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Consciousness embodied: language and the imagination in the communal world of William Blake

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Consciousness Embodied: Language and the Imagination in the Communal World of William Blake

By Robyn Pierce

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at the

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Supervised by: Prof. Merle Williams and Prof. Eugenie Freed-Isserow

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation *Consciousness Embodied: Language and the Imagination in the Communal World of William Blake* is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Robyn Pierce

_____of_____2014

Abstract

This dissertation examines the philosophical and spiritual beliefs that underpin William Blake's account of the imagination, his objections to empiricism and his understanding of poetic language. It begins by considering these beliefs in relation to the idealist principles of George Berkeley as a means of illustrating Blake's own objections to the empiricism of John Locke. The philosophies of Locke and Berkeley were popular in Blake's society and their philosophical positions were well known to him. Blake and Berkeley are aligned against Locke's belief in an objective world composed of matter, and his theory of abstract ideas. Both reject Locke's principles by affirming the primacy of the perceiving subject. However, Blake disagrees with Berkeley's theologically traditional understanding of God. He views perception as an act of artistic creation and believes that spiritual divinity is contained within and is intrinsic to man's human form.

This account of human perception as the creative act of an immanent divinity is further elucidated through a comparison with the twentieth-century existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty examines human experience as the functioning of an embodied consciousness in a shared life-world. While Merleau-Ponty does not make any reference to a spiritual deity, his understanding of experience offers a link between Berkeley's criticisms of Locke and Blake's own objections to empiricism. Through a comparative examination of Blake and Merleau-Ponty, the imagination is revealed to be the creative or formative consciousness that proceeds from the integrated mind-body complex of the "Divine Body" or "human form divine". This embodied existence locates the perceiving self in a dynamic physical landscape that is shared with other embodied consciousnesses. It is this communal or intersubjective interaction between self and other that constitutes the experienced world. Merleau-Ponty's account of the chiasm and his notion of *flesh*, discussed in *The Visible and the Invisible*, are applied to Blake in order to elucidate his belief in poetic vision and the constitutive power of language. The form and function of language are compared with that of the body, because both bring the individual experience of a perceiving subject into being in the world and facilitate the reciprocal exchange between the self and other. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that Blake characterises the body and language as the living media of the imagination, which facilitate a creative exchange between a perceiving self and a shared life-world.

Key Words

William Blake; imagination; language; community; John Locke; empiricism; George Berkeley; idealism; Maurice Merleau-Ponty; phenomenology; embodied consciousness; intersubjective; chiasm.

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A Note on the Text

This study examines William Blake's illuminated poetry as a "composite art" consisting of both image and text.[1] Digital facsimiles of Blake's original plates have been accessed via *The William Blake Archive*.[2] All textual references to Blake's own works are to *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* edited by David V. Erdman, with commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Random House Inc, 1988). These references provide the plate number, as well as the line number for verse works, together with a page reference to Erdman's text. All spelling and punctuation has been reproduced as it appears in Erdman's text, and page references to this text are preceded by the abbreviation "E".

The following abbreviations for in-text references to Blake's works have been employed:

AR	All Religions are One
Berk	Annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*
BL	Book of Los
BU	First Book of Urizen
DC	Descriptive Catalogue of Blake's Exhibition
E	Europe a Prophecy
FZ	Vala or the Four Zoas
J	Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion
Lav	Annotations to Lavator's *Aphorisms*
M	Milton a Poem
MHH	The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
Rey	Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds
Swe	Annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*
VDA	Visions of the Daughters of Albion
VLJ	Vision of the Last Judgement
Word	Annotations to Wordsworth's Poems

[1] This term is taken from W.J.T Mitchell's seminal study entitled *Blake's Composite Art: a Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978). His study offers "the first extended, systematic attempt to define the nature of Blake's composite art from the inside out, as an expression of his own theories of art rather than as a late example of the long tradition of pictorial and poetic marriages which include the emblem book and the illuminated manuscript" (xv). This study is not concerned with the complex relationship between image and text in Blake's works, but it does examine both the pictorial and poetic elements of Blake's art because both elements form an integral part of his poetic vision and philosophy.

[2] This digital collection of Blake's works is maintained by the editors Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, and can be accessed online at the address: http://www.blakearchive.org.

In-text references to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophical writings are abbreviated as follows:

CD	Cézanne's Doubt
PoP	Phenomenology of Perception
PW	Prose of the World
S	Signs
SNS	Sense and Non-sense
VI	The Visible and the Invisible

Other in-text abbreviations include:

BL	*Biographia Literaria* by Samuel Coleridge
PL	*Paradise Lost* by John Milton

Cover page image is taken from "The Reunion of the Body and the Soul". *Robert Blair, The Grave*. 1808. Object 13. Collection of Robert N. Essick. (*William Blake Archive*)

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For my team captains Lesley Pierce, Jeff Pierce
and Brett Coomer, who let me be with Blake.

Introduction

"No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher."[3]
— Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Genius and Inspiration are the Great Origin and Bond of Society."[4]
— William Blake

Although William Blake was once read as a poet who had produced a largely incomprehensible spiritual mythology, together with some pleasing lyrics and a book of children's poems, studies such as S. Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary* and Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* have succeeded in establishing what was then a new approach to the ideas and symbols of Blake's oeuvre. [5] These studies consider the ideas in Blake's work as a "unified scheme" (Frye 14). They examine the relationship between his ideas and those of his contemporaries, as well as the dominant concerns of his society, in order to reveal a complex spiritual philosophy. What these seminal works and much subsequent Blake scholarship have illustrated is that it is imperative to consider the philosophical grounding of his spiritual, epistemological and ontological beliefs in order to come to an understanding of William Blake as a visionary poet and artist. This dissertation considers Blake's account of the imagination, because it is the central principle that underpins his entire body of work and is the culmination of his spiritual and philosophical beliefs. Therefore, like Damon and Frye, my study also approaches Blake's oeuvre as a cohesive philosophy that can be explored by considering Blake in relation to the intellectual environment of his society. However, this dissertation also moves beyond a comparison between Blake and the concerns of his contemporary society to consider his philosophical ideas alongside the twentieth-century philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For, although Blake's beliefs were unpopular in his own lifetime, they "confidentially wink" (Frye 12) at the concerns of later thinkers.

[3] *Biographia Literaria*. Chapter. XV (19).
[4] An advertisement that Blake wrote for the "Exhibition of Paintings in Fresco, Poetical and Historical Invention." in 1809 (E 528).
[5] *A Blake Dictionary: the Ideas and Symbols of William Blake.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924;
Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1947.

Blake's definition of the imagination emerges in conjunction with his objections to many of the popular philosophical ideas and established beliefs of eighteenth-century Britain. His opposition to the prevailing theories, ideological systems and social practices of the English Church and State, which he believed to be fundamentally oppressive and exploitative, never weakened. He was sympathetic to the insurgents of the French and American Revolutions; in fact, John Mee counts Blake as an important voice within London's dissenting culture and the greater radicalism of the Enlightenment.[6] However, despite finding affinity with the dissenters as a socio- political radical, Blake opposed the Enlightenment's principles of reason and rationalism. The term "Enlightenment" describes the growing popularity of reason in Blake's society, which began in the seventeenth century with key events such as the formation of *The Royal Society* in 1660 and the publication of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690.[7] The *Royal Society* was formed in London as a scientific society that defined scientific enquiry according to Sir Francis Bacon's "new" scientific method of empirical observation and inductive reasoning (Lynch 173).[8] The empirical philosophy of Locke's *Essay* was widely read in Blake's Britain and became an influential treatise on human knowledge. Both the *Society* and Locke considered the world that is the subject of experience as a material object, dismissing human sensibilities and focusing on the systemisation of human knowledge. This emphasis on reason spread to both politics and religion, influencing the rise of liberalism and Deism (Piland 12-13). Indeed, many of the members of the *Society* were Deists, believing in a "Natural Religion" which considered that God had created the world according to the principles of science and granted humanity the gift of reason with which to understand it.

While Blake was sympathetic to some of the ideals of liberalism, such as its criticism of the class system in Europe, he took issue with his society's emphasis on reason, the notion of a remote deity, and the manner in which empiricism casts human beings as observers of the mechanical processes of nature. Moreover, the "Age of Reason" treated the imagination as a "degenerative malady of intellect" (Damon 195), and asserted the advancement of reason over creative or artistic pursuits. Blake responded to these philosophical and spiritual ideas as a prophetic poet

[6] John Mee offers an excellent discussion of Blake's involvement with the radical socio-political ideas of his age in *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).
[7] The full name of the *Royal Society* is *The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge.*
[8] This new method was outlined in Bacon's *Novum Organum*, published in 1620.

who champions the creative processes of human consciousness and humanity's spirituality. One of the first illuminated books produced by Blake was *There is No Natural Religion*, which offers a response to the scientific method of the *Society* and Locke in the form of a short poetic argument. Thus, from the very beginning of his career as a poet and visual artist, Blake set himself in opposition to his society's valorisation of reason.

Blake singles out Locke on the basis of his denial of innate human ideas, as well as his argument that human perception lacks divine sensibility. Blake received the ideas of Locke's *Essay* with "Contempt and Abhorrence" (*Rey* E 660) and groups Locke, Bacon and Newton into a "Satanic Trinity" (Damon 243) throughout most of his poetry. Blake read Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605) with the same "Contempt" as Locke's *Essay*, because both treatises asserted the importance of reason over the imagination. Moreover, both Bacon and Locke doubted subjective experience, and believed that all knowledge must be proven by reasoned argument or scientific experiment. Newton was president of the *Royal Society* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and has been called the "greatest of natural philosophers". His theory of gravity and his account of an astronomical universe that is governed by rational laws were very influential in Europe. He also agreed with Bacon's position that scientific theory must be supported by scientific experiment (Dominikzak 655; Damon 298).

Blake criticised Newton because his study of natural phenomena reduced the world to a material object that functions according to a system of mechanics. For Blake, this account of the experienced world disregarded spiritual understanding and the creative endeavours of the imagination. Therefore, to view the world in this way is "Single vision & Newtons sleep" (E 722).[9] It was Blake's belief that these thinkers "mock Inspiration & Vision", which are the work of the imagination enacted by the "human form divine" ("A Divine Image" E 12-13). This is because their consideration of human knowledge and experience does not account for creative human endeavours or for those aspects of human experience that escape rational explanation, such as passion, energy, inspiration or spiritual vision, all of which are encompassed by the imagination. For Blake, "Inspiration & Vision was then & now is &...will always Remain [his]

[9] Taken from a letter to Thomas Butts, dated 22 November 1802.

Element [and his] Eternal Dwelling place" (*Rey* E 660 – 661). He therefore positioned himself as a visionary poet against those philosophies which undermine the importance of the human imagination.

In light of this, it is not surprising that Blake was sympathetic to philosophical studies that opposed Locke, such as George Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). In an effort to explore the philosophical approaches that influenced Blake and his attitudes to other eighteenth century thinkers, many scholars have examined the relationship between the philosophy of George Berkeley and Blake's own criticisms of objective thought.[10] Both Blake and Berkeley spoke out against Locke's empirical study of human understanding and associated the human act of perception with a divine spirituality. Berkeley's *Principles* directly addressed some of the main arguments of Locke's *Essay*, such as his consideration of "matter" and "general ideas"; although Berkeley was in many respects an empiricist, it was his idealist consideration of perception that directly opposed Locke. However, Blake's poetic critique of Locke's empiricism moves beyond Berkeley's idealism and his traditional theological beliefs. Berkeley opposes Locke as an Anglican who understands God to be an Infinite Mind that perceives, and thereby creates, the world. This act of creative perception is replicated by man's finite consciousness. Blake's objections to Locke are offered by an artist who approaches perception as an act of creation, an engagement between an individual subjective consciousness and the world, for he believes that spiritual divinity is contained within, and is intrinsic to the human form.

The idealist aspects of Blake's beliefs have led scholars, such as Northrop Frye, to argue that Blake deems perception to be "a mental act" and "not something we do with our senses" (19). Despite this judgement, Frye also rightly notes that for Blake there can be no categorical "distinction between mental and bodily acts", and that "in fact it is confusing to speak of bodily

[10] One of the principal studies of this relationship is Joanne Witke's *William Blake's Epic: Imagination Unbound* (Law Book Co of Australasia, 1986) which examines *Jerusalem* as the triumphant poetic expression of Blake's metaphysical "system". She examines some of the philosophic principles of Blake's epic poem through a central comparison with Berkeley, and discusses their shared dissatisfaction with Locke's generalizing philosophy. Kathleen Raine also deals with the similarities between Blake and Berkeley's affirmation of the mind as the principal constituent of the universe throughout her book *Blake and the New Age* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979). Northrup Frye briefly considers some of the connections between the two scholars in his detailed assessment of Blake's beliefs in *Fearful Symmetry* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1972).

acts at all if by 'body' we mean man as perceived form" (19). Frye identifies the complex relationship between body and mind that is encompassed by Blake's account of the imagination, or imaginative perception; yet he still affords greater importance to the processes of the mind, arguing that:

> We use five senses in perception, but if we used fifteen we should still have only a single mind. The eye is a lens for the mind to look through. (19)

What Frye's account of perception and the imagination fails to consider is the body's location *within* the perceived world, and the role of the body as the connective medium between an experiencing self and an experienced world. Although he highlights the central role of the senses in the act of perception, he reduces the senses to a tool used by the mind. Blake's account of the imagination certainly emphasises the creative processes of the mind, but this he consistently links to the energy of the body and the sense experience of embodied perception.

The imagination is predicated upon an interaction between a perceiver and the experienced world. Blake defines the role of the body as that which facilitates this interaction, because it locates the subject in the world. Thus, the body emerges as "a portion of Soul" that is "discernd by the five Senses" (*MHH* 4 E 34), or that aspect of the "Divine Body" (*Laocoön* E 273) that functions as the physical medium for human experience. The creative powers of "God and Man" are indistinguishable in the imagination (Damon 195), because the imagination enacts a self-sustained creation of the experienced world through the processes of the perceiving body. An examination of the imagination as a purely "mental act" ignores a formative dimension of human experience. Moreover, it considers individual perception as an internal act that is fundamentally separated from the perceptual experience of other human beings. It is the body's location in experienced space that places one in communion with other human beings, all of whom are also situated in a dynamic landscape through an embodied existence and engaged in the processes of perception. As a result, this community of embodied human perceivers is involved in the interactive creation of a shared world. The separation of human experience into mental experience and bodily experience effectively institutes a separation between the perceiving self and the communal human world. Moreover, an emphasis on the internal world of the self and the consideration of others as elements of an objective world runs the risk of contributing to an exploitative and oppressive society, in which one's personal needs and desires are considered to

be more important than those of others. Thus, Blake's call to recognise the creative powers of the human form, and to consider the experienced world as an intersubjective exchange rather than a physical object, is also a call to human beings to recognise the divine creative potential in *each other*.

Blake's account of the imagination as the central faculty of the "human form divine", as well as its role as the facilitator of reciprocal creative exchange between each human self and a shared social world, takes him beyond an idealist critique of empiricism and offers a spiritualized proto-phenomenological understanding of human experience. The phenomenological enquiry of Merleau-Ponty is concerned with existential phenomenology, which diverges from the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl that established phenomenology as a philosophical discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century. Existential phenomenology is based in an ontological study of human experience and examines "concrete human existence", or human existence as the involvement of a conscious experiencing self in an experienced world (Smith). It is not concerned with the "transcendental structures constitutive of the objectivity of the entities encountered" in the experienced world, but with the ontological position of the perceiving subject that brings about the conscious experience of "objective entities" or phenomena (Macann 63).

Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenological enquiry is particularly concerned with the functioning of an embodied consciousness that is integrated into an experienced space, as well as with the ways in which it both constitutes and is constituted by a lived and living world. His phenomenology engages with the problems presented by idealist and empiricist philosophies, seeking an alternative approach that draws on, and adapts, previous phenomenological strategies. He argues that empiricism and idealism have ignored the fact that human beings inhabit the space which they experience. Merleau-Ponty's consideration of embodied perception outside of the traditional Cartesian categories of "body" and "mind", as well as his consideration of the relationship between both self and world and self and others, provides an apt and highly beneficial lens through which to consider Blake's account of the embodied creative perception encompassed by the imagination.

In his writings, Merleau-Ponty compares the mode of interaction involved in embodied experience with the self-referential, coexistent and mutually dependent signification of both language and art. Here again, Merleau-Ponty disagrees with the separation of form from meaning. In his late unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*, he discusses language as a vital dimension of embodied existence that also facilitates communal interaction and the creation of a shared world. This comparison between the signifying systems of language and art and the interactive experience of embodied consciousnesses also offers a profitable comparison with Blake who approaches perception and experience as an artist and poet. Northrop Frye notes that "Blake… [is] aided by his practical knowledge of how the creative imagination works"' and that his experience as a "practising artist" (85) and poet separates his approach to important philosophical questions from thinkers such as Swedenberg or Berkeley. For Blake, the imagination is also "the basis of all art" (Damon 195), because it encompasses the poet's individual creative vision that arises from a unique subjective engagement with the world. Blake writes that, "One Power alone makes a Poet.- Imagination, The Divine Vision" (*Word* E 665). Therefore, Blake's account of the imagination culminates in his account of poetic language, which brings a perceiving subject's unique conceptual understanding, or "vision", of the experienced world into being. This account of language opposes the view that language is merely representative of an abstract or eternal meaning, and asserts that the "Divine Vision" encompassed by embodied perception can only be understood and expressed through language. Thus, Language is vital to the development of human community, because it brings the experiences of the self into being with the experiences of others.

