes that "I am not so wretched as you are" (74), her misrecognition of Victor's "wretchedness" also marking it as a kind of deviancy. Victor's constructive skepticism, once comforting, increasingly looks more problematic. Victor's existential horror up is somehow compounded by his institutional faith in constructive skepticism. We see Shelley's novel raise the question of how the unfamiliar and the emergent, figured in the ranging of the Creature, undermines the legitimacy of verisimilitude as a response to uncertainty and, in turn, makes any assurance of "certain happiness" not only uncertain but largely contingent on an adequate acknowledgment of the extent and nature of the risks posed by uncertainty.

6.3 Caleb's Unreasonable Doubt

William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (1794) offers a compelling interrogation of the relation of doubt and desire, by which I mean not only how doubt could be said to produce or be attended by different forms of desire (for instance, the desire to resolve doubt into certainty), but also how different forms of desire condition different forms of doubt, and, even more strikingly, how doubt itself constitutes a form of desire in the novel. Since the novel's exploration of doubt also focuses on how doubt organizes legal inquiry (for example, into Tyrrel's murder or Falkland's guilt), I also want to consider how the novel's treatment of doubt is in conversation with a form of legal doubt that, by the late eighteenth century, had emerged as a central strategy within legal epistemology for addressing the problem of legal judgment in the face of imperfect evidence. Indeed, that rational, procedural form of doubt remains crystallized in the familiar "beyond reasonable doubt" evidentiary standard, which first emerged in common law practice in the late eighteenth-century and which continues to organize legal proof in American criminal law. Much has already been written about the novel's explicit thematization of legal judgment as well as its incorporation of various legal frameworks—for instance, the frameworks of testimony and trial—within its narrative form.¹⁶⁸ Given the central role of doubt in the legal theory of the period, the novel's emphasis on the role of doubt in assessing Falkland's case could be regarded as part and parcel of its appropriation of this broader legal framework. However, in this essay I intend to concentrate on how the novel's insistence on the relation of doubt and desire ultimately works to subvert this form of legal doubt by exposing the desires that condition it and thus upending assumptions regarding its disinterested and reasonable character.

To begin to develop these claims, we might turn to Godwin's suggestive remark in his 1831 advertisement to *St. Leon* that it was, in part, "the state of doubt in which the reader might for a time be as to the truth of [Caleb's] charges" against Falkland that made *Caleb Williams* "a narrative of no uncommon interest" (*St. Leon* v). It is a remark that testifies as much to the centrality of the trial framework to the novel's form as it does to the centrality of procedural doubt within that legal framework. And yet Godwin does not assume the reader's state of doubt to reflect the kind of disinterestedness we might expect or even demand from a judge or jury member reviewing Falkland's case. Rather, it is a sign of the reader's "uncommon"—that is,

¹⁶⁸For recent treatments of *Caleb Williams* in relation to eighteenth-century legal theory and practice, see Marshall 27–64, Grossman 37–38, and Hoeveler and Jenkins 327.

extraordinary or even excessive—interest in Falkland’s case. This is doubt as suspense, not suspension. It heats up rather than cools down judgment. In this sense, the character of the reader’s doubt could be said to have a closer affinity with Caleb’s doubts and suspicions about Falkland; it reproduces Caleb’s doubt-as-suspense.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, however, the reader’s doubt also appears to constitute a negative recoil from Caleb’s suspicions. Here again Godwin’s retrospective remark is suggestive since Godwin assumes the reader’s doubt to center on the “truth of [the] charges” put forward by Caleb rather than directly on the facts of Falkland’s case—or, in Godwin’s terms from the same advertisement, not on Falkland’s “atrocious crime” itself but on the “annoyance [Falkland] suffers from the immeasurable and ever-wakeful curiosity of a raw youth” (v). In other words, it is a question of the merit or grounds of Caleb’s suspicion, a question that includes but also exceeds the question of Falkland’s actual guilt. Although Godwin seems to assume that the reader’s doubts only exist “for a time” (presumably until Falkland confesses), the novel’s ethical difficulty and sophistication would seem to hinge on the fact that the reader’s doubts about the “truth” of Caleb’s charges – again, in this sense of their warrant, of the legitimacy of Caleb’s grounds for making them – remain long after the factual certainty of Falkland’s guilt is established. The reader’s doubt does not ultimately register a dispute about the facts of Falkland’s case but rather a dissatisfaction with the moral ambivalence of Caleb’s doubt. On one hand, it seems evident that Caleb’s doubt about Falkland’s innocence is hardly grounded in a disinterested desire for legal justice. Instead, his doubt seems grounded in an excessive, indeterminate form of desire. On the other hand, Caleb’s doubt, however compromised by desire, somehow succeeds in discovering Falkland’s guilt where the supposedly disinterested procedural doubt of the legal system fails. In this sense, the reader’s dissatisfaction with Caleb’s doubt is compounded by an equal dissatisfaction with the legal system, whose form of legal doubt appears no less compromised. To complicate matters even further, the affinities between the reader’s and Caleb’s doubt make it so that any dissatisfaction the reader may have with Caleb’s doubt also amounts to a negative recoil from her own doubt-as-suspense, a recognition of how this affective excess similarly compromises any claim the reader has to disinterested judgment. This compounding dissatisfaction should be seen as an emergent effect and instrument of the novel’s negativity, one which turns doubt upon

¹⁶⁹Uphaus similarly observes that Caleb’s curiosity “excites” and “expresses the desires of the reader’s curiosity” (281) and functions as “a psychological attribute by which the reader is lured into reenacting Caleb’s processes of mind” (282).

itself to interrogate a certain faith in doubt's reliability as a disinterested ground for judgment under uncertainty.

6.3.1 Constructive Skepticism and "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt"

While the novel's pursuit of doubt as desire engages most directly with the legal form of "reasonable doubt" I have described above, it should also be seen as engaging with and commenting on a more widespread embrace of rational skeptical procedures as a viable response to the problem of judgment under uncertainty in the period. As Barbara Shapiro notes in her discussion of eighteenth-century legal theory, because legal theorists assumed a fundamental similarity between legal and everyday reasoning, eighteenth-century legal epistemology should not be understood as distinct from the general epistemology of the period. Rather it should be viewed largely as an attempt to apply the most current epistemological theory to specific legal problems (Shapiro, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* 19, 38). As Shapiro observes, long before the phrase "reasonable doubt" emerged in the common law court, it formed the cornerstone of a broad epistemological program that united philosophers and divines of various stripes around the premise that, despite epistemological uncertainty, "reasonable men, employing their senses and rational faculties, could derive truths that they would have no reason to doubt" (*Beyond Reasonable Doubt* 7).