There have not been many studies that consider Blake's work in relation to phenomenology. Thomas Frosch notes that his general approach to a consideration of the "renovation of the body in the poetry of William Blake" in *The Awakening of Albion* is "influenced by such phenomenologists as Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty" (11). Frosch draws some useful comparisons between Blake and Merleau-Ponty, but these are brief and Merleau-Ponty is only mentioned a few times throughout the entire book. Similarly, in *Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction* Peter Otto makes apt references to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body and his linguistic approach to experience in his discussion of Blake's later poems, specifically *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. However, Merleau-Ponty is only mentioned briefly and,

despite the affinities Otto recognises between Blake and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, this comparison does not form the focus of his study. In "Blake and the Postmodern", Hazard Adams attempts to relate the dialectical processes that he associates with Blake's "contraries" to an understanding of language in the wake of modernism. He suggests that Blake would have been sympathetic to a "phenomenological return to concrete actuality" (16). Adams is the first to suggest a comparison between Blake and phenomenology. His comparison is brief, a fertile suggestion rather than a consistently developed argument, but his view of a shared dissatisfaction with the "old Lockean way" (16) anticipates this dissertation's current study of Blake. In his essay on "Blake and Postmodernism", Edward Larrissey, specifically recalling the earlier essay by Adams, writes that:

> ...there is yet more to be learned from Adams's essay…Contemporary readers may have something to learn, and apply to Blake, by re-examining the phenomenological idea of the bodily situatedness of the subject. (258)

This dissertation offers a response to the suggestion that there is more insight to be gained from a comparison between Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embodied consciousness and Blake's belief in the "mental deity" which resides "in the human breast" (*MHH* E 38).

This study of William Blake's account of the imagination begins by exploring the similarities and differences between the ideas of Blake, Berkeley and Locke. The first chapter outlines Blake's unique spiritual and philosophical beliefs by comparing his assertions about the imagination and the "human form divine" with the tenets of empiricism and idealism that were respectfully defined by the philosophies of Locke and Berkeley. Blake was familiar with the philosophies of both Berkeley and Locke, and his direct engagement with their ideas is useful in clarifying his own philosophical position. Following this, the second chapter of this dissertation introduces the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and presents a phenomenological examination of Blake's ontological positioning of the "human form divine" as an embodied spiritual consciousness in the experienced world. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates that Blake's notion of a divine human self characterises the imagination as the creative or formative faculty that emerges from the conscious embodied interaction between a perceiving self and the phenomena of the world. The final chapter focuses on Blake's account of poetic language, and explores the role of language in the creative efforts of the imagination and the development of

communal “Vision”. This discussion of Blake and language is positioned in relation to the prevailing debates regarding language in the eighteenth century but it also draws upon the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. It focuses on Merleau-Ponty’s examination of the body and language as the connective *flesh* between self and world, explored *The Visible and the Invisible*, in order to illustrate how the development of communal “Vision” and a successful society in Blake’s work is dependent upon the recognition of the role of the imagination in the creation of the experienced world.

By taking up the challenge of a comparative examination of Blake and Merleau-Ponty, this dissertation has been able to offer fresh insight into the integrated existence of “body” and “mind” in Blake’s “human form divine”, and its formative role in the constitution of the experienced world. The creative processes of the imagination are shown to proceed from a human being’s conscious embodied existence in a meaning-laden world. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty’s account of the *flesh*, which builds upon his earlier account of embodied consciousness, explores the manner in which the conceptual understanding gained from embodied perception is bound to human consciousness and the experienced world through language. This characterises language as the body of thought that facilitates a perceiving subject’s conscious engagement with a shared world. Thus, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account of consciousness is able to illustrate how Blake’s imagination proceeds from the corporeal existence of the body and the physical medium of language in order to facilitate the communal or intersubjective interaction that constitutes the human world.

Chapter 1

Blake's Objections to Locke and Berkeley

Blake's vision for humanity, and his belief in his role as a visionary poet, is based upon a unique philosophical and spiritual understanding of the experienced world. Blake was well read in philosophical matters; his knowledge and criticism of Newton, Locke and Bacon have been amply acknowledged. Joanne Witke notes that he was well acquainted with the ancient "doctrines of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus" in addition to contemporaries such as Berkeley (1), and he was well read in the writings of Boehme and Paracelsus.[11] These texts would have been analysed with the same critical eye that Blake applied to the Bible or any of Milton's works, as well as being read with the same artistic sensibility. Blake's careful reading and annotating of these writings illustrates his intellectual commitment to ontological and epistemological questions. By situating Blake in relation to some of the prevailing attitudes of his society, and particularly in relation to philosophers known to him, one can begin to separate out those key aspects of Blake's beliefs which inform his understanding of poetry and human experience. This investigation of Blake's philosophy will focus on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers John Locke and George Berkeley. This is because their considerations of human knowledge and understanding were both well known to Blake[12], as well as offering particularly beneficial points of comparison from which to clarify Blake's philosophical position.

John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was first published in 1689 (though dated 1690) and went through many editions and reprintings. The method of the *Essay* and the conception of human understanding presented by Locke both heavily influenced and, to a large degree, reflected the dominant ideas of English society during the eighteenth century. Locke was prompted to write the *Essay* after a discussion with friends could not be resolved because of the "doubts which [perplexed]" them. Locke suggests that the root of these doubts is a limited

[11]Blake mentions "Paracelsus & Behmen" as early influences, together with Milton, Isaiah, and Shakespeare, in a poem he wrote for John Flaxman (12 Sep 1800 E 707).

[12] In a letter to George Cumberland Blake mentions Locke's position regarding invention and judgement in a discussion of "pretended Philosophy" (6 Dec 1795 E 699); his annotations to *Siris* (E 663-664) offer evidence of his engagement with Berkeley's philosophy.

knowledge of their own "abilities" of understanding, and therefore proposes an examination of human understanding in order to solve the difficulties of their situation (*Epistle to the Reader* 7).[13] Locke's belief is that it is necessary to consider understanding with the same scientific objectivity that Newton considered nature in the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), and to subject it to rational experimentation in the same tradition as Bacon and the *Royal Society*, in order to ascertain the extent of human knowledge and understanding. By adopting this method Locke hoped to introduce a legitimate method of enquiry and to free philosophy from subjective and idealist speculation.

Thus, it is Locke's intention in the *Essay* to consider "human understanding" as an empirical object, and to study it using the methods of empirical observation. This is a difficult task because "understanding, like the eye," may allow humanity to "see and perceive other things" but "takes no notice of itself" and therefore must be "set at a distance" in order to be studied (Locke 25). Locke considered himself to be the "under-labourer" of great scientific men such as "the incomparable Mr. Newton" and intended to remedy the "[v]ague and insignificant" findings of other philosophical enquiries which Locke accused of hindering true knowledge and creating a "sanctuary of vanity and ignorance", largely through the deceptive use of "hard and misapplied words" that have been "mistaken for deep learning" (*Epistle* 14). The result of his effort to conduct an empirical study of human understanding that was plainly expressed, and could engage anyone who possessed "common sense", was very well received. Students were advised that "Locke's Human Understanding must be read" (Waterland 23) and after the *Essay* was put on the curriculum at Trinity College in Dublin some scholars hoped that Locke might restructure the *Essay* as a textbook (Winkler *Introduction* ix-x). The popular success of the *Essay* during this time led the *Illustrated Magazine of Art* to state in 1853 that "[n]o book of the metaphysical class has ever been more generally read" (182).

Owing to the popularity of the *Essay*, Locke's empirical principles went on to influence many philosophical thinkers, and many scholars, philosophers and poets responded to the *Essay*. This period of enlightenment, stretching roughly from the end of the seventeenth century into the

[13] All page references to Locke's *Essay* are taken from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* collated and annotated by Alexander Campbell Fraser in two volumes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894). All references to the main body of Locke's *Essay* will provide only book, chapter, and section numbers.

eighteenth century, has also been dubbed the "Age of Reason" because of the philosophical and socio-political emphasis placed on reason, rather than theology, as the basis for a system of thought. Locke's essay is a seminal work of this period and exemplifies the principles of objective examination and deductive reason. This approach to philosophy was also criticised; both Blake and Berkeley emerged as opponents of Locke's central principles and the "Age of Reason" which had both shaped and been shaped by the *Essay*.

Locke's central point in the first book of the *Essay*, which forms the basis of the rest of his enquiry, is that human beings possess no innate ideas. He expresses frustration with philosophical enquiries that suggest that people enter the world knowing or understanding certain truths. Locke's central thesis is that *all* knowledge and understanding is the result of sense experience, and that human beings enter the world with only the faculties to receive, analyse, and interpret sense stimuli as ideas in the mind. As a result, most of the *Essay* proceeds as an effort to find evidence for all human understanding in sense experience. Locke reaches the crux of his *Essay* in the fourth chapter:

> Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them.
> Knowledge...seems to me to be nothing but the perception of the connection of and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, of any of our ideas. (4.1: 1)

Locke approaches man as a natural object, which nonetheless perceives and surveys a world composed of things that are all forms of the same basic matter. The sensory characteristics of these forms are received by the senses and conveyed to the mind as complex ideas, but these can be analysed and broken down into their basic sensible qualities, or simple ideas, in order to be studied and understood. All ideas are the result of "sensation", in which the senses "convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things according to those various ways wherein objects do affect them" (2.1: 3), or "reflection", which involves "the perceptions of the operations of our own mind within" (2.1: 4). In the case of reflection the mind needs to be examined and considered as an object, just as the senses converge upon an external object in order to produce ideas in the mind.

However, Locke argues that while one is able to perceive the sensory qualities of an object one cannot directly access the object or its constitutive matter. This is because human beings do not possess any faculty that would allow one to perceive the "substance" that is the underlying cause of the sensory qualities human beings perceive. For,

> beyond these ideas, as received from their proper sources, our faculties will not reach...So that we are no more able to discover wherein the ideas belonging to body consist, than those belonging to spirit...the simple ideas we receive from sensation and reflection are the boundaries of our thoughts...in short...the substance of spirits is unknown to us; and so is the substance of body equally unknown to us. (2.23: 29-30)

In this passage Locke makes two important claims. He asserts that human perception is inherently non-spiritual or fallen, as the human body does not possess a faculty with which to perceive or understand the spiritual (and so, by extension, one cannot be certain of the existence of spirit in the objective world). This is in accordance with the Christian notion of the "fall" of humanity or the separation between human perception and divine sensibility and knowledge that occurs when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden in *Genesis*. As a result of their original sin, human beings no longer have control of their spiritual development and must rely on the mercy of Christ's sacrifice to re-enter Paradise. [14] Secondly, Locke argues that human beings cannot perceive the "substance" that constitutes the objective world, but its existence can be assumed because it is the source of the sensible qualities humanity *does* perceive. Therefore both the "spirit" and the "substance" must be believed to exist on the basis of the perceived world they constitute, even though they cannot be perceived or known because human perception is limited to the senses of the body.

Blake's divergence from Locke's empirical position is very clear in the seemingly simple argument he puts forward in his early work *There is No Natural Religion*. Blake's assertion that "Man cannot naturally Percieve. but through his natural or bodily organs (*sic)*" is in agreement with Locke's empirical position. Blake agrees with Locke that humanity is "limited by [its] perceptions" (a E 2) and that these perceptions can occur only to the human body. However, Blake goes on to say that humanity "perceives more than sense (tho' ever so-acute) can

[14] The theories that emerged in the eighteenth century regarding this notion will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 "*Parole, Langue* and Language as *Flesh*", pp. 84-96.

discover" and that humanity's ability and "desire" to move beyond the "same dull round" and to see the "Infinite" (b E 2-3) demonstrates that humanity does possess an inherent spiritual sensibility. For, "None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions" (a E 2). Blake's objection to Locke takes the form of a simple question: if human knowledge cannot go beyond human perception, how can one have any notion of the spiritual or divine? Blake's proof of humanity's "Infinite" divine sensibility is "the Poetic or Prophetic character" which ensures that the world does not become "the ratio of all things" (b E 3), or the mere empirical representation described by Locke. Blake finally writes that "He who *sees* the Infinite in all things *sees* God"[15] (b E 3). Here Blake does not use the word "imagine" or "envision", but emphasises the act of observation that is the fundamental principle of empiricism in addition to redefining the notion of human perception.[16]

Blake opposes Locke's understanding of perception more directly in one of his most famous passages from the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

> If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.
> For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (14 E 39)

If Blake's image is considered from an empirical point of view, the "doors of perception" are the senses of the body that provide the mind, contained in the "cavern" of the human skull, with an opening through which to view the world. However, because existence within the cavern results in a physical separation from the perceived world beyond the body's sensory "gates", human understanding of the physical world is obscured. Only a little light can be let into the darkened cavern through the one-way door, and so provide "narrow chinks", or limited sense perceptions, through which one is able to gain an understanding of the outside world. This image of the human mind as a separate dark cavern, and of the senses as the inlets of perception, recalls an image used by Locke to explain the mechanics of human perception:

> ...external and internal sensation are the only passages I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For, methinks, the understanding is not much

[15] My emphasis.
[16] Blake may well have been recalling Job's affirmation that "though after my skin worms destroy this [natural] body, yet in my flesh shall I see God/ Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold" (*Book of Job* 19:26-27). However, Job's assertion also points to a belief that human resurrection occurs in the body.

> unlike a closet wholly shut up from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without... (2:11. 17)

Locke clearly distinguishes between "external" and "internal" sensation, or between bodily sensation and the intellectual consideration of mental sense-impressions. He describes the operations of these two aspects of perception as the letting of light into a dark room through "little openings", in order to capture an internal idea that "resembles" or copies external objects. Blake, rightly, believes that this image describes human perception as "closed" and limited. In accepting Locke's empirical explanation of perception, human beings have "closed [themselves] up", and deliberately limited their own knowledge and understanding. However, this artificial limitation can be "cleansed" or removed to reveal the "infinite" potential of human perception. Blake's image is of breaking free of a seemingly natural but, in fact, self-imposed prison, and his attempts to "cleanse" humanity of its self-imposed constraints is the subject of all his work.

Locke's position in the *Essay* is that any intellectual or philosophical study of the external world can be accomplished only by analysing the sense data collected through perception. His theory of perception insists that there is a separation between the unknown matter that constitutes external objects and the resultant ideas generated by the perceiving subject. Thus, the entire *Essay* is based upon an assumption that there is an inherent division between subject and object. Moreover, Locke privileges the objective realm because it is the realm constituted by a divine creator, thus opening it to empirical study; he criticises the subjective realm because it is the realm of fallen human ideas, and is therefore separate from complete divine understanding.

George Berkeley established himself as one of the leading critics of Locke's *Essay* during the eighteenth century by affirming the central importance of the perceiving subject. In the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), Berkeley's central argument is that "*esse est percipi*" (1.2: 3)[17], or "to be is to be perceived". He explicitly opposes Locke's theory of matter and his understanding of sensory qualities as indicative of an external object by arguing that things exist only as an amalgamation of different sense perceptions which cannot be separated from the perceiver. Berkeley studied and taught at Trinity College (where Locke's *Essay* was on the

[17] References to Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* include the book, chapter and section numbers.

curriculum) and was appointed Bishop of Cloyne in 1734 (Berlin 115). Therefore, Berkeley's *Principles* stands as a direct engagement with and reasoned response to some of the theoretical problems raised by Locke's study. However, Berkeley also constructs his philosophical argument from the position of a Christian believer and a leader in the church. His argument attempts to reaffirm the moment of perception as an act of creation, and he offers the world's continued existence as proof of God's existence as divine creator.

There are many similarities between this central attack on materialism and Blake's own assertion that the five senses are humanity's only gateway to the experienced world. Blake and Berkeley are also aligned in their rejection of Locke's notion of matter, and his belief that an objective reality exists separately from human perception. In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* a "mighty Devil" engraves the following question on a rock using the "corroding fires" of creative energy (in much the same manner as Blake etched his illuminated works using corrosive acids):

> How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
> Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five? (*MHH* 5 E 35)

The Devil challenges Locke's stated belief in objective matter and his notion of common sense. The phrase "clos'd by your senses five" offers a similar image to the "closed" cavern Blake describes on plate 14 of the *Marriage*. For Locke, the human mind is furnished with an understanding of the bird's flight by sense-data that are captured by the senses; one's worldview is essentially encapsulated by the sensory experience of the body. This empirical explanation of perception characterises perception as passive and suggests that multiple people perceiving the same Bird would have the same sense perception and, therefore, the same understanding of their experience. However, the Devil describes the experience of seeing the Bird as "an immense world of delight". The moment in which the Bird is seen is coupled with the arousal of personal emotion, so that the moment of perception *creates* this "immense world" through the interaction of the perceiver and the "Bird that cuts the airy way". The Bird embodies this "immense world of delight" but the joy prompted by perceiving the bird is inaccessible from a materialist perspective. Thus the Devil suggests what Blake would later write in a letter to Dr Trusler:

> ...Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes...As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions

> of Fancy are not be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination". (E 702)

Here Blake rails against Trusler's separation of personal spiritual experience from the experienced natural world. For Blake there is no generalised perception or understanding, only personal or individual experience; therefore there can be no generalised knowledge, only individual understanding and creative vision.