It is specifically this conservative character of constructive skepticism and how it conditions the character of legal doubt adopted within eighteenth-century legal theory that I want to examine in this section as a necessary philosophical background for understanding the novel's approach to doubt. This conservatism is inscribed in the demand that legal doubt must be "reasonable" doubt. It is a qualification that reflects constructive skepticism's organizing assumption regarding the qualified value of rational skepticism as a response to judgment under uncertainty. On one hand, the "beyond reasonable doubt" standard reflects the recognition that an actively skeptical posture helps reduce the risks of factual error and wrongful conviction in legal judgment. On the other hand, the standard reflects the recognition that, since legal facts are always subject to some degree of uncertainty, at a certain point doubt must lose its instrumental value and become an impediment to legal judgment. Allowing some doubt helps reduce the risk of wrongful conviction; allowing *any* doubt makes it impossible to convict at all. As such, the "beyond reasonable doubt" standard attempts to strike a balance between, on the one hand, a

desire to reduce the risks of uncertainty and, on the other, a desire to preserve the possibility of legal judgment despite the risks that inevitably attend uncertainty. It achieves this balance by positing a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of doubt, between “reasonable” doubts that are recognized within the legal process and “unreasonable” doubts that, for various reasons, fail to qualify. The distinction aims to separate “plausible” from “merely possible” doubt, “reasonable” doubt from “any doubt at all,” and, most importantly for our purposes, “private” or “interested” forms of doubt from “public” or “disinterested” forms of doubt.

Though these distinctions appear largely normative in retrospect, they were regarded as descriptive in the period and, along with constructive skeptical arguments for the sufficiency for “moral certainty,” depended more fundamentally on a descriptive epistemological distinction between two kinds of knowledge, “probable” and “demonstrative.” “Demonstrative knowledge” entailed propositions that could be proved by logical demonstration and, thus, produced an “absolute” or “demonstrative” certainty that necessitated assent. Since probable knowledge could never admit of this level of demonstrative certainty, the evidentiary standards for proof in probable knowledge had to be adjusted to reflect the intuition that one could gain sufficient, if incomplete, degrees of certainty to justify practical action by ascending a graduated scale of belief based on degrees of “moral evidence.” In this sense, degrees of evidence could be correlated to relative degrees of belief ranging from absolute doubt or disbelief up to opinion and, finally, to full confidence and conviction. “Moral certainty” existed at the top of this evidentiary hierarchy and was assumed to provide a functional equivalent to demonstrative certainty in the realm of contingent fact. It was reserved for propositions that would be “unreasonable” to doubt despite any theoretical level of uncertainty.

Intuitions about the sufficiency of moral certainty were developed with reference to widely-observed and fairly uncontroversial natural regularities (e.g., the rising and setting of the sun or the ebb and flow of the tides) or to widely attested historical or geographical facts (e.g., that there was a historical figure named Julius Caesar or that a city called Rome existed). But the eighteenth-century legal theorist had little reservations about applying the label of moral certainty to less regular, more controversial legal facts. Eighteenth-century legal treatises readily adopted the basic epistemological distinction between moral and demonstrative knowledge to develop a normative account of evidentiary standards. Treatise writers approached the epistemological distinctions as if addressing an audience that would be either unfamiliar with the

nature of moral evidence or somehow reluctant to accept the sufficiency of moral certainty relative to demonstrative certainty. Similarly, treatise writers tended to treat orientations towards uncertainty that challenged the sufficiency of moral certainty as irrational and pathological. Such orientations reflected an excessive and unreasonable desire for certainty that failed to grasp the very nature of probable knowledge, much less the exigency and necessity of practical action under uncertainty. They fixated on doubts that were theoretical instead of practical, scrupulous instead of significant, matters of private rather than public concern.

To enjoin readers to accept the sufficiency of moral certainty, treatise writers could depict the relation between demonstrative and moral certainty in various ways and to various effects. In *Essay Upon the Law of Evidence* (1789), for instance, the jurist John Morgan stresses the functional equivalence of moral and demonstrative certainty to the point of identity, asking readers to accept the truth of legal testimony under oath with the same confidence as if it had been demonstratively proven. For Morgan, even though “human testimony, i.e. evidence given by one man to another, can never produce certainty,” nonetheless, in matters where a witness is under oath “[a mind] must acquiesce [to a witness’s testimony] therein as from a knowledge by demonstration, because, according to the nature of things, it ought not any longer to doubt, but to be nearly, if not as perfectly well satisfied, as if we of ourselves knew the fact” (5). Treatise writers could also stress the categorical difference of demonstrative and moral certainty in an effort to reinforce the concept of sufficient though incomplete evidence. This latter strategy generally necessitated pathologizing the inability to perceive this difference as unreasonable and irrational. As we have seen with Gambier in Chapter 2, the desire to attain degrees of certainty thought to exceed “reasonable doubt” was generally treated in this manner as an epistemic category error, a refusal to accept the basic epistemic conditions governing the evaluation of matters of fact—what Gambier refers to as the “nature of the thing”—rather than, say, a legitimate concern or anxiety about the limits of practical judgment established by uncertainty. Indeed, it would be possible to show that similar epistemological distinctions continue to organize the concept of “reasonable doubt” in legal theory. For instance, in the 1850 case *Commonwealth v. Webster* still regarded by many legal theorists as the most lucid attempt to define the “beyond reasonable doubt” standard, Massachusetts Supreme Court Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw characterizes reasonable doubt as “. . . not mere possible doubt; because every

thing [sic] relating to human affairs, and depending on moral evidence, is open to some possible or imaginary doubt” (qtd. in Shealy 234 n. 40).

If Gambier’s account reflects a pathology of doubt developed in response to the threat posed to legal judgment within rational skepticism itself, then William Paley’s reflections on legal doubt in *The Principles of Political and Moral Philosophy* (1785) present an alternative skeptical pathology developed in response to a separate tradition of theological skepticism which perceived doubt as a sign of uneasy conscience and, as such, recommended withholding judgment in the face of any uncertainty. Unlike the rationalist pathology sketched above, which focuses on reasonable expectations of certainty as informed by epistemology, this alternative pathology focuses on how private concerns of conscience unreasonably interfere with public and civic duties to uphold and execute the law. This pathology was characterized as the “scrupulous conscience” which, as Shapiro explains, was regarded as “a troubled or diseased condition” of an individual “reluctant to act even after doubts had been resolved” (“Changing Language” 267). Thus, Paley laments the civil disservice performed by a jury member paralyzed by “an overstrained scrupulousness, or weak timidity” which “holds it the part of a safe conscience not to condemn any man, whilst there exists the minutest possibility of his innocence” (391). For Paley, such private reservations threatened the very efficacy of the legal system itself, where that efficacy was conceived largely in terms of its ability to root out and convict criminals despite uncertainty: “[W]hen certain rules of adjudication must be pursued [sic], when certain degrees of credibility must be accepted, in order to reach the crimes with which the public are infested; courts of justice should not be deterred from the application of these rules, by every suspicion or danger, or by the mere possibility of confounding the innocent with the guilty” (393). Indeed, in his 2008 study of the origins of the “beyond reasonable doubt” standard, James Q. Whitman draws on this figure of the “scrupulous conscience” to support his revisionist argument that the standard was developed—at least at first—not to promote sound evidentiary proof practices but rather to provide “moral comfort” for jury members anxious about the eternal consequences of an error in uncertain, temporal judgment. For Whitman, the reasonable doubt standard was “originally a theological doctrine” which responded to “religiously motivated reluctance to convict” (4) by “reassur[ing] jurors that they could convict the defendant without risking their own salvation, so long as their doubts about guilt were not ‘reasonable’” (3). In this sense,

Whitman argues, the standard was “not originally designed to make it more difficult for jurors to convict”—as we assume it to be today—but “to make conviction easier” (4).

These alternative pathologies should sufficiently demonstrate how the concept of “reasonable doubt”—though ostensibly formulated as a means of alleviating the problems of uncertainty—is also informed more fundamentally by a conservative desire to preserve the possibility of legal judgment under uncertainty against the threats posed by more radical forms of skepticism, whether those threats are perceived as coming from within the rational tradition itself or from outside that tradition in the form of theologically-inflected skepticism. These pathologies should also illustrate how the concept of “reasonable doubt” responds to this threat by normalizing a circumscribed form of “reasonable” doubt that reflects these conservative assumptions and, in turn, pathologizing other orientations towards uncertainty that do not reflect these conservative assumptions as excessive and illegitimate. With these observations, we are now in a position to consider how the novel’s exploration of doubt and desire—and, more precisely, doubt-as-desire—responds to this conservatism informing “reasonable doubt.”

6.3.2 Before Skepticism: *Caleb Williams* and Unreasonable Doubt

The novel’s insistence on the relation of doubt and desire can be read as an attempt to expose how the desire to preserve the possibility of legal judgment against uncertainty conditions the form of procedural, rational doubt adopted by the legal system and, ultimately, circumscribes the kinds of inquiry it can perform. The novel’s pessimistic depiction of the inability of the legal process to, if not convict Falkland for Tyrrel’s murder, at least save the Hawkinses from wrongful conviction seems constructed to raise doubts about the ability of procedural doubt to identify and assess risks associated with factual uncertainty or, more provocatively, to achieve anything more than preserve the appearance of the legitimacy of the legal process itself. In this sense, the novel asks whether legal doubt is grounded, as it professes, in a desire to assess and respond to the risks of uncertainty or, instead, grounded in a more basic desire to preserve the possibility of legal judgment under uncertainty itself. Further, the novel seems particularly invested in exposing how the normative distinction between “reasonable” and “unreasonable” forms of doubt does not necessarily reflect a legitimate response to the risks of uncertainty but rather functions as a technique for rationalizing the legal status quo. It is as if the novel’s subversive treatment of the distinction between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” doubt aims to

recast that distinction as one between “legitimizing” and “delegitimizing” forms of doubt. “Legitimate” doubts are “legitimizing” in the sense that they operate within the legal system to strengthen and legitimize the claim that it is not only possible but reasonable to perform legal judgments despite uncertainty, whereas “illegitimate” doubts are “delegitimizing” in that they threaten to undermine this claim. In this context, the desire of the legal system to represent such doubts as illegitimate “in themselves” rather than in relation to the organizing assumptions of the legal system becomes an essential strategy for preserving and reinforcing the authority of the legal system itself. The normative distinction between reasonable and unreasonable forms of doubt relies, primarily, on the assumption that “unreasonable” doubts threaten the legal system on account of their origins in illegitimate forms of desire. But while the distinction purports to preserve the legal process from the pernicious influence of desire, the novel explores the chilling possibility that this distinction not only effectively *inscribes* such unreasonable desires in the legal process but also surreptitiously obscures or conceals this fact by directing critical attention towards a specter of unreasonable doubt.¹⁷⁰

We can draw out these interests in the novel by considering the brief and seemingly irrelevant appearance of a group of skeptics in the midst of Collins’s narrative:

. . . Hawkins and his son were tried, condemned, and afterwards executed. In the interval between the sentence and execution Hawkins confessed his guilt with many marks of compunction; though there are persons by whom this is denied; but I have taken some pains to enquire into the fact, and am persuaded that their disbelief is precipitate and groundless. (Godwin *Caleb Williams* 174)

The passage is one of the few times Collins breaks from his task of narrating the events surrounding Tyrrel’s murder to perform the task of validating his narrative. It is significant that this task of validation takes the specific form of a procedural skeptical inquiry. Collins doubles back to review and confirm the evidence for Hawkins’s confession in the face of skeptical objections, in a manner that, though technically extralegal, seems intended to mirror and extend

¹⁷⁰I should register my distance from the novel’s position here. I concur with Gregg Crane’s assessment that “[t]he impossibility of absolute certainty does not mean that all judgments are merely arbitrary exercises of power. In terms of their truth content, all narratives are not equal. Some are more plausible than others” (802). What I do intend to draw out, however, is what I take to be the novel’s deep moral ambiguity which, as I have suggested, arises in large part from its formal indeterminacies. And here I follow Tilottama Rajan’s important readings of these indeterminacies as characteristic features of “Romantic narratives,” which contrary to the common perception of the Victorian Novel, are not disciplinary but exploratory, disruptive in character. See Rajan, “Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel.” *Studies in Romanticism* 27.2 (1988): 221-51 and *Romantic Narratives* (Johns Hopkins, 2010).