Blake identifies most strongly with Berkeley's Idealist principles, meaning those which assert that phenomena are experienced as ideas within a perceiving mind and that our understanding of reality is composed solely of these perceptions. While Berkeley is in many respects an empiricist himself in view of the importance he gives to direct sensory experience, he strongly disagrees with the notion of an objective world that can be known and understood through the study of matter which is conceived to be unintelligible to the senses and completely independent of a mind. For this reason Locke's proposition that there exist "primary qualities" which adhere to an object and are, therefore, extrinsic to perception, is abhorrent to Berkeley. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke explains primary qualities as:

> Qualities…such as are utterly inseparable from the body, in what state soever it be; such as in all alterations upon it constantly keeps[…]For, division…can never take away either solidity, extension, figure, or mobility from any body, but only makes two or more distinct separate masses of matter, of that which was one before… (2.8: 9) [18]

"Secondary qualities" include "colours, sounds, tastes," and other such sensations that are construed as real when experienced by a subject. In making this distinction, Locke separates ideas in the mind from qualities in the object itself, and the power in each object's "matter" to initiate perception, which "excites" ideas in the perceiver (2.8: 7). "Primary qualities" (2.8: 9) are given a higher status owing to the fact that they can be mathematically measured, and secondary qualities are devalued as their subjective correlatives.

[18] Locke's theory of primary qualities adheres to the standard Cartesian characteristics of *res extensa*, in which the essential being of an object is found in its immutable existence as substance or matter.

Locke's distinctions seem illogical to Berkeley, who argues that all sensations and observations (whether they are thought to be primary or secondary) form the only access that a person has to the world in which he or she is living. He writes:

> That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind, is what every body will allow. And to me it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the Sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them. (1.2: 3)

Berkeley argues that within the perceiver there are *only* ideas which exist *only* in being perceived. He thus collapses the distinction Locke makes between ideas and objects. Any "knowledge" of or belief in "the existence of bodies without the mind" is a result of "reason inferring their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense" (1.2: 18); therefore even "if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it", and if external bodies did not exist "we might have the same reasons to think there were that we have now" (1.2: 20). Moreover, regarding the substance or matter of these bodies Berkeley says:

> But, *secondly*, though we should grant this unknown substance may possibly exist, yet *where can it be supposed to be?* That it exists not in the mind is agreed; and that it exists not in place is no less certain; since all place *or extension exists only in the mind*, as hath been already proved. It remains therefore that it exists nowhere at all. (2.1: 67)

Blake states a very similar argument in *A Vision of the Last Judgement* when he says:

> Mental Things are alone Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place <it> is in Fallacy & its Existence an Imposture Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought Where is it but in the Mind of the Fool. (E 565)

Blake agrees with Berkeley that objective or "Corporeal" matter cannot be found or known, and calls Locke's theory of matter a "Fallacy". Moreover, Blake's assertion that "Mental Things are alone Real" echoes Berkeley's fundamental proposition *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived). Blake would later assert that, "...every Space that a Man views around his dwelling-place...is his Universe" (*M* 29[31]: 5-7 E 127).

In addition to his resistance to simplistic conceptions of matter, Berkeley also attacks Locke's notions of abstract and general ideas. General ideas are common qualities that are separated from objects as purely mental concepts and contain no particular values. These generalities, then, are

meant to refer to all of the possible particularities of one type of quality and not to refer to any one quality specifically. Locke argues that our minds are able to consider general ideas because we are able to abstract, or remove, qualities from their particular forms, so that we can, for instance, consider colour apart from its context in an oil painting. This abstraction is necessary for the creation of the sign system of language in which particulars must be forgotten in order for "outward marks" to represent to others "our internal ideas". He argues that the abstraction of general ideas from "particular beings" allows for "precise, naked appearances in the mind" to which a sound can be ascribed and then used to communicate.[19] (*Essay* 155) Once again Berkeley objects to Locke's distinction between ideas in the mind and qualities in an object**.** He argues that there can be no "naked appearances in the mind"**,** but that general ideas are always a composite of particular experienced perceptions and that the consideration of any idea cannot exist without being located in a particular context of some kind. When attempting to consider a triangle, a person must picture a three sided figure that is "equilateral, equicrural, [or] scalenon" and not an idea which is "*all and none* of these at once". Indeed, this *is* "something imperfect that cannot exist" (4.7: 9; *Principles* Intro: section 13), and a person can no sooner consider a "general" object than cease to perceive completely.

Blake concurs strongly with Berkeley on this point, making statements such as "What is General Nature? is there Such a Thing? what is General Knowledge? is there such a thing? Strictly Speaking All Knowledge is Particular," (*Rey* E 648) and "it is impossible to think without images of somewhat on earth" (*Lav* E 600). Neither Blake nor Berkeley believed that the human mind could consider wholly abstract ideas, and Blake certainly did not believe it was useful to attempt to dismiss "Particular[s]". There are also similarities between Berkeley's "inclination to mysticism" (Berlin 116), because of his belief in a divine world based on direct experience, and Blake's belief in inherent spiritual vision. Isaiah Berlin writes of Berkeley:

> The world is for him a spectacle of continuous spiritual life, in the first place, in the mind of God, and secondarily in the minds of His creatures, men. This is not, for him, a philosophical theory or hypothesis, but a direct vision. (116)

[19] Locke's consideration of language will be more fully explored in Chapter 3 "*Parole, Langue* and Language as *Flesh*", pp. 90-96.

And for Blake, "All that we See is VISION from Generated Organs gone as soon as come, Permanent in The Imagination, Consider'd as Nothing by the NATURAL MAN" (*Laocoön* E 274). What Blake calls "vision" is the result of the interaction between one's bodily senses, or "Generated Organs", and the creative mental processes of one's spiritual "Imagination". The "Imagination" is responsible for creating art out of perception, or indeed is the living creation of art, and therefore is responsible for preserving the transient "natural" world as "permanent" spiritual vision. Blake's ideas and spiritual beliefs were already well-formed by the time he read Berkeley, so it is most useful to examine exactly where Blake agrees with Berkeley and where his own particular beliefs differ.

By denying that there is a separation between experience and the world, Berkeley runs into a problem which brings him to his argument for the existence of God – namely, if it is true that things exist only when they are perceived, how is it that things continue to exist when we do not perceive them? Moreover, what affords human beings the ability to perceive and understand phenomena? In *Principles* Berkeley's proof for the existence of God is based upon his theory of causation. He argues that phenomena or, to use Locke's term, "objects of perception", are inactive and therefore cannot be responsible for the sensible ideas human beings produce during perception. Thus, there must be a creative spirit that causes these ideas.[20] However, Berkeley addresses this problem more directly in the *Dialogues* (1713) where he puts forward his better known theory of perception as evidence of God's existence.[21]

> When I deny sensible things an existence out of the mind, I do not mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now, it is plain they have an existence exterior to my mind; since I find them by experience to be independent of it. There is therefore some other Mind where they exist, during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them: as likewise they did before my birth, and would do after my supposed annihilation. And the same is true with regard to all other finite created spirits it necessarily follows there is an *omnipresent, eternal Mind*, which knows and comprehends all things, and exhibits them to our view in such a manner, and according to such rules, as He Himself hath ordained, and are by us termed the *laws of nature*. (3: 77)

[20] This argument also enables Berkeley to avoid the risks of a narrow solipsism.
[21] *Dialogues* is an abbreviated form of the title *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Pholonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists* (1713).

Berkeley's theory is that there must be an infinite Mind which constantly perceives, and therefore continually creates, the world, whether each individual's finite mind is aware of it or not. It is this Mind/Spirit that is God, the creator of the world. In this way, Berkeley's God is theologically traditional, but also highly speculative as a basis for philosophical proof. Blake's conception of God is also connected to man's powers of perception, but his God is not external to this world. Berkeley's traditional God is, for Blake, the judgemental Elohim of the Old Testament who provides the basis for theories of abstraction and of a world divided into good and evil (Damon 119). "Thus, [fallen] Nature is a Vision of the Science of the Elohim" (*M* 29[31]: 65 E. 128). Instead, Blake understands God to exist as an inherent spirituality in human beings, which is inseparable from human form and animates each individual with creative energy.

This key theoretical difference between Blake and Berkeley is readily apparent in Blake's annotations to Berkeley's *Siris* (1744). In this essay Berkeley summarises his philosophical and metaphysical beliefs in much the same way as they were put forward both in *The Principles of Human Knowledge* and in the *Dialogues*. Berkeley writes:

> God knoweth all things, as pure mind or intellect, but nothing by sense, nor in nor through a sensory. Therefore to suppose a sensory of any kind, whether space or any other, in God would be very wrong and lead us into false conceptions of his nature. (203)

Written close to this comment, Blake's annotation reads "Imagination or the Human Eternal Body in Every Man" (E 663). Berkeley's positioning of God outside of experienced space and sensory perception is disputed by Blake who believed the creative powers of perception, the "Imagination", to be intrinsic to the embodied existence of every human being. Each person is therefore simultaneously both human and divine. Blake situates divinity and its creative power within the human mind and the energy of the human body. When Blake invokes divine inspiration in *Milton*, this power comes "descending down the Nerves of my right arm \ From the Portals of my Brain, where...The Great Eternal Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise" (2: 6-8 E 96). The imaginative human body acts within space and experiences as part of the space which it perceives. This space is shared with other individuals, all of whom are constantly engaged in a process of perception, which is encompassed by the five senses of the body. They are thus

collectively involved in a mutual creation of the world which they experience. Blake considers "God" to be "a Man in the Spiritual or Imaginative Vision" (*Berk* E 663). This belief in the creative power of "Every Man" as situated within the body and within the world caused Blake to disagree both with Locke and, ultimately, with Berkeley.

In "The Divine Image" (E 12-13) from *Songs of Innocence*, Blake offers a striking image of his concept of the divine human body that opposes the traditional Christian belief that God is a transcendent Creator who is separate from humanity and the experienced world. In so doing, he implicitly opposes the argument that the world is sustained by an external deity, and the notion that humanity's embodied perception is ultimately limited or fallen.

The Divine Image

To Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
All pray in their distress:
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is God our father dear:
And Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is Man his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man of every clime,
That pray in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew.
Where Mercy, Love and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too

In the first stanza Blake describes the established Christian practice of praying to the divine abstract "virtues" of "Mercy Pity Peace and Love" for assistance or comfort in moments of "distress". When these "virtues" are experienced on Earth they are attributed to God by

traditional Christian doctrine, and are believed to be learnt from religious teachings or deemed to appear in human behaviour as attempts to imitate God, rather than inherent in human nature. Blake reconnects these seemingly abstract divine "virtues" with their human bearers on Earth. "Man" becomes "God our father dear" by embodying the "virtues" of "Mercy Pity Peace and Love". Blake's emphasis on the "human heart", "human face", "human form" and "human dress" suggests that these "virtues" can proceed *only* from human experience on Earth. Thus, when calling upon these divine "virtues", Christians are, in fact, calling upon the "human form divine" that possesses both the physical capabilities of the body and the immanent divine virtues of "Love Mercy Pity [and] Peace".

Blake's fourth stanza presents a corollary of the reasoned argument he has put forward, beginning with the "If...then..." formulation common to mathematical proofs. If the argument of the first three stanzas is understood and accepted, then it must also be accepted that Christian prayers are directed to the incarnate "human form divine" and not to a transcendent deity. This, therefore, precludes Christians from judging the "heathen, turk, or jew" to be inferior, because the "human form divine" is common to all of humanity and not limited to Christians or those of a certain "clime" or social class. Blake's song affirms the need to praise God by serving and loving others rather than by judging them in accordance with religious doctrine or normative moral values. Thus, Blake's song reiterates the new commandment that Jesus gives to his disciples "that ye love one another" (*John* 15:17) [22]. This new commandment replaced the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses by the "jealous" (*Exodus* 20:5) God of the Old Testament. This "Father of Jealousy" (*To Nobodaddy* E 471) commanded the Israelites to worship no other gods, but did not directly call upon the Israelites to care for or respect each other. Blake considered this self-centred God to be "the false God of this World" (Damon 301), and praised the mutual respect and care enacted by the "human form divine".

This assertion is reinforced by the images on Blake's plate. In the bottom right hand corner of the illuminated plate, Blake has depicted Jesus (sometimes including the traditional halo to denote the spirit of God) with his hand outstretched to another man. Their relative postures suggest a

[22] All Biblical passages are taken from the King James Version.

miniature version of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" as depicted in the Sistine Chapel. S. Foster Damon notes that "Michelangelo was to Blake's painting what Milton was to Blake's poetry", and goes on to say that Blake would have "understood the symbolism of the paintings in the Sistine Chapel" (272). In this version, the incarnate Jesus represents divinity; by extending his hand to Adam, he aligns his incarnate state of being with all humanity. A woman at the top (perhaps Eve) strides out with an angel hovering at her side. The angel's outstretched arms suggest that divine action proceeds from the woman's experience, that "God only Acts & Is" (*MHH* 16 E 40) through human beings, because it is the woman and the angel who are moving to the aid of the children who kneel with heads turned upwards in supplication to a distant God.

In addition to these human figures, the plate is dominated by the energetic flames or vines that surround the text. In some copies of the *Songs* Blake has coloured these vigorous strokes with the reds, yellows and oranges of fire[23], and in others he has simply coloured them as green vines[24]. In others still, most notably copy B of the combined *Songs* and copy V, the strokes are coloured as an amalgamation of both flame and vegetation. Both the vine and the flame are important biblical symbols. In the Old Testament God speaks to Moses through a burning bush; this is the "Jehovah of the Bible...who dwells in flaming fire" (*MHH* 5 E 35) notably separate from the earthly bush. Later the Holy Spirit descends to Earth in "cloven tongues like as of fire" (*Acts* 2:3). The symbol of the vine refers to Jesus who describes himself as the "true vine" (*John* 15:1) and says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch...and cast...into the fire, and...burned" (*John* 15: 5-6). Jesus uses this image of the vine and the fire during the same lesson in which he calls upon the disciples to love one another in accordance with divine love. Blake's fusion of the vine and the flame in his image reinforces Jesus' message as one of inclusiveness, in which every member of human society must receive equal love and care because every human being is divinity incarnate. For Blake, Jesus is the "eternal vine" (*E* iii: 2 E 60) that feeds the fruits of spiritual vision. The flaming vine acts as an emblem of the "human form divine" because it is simultaneously vegetative, or from the natural Earth, and moving with divine energy.[25]

[23] Copies A, C, E, T, Y, Z and AA are all largely coloured with flames.
[24] Copies B and G of *Songs of Innocence*.
[25] The text of "The Blossom" is surrounded by a similar flaming vine. The sexual imagery of the poem also connects this emblem to the creative energy of the body.

Blake's emphasis on a God whose virtues and actions are based in human experience suggests that the notion of God as a humanized ruler or father is a construction based upon the experience of human paternity. The tendency to personify God is, for Blake, evidence of the rootedness of the divine in human experience. The identification of God with a human father figure is explored in the pair of songs "The Little Boy Lost", and "The Little Boy Found" (E 11), also found in *Innocence*. A little boy attempting to follow his "Father" (1) through a marshy wilderness calls the father to speak to him and guide him, "Or else [he] shall be lost" (4). The boy is seemingly lost in spiritual darkness, for as he weeps the ethereal "vapour" flies away and leaves him "mire[d]" (7) or trapped in lonely despair without spiritual direction. Lacking any "wand'ring light" (2) or Godly voice to guide him in the first poem, the child is despondent. When he is given a guiding light in the second poem, the child still begins to cry and God appears to him "like his father in white" (4), because this is the protective and guiding figure the child has been expecting. The boy does not understand these virtues when they are separated from a human Father, and so God is given a human form and the boy is led "by the hand" (5) to his mother, who "in pale sorrow" has also been wandering the "lonely dale" (7) looking for her lost son. The "Little Boy Lost" poem originally appears in *An Island in the Moon*, but the wandering boy is not "Found" until both poems are placed in *Songs of Innocence*. Blake's inclusion of the divine human father in *Innocence*, alongside poems such as "The Divine Image", emphasises that these divine virtues are intrinsic to human experience, and have been abstracted from their human bearers in order to construct the image of a transcendent God. Godly virtues are so fundamentally connected to human experience that this separation, based upon a belief in the fall of humanity, results in the personification of God.

In *Experience* "The Human Abstract" (E 27), the contrary to "The Divine Image", shows the destructive potential of removing these virtues from their human bearers in a society that embraces reason only without spiritual vision. The argument put forth in "The Divine Image" is seemingly dismantled in the first two stanzas:

Pity would be no more
If we did not make somebody poor,
And Mercy no more could be
If all were as happy as we.