the careful legal procedures performed to absolve Falkland of any involvement in Tyrrel's murder. Despite their minor presence, these skeptics function as an essential feature of Collins's skeptical investigation. They enable Collins to demonstrate what Caleb calls the "uncommonly judicious" (166) nature of Collins's investigation by situating his procedural application of reasonable doubt in productive contrast with a doubt that is marked, explicitly by Collins and implicitly in other respects, as unreasonable. The episode illustrates Collins's willingness to entertain doubt as well as his willingness to assess and dismiss it on rational grounds: Collins does not dismiss the disbelievers reflexively but only after he has "taken some pains to enquire into the fact" and is "persuaded" that their doubts are "precipitate and groundless." The figure capitalizes further on the suggestive contrast established between Collins's dynamic performance of a procedural doubt and the skeptics' static doubt and, likewise, between Collins's singularity and the skeptics' collectivity. It is not just Collins's independent inquiry but his very independence of mind that is set in relief with the mob-like collective judgment of the skeptics. This is true even as Collins's performance of intellectual autonomy manages to disable the reader's own critical capacities by omitting any specific content that readers might use to perform their own assessments of these skeptical doubts. The skeptics, along with the nature of their reservations, remain unnamed (do they deny that Hawkins ever confessed or that he was ever guilty, or both?). They are a stage prop in Collins's performance of reasonableness, a rhetorical *aporia* that allows Collins to acknowledge and then authoritatively dismiss any doubt about the legitimacy of Hawkins's execution.

The episode should sufficiently illustrate the novel's explicit interest in what I will refer to as the "rhetoric of reasonableness" deployed by constructive skepticism. And, similarly, observing the interpretive instability of this episode as the novel progresses should illustrate how the novel wields irony to undermine the authority of this rhetoric. Of course, whatever authority the reader grants Collins will be largely undermined by his later revelation that his judgment of the case had been influenced by his fear of retribution from Falkland and, more to the point, his desire to preserve the moral distinctions that the uncertainties of the case threaten to disrupt. "If you could change all my ideas, and show me that there was no criterion by which vice might be prevented from being mistaken for virtue," he asks Caleb, "what benefit would arise from that?" (Godwin *Caleb Williams* 416). The question could be taken as the novel's most concentrated expression of the conservative impulse I have been examining, and it affords a suggestive

glimpse into how the desire to preserve the possibility of legal judgment under uncertainty is suffused with an anxiety about the consequences of its impossibility. In this light, legal doubt emerges as a form of suspense that anxiously anticipates its ability not to account for uncertainty but to overcome it.

But, Collins's revelation aside, it is also true that his rhetorical deployment of the skeptics never quite behaves the way he intends. And the unruliness of the rhetorical figure itself suggests how, in the final analysis, the real instabilities and risks that attend uncertainty defy the efforts of constructive skepticism to contain them. Collins's effort to validate his narrative raises suspicions about why it must be validated in the first place. Collins introduces the skeptics as a way of closing down the question of Hawkins's confession, but they eventually mark the very rupture in Collins's narrative Caleb will fixate on when formulating his own doubts about Hawkins's guilt and Falkland's innocence. Collins presumably omits the skeptics' specific objections from his narrative because he believes they have no rational basis. Yet, in the light of Hawkins's innocence, this omission seems to demand that readers acknowledge the ethical merit of the skeptics' doubts *prior to* and even *despite* any consideration of their rational basis. Similarly, the skeptics' plurality, which at first appeared to be a sign of their intellectual slavishness, becomes a sign of their intellectual and moral resolve—especially once we take into account that they are essentially the only collective body figured in the novel not under the absolute sway of some social superior. All told, by the novel's end, the figure's rhetorical function seems to shift from *aporia* to *exempla*, in what amounts to an ironic inversion of that religious genre's tendency to introduce skeptics as counterexamples whose disbelief and its miserable consequences are meant to redouble the faith of both reader and author. In this inversion, “unreasonable” doubt as it is defined by constructive skepticism stands out as the only reasonable and ethical response to the risks of uncertainty.

The critique I have developed from Collins's episode with the skeptics should clarify the novel's deep skepticism regarding the legal concept of reasonable doubt, the rhetoric of reasonableness it deploys, and the conservative desires that inform it. Yet, as much as Collins's episode with the skeptics clarifies about the novel's interest in “unreasonable” doubt as a negative response to “reasonable doubt,” it risks giving the false impression that this response can be neatly, clearly, or completely articulated by this critique. On the contrary, this critique seems to be only a side effect of a much more disruptive form of negativity pursued by the novel,

one which ultimately muddies whatever critical or moral clarity I have drawn from the ironies above. In fact, it is arguably even misleading to characterize the effects of the novel's negativity as "critique," since the procedure of rational critique we have inherited from the eighteenth century is animated by the very same spirit of constructive skepticism the novel calls into question. To see this, simply consider that Kant's critical project, although typically framed as an idealist response to Hume's skeptical empiricism, is no less a variety of skepticism itself, one that is distinctively conservative and therapeutic.¹⁷¹ This is an observation I will return to in the coda when I consider how the negativity *Caleb Williams* pursues suggests a much different understanding of Romanticism's relation to skepticism than the one proposed by Stanley Cavell in his well-known account of Romanticism as a "response" to Kant's settlement with epistemological skepticism.

If it is misleading to characterize the novel's negativity as critique, it is similarly misleading to characterize it as a form of skepticism itself, even as the novel's negativity takes doubt both as its central instrument and object of inquiry. This is because the force of novel's negativity seems to originate in its exploration of doubt as it exists *before* it hardens or stabilizes into skepticism. Indeed, the novel seems to resist any conflation of skepticism and doubt in an effort to preserve the unruly aspects of doubt that get lost once doubt is disciplined by skepticism. That is, if skepticism can be characterized as a directed, instrumental application of doubt to specific intellectual or epistemic problems, then I would argue that the novel pursues a form of doubt that lacks this instrumentality or directedness: a form of doubt that is inchoate, marked by affective excess rather than intellectual restraint, hot rather than cold.¹⁷² In the

¹⁷¹After all, Kant's aim is to reassure us that we can remain confident in our ability to employ our rational faculties to attain reliable knowledge about the phenomenal world of appearances as long as we accept our inability to know the world beyond appearances, in itself, as noumena.

¹⁷²In his essayistic treatments of belief and doubt, Godwin does attempt to inject desire into rational skepticism, and briefly surveying the problems he encounters should illustrate how rational skepticism cannot accommodate the examination of doubt and desire the novel pursues. In "Essay of Skepticism," for instance, Godwin works against the common assumption that skepticism must be "necessarily allied to coldness of character" and insists instead that skeptical inquiry must be imbued with an "ardour and animation" located between cold "indifference" and overheated "enthusiasm" (308). Even as the skeptic must be "careful not to suffer a predilection for one side of a question" (302) he is nonetheless "by no means inclined to hold himself in a state of equal indifference to all opinions" (304). Yet, Godwin seems well aware of problems of asserting the influence of interest or passion into rational skepticism in this way, a fact which comes through in his more downbeat essay, "On Belief." There, the disinterested procedure posed as an ideal by skepticism seems to be inevitably thwarted by an insidious will to believe. For while Godwin insists that "we must be, at all times, and to the last hour of our existence, accessible to conviction built upon new evidence" (247) he also admits that when considering any consequential issue there appears to be "ever a secret influence urging me earnestly to desire to find one side of the question right and the other wrong" (249) and that "[t]hat which we wish to believe, we are already greatly in progress to embrace" (249).

episode above, Collins refers to the skeptics' doubt as "groundless" in the sense of lacking rational grounds, but it is better to characterize the doubt I am describing as the affective ground from which skeptical doubt draws its critical energies, the raw doubt-as-desire that skepticism refines and harnesses. Here it should be clear that I have effectively described the character of Caleb's doubt. It should also be evident that the destabilizing effects achieved by the novel will emanate from the unreasonableness of Caleb's doubt-as-desire. In any case, these effects seem too ambivalent to constitute anything like a skeptical program. They faithfully reproduce the doubt and uncertainty from which they originate.

These negative definitions of the novel's negativity should provide a sense of just how far the novel must depart from our usual understanding of the forms negativity can take so that it may arrive in uncharted waters or, as Godwin famously declared, "launch [readers] upon a sea of moral and political inquiry" (*Caleb Williams* 451). However, we can begin to sketch out a positive account of the novel's negativity by first identifying the ways that Caleb's doubt does appear to accord with the critique of "reasonable doubt" I have developed from the passage above. Once we have pursued this accord to its limit, we can then consider how the unreasonableness of Caleb's doubt necessarily points beyond this critique.

In light of the legal epistemology I have sketched, we might argue that Caleb's tendency to understand his doubt primarily as a form of curiosity—one that is excessive, unproductive, and idiosyncratic or, in Caleb's terms, "ungoverned," "infantine," and "unreasonable" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 212, 224)—reflects the extent to which Caleb has internalized the normative distinction between reasonable and unreasonable doubt as means for assessing the ethical merit (or lack thereof) of his doubt. Indeed, Caleb consistently weighs his skeptical disposition against an internalized sense of what a reasonable person would or would not doubt. He continually seeks—and fails—to find what he would consider to be rational grounds to justify his dissatisfaction with Collins's narrative. Caleb doubts Hawkins's guilt even as Hawkins's alleged confession makes him feel "there was no longer a possibility of doubting" (180); he pursues his suspicions about Falkland even as "could find nothing that [he] could consider as justifying [him] in persisting in the shadow of a doubt" (198) about Falkland's innocence. In this way, Caleb anxiously observes the distance between his doubt as it is and his sense of what it should be.

Moreover, Caleb's internalization of these norms helps explain, to some extent, his inability to attribute *any* ethical value to his doubt, despite the many opportunities he has to reassess or qualify its value in light of new evidence. Falkland confesses his guilt, Collins reveals his narrative to have been compromised by political and practical concerns, but Caleb only grows more certain of the unethical and pathological nature of his own doubt. In his retrospective attempt to "divid[e] . . . the offensive [and] defensive" (212) parts of his actions, he ends up condemning all his behavior leading up to Falkland's confession. By the novel's conclusion, Caleb has even rejected this division and remains saddled with a sense of guilt many critics have found to be, like his curiosity, excessive and inexplicable. Yet, on this reading, any dissatisfaction a reader might have with Caleb's inability to recover any ethical merit in his actions or with the excessive sense of guilt that results from this inability should ultimately resolve into a dissatisfaction with the normative assumptions that enable Caleb to misread his doubt in this way. Caleb's conversations later in the novel with Collins and Laura—both of whom reinforce this misreading—seem designed in part to exacerbate this sense of dissatisfaction. And, in this way, the novel recovers the ethical potential of Caleb's doubt while also sowing discontent with institutional efforts to obscure or discredit that ethical potential.

Approaching Caleb's doubt in this recuperative manner illustrates how the novel's negativity carries forward the deconstructive project Godwin pursues against political institutions in *An Enquiry to Political Justice* (1793). In that work we find Godwin similarly invested in exposing the various techniques political institutions deploy to condition private acts of judgment so they reflect and reinforce the organizing assumptions of the institutions themselves. Caleb's mistaken dismissal of his doubt as idiosyncratic and his consequent inability to perceive its ethical and political potential exemplifies the pernicious effects of what Godwin attacks in the *Enquiry* as the attempt to distinguish between public and private spheres of judgment, or, in Godwin's terms, between "conduct in civil concerns" in which positive institutions "may properly interfere" and "matters of conscience" in which "positive institutions ought to leave me personally free" (*Political Justice* 75). For Godwin, while such distinctions might appear to establish an autonomous sphere where ethical considerations preside independently from political interests, their ultimate effect is to consolidate institutional power against the disruptive ethical and political potential of conscience. And it is notable that, for Godwin, the tension an individual feels between the responsibilities dictated by private judgment and those dictated by

institutions often manifests as doubt: an individual's desire to "believe what is dictated to them" by institutions is frustrated by the absence of "that in which belief consists, evidence and conviction" (368), resulting in "a perpetual dissatisfaction" (368) which speaks to the "execrable tyranny" (368) of any attempt to coerce private judgment.¹⁷³ Caleb's doubt thus has the effect of both exemplifying this dissatisfaction for and generating this dissatisfaction within the reader.

Although the novel's negative project aligns with the deconstructive project of the *Enquiry* in this general sense, the novel's insistence that the procedural skepticism adopted within rational inquiry itself constitutes a form of institutionality that compromises private judgment illustrates how the novel manages to extend the *Enquiry*'s project beyond the limits imposed by its own commitment to rationalism. To be sure, throughout the *Enquiry* Godwin is concerned with preserving the autonomy of private judgment against the impositions of institutional norms. Yet Godwin also places great faith in the assumption that reason always functions in accord with individual conscience, as an instrument and not an impediment to the unbiased exercise of private judgment. It is a faith that originates in Godwin's appreciation for the dynamic and progressive nature of rational inquiry, which he characteristically contrasts to the stagnancy of custom and dogma. "Refer [people] to reading, to conversation, to meditation," Godwin writes, "but teach them neither creeds nor catechisms, either moral or political" (352). Indeed, it is in this spirit that Godwin deploys a rhetoric of reasonableness throughout the *Enquiry* to punctuate his own exercises in private, rational judgment. But this assumption regarding the natural alignment of reason and conscience also blinds the *Enquiry* to how a rhetoric of reasonableness might be deployed *against* conscience as it manifests in "private" doubt or how such a rhetoric might be wielded to close down, rather than open up, rational inquiry. Yet, this is precisely how Collins (or Paley) deploys such rhetoric. Likewise, these are the rhetorical and ideological effects that Caleb must resist to pursue his own unreasonable doubt. In this respect, *Caleb Williams* could be said to turn the *Enquiry*'s deconstructive project on the latent threat of dogmatism posed by the rhetoric of reasonableness that treatise employs.