And mutual fear brings peace,
Till the selfish loves increase;
Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

While "Pity" and "Mercy" proceed from human experience, the speaker reasons that this is possible, and necessary, only because human nature has created a society rife with poverty, unhappiness, fear and selfishness. The central image of the poem is the Tree of Knowledge, whose forbidden fruit Adam and Eve consumed in Eden and in so doing condemned the world to the social ills of fallen humanity. As a result, the speaker of the poem does not take responsibility for the "dismal" environment described in the poem or suggest that it can be improved. Instead, the speaker presents the reader with a reasoned argument, based on a doctrinal understanding of good and evil, in order to account for social strife, but also attempts to legitimise human cruelty and selfishness. The tree of Blake's poem "grows...in the Human Brain", the seat of human perception and understanding, rather than the objective realm of "Nature". Here, Blake aligns himself with Berkeley's idealism against Lockean empiricism. Much like the "mind forg'd manacles" Blake describes in "London" (E 26-27), the tree obscures and restricts perception by spreading "Mystery" and bearing the fruits of "Deceit". It has been planted and fed by a philosophy of objective reason, and by the Christian doctrine of the Church of England. These tenets of eighteenth-century British society describe the mysteries of spiritual essence and matter, and teach the virtues of a transcendent deity and of humanity's original sin respectively. The result of the acceptance of these two ideologies is that the potential for transformative spiritual vision in Blake's society is crippled.

Crouching at the bottom of the plate depicting "The Human Abstract", tangled in the chains of abstracting reason, or the ropes of his web of religion (*FZ* viii 176–181 E 375), is Urizen. This is probably the "Selfish father of men" that Earth addresses herself to in "EARTH'S Answer" (E. 18 – 19), and the "starry king" who casts down the fiery infant Orc in "A Song of Liberty" (*MHH* 25 E 44–45). His name is widely accepted as a homophonic reference to "Your Reason", or it may be derived from the Greek *oúrizein* meaning "to limit" or "to measure"[26] (Damon 419).

[26] It cannot be confirmed whether this etymological link is intentional or not, because it is not known whether Blake knew Greek when he first introduced Urizen.

He symbolises the accepted system of beliefs of Blake's society.[27] Urizen sets himself above humanity, believing himself to be holy, and imposes his laws, thereby placing limitations on humanity's inherent spiritual energy (Damon 419). Although he is pictured here, Urizen is not the speaker of "The Human Abstract" who wishes to show the reader the damaging reason and abstraction represented by Urizen's tree (Damon 422) as it has taken root in British society. Urizen's position is, in fact, given expression in "A Divine Image" (E 32) which offers a second contrary to "The Divine Image", although it is known to have been included only in one copy of the *Songs*[28]. Here Urizen tells us that:

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face
Terror, the Human Form Divine
And Secrecy, the Human Dress

The Human Dress, is forged Iron
The Human Form, a fiery Forge.
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge

Urizen dismisses all human access to the godly virtues of "The Divine Image"; the physical human "form", "heart", "face" and "dress" are reassigned fallen human vices. Contrary to the virtuous divine image in *Innocence*, and the tender and meek human spirit encountered in "The Lamb", here humanity's heart is a "hungry Gorge" capable of destructive "Cruelty", "Jealousy", "Terror" and "Secrecy". Urizen wilfully ignores humanity's virtuous and creative potential, and imposes his rigid perception of humanity's "Form" as a ruinous "fiery Forge" and its "Dress" as

[27] One of the popular religious philosophies of "the Age of Reason" was Deism, or the "Natural Religion" (Damon 100) which Blake rejects in *There is No Natural Religion*. Deists believed in God as the Creator of the world and its scientific or natural principles, but did not believe in the continuous presence of God in the world as a spiritual power or force. Thus, Deism's God is distant and inaccessible. He has set the world into motion according to the physical and scientific processes of nature, as well as according to certain social and physical laws, but plays no further part in its operations. Damon notes that to a large extent this was an attempt "to make religion intellectually respectable by the application of common sense" (100), and attributes some of Deism's popularity to the success of Newton's study of the natural sciences and Locke's empiricism. Blake strongly disagreed with the Deists and actively spoke out it against the principles of Deism from his early work *There is No Natural Religion* to his late epic *Jerusalem*. The Deist's interpretation of nature as the operation of mechanical causes and effects, and their elevation of reason above all other human faculties was abhorrent to Blake. "Deism, is the Worship of the God of this World by the means of what you call Natural Religion and Natural Philosophy" and "was the Religion of the Pharisees who murderd Jesus" (*J* 52 E 201). Deism treats the human body as a "Vegetated Spectre", but this must be "put off" before one "can be the Friend of Man" (*J* 52 E 200).

[28] The Blake archive reports that "A Divine Image" is included only in copy BB of the combined *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* among the copies printed by Blake. Blake may have felt it was too explicit as a "contrary" to the "The Divine Image" of *Songs of Innocence.*

immutable "forged Iron", and humanity's "Face" has become the outer "seal" of a volatile "Furnace". However, the imagery of the "Forge" is later aligned with Los in Blake's mythology, and he is seen at the bottom of Blake's plate working at his blacksmith's "Furnace", forging the sun. This illumination could possibly be an illustration of Los's creation of the "immense Orb of fire" that he forms on his "Anvil" with his "vast Hammer", as later described by Blake in *The Book of Los* (5: 32-34 E 94). Los, whose name may well be an anagram of *sol,* is the symbol of the imagination or creative spiritual energy. By working against Urizen's "fetters of iron" (*BU* 4[b]: 28 E 75), Los melts his rigid metals and casts new forms. Los takes hold of the creative embodied spirit that Urizen deems to be dangerous and fallen, and redirects it towards the visionary endeavours of the imagination.

While Urizen's reason is oppressive and controlling, Blake still believed that reason was a vital component of the divine "Four-fold man" (*M* 21[23]:16) when it is allowed to interact freely with its contrary, creative energy (Los). Blake's use of reason and mathematical logic in "The Divine Image" suggests that imaginative and ethical understanding cannot function without due rational process. Certainly, the "human *form* divine"[29] is indistinguishable without a definitive "bounding line" (*DC* E 550), and "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of [divine] Energy" (*MHH* 4 E 34). Moreover, Blake's inclusion of "Blake & Newton & Locke" with "Milton & Shakespear & Chaucer" among the "Chariots of the Almighty" in the climatic vision of *Jerusalem* (98: 8 – 9 E 257) is testament to the fact that he did not believe in the eradication of reason. As a result, some scholars have argued that Blake's attitude towards the philosophies represented by Urizen, including that of Locke, is not wholly critical.

For instance, Steve Clark suggests that**,** despite Blake's feelings of "Contempt & Abhorrence" (*Rey* E 660) toward Locke's views on human understanding**,** he "may be said to be of Urizen's", or Locke's, "'party without knowing it'" (149). In a paper contributed to *Blake in the Nineties*, Clark argues that Blake and Locke are aligned as revolutionaries who both appeal to their society to critically re-examine religious orthodoxy. In this way, despite Locke's obvious materialism, both men believe in a growing need to "put off Holiness/And put on Intellect" (*J* 91:55-56 E

[29] My emphasis.

252). Indeed, Locke's attempt to base his philosophical study in empirical observation instead of *a priori* metaphysical or theological proofs is testament to this. Clark also suggests that Blake's preoccupation with Locke led to his having a significant impact on the symbolic structure of many of Blake's works. Clark contends that, in both *The Four Zoas* and *The Book of Urizen*, Urizen's actions illustrate a determined endeavour to create**,** although his efforts are recognised only as an attempt to quantify the world and to restrict vision. As a result, Urizen is denied a place in Eternity despite his labours, which have involved the same intense energy as Los' "Labour at the resolute Anvil" (149). Clark's conclusion is that "Eternity must be seen as the problem in rather than the solution to Blake's thought"**,** because it excludes this intellectual labour. However, he also argues that this is not a "refutation" but a "consolation"**,** because it succeeds in foregrounding "the power of the Lockean qualities of endeavour, self-discipline and achieved mastery of a recalcitrant world." (149).

Clark succeeds in illustrating that the relationship between Blake and Locke is more complex and more nuanced than might commonly be accepted. Nevertheless, he fails to recognise that it is not the principles of Locke's intellectual labour that Blake finds so "abhorrent", since both were engaged in an exploration of human understanding that was firmly rooted in human perception. Rather, it is Locke's preconception that Blake finds so frustrating: that is, Locke's argument that human perception can only replicate an external world in its division of subject from object. In addition to this, Clark reads many of the Blake passages he cites as a straightforward invocation of Lockean principles**,** skipping over the possibility that they might be read as a "dramatization" or "conscious critique" (137) of Locke. Neither Urizen nor Locke allows for an interaction between imagination and energy, or self and world, because both assert one perspective over all others. Urizen's intellectual activity does not attempt to connect or collaborate with an other, and it is ultimately his self-centredness that prevents him from entering Eternity.

Urizen remains unnamed until he is called forth by Oothoon in Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). Blake's *Visions* poetically addresses a number of physical and ideological

systems of oppression and injustice in the eighteenth century, including slavery[30] and female sexual oppression[31]. Inherent in Blake's criticism are his assertions of the damaging contribution of Locke's principles to the development of this type of systematic oppression, and his emphasis on the need for spiritual vision. Oothoon is oppressed and terrorised both by Bromion, who rapes and impregnates her as though she is an object to be possessed, and by Theotormon, who views Oothoon as a fallen woman and turns away from her in service of his own piety and selfish grief. Both male characters are informed by a Lockean understanding of experience and Oothoon rightly recognises that their perspectives form part of Urizen's spiritual and philosophical law.

Dennis Welch outlines "[t]hree particular features of Locke's thought" that contribute to both Bromion and Theotormon's attitudes towards Oothoon and their personal philosophical positions, namely:

> (1) [Locke's] close linkage of observable properties or qualities to their respective substances; (2) his concept of the self as appropriative consciousness; and (3) his connection of the self with ownership and property. (110)

The first of these features is particularly evident in both Bromion and Theotormon's perception of Oothoon. While Locke did not believe that people should be judged by their "observable properties", his characterisation of "substance" or essence in the *Essay* suggests that there is a causal link between an object's perceived qualities and the spirit or essence that is the "unknown support of those Qualities" (2.32: 2). Locke's theory of an unknowable spiritual substance suggests that the human soul is totally incomprehensible (Welch 112) and, therefore, to consider objective experience and "observable qualities" as the basis for all moral action is seemingly justifiable. Blake identifies the danger of conflating observable difference with spiritual or essential difference when he says: "...Accident being formed / Into Substance & Principle, by the cruelties of Demonstration / It became Opake and Indefinite..." (*M* 29: 35-37 E 128). Locke's empirical philosophy is based in this type of objective "Demonstration", and his theory of unknowable or "Indefinite" substance can easily lead to this confusion between external

[30] This is most famously dealt with in David Erdman's *Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (1954. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977); and in his article "Blake's Vision of Slavery". *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15.3/4 (1952) 242-25.

[31] *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* has also often been interpreted as a poem that is in conversation with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), published just one year earlier. Nelson Hilton deals with this expertly, as well as with Blake's engagement with other debates regarding social liberty at this time, in "An Original Story". *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality* Berkeley: U of California P, 1986, 69-104.

"Accident" and internal essence. Blake's belief is that while "Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay" (*DC* III E. 532). Hazard Adams notes that Blake is probably drawing upon Aristotle's distinction between "Accident" and "Substance". "Substance" is a quality or entity which does not rely upon another entity for its existence or identity, while "Accident" is a quality that belongs to, and is dependent upon, another entity (*His Poetry and Painting* 27). Therefore, to mistake "Accident" for "Substance" is to believe that outer appearances and temporary states of being indicate one's inherent character or spiritual wellness.

Bromion adopts an objective or materialist perspective as the self-confessed slave owner and lust-filled man. He believes that he has to do no more than "ren[d] [Oothoon] with his thunders" (1: 17 E 46), and physically claim her, in order to possess her entirely. Here the word "rend" is carefully chosen by Blake to mean both Bromion's sexual rending, or breaching, of Oothoon, and his taking possession of her as his own property as he would a "harlot" or prostitute, or indeed a slave. Drawing on Locke's concept of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, Bromion understands his consciousness to be an accumulation of the different sense perceptions that he possesses. Moreover, his personal identity is based in this "appropriative, possessive and proprietary consciousness" (Welch 108), and not in an understanding of his unique human soul or creative imagination, because he believes spiritual essence to be unknowable and all human perception to be the same. Oothoon's rape and pregnancy physically brand her, as the "swarthy children of the sun" are branded with Bromion's "signet" (1: 19). Theotormon's silent jealousy concedes Bromion's ownership of Oothoon. He cries "secret tears" (2: 7 E 46), but Theotormon does not object to Bromion's philosophical or moral standpoint. Both men believe that the different external features of African men and of women are indicative of essential internal differences. It is for this reason that Bromion says of slaves and of women that "[t]hey are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge" (1: 22), believing that their oppression is evidence of an inherent spiritual or emotional need to be dominated.

Oothoon attempts to convince Theotormon of the flower/nymph's assertion that "the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away" (1:9-10 E 46). She calls upon "Theotormons Eagles" with a "holy voice" to "Rend away [her] defiled bosom that [she] may reflect / The image of Theotormon on [her] pure transparent breast." (2:13-16 E 46) Blake's Eagles are birds of

visionary genius. Oothoon wishes to show Theotormon that beneath her "defiled bosom" her soul is "pure", and that, although her physical state of being has been altered, her "whole soul" still "seeks" (1:13 E 46) to be with him. Here "rend" signifies Oothoon's wish to separate the "defiled" flesh from the rest of her living body, regardless of the physical and emotional pain it causes her. Many scholars have commented negatively on Oothoon's invocations of this image of self-flagellation because she appears to accept Theotormon's perception of her. However, this is a sincere attempt by Oothoon to dispel Theotormon's "black jealous waters" and to cleanse his vision of her, despite the fact that she is functioning within his limited understanding of her. Ultimately though, Oothoon's self-imposed punishment is not successful and her damaged body only confirms Theotormon's belief that her "whole soul" has been "defiled", because he assumes that her external bodily qualities "reflect" a damaged "soul". Therefore, when Oothoon reflects Theotormon's smile it is "As the clear spring mudded with feet of beasts grows pure & smiles (2: 1-19 E 46) because her soul has not been sullied; only Theotormon's vision of her has deteriorated.

Oothoon continues to try to persuade Theotormon in spite of his judgemental smiles and his silent weeping. She calls on him to see the dawn that comes after night, and for him to recognise humanity's immanent spiritual imagination which has the potential to overcome oppression. For "the village dog / Barks at the breaking day", the "nightingale" no longer laments, the "lark" of inspiration is restless and "the Eagle" of genius "lifts his golden beak to the *pure* east; / Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake / The sun that sleeps too long."[32] (2: 24-28 E 47) "The sun" becomes a symbol of Oothoon's soul, which has been dominated during the "night" that "clos'd [her] in its deadly black"; however the "night is gone" (2:29 E 47) and the sun is rising. Oothoon's soul seeks to transcend her oppression, as the rising sun overcomes the darkness of night.

However, despite her personal attempts to overcome Bromion's possession of her and to transcend her spiritual suffering, Oothoon is still trapped by the limited Urizenic consciousness of Theotormon and her society:

[32] My emphasis.

They told me that the night and day were all that I could see;
They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle.
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.
Instead of morn arises a bright shadow, like an eye
In the eastern cloud: instead of night a sickly charnel house;
That Theotormon hears me not! To him the night and morn
Are both alike: a night of sighs, a morning of fresh tears; (2: 30-38 E 47)

Oothoon laments that she has been taught the Lockean principles and moral doctrine accepted by the influential "They", the social and cultural authorities of her society. She is meant to conceptualise her experience in terms of the dualistic categories of "night and day", referring to the systematic separation of the physical and the spiritual and the principles of good and evil, as well as the hierarchised separation of people according to race or gender. Oothoon's society has also taught her to accept that she has no spiritual sensibility or imagination as a result of her fallen human condition. She is separated, "obliterated and erased", from the world she experiences and limited to the objective and material perception of her "five senses" because the world is considered as an external object, and the creative role of her "infinite brain" is denied. The bodily passion and energy of Oothoon's "heart" has been bound into a "red round globe hot burning" and dispelled into the meaningless "Abyss". Drawing from Milton, Blake's "Abyss" is associated with the "wild abyss" ruled by "Chaos" (*PL* II: 907; 910) that spans the distance between Hell and Earth in *Paradise Lost*. This gulf is the "womb of nature" consisting of the "dark materials" used by the "almighty maker" to "create more worlds" (II: 911-916). As such, the "Abyss" is therefore the formlessness that lies outside of the created, experienced world, and the "non-entity" that Oothoon stares into when she stands "cast out / A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity" (7:14-15 E 50).

As a result of her oppression, the "morn" Oothoon had earlier envisioned has not been realised and the spiritual renewal of the rising sun has become the judgemental eye in the sky that stares down at the trio (and at the viewer) on the frontispiece of the poem.[33] The transient "night" Oothoon believed she could overcome has become a "sickly charnal house", and it does seem as

[33] This eye is created by the shape of the clouds outside the cave, and the sun or moon that the clouds enclose. In some copies, a radiant sun of vision struggles to shine through oppressive dark clouds, but in other copies the eye seems more malevolent and judgemental.

though Oothoon no longer exists for Theotormon who "hears [her] not". The disease-ridden charnel house is also part of Adam's vision of the fallen earth in Book XI of *Paradise Lost*. He sees humankind infected by the disease of sin and tended to by despair, condemned to live a mortal life and die (XI 477-593). Theotormon mourns the loss of Oothoon, because he judges her to be "defiled" in accordance with both "physical fact and social censure"; for Theotormon this "experience cannot be undone" (Welch 123) or used as the basis for spiritual growth.

Following this, Oothoon launches a philosophical discussion with the two men that is framed largely as rhetorical questions. Her questions on plate 3 borrow from the empirical method of observation and consider the relationship between bodily "sense" and consciousness in the natural world. Oothoon explains to Theotormon that her soul has been made "sweet" by her oppression and suffering, because "the soul prey'd on by woe" must grow in order to overcome its traumatic experiences (3:17 E 47). Welch reminds us that this does not mean that Blake "naively defend[s] suffering," but that he recognised the necessity for experience to facilitate personal understanding and spiritual development (124). This is why the "habitations", "pursuits" and "joys" of different creatures are as different as their outward "forms"; their inner spiritual imagination develops and grows according to their experience in the same manner as their physical body undergoes a unique development. Neither Oothoon's physical body nor her creative spiritual imagination is privileged by Blake. As a "holy form divine" or a holy imaginative body, Oothoon's personal experiences are intrinsic to both her physical form and her spiritual essence. Her questions to Theotormon (3:2-13 E 47) criticise his empirical separation of "sense" experience and spiritual experience. Oothoon does not submit to his perception of her and washes off the blood-like "red earth" that has temporarily tainted her wings, "hover[ing] round Theotormons breast" (3: 19-20 E 47) as a transcendent angel.

Theotormon breaks his self-involved silence to challenge Oothoon's philosophical and spiritual beliefs. Oothoon's spiritual imagination appears to be worthless to Theotormon, whose values are determined by an empirical system of measurement and a system of knowledge based on physical states.

> Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?
> Tell me what is a joy? & in what gardens do joys grow? (3:23-24 E 47)

He argues that personal “thought” does not hold any influence over physical “substance” or matter. This is because “thought” is without any quantifiable value because it is not composed of a knowable or measurable “substance”. Similarly, Theotormon believes that “joys” and “sorrows” are externally imposed upon him, rather than part of his personal interaction with the experienced world. He considers that his current state of “woe” is unchangeable for the same reason that he judges Oothoon’s physical and spiritual corruption to be irreparable, because he mistakes a transient physical state for an immanent spiritual identity. In *Milton* Blake cautions the reader to “Distinguish...States from Individuals in those States. States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease” for “You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die” (32[35]: 22-24 E 132). Theotormon has accepted the Church’s teaching that “Satan and Adam are States”, and therefore does not understand that “The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself” (*M* 32[35]: 25; 32 E 132). He hopelessly wishes that he could recall the previous “thoughts” he had of Oothoon and that his previous “joy” could be renewed. For Theotormon, this is comparable to “travers[ing] times and spaces far remote and bring[ing] / Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain” (4: 6-7 E 48), which he judges to be empirically impossible.

Bromion’s response valorises Theotormon’s empirical epistemology, but urges him cynically to seek material joys and physical gratification rather than to remain in pious “woe”. Theotormon’s eyes are focussed on the “ancient trees” and the “fruit” of Biblical Eden, but Bromion reminds him that “trees and fruits flourish upon the earth / To gratify senses unknown” (4:14 E 48). Bromion’s statement that there are physical joys “spread in the infinite microscope, / In places yet unvisited by the voyager. and in worlds / Over another kind of seas, and in atmospheres unknown” (4:15-17 E 48) for Theotormon to possess is a hollow temptation from a misguided materialist. In *Paradise Regained* Satan tempts Jesus with a vision of “great and glorious Rome”, gained by a “strange parallax, or optic skill...Of telescope” (IV: 45; 40-42) that shows:

> Many a fair edifice besides, more like
> Houses of gods - so well I have disposed
> *My aerie microscope*--thou may'st behold,
> Outside and inside both, pillars and roofs
> Carved work, the hand of famed artificers

In cedar, marble, ivory, or gold.[34] (IV: 55-60)

In offering Jesus possession of the kingdom of Rome and all its "spoils" (IV: 46), Satan offers him the power and dominion that materialists believe to come with physical ownership. Moreover, these words echo Locke's claim in the *Essay* that if "Seeing were in any Man a thousand, or a hundred thousand times more acute than it is now by the best Microscope...he would be in a quite different World from other People..." (2.23: 12). Empiricism's objectification of the experienced world has led Bromion to believe that anything that he perceives is under his dominion. In *Milton*, Blake calls this a "false appearance which appears to the reasoner" and a "delusion" because the "Microscope knows not of [imaginative perception] nor the Telescope. they alter / The ratio of Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouchd" (29[31]: 15-18 E 127). Bromion wishes to remind Theotormon that there are no "other joys" apart from the material comforts provided by "riches and ease", and "no sorrows" apart from the sorrow of being without material possessions. Therefore, Theotormon should not hope to recapture past joys, but to accumulate new ones and to possess a female sexual companion as Bromion has possessed Oothoon. Importantly, while Locke and Bromion believe that knowledge may be gained by an *increase* in sense experience, and that ultimately there is "one [empirical] law for both the lion and the ox" (4:22 E. 48), for Blake, it is the "*improvement* of sensual enjoyment"[35] (*MHH* 14 E 49) in the imaginative body that is able to develop spiritual vision.

In response, Oothoon rails against Bromion's materialistic definitions of "joy" and "sorrow", his commodification of personal experience, and his enforcement of a universal "law", asking:

How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys
Holy, eternal, infinite! and each joy is a Love. (5:5-6 E 48)

She could have added to this, "He who binds to himself a joy / Does the winged life destroy" (*Eternity* E 470), because by attempting to objectify and ascribe the same basic value to all joy, Bromion robs each different joy of its unique situational value. Oothoon also curses Theotormon's "hypocrite modesty" (6:16 E 49) which brands her "Open[ness] to joy and to delight" (6:22 E 50) as sinful and demeaning. His religious perspective characterises Oothoon's enjoyment of sex and her spiritual engagement with sensual pleasure as sordid. Moreover, his

[34] My emphasis.
[35] My emphasis.

Lockean objectification of Oothoon judges her as a non-spiritual entity. Oothoon recognises, though, that the male perspectives she has been confronted with are not limited to Theotormon and Bromion, and directs her outrage at Urizen, "Creator of Men! Demon of heaven", who has formed men in accordance with his "image" (5:3-4 E 48). Urizen imposes a univocal system of meaning that ignores the role of the perceiving subject in experience; drawing on his own jealousy and self-aggrandisement he seeks to create a "repeatable, intermeasurable, and interchangeable humanity reflective of his consciousness" (Welch 115). It is this system of objective reason and rigid moral doctrine that Oothoon rejects, because it denies the existence and importance of the personal spiritual imagination that is inseparable from the human body. Her transcendent spiritual vision fails in consequence of the narrow perceptions of her male counterparts, and the widely accepted philosophical and spiritual outlook they represent, and not because of her own non-substantial or fallen spirituality.

Blake's personal objections to Locke's empiricism and to Berkeley's theological idealism are the result of his belief that each human being exists as a holy imaginative body. In both "The Divine Image" and *Visions*, Blake rejects the abstraction of moral and spiritual virtues from human experience, and asserts that human beings engage creatively with the world through their embodied perceptions. This belief illustrates a proto-phenomenological approach to experience that may fruitfully be compared with the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although Merleau-Ponty does not consider human experience from a theological or spiritual perspective, he also situates his philosophical argument in tension with the principles of empiricism and idealism, and considers perception as the functioning of an embodied consciousness in its relation to a shared living space.

Chapter 2

The Imagination as Embodied Spiritual Consciousness and Intersubjective Society

William Blake's inclusion in the English literary canon and his current status as one of the six most prominent Romantic poets is extraordinary considering the lack of success he enjoyed during his lifetime.[36] His posthumous success suggests that the ideas that Blake considered were perhaps too radical for his own society, instead engaging and capturing the imaginations of later generations. Blake seems to have been a poet and an artist ahead of his time, a revolutionary and a visionary in the true sense of the word: re-imagining his current society, but also going beyond it. It is not only his artistic or poetic style but often his philosophical ideas[37] that have captured the attention of twentieth and twenty-first century scholars. This is because Blake's rebellious re-evaluation of popular or classical philosophy is not out of place with the general reconsideration of previously established ontological and epistemological categories and hierarchies during this period.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was one of a group of phenomenological philosophers who emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Phenomenology refers to the study of "structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view", and is particularly concerned with the relationship between intention, or the conscious direction of a perceiving self, and the phenomenal world (Smith). While the concerns of phenomenology have been considered obliquely by philosophical enquires throughout history, it was established as an area of

[36] While Blake's position with regard to Romanticism may be ambiguous, as a good portion of his work can be considered "Pre-Romantic", he is now often considered to be one of the "big six" Romantic poets along with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron.

[37] S. Foster Damon's study of *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924) and *Fearful Symmetry* by Northrop Frye (Princeton. NJ: Princeton UP, 1947) are the two seminal works that consider the overarching philosophical system of Blake's body of work. Contemporary Blake scholarship has also offered some useful discussions of Blake's philosophy in relation to more recent philosophical and literary theory. For instance, *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality* (Eds. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler, Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) presents a post-structuralist approach to Blake, and *Palgrave: Advances in William Blake Studies* (Ed. Nicholas M. Williams. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) engages with new critical approaches to Blake, with studies examining Blake within the disciplines of scientific studies, gender studies and postmodern theory.

philosophical study by Edmund Husserl in the first decade of the twentieth century. The focus of Husserl's phenomenological study was "intentionality", which argued that human consciousness is always consciousness *of* something and therefore is characterised by a consideration of objects. Martin Heidegger followed on from Husserl with *Being and Time* (1927), which considered "Being" or the pre-conceptual condition of existence (Smith). Both Husserl and Heidegger influenced Merleau-Ponty, whose existential phenomenology both refined and diverged from Husserl's examination of consciousness and Heidegger's examination of Being and established Merleau-Ponty as a seminal phenomenologist.

This movement grew out of a resistance to pre-existing theoretical explanations of human experience, such as scientific studies of sensation, and attempted to return to a philosophical examination of phenomena and human consciousness (Smith). Merleau-Ponty writes that "[t]rue philosophy consists of re-learning to look at the world" (*PoP* xxiii), and this is the task he takes up in all of his work. In his first major work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he presents a critical assessment of the ontological explanations offered by "empiricism" and "intellectualism", and attempts to explore the ways in which these theories provide a limited understanding of human experience. Merleau-Ponty argues that these theories are problematic because both presuppose an objective viewpoint, removed from any subjective perspective, while nevertheless being based upon an a priori engagement between a perceiving self and an experienced world. This unmediated interaction between an embodied consciousness and a dynamic life-world, which the theories of empiricism and intellectualism have neglected, he defines as primordial or pre-theoretical. Merleau-Ponty believes that in neglecting to consider this interaction empiricism and intellectualism have failed to recognise the extent to which human perception participates in the creation of the experienced world.

The ideas put forward in Merleau-Ponty's first major thesis are extended and redeveloped in later works such as *The Visible and the Invisible* (1948; trans. 1964), but the *Phenomenology of Perception* sets out the core aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy: his dismantling of the Cartesian categories of subject and object, his theory of embodied consciousness, and his notion of a synergetic and intersubjective life-world. Other works, such as *Sense and Non-Sense* (1948), *Signs* (1960), and *The Prose of the World* (1969) offer more focused comparisons between the

emergence of meaning in art and language, and the constitutive potential of acts of perception. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of perception provides a useful philosophical lens through which to consider Blake. This is because he consistently gives prominence to an integrated body-mind complex that perceives from its location within an interactive community in a shared world; moreover, he characterises perception as a creative act.

Merleau-Ponty begins his examination of perception by discussing a central problem in both empirical and intellectual philosophy. While empiricism and intellectualism are often philosophically opposed, both presuppose a boundary between subject and object in the experienced world. Each offers a reversal of the other. Empiricism is defined by an emphasis on the objective world and the study of sense-impressions; the mind receives sense-data, almost uncontrollably, from an external source and perception is seen as a separate analysis or judgement of sensory material. The world is constituted by matter and represented in the mind as on Locke's tabula rasa. Proponents of intellectualism believe that it is consciousness or thought that is responsible for perception which thus orders the perceived world. While empiricism privileges the senses (and the external), and intellectualism privileges the mind (and the internal), both schools of thought position the experienced landscape outside of a human observer, and it is this objective environment which forms the starting point for any explanation of the world. This opposition between subject and object is assumed, but for Merleau-Ponty never conclusively proven. For both schools the "notion of sensation...seems immediate and obvious", but Merleau-Ponty believes that these "traditional analyses [have] missed the phenomenon of perception" (*PoP* 3). It is precisely these categories of subject and object that have been applied to experience and readily accepted as common sense that we must *un*learn in order to understand the original nature and value of our being.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty proposes a "return to phenomena" (2) in order to free philosophy from the dualistic separation of subject and object, or mind and body. He rejects empiricism's simplistic view of sense-data and the notion of a pure sense-impression, instead explaining perception in terms of a phenomenal or perceptual field. To illustrate what he means, Merleau-Ponty provides the example of a "white patch on a homogenous background", such as a chalk mark on a blackboard. The whiteness of the chalk

mark would be indistinguishable and meaningless if it were not placed in contrast to the black background, and the same is true of the colour of the blackboard; each element is defined in relation to a contextual field of perception. Merleau-Ponty tells us that the "perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'", and therefore "[e]ach part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is...already charged with a meaning" (*PoP* 4). The term "element" is introduced to refer to phenomena in the phenomenal field in an effort to move beyond the categories of subject and object. Merleau-Ponty argues that in the act of perception one object, or one quality, is never totally isolated or "pure"; if a "pure impression" is "introduced, it is because instead of attending to the experience of perception, we overlook it in favour of the object perceived" (*PoP* 4). Therefore, the notion of sense-data is an abstract concept that attempts to remove a particular quality from its context, and offers a distorted explanation of the interactive and relational nature of perception.

Following his account of the phenomenal field, Merleau-Ponty describes perspective as the point of focus assumed by a perceiver in a complex and relational landscape. Importantly, the differential relationship between elements in the field of perception indicates that there are other perspectives, or points of focus, that have been temporarily disregarded by the perceiving subject. Indeed, "[t]he word perception indicates a direction rather than a primitive function" (*PoP* 13). This is why perspectives are meaningful, because each perspective is defined in relation to all the other perspectives that might be considered. Perception, therefore, involves an opening up of the self onto a world of possible perspectives, and an interaction between a perceiving self and an experiential landscape. "Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them" (*PoP* xi). For Merleau-Ponty, perception's directional focus, or "attention", is inherently constitutive or creative because it involves a meaningful view or organisation of the experienced world. In turn, the meaning-laden landscape of the experienced world awakens and develops human consciousness (*PoP* 30-31). Thus, perception "must be understood as a process of integration in which the text of the external world is not so much copied", or represented, "as composed" (10), or presented to an organising consciousness. In addition, one's current perceptions are also defined in relation to previous perspectives and

imbued with meaning on the basis of these past experiences (PoP 60). For instance, dogs may attract interest or affection until one is bitten by a dog, after which all dogs may appear dangerous and repulsive. Therefore, the "background" context against which new perceptions are considered is simultaneously internal, or generated by a perceiving subject, and external, or generated by the experiential landscape; it is constantly shifting. Moreover, the internal and external pass into each other in the phenomenal field so that it becomes impossible, and indeed unhelpful, to conclude what is determined by the self and what by the experienced world.

In establishing the interactive and relational perceptual field, Merleau-Ponty begins to collapse the seemingly inflexible fundamental categories of subject and object, mind and body, that had gained currency through the history of philosophy. In setting up a system of abstract concepts, empiricism and intellectualism are deemed to have systematically denied "living" experience. Empiricism succeeds in "concealing phenomena instead of elucidating them", because it describes only the "blind processes" of furnishing the mind with sense impressions, so that perception "is built up with states of consciousness as a house is built with bricks" (*PoP* 25). This provides an image of a rigid artificial system of knowledge that ignores the scope of human experience; this is similar to Blake's image of the restrictive systems of "Law" and "Religion" that furnished his society with the "stones" and "bricks" to build its punitive "Prisons" and "Brothels" for the satisfaction of forbidden desires (*MHH* 8:1 E. 36). Empiricism considers human beings as predominantly natural or biological entities and almost entirely denies the cultural human world:

> ...it is, then, desirable to point out everything that is made incomprehensible by empiricist constructions and all the basic phenomena which they conceal. They hide from us in the first place 'the cultural world' or 'human world' in which nevertheless our whole life is led. (*PoP* 27)

The "cultural" or "human" world is categorised as subjective and unquantifiable, and therefore disregarded by empiricists. This empirical world exists *in itself* and gives no credence to the role of an active subject. Contrary to this, intellectualists view the world as *for itself* and believe that objective reality is the "immanent end of knowledge" (*PoP* 33) rather than the basis of fact.

Similarly, though, they forget the active role of the perceiving subject. [38] In order to begin "to understand [the] strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the [experiential] landscape", and to examine sense experience as "that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life" (*PoP* 61), Merleau-Ponty argues that one must "return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world" in order to "rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system 'Self-others-things' as it comes into being" (*PoP* 66). He therefore begins by reconsidering the "self" as an active participant in the primordial life-world before moving onto "others" and "things".