So far, I have approached Caleb's unreasonable doubt with the assumption that it aligns with and reinforces the critique of reasonable doubt I have teased out of the novel's ironic

¹⁷³ Moreover, Godwin's specific critique of legal institutions in the *Enquiry* involves recovering and elaborating the radical ethical implications of the "imperfection" or "uncertainty" of evidence (Godwin *Political Justice* 381, 401). For Godwin, since "[n]o principles of evidence have yet been laid down that are infallible" (78), the "veracity" and "competence" of witnesses as accurate and just observers must be subject to "continual doubt" (381).

treatment of Collins's rhetoric of reasonableness. On this assumption, the novel would appear to stage a coordinated critique of the legal system that mobilizes doubt and irony to undermine the legitimacy of the circumscribed form of doubt that system normalizes in an effort to preserve its own legitimacy. From this perspective, the novel's critique of reasonable doubt also appears to align with—and extend in striking and productive ways—the deconstructive project pursued in Godwin's *Enquiry*. This is a satisfying and neat interpretation of the novel's interest in unreasonable doubt. But it also helps clarify why Caleb's doubt *cannot* be perceived as ethically viable and must instead be regarded as “unreasonable” in ways that exceed the ideological distortions created by the normative account of reasonable doubt. For, on this reading, Caleb's doubt, although wrongly dismissed by the legal system and even by Caleb itself on the basis of its private and pathological nature, nonetheless appears to emerge as a viable ethical orientation to the problem of judgment under uncertainty. Yet, the novel's interest in unreasonable doubt does not seem to be how unreasonable doubt might *replace* the circumscribed form of “reasonable doubt” adopted within legal theory as, say, a more adequate response to the risks of judgment under uncertainty. Rather, the novel's interest lies in how Caleb's unreasonable doubt reveals the fundamental interestedness of all doubt—that is, how all doubt is grounded in desire—in a way that calls into question the viability of doubt as a disinterested ground for legal judgment. This point is succinctly captured in a central ethical paradox that frustrates any recuperative reading of Caleb's doubt: as readers, we have no way of knowing that Caleb's doubts about Falkland are justified until he confirms this fact through evidently unjustifiable means. Any attempt to assert the ethical viability of Caleb's doubt requires condoning the perverse psychological torture he performs on Falkland to confirm his suspicions. Caleb may not be as guilty as he believes, but he is hardly innocent. Further, this ambivalence gestures towards the insufficiency of the categories of guilt and innocence to capture Caleb's moral predicament.

While many critics have been puzzled by Caleb's excessive sense of guilt at the novel's end, there has been little debate that Caleb's suspicions towards Falkland at the beginning of the novel are ethically problematic in ways that the reading of Caleb's doubt I have pursued above cannot adequately address. For where I have read Caleb's tendency to understand his doubt as curiosity to be, in some respect, an ideological mechanism that misrepresents an ethical response as a pathological one, other critics have persuasively interpreted Caleb's curiosity to be a symptom of other inchoate forms of desire. Some critics, for instance, have argued that Caleb's

curiosity masks a political desire to wield the knowledge of Falkland's secret crimes against him as a means to achieve political power and equality.¹⁷⁴ Others have seen Caleb's compulsive curiosity as a symptom of his unspeakable homosocial desire for Falkland.¹⁷⁵ Caleb himself at one point proposes the compelling explanation that his excessive, suspicious reading of Falkland's behavior amounts to a symptom of his early habit of reading romances, in what amounts to a suggestive gesture towards the relation between paranoia and the experience of politeness that several critics have since explored in other contexts (*Caleb Williams* 60).¹⁷⁶ On one hand, the viability and mutual compatibility of these different interpretations should attest to the overdetermined nature of Caleb's doubt; this interpretive excess could be said to simply reproduce the affective excesses that condition Caleb's doubt. On the other hand, although this interpretive excess appears to present several competing or complementary desires "motivating" Caleb's doubt, it also attests more fundamentally to the indeterminate nature of Caleb's doubt — that is, its lack of clear motive, interest, or aim. It is as if Caleb's doubt radiates interestedness even as it does not display interestedness in any of its recognizable forms. The fact that no single interpretation of his curiosity feels any more viable than the other confirms this indeterminacy. And this observation lends some credence to Caleb's tendency to characterize his curiosity as immature and inexplicable instead of sinister or malicious. Indeed, even as critics have perceived something much more sinister behind his treatment of Falkland than "curiosity" can address, they have rarely suggested that Caleb is conscious of or consciously concealing the desires that motivate his curiosity. Instead, it is much more common to read Caleb as a victim of his repressed desires or other ideological mechanisms.¹⁷⁷

Rather than attempting to ascribe some specific motive or desire to Caleb's doubt, it seems more productive to consider how the indeterminate nature of Caleb's desire itself generates an irresistible but problematic urge in the reader to doubt his motivations even as

¹⁷⁴See, for instance, Handwerk 951–53, which also persuasively argues that Caleb's guilt reflects Caleb's inability to recontextualize, and thus rationalize, his own actions within an ideological framework in the same way he can Falkland's at the end of the published version of the novel.

¹⁷⁵ See Gold, "It's Only Love;" Corber, "Representing the 'Unspeakable;'" and Sedgwick 116–17.

¹⁷⁶ For instance, see Jesse Molesworth's recent discussion in *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* of the novel as a "weapon against Enlightenment" that fosters the illogical and excessive expectations about the causal and teleological shape of everyday experience (Molesworth 6–7).

¹⁷⁷ For instance, Gold and Handwerk pursue their ideological readings explicitly against the assumption that Caleb's behavior can be attributed to personal idiosyncrasy or pathology. Even Uphaus, who objects to reading Caleb's behavior in terms of the "corrupting influences of social and political institutions" (279), nonetheless mitigates Caleb's agency by asserting that "Caleb's curiosity is not entirely governed by conscious control: his instincts exceed his control and always drive him forward" (282).

Caleb's desires remain inaccessible. Of course, as I have already suggested, this lingering dissatisfaction with Caleb's doubt is important in itself for the way that it disrupts any moral or ethical certainties that might potentially be inferred from Caleb's act of discovering Falkland's guilt. Even though, against the background of the ineffective and compromised procedural doubt of the legal institution, Caleb's doubt somehow emerges as a *more* ethical response to judgment under uncertainty, the reader's sense that Caleb's doubt is grounded in illegitimate desire—which remains even after Falkland confesses—makes it difficult to attribute any ethical or legal value to his discovery. The ethical dilemma manages to exceed the mutually exclusive logic of ethical judgment in a way that evacuates it of its meaning. In this context it seems possible to say that Caleb's doubt is somehow unethical yet ethical, but to say this is to say nothing at all about Caleb's doubt. Instead, it is to demonstrate the insufficiency of these categories themselves to respond to the complexity introduced by uncertainty. But it seems equally important that this dissatisfaction—that is, the reader's conviction that Caleb's doubt is somehow motivated by illegitimate desire—remains even as the reader has no means of resolving the indeterminacy surrounding Caleb's doubt-as-desire, no means of confirming this suspicion. It reflects the extent to which the reader's doubt is itself unreasonable, propelled but also compromised by the desire to judge Caleb's actions finally as ethical or unethical, interested or disinterested. In this way, the novel embraces the ethical dilemma presented by Caleb's doubt as a productive site of negativity and exploits it to sow a more fundamental doubt about the legitimacy of ethical judgments, one captured in Caleb's own progressive dissatisfaction with his former belief that innocence and guilt were “things in the whole world most opposite to each other” (243) as he discovers that such a belief is “impossible . . . to hold” once one is “conversant with the passions and institutions of men” (404).

Coda: Romantic Doubt

While the striking deconstruction of eighteenth-century constructive skepticism *Caleb Williams* performs seems to be only a by-product of the novel's more ambitious pursuit of the destabilizing excesses of negativity, the presence and precision of that critique suggest the potential for reading the form of doubt the novel recovers—what I have characterized as doubt “before skepticism”—as a specifically “Romantic” form of doubt that constitutes, to some extent, a Romantic reaction to the conservative and constructive character of eighteenth-century

rational skepticism. By characterizing this Romantic doubt as a “reaction” to skepticism in this way, I expect readers to hear echoes of Stanley Cavell’s interpretation of Romanticism as a response to Kant’s “settlement” with skepticism. But, by recalling Cavell, my aim is also to demonstrate how this form of Romantic doubt offers a significant challenge to Cavell’s thesis and, further, reveals the more conservative aspect of Cavell’s account of Romanticism.

To draw out this challenge, I want to focus on the way that Cavell constricts or limits the possible forms that any Romantic “reaction” to—and, particularly, *against*—Kant’s settlement with skepticism might take. Cavell imagines the Romantic response to Kant’s settlement to have two faces. One face, which Cavell calls “avoidance,” registers a fundamental dissatisfaction with the limits Kant places on our ability to access the thing-in-itself, while the other, which Cavell calls “acknowledgment,” accepts the validity of and stability afforded by Kant’s limits on knowledge. In one sense, Cavell sees these twin reactions as dynamically constructed and mutually reinforcing: the Romantic “simultaneously craves [the] comfort [of Kant’s idea of limitation] and crave[s] escape from its comfort . . . as if the one stance produced the wish for the other” (*Quest for the Ordinary* 32). But, in another, Cavell sees them as a two-phase progression that amounts to a maturation. While Cavell empathizes with the Romantic response of “avoidance” (“You don’t—do you? —have to be a romantic to feel sometimes about that settlement: Thanks for nothing” [31]), it is evident that Cavell regards “acknowledgment” as the more productive, mature, and theoretically interesting response. For whereas the strategy of avoidance entails for Cavell pursuing the idle Romantic fantasies of animism and solitude, the strategy of acknowledgement sets to the responsible tasks of accepting and adjusting to the hard limits established by language as a social form and, further, of working within these confines to remake and contribute to (ordinary) language so that it reflects common interests and desires.

Cavell’s preferred project of acknowledgement and adjustment continues to influence approaches to Romanticism in ways that testify to its critical sophistication and potential.¹⁷⁸ But one issue with Cavell’s interpretation is that, because he ultimately accepts the philosophical authority of Kant’s settlement—he refers to it as “the most stable philosophical settlement in the modern period” (31)—Cavell has a fairly limited conception of what rejecting Kant’s settlement

¹⁷⁸For two recent studies informed by Cavell’s project of acknowledgment and adjustment, see Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited: Romanticism and Adjustment* and Duffy, *The Constitution of Shelley’s Poetry: The Argument of Language in Prometheus Unbound*. For another important critical engagement with Cavell’s approach to Romanticism, see Roberts, *Chaos of History*, esp. 19-24.

might entail. And he assumes, ultimately, that Kant's settlement sets the conditions for any response to it. Cavell's strategy of avoidance may have the Romantic reject the terms of Kant's settlement, but only after she has accepted Kant's characterization of the problem of knowledge as valid and authoritative (if only to overcome it on his terms). Yet, the negativity I have explored in this essay points us to an alternative form the Romantic rejection of Kant's settlement might take. In this form, the Romantic's dissatisfaction with Kant lies not with the ways Kant's limit cordons off certain knowledge or denies transcendence but in the way that Kant's settlement misrepresents the nature or extent of the threat to judgment posed by uncertainty. Romantic doubt, as informed by negativity, does not reject Kant's limits themselves but rather rejects the false comfort with uncertainty and false confidence in our ability to overcome its threat that those limits promote. Instead, Romantic doubt would cultivate a discomfort with the risks uncertainty poses and sow doubt about our ability to overcome or even know them. Romantic doubt is the "awful doubt" (Shelley 77) of Shelley's "Mont Blanc" that an unflinching view of Nature as mystery recommends: a sense of doubt that is informed by an awe of uncertainty, that stands in opposition to the mild "faith" in our ability to reconcile ourselves with uncertainty through positive means, and that "but for such faith" would achieve this (negative) reconciliation and likewise ". . . repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe" (80-81). The discontent with "moral certainty" Romantic doubt names clarifies the political and ethical charge of Keats's formulation of negative capability as "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (492). From the perspective of Romantic doubt, Keats's negative capability does not recommend relinquishing our desire for absolute certainty or cultivating an ease with uncertainty. Rather, it cautions against the "irritable," false comfort that follows from believing that we can conquer uncertainty through constructions of fact and reason. It is a reminder that even to reach for fact or reason is to underestimate the threat of uncertainty since our desire to overcome that threat always threatens to persuade us we already have.