Central to Merleau-Ponty's conception of experience is his notion that each individual exists as an embodied consciousness. The first section of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is devoted entirely to "The Body". This is because Merleau-Ponty wishes to identify the body's central ontological importance as that entity which allows a human being to perceive, act, interact and, essentially, to exist in experienced space. Both empiricism and intellectualism relegate the body to the status of a purely physical entity. It is treated as a corporeal object and an organic machine that carries out the mechanical processes of sense perception, and its status as a living conscious form is ignored. These philosophies have failed to recognise the body's unique status as that which is both experiencing and experienced, both acting and reacting. Merleau-Ponty's description of two hands touching provides one of his best examples of the body's existence as both subject and object:

> ...when I touch my right hand with my left, my hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too. We have just seen that the two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other. When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate roles of 'touching' and 'touched'. (*PoP* 106)

The state of being of each hand shifts according to which aspect of the body is invoked. Each hand moves between being integral to the acting subject and being an object upon which the subject acts. Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is both impossible and illogical to attempt to

[38] Merleau-Ponty is drawing upon Sartre's distinction, drawn in *Being and Nothingness* (1943. Trans. 1956), between the "in itself" characterised by an existence as an object and the "for itself" of consciousness.

separate the body from the mind, or external experience from internal experience, because the ontological structure of the living body seamlessly integrates physical presence and mental awareness. To view the body only as a mechanical object characterises human beings as spectators, both of the processes of the body and of the experienced world:

> But I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I *am* it...We do not merely behold as spectators the relations between the parts of our body, and the correlations between the visual and the tactile body: we are ourselves the unifier of these arms and legs, the person who both sees and touches them.[39] (*PoP* 173)

The body is not a passive receiver but, rather, actively "rises toward" (*PoP* 87) or addresses the world; it exists in interaction with the fecund elements of the perceptual field. The spontaneous perception and action of the living body forms a human being's primary interaction with the natural and social world. This spontaneity is characterised by a fusion between body and mind which humans immediately inhabit and control even though they do not immediately understand it. Merleau-Ponty argues that when one accomplishes an action, such as walking across a room and opening a door, one is not consciously aware of each process the body undertakes to complete the task. I wish to cross the room, and I do. Body and mind unite and I act – there can be no distinction; it is the spontaneous movement of an embodied consciousness.

Human beings therefore become part of the world through their expressive psycho-physical movements. Once an action is completed (the door one wished to access has been opened), one has altered one's context and that of every individual with whom one exists. Merleau-Ponty describes the structure of embodied experience as a "point-horizon". The "horizon" is the landscape of the experienced world that is presented to the body and that one's body opens onto; it is orientated according to the movement and directional gaze of an embodied consciousness. It is by virtue of having a body that the perceiving subject can interact with and move through the lived space of the experienced world, and therefore one's position both opens up a "world-horizon" and provides a "point" of focus. Indeed, "[t]o be a body, is to be tied to a certain world" but the "body is not primarily *in* space: it is *of* it"[40] (*PoP* 171). One's body is the "meaningful core" (*PoP* 171), the centre from which one takes up a view of the world, but which the self cannot objectively view in itself.

[39] My emphasis.
[40] My emphasis.

In order to illustrate the problem with trying to explain the living experience of the body in terms of the separate categories of subjective consciousness and objective sensation, Merleau-Ponty refers to case studies of amputees who experience a "phantom limb" (*PoP* 87-88). The sensation of a phantom leg is tied to the lingering memory of a working limb. The gradual decline in phantom sensations correlates with a patient's slow acceptance of physical loss, and therefore a shrinkage of relations to a world that is accessed through the body. However, for Merleau-Ponty this does not explain why "the severance of the nerves to the brain abolishes the phantom leg" (*PoP* 89), or why these memories are experienced physically rather than as mental images. Therefore, what one needs to understand is "how the psychic determining factors and the physiological conditions gear into each other." (*PoP* 89). In order for the psychic and the physiological to interact, or come together, a common "point of application" (*PoP* 89) is required, and this is the living body in the experienced world: the intersection of consciousness and corporeality that intermediates with a perceptual field. As a result:

> The psycho-physical event can no longer be conceived after the model of Cartesian physiology...The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instance in the movement of existence. (*PoP* 102)

Drawing upon the Cartesian tradition, Merleau-Ponty often substitutes the term "soul" to mean all human mental processes, or human consciousness. In so doing, he opposes the idea of a dominant organising force or spirit that bestows knowledge or understanding, and emphasises the rootedness of human consciousness and understanding in embodied perception.

In the second part of the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty moves on to "The World as Perceived", which deals with the ways in which a human being interacts with the other entities that make up the rest of "space" – namely, things and other embodied subjects. The perception of an embodied consciousness is inter-sensorial. Rather than building up complex ideas from isolated perceived qualities, the living body experiences "things" at the intersection of all of the body's senses, which overlap and inform one another (Hass 68-69). The direction and focus of the living body's contact with things in the multidimensional perceptual field produces meaning because it assumes a particular perspective. Empiricism suggests that the properties of objects

can be wholly known through perception (even if an object's constituting substance cannot), while intellectualism distrusts the physical landscape. Merleau-Ponty's central argument is that objects are experienced from a particular position through a limiting focus, and therefore are not open to the total understanding empiricism outlines. Moreover, to discount this experience of the physical landscape is to discount all consciousness and meaning produced in the actions of the living body. One has "the experience of a world, not understood as a system of relations which wholly determine each event, but as an open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible" (*PoP* 255). The notion of "inexhaustibility" arises because in the system of "self-others-things" one's living body is at the centre of a synergistic interaction between perceived and perceiving elements that produces a phenomenological life-world that exceeds the sum of its parts.

In dismantling the "bilateral" (*PoP* x) theories of empiricism and intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty argues that meaning is not a pre-constituted product of the external world that is judged or considered by the perceiving subject from a distance. Instead, meaning emerges from the living body's conscious activity *in* and *with* the world. For, the "...body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly *alive*, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system"[41] (*PoP* 235). The world remains *alive* with meaning because the perceiving body's focused attention affords depth and perspective to "the inconceivable flatness of being" (*S* 67) and so succeeds in outlining a meaning. Thus, for Merleau Ponty:

> All perception, all action which presupposes it, and in short every human use of the body is already *primordial expression*. Not that derivative labour which substitutes for what is expressed signs which are given elsewhere with their meaning and rules of usage, but the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs, makes that which is expressed dwell in them through the eloquence of their arrangement and configuration alone, implants a meaning in that which did not have one... (*S* 67)

In taking up a position in experienced space, as a "being-in-the-world" (*PoP* 92), the conscious body "brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility" in order to

[41] My emphasis.

constitute a "human setting" (*PoP* 157).[42] This is the human body's "primary operation" or immediate action in the world and from it all philosophical or scientific theories are derived.

The "primordial", "pre-objective" or "pre-reflective" realm is the original fact of human existence that objective thought has forgotten. It is as an embodied being in the primordial realm that a human being is able to develop consciousness, because consciousness is always consciousness *of* something and does not exist as an abstract function outside of experience:

> Underlying myself as a thinking subject, who is able to take my place at will on Sirius or on the earth's surface, there is, therefore, as it were a natural self which does not budge from its terrestrial situation and which constantly adumbrates absolute valuations...In so far as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent upon my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way which I do not choose. (*PoP* 511)

The primordial body's "being-in-the-world" precedes and prefigures philosophical reflection, and is the ontological structure upon which the social and cultural world, as well as personal identity, is built. For, "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (*PoP* xxii). That is, there is no pure human essence or pure consciousness that defines a human being's identity. It is only as a human being-in-the-world that one can develop consciousness, and a human self can only come to be defined in relation to the shared world with which one interacts. "There can be no consciousness that is not sustained by its primordial involvement in life and by the manner of this involvement" (*CD* 24). Therefore, the "natural man" subtends the "thinking subject", and the active, living body expresses itself as a perceiving self. The perceiving subject must assert a personal "voice" against a "primordial silence", and enter into a conversation with other expressive, perceiving subjects.

In his essay on "Cézanne's Doubt", Merleau-Ponty discusses Cézanne's later paintings (following his impressionist work) as an illustration of his understanding of primordial experience. He begins by distinguishing between visual art that attempts to recapture nature through a scientific or codified method of representation, and art that attempts to paint the world as it appears to the primordial subject: as an "emerging order... organizing itself before our eyes"

[42] Merleau-Ponty's term "motility" refers to the body's structure of movement within a physical landscape, and the pattern of movement that is occasioned by its physical properties.

(*SNS* 14). Merleau-Ponty argues that scientifically rendered paintings treat nature as an object that exists *in itself*, attempting to present an accurate copy of nature that represents the meaning it already contains. However, Merleau-Ponty notes that Cézanne wished to paint "from nature" (1) or from the immediately experienced world from which science derives its theories. He contends that Cézanne therefore aimed to depict the primordial act of conception, or creative perception. Thus, it was necessary for Cézanne "first to forget all he had ever learned from science and, second through these sciences to recapture the structure of the landscape as an emerging organism" (17). Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Cézanne's artistic process suggests that an attempt to return to primordial experience requires an active suspension, or setting aside, of established theories of experience.[43] Merleau-Ponty argues that it was Cézanne's wish to encourage the viewer to "forget" these theorisations in order to recognise the significance of primordial or immediate experience. By forgetting or stripping away pre-established systems of meaning, Cézanne is able to show that before meaning is represented, it emerges spontaneously at the interface between a human embodied consciousness and a dynamic life-world.

Nonetheless, the second part of Merleau-Ponty's statement offers an important qualification: that without a mode of representation it is impossible to "recapture the structure of the [primordial] landscape" or to express and reflect upon primordial expression. This is because primordial experience is the state of being that *gives rise* to the media for reflection such as artistic expression and cultural theorising; it can therefore only be considered retroactively through the same systems of expression that emerged from it. The primordial realm is "the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built *in order to know it*"[44] (19). The danger in not recognizing the significance of primordial experience is that the "spontaneous organization of the things [human beings] perceive" can be conflated with the "human organization of ideas and sciences" (13), with the consequence that the meaning generated in the immediate interaction between self and world can be separated from human experience and attributed to abstract intellectual processes. Merleau-Ponty argues that this is

[43] This is similar to Husserl's notion of the *epoché*, which calls for a suspension of all considered opinions regarding the physical world in order to focus on how phenomena are consciously experienced (Smith). This method of enquiry describes a "reduction" of pre-established knowledge and theoretical paradigms in order to consider human experience without any pre-conceived notions (Cogan).
[44] My emphasis.

what has occurred with the theories of empiricism and intellectualism. These philosophies have abstracted and separated the once integrated and interactive elements of embodied experience.

In a later essay entitled “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence”, Merleau-Ponty explains that his comparative discussion of perception and painting is not an attempt to provide a figurative account of perception, but to examine perception as a truly creative act:

> And there is not simply a question of an *analogy* between the two problems; it is the expressive operation of the body, begun by the smallest perception, which is amplified into painting and art. The first sketch on the walls of caves founded one tradition only because it was gleaned from another – the tradition of perception. (*S* 70)

Merleau-Ponty characterises perception as the interactive or creative production of meaning that occurs between an engaged consciousness and a meaning-laden life-world. This offers many points of comparison with the English Romantics’ general emphasis on personal imagination and the role of the perceiver in the creation of the experienced world. In many respects, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception is similar to Samuel Coleridge’s account of the imagination. Coleridge describes the imagination as a “synthetic” power that creates the experienced world by facilitating the interplay between the experience of the perceiver and the thing perceived (*BL* XII). In so doing, he disagrees with figures such as Samuel Johnson, who defines the imagination in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as "Fancy” or “the power of forming ideal pictures**;** the power of representing things absent to one's self or others" (508). This definition characterises the imagination as a reflective faculty that is able to reconstitute previous mental images in the mind. Johnson’s definition is built upon an empirical account of perception that considers the mind to be a mechanical receptor that passively receives ideas and sense-data. Thus, for Johnson, the mind is not active in perception and the imagination can only reconsider ideas previously acquired through sense experience. Coleridge rejects this definition of the imagination as “Fancy”, and in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) he distinguishes fancy from the “primary” and “secondary” imagination.

The primary imagination is described as the “living Power and prime Agent of human Perception” that creates and sustains the perceived world in the “finite [human] mind”; just as the “infinite” mind of God sustains the “eternal act of creation” (*BL* XIII: 202). It is the

organising power that facilitates a human being's exchange with the perceived world, and therefore results in the creation of the world for each human being. "Fancy" is defined as nothing more than "a mode of Memory" which "emancipate[s]" or abstracts past perceptions "from the order of time and space" (*BL* XIII: 202). Unlike the imagination, fancy does not fundamentally alter the "materials" it considers because it does not function as a creative consciousness, and therefore can provide only new associations between premade images. The secondary imagination builds upon the operations of the primary, arranging new meanings and operating through artistic or poetic modes of expression. It is characterised by the same "agency", or conscious intent, but "differ[s] only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation" (*BL* XIII: 202). The secondary imagination is the expressive faculty that erects a system of signs to convey the ideas produced by the primary imagination. Coleridge's distinction between the primary and secondary imagination is very similar to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between a perceiving subject's immediate founding of a life-world and the artistic expression or reflective theorising of this primordial experience. Moreover, both Merleau-Ponty and Coleridge characterise consciousness as a primarily organising or creative force, and not as an inactive *tabula rasa*.

Together, the composite primary and secondary imagination functions as an "esemplastic" power that brings together and organises phenomena to constitute a meaningful and knowable world. Thus, for Coleridge, the imagination encompasses the creative powers of the human mind that sustain the world through a human being's limited perception, just as God sustains the world through the infinite perception of His creative mind. This argument is not far removed from Berkeley's idealism, with which Coleridge identified himself (Engell 110). Certainly, the theologically traditional position presented by "Berkeley suited Coleridge's spiritual beliefs" (Class 58), but Coleridge's understanding of perception is not strictly idealist. By characterising the imagination as a creative interaction, Coleridge acknowledges the existence of an external world of perceived objects with which the perceiver is engaged. Similarly, Blake diverges from Berkeley's idealism because he situates the divine creative power of consciousness in the physical human body, but it is also this belief that distinguishes Blake's account of the imagination from Coleridge's. Blake does not believe that human perception *re-enacts* the creative powers of God. Blake asserts that God *is* incarnate humanity, and that the imagination's divine creative power is enacted through the conscious human form.

It is in Blake's belief in the rootedness of this creative organising force in the human body and its operations that aligns him so closely with Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, Blake also rejects the process of reflection that derives objective theories from immediate embodied perception, while simultaneously denying the significance of this inherent relationship between self and world. However, unlike Coleridge and Blake, Merleau-Ponty does not associate human consciousness with a spirit or deity and, unlike Berkeley, he does not make any theological assumptions in his philosophical consideration of consciousness. To Berkeley's statement that "Reason considers and judges of the imagination" Blake responds that "Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense" (*Ber* E. 664); yet Blake affords the creative perception of immediate experience spiritual or divine significance because he believes this to be the creative act of God. Blake's divergence from Coleridge's account of the imagination is also important. While Coleridge considers the imagination to engage the creative powers of the human mind, Blake describes the imagination as the total interaction of an embodied consciousness, encompassing both the senses of the body and the intellectual or creative powers of the mind.

Blake mentions the "senses" of the body many times in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and distinguishes between "finite" perception and "infinite" vision, or limited sense perception (like that described by the empiricists) and imaginative perception, or the integrated perception of an embodied consciousness that actively contributes to the creation of a life-world. While Blake makes assertions such as "Mental Things are alone Real" (*VLJ* E 565) and praises the "enlarged and numerous senses" of the "ancient Poets" (*MHH* 11 E 38), the distinction between bodily sense and mental perception is not based upon the dualistic assumptions of either empiricism or idealism. Like Merleau-Ponty, Blake dismantles and recasts these categories (though following a different process) in an attempt to change how human beings understand their own existence and to alert them to the potential of visionary perception.

The entire *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* can be read as an indictment of the hierarchical separation of body, mind and spirit. Here Blake explains that theologians and philosophers have

taught that “Good is the passive that obeys Reason” from the mind, and “Evil is the active springing from [the] Energy” (3 E 34) of the body. To this Blake responds:

> 1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses. The chief inlets of Soul in this age
> 2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is The bound or outward circumference of Energy. (4 E 34)

Blake understands “Man” to be an embodied *spiritual* consciousness that cannot be separated into a distinct “Body” and “Soul”. Therefore, the body is a “portion”, or aspect, of the indivisible mind-body complex of the “Soul”. This is the same point that Blake makes in “The Divine Image” where Blake describes divine virtues as aspects of the human form:

> For Mercy has a human heart
> Pity, a human face:
> And Love, the human form divine,
> And Peace, the human dress.
>
> Then every man of every clime,
> That prays in his distress,
> Prays to the human form divine.
> Love Mercy Pity Peace. (9-16 E 12-13)

There is therefore no external Spirit of God that is outside of lived space; instead spirit is encompassed by the form and energy of the body and its abilities to act and perceive. Without the “five senses”, the body would have no way of opening onto the experienced world. Moreover, it is the body’s “energy” and “life” that facilitates one’s interaction with the perceptual elements of the world. Blake views reason, the portion of soul associated with the mind, as the “outward circumference”, or the counteracting and limiting force, of bodily energy. This is because energy can degenerate into chaos if it is left totally unrestrained or undirected. However, reason must also be balanced and restrained by energy otherwise human experience will become unbalanced and distorted. Thus, the human soul exists as a mind/body complex that integrates reason and energy in order to give rise to a consciousness that is capable of a holistic engagement with its environment.