CONCLUSION

Thinking Beyond Neo-Kantian Romanticism

My approach throughout the dissertation has been predominantly negative and polemic, focused on directly engaging and contesting the neo-Kantian picture of Romanticism and the neo-Kantian approach to intellectual history that informs it. In this conclusion, therefore, I want to gesture towards a more constructive account of what Romanticism might look were we abandon this foundational neo-Kantian approach with its instrumental *topos* of crisis.

In some sense, it seems impossible to think beyond neo-Kantian Romanticism without fundamentally altering a foundational picture of British Romanticism. By this, I do not only mean that neo-Kantian intellectual history was the indispensable ground on which a modern theory of Romanticism was constructed. I also mean that the theoretical concept of Romanticism itself seems to be a distinctly intellectual-historical formation. Neo-Kantian intellectual history – with its emphasis on a break into modernity -- encourages a certain revolutionary image of Romanticism, which in turn provides the sharp dramatic contours that make neo-Kantian intellectual history compelling. Moreover, as Clifford Siskin and William Warner have suggested in their recent search for a new model of Romanticism, it is possible to approach intellectual history as a Romantic mode of historical inquiry, one premised on distinctly Romantic assumptions about the role individual ideas and individuals play as agents of historical change. For Warner and Siskin, the history of ideas is “deeply implicated in Romanticism itself” (287), and intellectual history is finally more a manner of “being Romantic” than a means of “put[ting] Romanticism into history” (283). Thinking beyond neo-Kantian Romanticism would arguably then require abandoning precisely the style of intellectual-historical reading that has encouraged the construction and elaboration of the theory of Romanticism. Indeed, with Siskin and Warner in view, it seems possible to argue that the neo-Kantian *topos* of crisis I have explored is itself a legacy of Romanticism, a style and critical sensibility importantly embraced and cultivated within Romantic literature.

To be sure, the theory of Romanticism is so thoroughly bound up with modern intellectual history that, although I do think we should ultimately distance ourselves from a neo-Kantian approach to Romanticism, I do not believe we should abandon a critical and historical interest in the mutual imbrication between the theory of Romanticism and the practice of (neo-Kantian) intellectual history. Indeed, in this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate the necessity and critical payoff of such an interest. Yet, as Siskin and Warner observe, the intractable problem with approaching Romanticism through the history of ideas – one that my study confirms – is that such an intellectual-historical approach tends to overestimate the revolutionary or radically different character of Romanticism. In the terms I have developed in this dissertation, we might say that neo-Kantian intellectual history encourages a view of Romanticism as a site of a critical inflection point: nothing sort of the beginning of modernity.

Instead of approach Romanticism as such critical or revolutionary event in the “history of ideas,” Siskin and Warner propose that we should approach the Romantic period as an “eventuality” in a “history of mediations.” Here “mediation” functions as a “shorthand for the work done by tools, by what we would now call ‘media’ of every kind – everything that intervenes, enables, supplements, or is simply in-between” (282). For Siskin and Warner, this broader concept of mediations allows us to study not only the abstract “ideas” operative in traditional intellectual history but also the mediated networks which enable, circulate, and reproduce these abstractions. Within a history of mediations, Siskin and Warner argue, Romanticism would name an “eventuality” rather than an “event” (283) since Romanticism amounts to contingent effect of a prior, more significant event in the history of mediation, the Enlightenment. And attending to this new set of objects means “not all periods have the same purchase on change” (290). For Siskin and Warner, Romanticism is “the condition of begin *after* the event” (288) of the Enlightenment, of encountering and responding to the elaboration and saturation of the different historically-specific forms of mediation developed during the Enlightenment. In another formulation, Romanticism occurs on the “operational platform” provided by Enlightenment forms of mediation (285). On this view, the Victorian period would entail an even narrower set of contingencies on top of the platform of Romanticism. For Siskin and Warner, if the Enlightenment is “an event,” then “Romanticism is an eventuality, and the Victorian is a variation” (289): each successive period is built on a “platform” of mediations established by the previous period.

Siskin and Warner's picture of Romanticism as "eventuality" provides a welcome alternative to the longstanding emphasis on crisis and discontinuity within Romantic studies. But their turn to mediation likewise promises to provide solid theoretical ground for the revised history of the relation of Romanticism to Enlightenment skepticism I have pursued in this dissertation. This is because, in the history of mediations, what becomes significant are not individual ideas but widely adopted "protocols:" which Siskin and Warner gloss as "enabling constraints: the rules, codes, and habitual practices that help secure the channels, spaces, and means of production and communication" (284). Indeed, in this dissertation, I have tried to re-imagine skepticism as a "protocol" in this sense, a habitual practice widely, if also cautiously, endorsed as a means of knowledge verification and error reduction since the seventeenth century. In a history of ideas, the most momentous events of the history of modern skepticism might appear to be Hume's *Treatise* or even Kant's critical project. But, in a history of mediations, the more important events would have been the more diffuse and progressive embrace of constructive skeptical protocols, an emerging appreciation for rational skepticism as a form of intellectual rigor and probity rather than pathological perversity. Warner and Siskin describe Romanticism as an "eventuality" that took place on the "operational platform" established by Enlightenment protocols (285). Humean epistemological skepticism might be viewed in similar terms: an eventuality or variation upon the more foundational event of constructive skepticism.

From a neo-Kantian perspective, literary Romanticism has always appeared to engage this more exotic – and distinctively "modern" – mode of Humean epistemological skepticism. But, when we approach Romanticism as responding to the broader "platform" of constructive skepticism – in this sense, the constructive skeptical *ethos* widely promoted by intellectuals of all stripes — the relation of Romanticism and skepticism takes on a much different character. Indeed, the Romantics appear equally ambivalent about skepticism as they always have in neo-Kantian intellectual history, but the nature and character of this anxiety is different. For whereas a neo-Kantian perspective proposes that Romantics worried over the radical implications of skepticism, my account suggests that Romantics were instead ambivalent about the confident and conservative character of instrumental or procedural skepticism. And this perspective reveals a more precise Romantic attention to the rhetorical or social character of skepticism, one that neo-Kantian history has routinely overlooked because of its uncritical embrace of skepticism as an intellectual procedure. In my readings, I have tried to suggest that Romantic writers approach

skepticism with a characteristic reflexivity trained on the blindspot that accrues around the practice of skepticism itself, one that can only be registered by attending to skepticism, on one hand, as a tacit, almost reflexive or instinctive modern protocol and, on the other, as a social and rhetorical performance.

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