In plate 12 of the *Marriage*, Blake dines with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel and asks them “how they dared so roundly to assert. that God spake to them” (E 38). To which Isaiah replies:

> I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.

Blake's Isaiah asserts that God *is* unknowable to a "finite organical perception", seemingly agreeing with Locke and other empiricists that human beings are constrained by the physical body rather than enabled by it. However, it is Isaiah's "senses", the inlets of perception, that connect his experiencing self with the world and that "discover'd the infinite in every thing". Blake attached crucial significance to Isaiah's personal vision of the Lord, as recounted in *Isaiah* 6: 1-5. Isaiah declares: "I saw … the Lord" (6:1), and "I heard the voice of the Lord" (6:8). Isaiah experiences the presence of the Lord through two of his bodily senses. Ezekiel also asserts that he both saw and heard the Lord in his revelation of his vision of God (*Ezekiel* 1: 25-28). Thus, imaginative perception is revealed to be possible only through the senses of the body, it is not purely a function of the mind. The "infinite" appears through the unified perception of body and mind. By believing these integrated functions of embodied consciousness to be disconnected, empiricism denies humanity's divine constitutive powers. It is the difference between seeing "with" the eye and seeing "through" it:

> This Lifes dim Windows of the Soul
> Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
> And leads you to Believe a Lie
> When you see with not thro the Eye (*ELG* 97-100 E 520)

A human being's integrated body-consciousness is the "Window of the Soul", but not in the traditional sense in which the human soul remains internal and inactive. The living body opens the human soul onto the world and allows it to perceive and act with imaginative vision.

Similarly, Blake asserts:

> ...for My Self [...] I do not behold the outward Creation [...] to me it is hindrance & not Action; it is as the Dirt upon my feet, No part of Me. 'What', it will be Question'd, 'when the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host, crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almightly.'[45] I question not my Corporeal or

[45] Here again, Blake is referencing Isaiah's vision in chapter 6 of *Isaiah*, "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory" (6: 3).

> Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it. (*VLJ* E 565-566)

The spectator who sees the Guinea Sun views the world solely as a material entity that can be possessed by a self, believing that the senses can only passively receive images of the world. The visionary poet recognises his ability as an embodied consciousness to participate in the creation of the world he experiences. The result of the interaction between the poet and the sun is the joyful "Heavenly host" that emerges as a testament to the creative power of the divine in the human visionary.[46] During this interaction, the senses enable the imagination as the medium of perception. It is from this original condition as a mental entity emerging "thro'" the "Window" of the body that a human being begins all "Action", rather than remaining outside of the world as a "Corporeal or Vegetative" spectator.

Thus, for Blake, "finite" perception makes use of the body's senses as openings that only allow impressions of the world *into* the human mind. This is equivalent to responding to Lockean 'sense data', with the mind functioning simply as a processing mechanism. "Infinite" perception recognises that the senses open the mind *onto* the world and facilitate the mind's interaction *with* the world. In *Europe a Prophecy*, the introduction of a "new materialist philosophy" (Damon 132) during Enitharmon's eighteen hundred year sleep results in the denial of the creative exchange of "infinite" perception in order to establish God as "a tyrant crown'd" (*E* 10: 23 E 63):

> ...then turn'd the fluxile eyes
> Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things.
> The ever-varying spiral ascents to the heavens of heavens
> Were bended downward; and the nostrils golden gates shut
> Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite. (*E* 10: 11-15 E 63)

It is a change in "Thought" that has "chang'd the infinite to a serpent" (*E* 10: 16 E 63). The image of the large coiling serpent encloses the text on Blake's plate. The serpent at once symbolises the deception and selfishness that Blake associated with the priesthood in England and stands for "the worship of Nature" (Damon 365), both by the druids and by the materialists. It is an "image of [the] infinite shut up in finite revolutions" (*E* 10: 21-22 E 63), or of the debasement of the senses to allow for the development of a religion that denies the role of human

[46] Blake is drawing upon the visions of both Isaiah and Ezekiel in this conclusion.

perception in the creation of the experienced world. It is the imposition of materialism that limits perception to "the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & *single* vision"[47] (*J* 53: 11 E 202), whereas the integrated perception of an embodied spiritual consciousness reveals infinite or imaginative perception.

However, Blake does not naively forget the limitations of the human body, which both facilitates and places physical restrictions on perception. The body can fall victim to many debilitating physical ills, and is therefore limited in its purely "natural" capacity. Annotating Berkeley's *Siris* he writes, "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body" (E 664). When the natural or biological functions of the body are emphasised then its physical mechanics are given greater importance than its existence as the facilitator of consciousness. Later in *Siris*, Berkeley asserts that "according to Themistius...it may be inferred that all beings are in the soul. For, saith he, the forms are the beings. By the form every thing is what it is. And, he adds, it is the soul that imparteth forms to matter..." To this Blake responds, "This is my Opinion but Forms *must* be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination"[48] (*Ber* E 664). While the body may present some physical constraints, the body's senses are the physical agents of the imagination. Moreover, the body gathers the senses into a single living form that surges through an interactive landscape, actively contributing to the world's constant creation or transformation. As a result, the body and its senses can never be totally "natural", physical, or inert.

Merleau-Ponty considers the effects of becoming physically disabled in his discussion of patients who have suffered an amputation. He argues that a "cripple" who has lost a hand rejects his "mutilation" because his body still exists as the "vehicle of [his] being in the world"; the environment that the amputee inhabits is still a world that is imbued with all the possibilities open to a fully working body. (*PoP* 94) Therefore, the world reveals to the patient both the body's central ontological importance as the "vehicle of being in the world" and its inherent deficiencies:

> ...for if it is true that I am conscious of my body *via* the world, that it is the unperceived term in the centre of the world to which all objects turn their face, it

[47] My emphasis.
[48] My emphasis.

> is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body. It is precisely when my customary world arouses in me habitual intentions that I can no longer, if I have lost a limb, be effectively drawn into it, and the utilizable objects, precisely in so far as they present themselves as utilizable, appeal to a hand which I no longer have. Thus are delimited, in the totality of my body, regions of silence. (*PoP* 94-95)

The body sustains an inherently limited perspective because its perceptions are dependent upon its physical capabilities, but it is also the central axis upon which a perceiving subject may "pivot" in order to expand perception and recognise the possibilities that the world presents. The body's limitations remind the perceiving subject that the world extends beyond one perspective, but also that the body is central in the constitution of the world for a human self.

In *Milton*, Blake describes the perceiving, embodied subject as the centre-point of a self-created universe:

> ...every Space that a Man views around his dwelling-place:
> Standing on his own roof, or in his garden on a mount
> Of twenty five-cubits in height, such space is his Universe:
> And on its verge the Sun rises & sets, the Clouds bow
> To meet the flat Earth & the Sea in such an order'd Space:
> The Starry heavens reach no further, but here bend and set
> On all sides, & the two Poles turn on their valves of gold;
> And if he move his dwelling-place, his heavens also move.
> Wher'eer he goes all his neighbourhood bewail his loss:
> Such are the Spaces called Earth & such its dimension:
> As to that false appearance which appears to the reasoner,
> As of a Globe rolling thro Voidness, it is a delusion of Ulro
> The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope. they alter
> The ratio of Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouched (29 [30]: 4-18 E 127)

By virtue of his perceiving body, "Man" takes up a position *in* "Space" and enters into a creative exchange with the seemingly objective "views around his dwelling-place". Yet these exist for each "Man" according to his perspective as he stands "on his own roof or in his garden on a mount".[49] This is the same sentiment as Lavater's third aphorism, with which Blake agreed: "As

[49] This description draws upon both Milton and the Bible's descriptions of Adam in Paradise. Ezekiel declares that, "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God …thou wast upon the holy mountain of God" (*Ezekiel* 28: 13-14). And

in looking upward each beholder thinks himself the centre of the sky; so Nature formed her individuals, that each must see himself the centre of being" (*Lav* E. 584). The hyphenated term "dwelling-place" emphasises that the perceiving subject both assumes a particular "place" or position as an observer, and dwells-*in* experienced space. One's "dwelling-place" becomes a "Universe" turning on the central axis of one's perceiving body, because the movement of one's limbs or the direction of one's gaze re-orientates one's point of interaction with the living world. On the edge of one's bodily perception the "Sun rises & sets" on a self-sustained horizon, and in accordance with the perceiving subject the "Clouds" of the sky, the "Earth" and the "Sea" are "order'd". The similarity between Blake's poetic imagining of a personal experiential horizon and Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception as a "point-horizon" is striking. For both Blake and Merleau-Ponty:

> ...our body is not merely one expressive space among the rest...it is the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself, that which causes them to begin to exist as things, under our hands and eyes...The body is our general medium for having a world...it posits around us a biological world [and] elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from the literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance... (*PoP* 169)

The Earth's spiritual "heavens" and its spatial "dimension[s]" are encompassed by each "Man's" perceptual "views" and the manner in which one's body opens onto the world, and not by the empirical measurements of "the reasoned". For Blake, this objective measuring reduces the human "Universe" to an abstract "delusion of Ulro", and denies the inherent meaning of the world lived and felt by the body. The dimensions of the world end for each "Man" where his personal vision ends and not in an arbitrary realm separated from him. Blake rejects the empirical argument that the "Spaces" of heaven and earth remain fixed outside of human consciousness, because the very idea of heaven or of earth is the result of the interaction of human consciousness with the experienced world. By denying the perceiving subject's creative role in perception, empiricism denies the meaning produced in the "point-horizon" interaction between self and world.

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in *Paradise Lost*, Milton explicitly places Paradise on "the champaign head / Of a steep wilderness..." (IV: 134-35), giving Adam "prospect large / Into his nether empire..." (*PL* IV: 144-45).

The "vortex" in Blake's *Milton* offers a beautiful image of the interactive synergy between body and mind that opens onto the world and allows for "infinite" or imaginative perception. The significance of the vortex in Blake's work, like many of his symbols, is polysemous, and Blake's use of this image in *Milton* (15 [17] E 109) is different from the vortices that are associated with Urizen. When this spiralling image is united with Urizen it becomes one of many "Cumbrous wheels" (*FZ* 72: 22 E 349), like the oppressive circular mills (*M* 1: 8 E 95) that are associated with the imposition of a system of abstract reasoning. In "Night the Sixth" of the *Four Zoas*, when the "Sciences were fixed & the Vortexes began to operate", the "turning wheels of heaven shrunk away inward writhing away"; this is Urizen's "selfish lamentation" (*FZ* 73: 21-26 E 350) that creates a destructive whirlpool from the waters of materialism (*BU* copy F 12). Kathleen Raine believes that Blake's vortex imagery may have drawn from Jacob Boehme or Thomas Taylor (Welch 226). Mark Greenberg, however, notes that it "is generally agreed that Descartes may well have been the source for Blake's vortex"[50]. The word "vortex" was used by Descartes in "his *Principles of Philosophy*, [where he] presents a mechanistic model for the operation of matter, the creation and phenomena of the universe" (199). Later, Locke offers a similar mechanistic understanding of the universe in the *Essay*. In *Milton*, Blake reconsiders the vortex as a symbol for the "nature of infinity". This is, as Dennis Welch believes, "a reaction to John Locke's quantitative understanding of eternity, infinity & substance" (224) and a recasting of the Cartesian categories of being.

It is worth quoting this passage in full:

> The nature of infinity is this: That everything has its
> Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
> Has passed that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind
> His path, into a globe itself infolding; like a sun:
> Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,
> While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth
> Or like a human form, a friend with whom he livd benevolent.
> As the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing
> Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host;
> Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding

[50] Greenberg cites the analyses of Jacob Bronowski in *William Blake* 1757-1827: *A Man Without a Mask* (Harmondsworth.: Penguin, 1954. 213); S. Foster Damon, *Blake Dictionary* (London: Thames and Hudsome, 1973. 240); Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (II. London: Routledge, 1979. 80); and Martin K. Nurmi in *Blake: Essays for Damon* (Ed. Rosenfeld, Albin H. Rosenfeld. Providence: Brown University Press, 1969. 307-09).

His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square.
Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth
A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity. (*M* 15 [17]: 21-35 E 109)

This description of "infinity" comes after Milton has left his sleeping body to walk through Eden with the "Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence". Milton is not made to traverse this spiritual realm as a formless "Shadow", but is provided with the "Image Divine" of his physical "Sleeping Body" (15 [17]: 3-7 E 109). Blake makes the point that "when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps, / Else he would wake" (15 [17]: 1-2 E 109). This is because the sleeping subject cannot traverse his dreams as a disembodied consciousness, their mental reconstruction of experience must draw upon his embodied interactions with the experienced world. Similarly, Milton must move through Eden, an "infinite" or imaginative state of consciousness, in his embodied form. In Eden he stumbles upon the "nature of infinity" which is dominated by the image of the vortex. The vortex is composed of a central still point and an outer bounding circle or circumference that is constantly shifting, seemingly moving simultaneously toward and away from the still point. Any attempt to separate these two intertwined dimensions of the vortex would destroy it and its effects; inside the action of the vortex, the centre and the circumference are inextricably linked. The curling vortex that is projected by "every thing" presents an image of the alternation of a living entity's internal horizon of thought and external horizon of perception that gives rise to consciousness.

Robert Gleckner notes that it is useful to think of this image diagrammatically: "each of man's senses is the intersection, or vortex, of two cones, the open ends of the cones continuing into outer (sensory) and inner (imaginative) infinity" (6). The image of the vortex depicts an intertwined integration of these two spheres of human existence. Urizen's vortices have failed to produce imaginative vision because, as a result of his abstract reasoning, he believes that the vortex moves in a unidirectional spiral towards the self. Holding to Locke's *tabula rasa*, Urizen sees the interaction between self and world as the one-way transmission of objective information to a subjective receiver. As a result, he is unable to:

...leave [his] world of Cumbrous wheels
Circle oer Circle nor on high attain a void
Where self sustaining [he] may view all things beneath [his] feet (*FZ* 72: 22-24 E 349)

Urizen finds himself trapped in a material universe and a self-centred vortex that is unable to connect his experience with the world or with another conscious being. For, "The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated from Imagination...clos[es] itself as in steel" (*J* 74: 10-11 E 229). This separation "draw[s] Jerusalems Sons / Into the Vortex of [Urizen's] Wheels" (*J* 74: 29-30 E 230). In Blake's vortex of infinity, external and internal experience become indistinguishable, for the work of an embodied imagination constitutes the world. Thus, "the doors of perception", or bodily senses, are "cleansed" by the imagination in order for "every thing [to] appear to man as it is: infinite" (*MHH* 14 E 39).

As the human "traveller" moves through "Eternity", the realm of regenerative spiritual imagination, the intertwining interaction of perception and consciousness produces the "globe" of a world that is constituted for a self. This is one's "universe" that changes according to the traveller's "wondrous journey on the earth", or one's actions as an embodied consciousness moving through a life-world. The orientating positions of "east & west" and "north & south" are constituted by the perspective of the "eye of man" because the perceiving body, rather than an abstract geographical position, is the central point from which the world is viewed and known. The experienced world is described as a horizon, or "one infinite plane", opened onto by an embodied consciousness. This is "not as apparent / To the weak traveller", such as Urizen, who sees the world as an object presented for inspection and who does not expand the centre of his existential vortex into the experienced world in order to produce imaginative perception, or vision. The "weak traveller" also encompasses Locke, who defines infinity and eternity as the indefinite continuation of space and time (*Essay* 2:17. 1). Blake's definition of these terms is tied to the clear and definite constitution, or outlining, of a human self-in-the-world (51). Just as Merleau-Ponty calls for an appreciation of the role of primordial experience and a critical advance beyond empiricist paradigms, so Blake invokes humanity's visionary capacity for understanding and experiencing the world as "Infinite" and unquantifiable because it is constantly involved in a process of creation through the interaction of self and world.

[51] Blake felt very strongly about "outlining", or the clear artistic delineation of a self. He writes that, "The great and golden rule of art, as well of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art..." (*DC* E 550).

The image of the vortex is of a spiralling form that has both a clear outline and is engaged in a constant expansion or movement outwards. This movement outwards is important for the development of the imagination because it is what allows the perceiving subject to connect and participate with other embodied selves in the living world. It is this participation that outlines the world as a "friend" in "human form". The journey of Milton in Blake's poem is a journey of self-annihilation, or the annihilation of the selfhood that alienates one human being from another. The identification of self with an other is love, and Blake tells us that, "...if a thing loves it is infinite" (*Swe* 49 E 604). In joining with his emanation "Ololon"52, Milton "breaks through the enclosures of time and space into eternity and infinity" (Welch 233). This inherently human world, rather than an objective or material world, bears many similarities with Merleau-Ponty's concept of intersubjectivity.

Once he has established the importance of understanding primordial experience and the body's orientation in living space, Merleau-Ponty explains one of his most important concepts: that one's "being-in-the-world" is also characterised by a primordial *co*-existence. An embodied subject not only opens onto the objective world, but also opens onto other embodied subjects who share the same living space. The living body is simultaneously subject and object, and therefore it both perceives and is perceived in experienced space. As a result, an embodied consciousness emerges as an "incarnate body", or a behaving body: that is, a self that is experienced and reacted to by other perceiving subjects. Unlike objects, the "incarnate body" is animate, dynamic and responsive. "I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviour and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world" (*PoP* 412). The embodied subject moves through space and acts with intention. It focuses its gaze and extends beyond the self in order to interact with the perceptual elements of the world, so contributing to a relational phenomenal field. The behaving conscious body is bound up with other perceiving subjects that are equally involved in their own behaviour and responses; through its behaviour each subject extends itself to others and connects or joins with them in a shared life-world.[53]

[52] Damon defines "emanation" as "the feminine portion or 'counterpart'" of a male. Once the individual enters "Eternity" there is no longer any sexual division (Damon 120).

[53] Merleau-Ponty is working within the context of his own conceptual framework in his consideration of others. There are a variety of other philosophical approaches to the problems of others that may refute or find fault with

In this primordial co-existence, self and other exist *co-extensively*. Merleau-Ponty proposes a possible solution to the problem of knowing whether another perceived body has consciousness by rescuing "others" from the objective realm and reinstating them as "other perceiving selves" that co-exist in a shared landscape:

> If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty. If, for myself who am reflecting on perception, the perceiving subject appears provided with a primordial setting in relation to the world, drawing in its train that bodily thing in the absence of which there would be no other things for it, then why should other bodies that I perceive not be similarly inhabited by consciousnesses? If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not 'have' consciousness? (*PoP* 408-409)

The actions and behaviour of the other body offer evidence of consciousness based on the self's ontological state. Consciousness always comes to be known through a body, even consciousness of the self which arises in the interaction between an embodied self and a life-world. Indeed, "[o]ther minds are given to us only as incarnate, as belonging to faces and gestures" (*CD* 16), but so is one's own mind which is fundamentally integrated with a corporeal body. For Merleau-Ponty, to doubt that another perceiving subject has consciousness is akin to doubting one's own conscious existence.

Merleau-Ponty understands the experienced world as a communal landscape in which self and other exist in a mutual, self-referential creation of a shared environment. As an embodied subject, it is my body that consciously experiences and creates my tactile world. However, there are also other embodied subjects whose perceptions and experiences cannot be conflated with mine and their expressive actions interact with mine, just as I interact with other stimuli from the world. Other perceiving subjects are not separated from me by an objective plane of existence, or trapped in a separate subjective realm, but exist in the same life-world as fellow conscious, behaving bodies:

> In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the

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Merleau-Ponty's account of other perceiving subjects, but Merleau-Ponty's approach to the problem of others is solved within the criteria of his own philosophical enquiry.

> other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception. (*PoP* 411)

In this way, every embodied consciousness becomes part creator of the common environment that all experience. For "[w]e are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world" (*PoP* 413). This interactive "common world" emerges as more than the sum of its parts, both extending beyond and continually shifting in accordance with the human community in which it subsists. Thus, the experienced world emerges as the reciprocal interaction of "self-others-things", in which the intersubjective exchange between "self" and "other" occurs in the shared realm of "things".

This description of an intersubjective life-world, made possible by each human being's immediate being-in-the-world, is similar to the "state" of being Blake depicts in *Songs of Innocence*. Blake's *Innocence* is an idyllic realm of unaffected interaction between self and world and self and others that pre-exists and pre-figures the culturally-coded world of *Experience*. The imagery of "The Ecchoing Green" (E 8-9), consisting of a continuous call and reply between the elements of nature, and the children and the adults, is very similar to the repeating round of the vortex of infinity. It succeeds in creating the image of a self-sustained world.

> The Sun does arise,
> And make happy the skies.
> The merry bells ring
> To welcome the Spring.
> The sky-lark and thrush,
> The birds of the bush,
> Sing louder around,
> To the bells chearful sound.
> While our sports shall be seen
> On the Ecchoing Green. (1-10)

The Sun rises on this microcosm, and the skies reply with happiness; the "merry bells ring" in reply to the approaching "Spring". The "sky-lark and thrush" sing to each other along with the other "birds of the bush", who "Sing louder around" in reply to the "bells chearful sound". These lines describe a shared life-world that subsists in elemental interaction and reciprocity, and the lines rhyming in couplets emphasise the accordant harmony of the scene. The images of the first plate also present rounded and circular lines. The dome of the oak tree forms the top of a globe-

like shape, supported by the hedge in the background and the shadows on the ground.[54] The adult guardians sit around the tree's circular trunk, while next to the text a child runs after a rolling hoop. The over-arching tree visually delineates the microcosm that has been brought into being through the interaction of the children and the adults.

The central action of the poem, the children's sport overseen by the adults, exemplifies the inherent vital energy of the human body that facilitates their interactive play and the communal bond that comes from the reciprocated joy between children and adults. "Old John" and the rest of the "old folk" (11–15 E 9) identify with the unrestrained play and joy of the children, who are not yet burdened by the cultural codes of adulthood, because the adults remember this state of existence that prefigured their own. Indeed,

> Such such were the joys,
> When we *all* girls & boys,
> In our youth-time were seen,
> On the Ecchoing Green. (17-20)[55]

The children's play is viewed by "Old John" who "laugh[s] away care" in reciprocation of the childish joys, echoing memories of his own youth and bringing the exchange of joy full circle. The children's joy is immediate, emerging spontaneously from their interaction with a fecund life-world that incites expressive action. However, it is through the reflection of the "old folk" that the reader considers the children's innocent joy because the children's play is primordial, and therefore pre-reflective. The "old folk" recall their youthful innocence only by refracting it through layers of cultural accretion, built up over time through experience. What is extraordinary, is that "Old John" does not dismiss the children's play as frivolous or meaningless, as so many adults in *Songs of Experience* do, but recognises the children's immediate understanding of the perceived world, and the joy that results from their interactive play. The children are recognised both as "other" and associated with the experience of the self, represented by "Old John". Their primordial existence is valorised in *Innocence*, and allowed to facilitate a communal world in which self and other exist in a harmonious interaction.

[54] This is more evident in certain copies, of which copy Z and copy Y are the best examples.
[55] My emphasis.

The imagery of call and reply, as well as reciprocal exchange, occurs often in *Innocence*. The Piper and the child in the "Introduction" (E 7) set the tone for the entire illuminated book when their energetic interaction results in the creation of the *Songs of Innocence*. The "Introduction" also promises the *Songs*' potential to facilitate further interactions through the medium of the book, which becomes a means of intellectual engagement and creative exchange between child and adult. This is illustrated on the title page of *Innocence*, which shows a mother or nurse sitting in a pastoral setting with two children kneeling round her lap. The two children are peering intently at a book she is holding, perhaps to look at its illustrations, while the woman reads to them and guides them through the book. The open book facilitates an interaction between the woman and the two children, calling upon them to go beyond themselves so as to connect with the perspectives expressed in the book they are reading, and to exchange ideas with each other. Immediately following this page, "The Shepherd" (E 7) exists in peaceful communion with the sheep he tends and his pastoral environment, where "the lambs innocent call" is followed by "the ewes tender reply" (5-6). This creates a microcosm, in which "From the morn to the evening" (2) the Shepherd watches over the sheep, and is filled with spiritual joy as his physical "tongue" is "filled with praise" (4). The sheep respond to the Shepherd's attentive care with contented "peace[fullness]" (7), and the overall image of the song is of mutual respect and affection.

Later in *Innocence*, the interaction between mother and child in "Infant Joy" (E 16) creates a nurturing environment of shared joy similar to that explored in "The Ecchoing Green". Blake's poem characterises the mother and child's exchange as a verbal call and response despite the child's being just "two days old" (2; 7), thus suggesting that the child can constitute meaning through primordial gestures and sounds, reflecting the joy being shown to it by its mother. Contrary to the "swaddling bands" that greet the child of "Infant Sorrow" (E 28) immediately after his birth, the child in "Infant Joy" is allowed to develop consciousness freely through its bonds with the life-world, whereas intrusive restraints, based on abstract cultural conceptions, are imposed on the baby in "Infant Sorrow". Mother and child constitute an environment of joy through the shared recognition of each other's happiness and through an intersubjective interaction that valorises personal experience. Once again, it is through the experienced reflection of the child's adult mother that its joy is expressed to the reader. The child cannot name itself "happy" or "Joy" yet, but its mother can identify the meaning of her child's

primordial experience and express it through a system of codified meaning. This is, in fact, what occurs throughout *Songs of Innocence*. As the author, Blake conveys or mediates *Innocence* from an experienced position, arresting the spontaneous production of meaning in his illuminated book just as the Piper fashions a "rural pen" (17 E 7) to capture his interaction with the ethereal child. It is for this reason that the voice of *Experience* sometimes cries out in *Innocence*, as in "Holy Thursday" (E 13) and "The Chimney Sweeper" (E 10), both of which oppose the exploitative treatment of children while venerating the children's imagination and inherent human worth.

In "Laughing Song" (E 11), the idyllic pastoral world Blake describes is constituted as a personified human world. Just as the ancient poets "animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses" (*MHH* 11 E 38), Blake's landscape is ascribed human characteristics in order to be understood. This natural world that empiricists believe to be a realm of organic matter is instead characterised by an intersubjective interaction. An important qualification in Blake's poem is the repetition of the word "When" at the beginning of his lines: "When the green woods laugh", "When the air does laugh", "When the meadows laugh with lively green" (1; 3; 5). This suggests that these natural sites are not always charged with "the voice of joy" (1) or a person's "merry wit" (3), but rely upon a human community to imbue the landscape with these qualities. For it is not merely a single poet who is involved in an interaction with this landscape; the "air does laugh with *our* wit"[56] (3), the "merry scene" includes "Mary and Susan and Emily" (7), and all sit down to eat at "*our* table"[57] (10). At the end Blake invites the reader to "Come live & be merry and *join with me*"[58], echoing Marlowe's famous invitation to "Come live with me and be my love" from *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*. However, Blake's supplication calls the reader to join him in a "sweet chorus" made up of a community of laughing people like "Mary and Susan and Emily" in a shared world rather than the secluded realm of two lovers. This is because, "to perceive imaginatively means to participate with the other" (Welch 231). That is why Oothoon finds joy and inspiration in coupling with the sun (*VDA* 6:23-7:1 E 50), and why Blake writes in *A Vision of the Last Judgement* that:

[56] My emphasis.
[57] My emphasis.
[58] My emphasis.

> If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination...if he...could make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder which always intreats him to leave mortal things as he must know then would he arise from his Grave then would he meet the Lord in the Air & then he would be happy. (E 560)

In moving out of the self, through the imagination, into a shared landscape one is able to connect with others and participate in a mutually created community. In a *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley makes a similar point when explaining the importance of poetry for the development of the imagination and a moral society:

> The great secret of morals is love; or a *going out* of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own.[59] (487-88)

While Blake associated the term "morals" with the social codification of behaviour, he would have agreed with Shelley that it is the imagination that facilitates interpersonal connections and prevents the selfish exploitation of others. A human being must transcend or *go out* of the self in order to incorporate the experience of another into his/her worldview, and thus build a community and contribute to the creation of a shared life-world. Blake's community of laughing children meet in the pastoral landscape of *Innocence*, but it emerges as the laughing and merry human world of Blake's poem in consequence of the children's imaginative interaction with each other in the landscape they all share and co-create.

The pastoral immediacy of *Innocence*, however, cannot be maintained and must inevitably move into *Experience*'s socio-cultural forms of community. The state of *Experience* encompasses a vital development of the imagination, because it is the state in which the self must learn to participate in a wider human community or society, as well as in the development of systems of expression and reflection. In *Songs of Experience*, Blake introduces his reader to the ideological structures of his own society and the inherent inequalities of its social systems. In many respects, Blake's "London" forms the central narrative of *Songs of Experience*:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
> And mark in every face I meet

[59] My emphasis.

Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse (E 26-27)

The reader has moved out of the primordial pastoral landscape of *Innocence* and into the industrialised city of Blake's contemporary London. However, Blake's "London" society is a failed human society "mark[ed]" by socially condoned oppression, because it is based upon the objectification and commercialisation of the experienced world. Blake criticises his society's acceptance of the exploitative systems of commerce, law and religion, which institute social hierarchies and alienate the self from other human beings. These systems are based upon an objective understanding of the experienced world that fails to consider the creative interaction between self and world, and self and others. They have become the "mind-forg'd manacles" of the members of Blake's society, or its self-imposed restrictions that result from privileging reason and dismissing embodied experience.

Blake's use of the word "charter'd" encapsulates several meanings. Firstly, to "chart" or map the city refers to the imposition of a rigid system of representation that designates the sections and the boundaries of "London". To "charter" also means to hire or rent, suggesting that "London" has become a city for hire, driven by material greed. Lastly, Erdman suggests that Blake's use of the world "charter" reflects an agreement with "Paine's condemnation of 'charter and corporation'" (*Prophet against Empire* 276) and his argument that city charters restrict the human rights of the majority of society. Moreover, for Paine the notion of a charter suggests that human liberties can be given and taken away by law, and are not inherent in the human condition

(211). Thus, the charter represents the imposition of an abstract system of entitlement that restricts rather than facilitates productive social interaction.

The last two stanzas decry the selfish exploitation of these social institutions. The cruel and dangerous profession of chimney sweeping formed an integral part of Blake's London, whose eighteenth-century houses were fitted with narrow flue networks. Master sweeps employed small children who would be able to clean these confined spaces. The children also provided cheap labour as they were often orphans or sold to their Masters by desperate parents, and would earn little more than their lodging and food. The "youngest and most delicate children" were shared by many masters and "employed exclusively to clean flues, which, from their peculiar construction," could not be swept "without great personal hazard" (qtd. in Gardner 66). This exploitation was tolerated by English society because the sweeps performed a necessary task; it was further justified by the belief that the labours of the lower classes were their Christian duty to society (Gardner 66). For Blake, this exploitation tarnishes and undermines the authority of the Church of England. Similarly, the soldiers who represent the selfish goals of the "Palace" king, or government, incur the penalties of war, while fighting for ideals which are not their own. In both instances, the desires and needs of one social entity is imposed upon the lives of another social group. The chimney sweep and soldier are considered as objects or tools that are utilised to fulfil a particular purpose, and are not considered as equal participants in an interactive community.

The "Harlot" is a by-product of a society that dismisses the body's senses and desires and reveres female chastity. Moreover, the value accorded to chastity results in the establishment of an illicit sex industry to cater to the repressed or misguided sexual desires of men. It is an industry to which the poor or lower class women of Blake's London were often consigned. The prostitute is a "blight" on the institution of marriage, upon which the values of chastity are based, and points to the hypocrisy of marriages based on social or economic convenience in which men need or choose to find sexual satisfaction elsewhere. She carries the "curse" of sexually transmitted disease and "blasts the new-born Infants tear". This could be a reference to a venereal infection which causes prenatal blindness (Bloom 142), but it is also a reference to the destruction of innocent joy. The harlot is the symptom of a diseased society that has become totally separated

from the successful interaction of *Innocence*. It is the imagination which integrates the self and allows for a creative interaction with others, and therefore a society which actively dismisses embodied spiritual consciousness will ultimately degenerate into selfish exploitation. Blake's London society must look back to the imaginative interaction of *Innocence* in order to find guidance. At the top of Blake's plate is an image of a small child guiding an old man. The child is pointing to something off to the side of the plate that the reader cannot see. The old man may be the Bard of *Experience*, or the outraged speaker of the poem, but he follows the child's direction. The young child is a symbol of *Innocence* and its guiding principles.[60] However, the child and the Bard must move forward together in order to build a city of imaginative interaction or vision.

Attempting to remain in a state of *Innocence* is also harmful and self-serving, as is evidenced by the title character of Blake's *Book of Thel*. The naive heroine of Blake's *Book of Thel* fails to enter into the state of *Experience* and, as a result, she remains isolated and unable to enter into vital human relationships. Thel is the young and virginal "daughter of Mne Seraphim" (1:1 E 4) who lives in the innocent "vales of Har" (2: 1 E 4). She laments the transience of her youth, which fades like "a smile upon an infants face" or "like music in the air" (1: 10-11 E 3), and is reluctant to accept the responsibility of entering into experience. Drifting through Har, the "state of self-love" (Damon 401), Thel has yet to become part of a community or to go beyond her own needs to consider the needs of others. She is engaged in a process of self-reflection, and her interactions with the other beings of the valley are focussed on her own doubts and fears. It is a "Lilly of the valley" (1:15 E 4) who first addresses Thel and attempts to reassure her. While the Lilly "mind[s] her numerous charge in the verdant grass" (2: 18 E. 4), and therefore has accepted certain social responsibilities, Damon correctly identifies the Lilly as a reflection of Thel's own innocence (401). The Lilly naively praises the blessed "small" and "weak" (1: 17-18 E 4), failing to recognise the hardships or difficulties that the meek may encounter beyond the sphere of innocence; it does not realise that Thel must leave Har's "eternal vales" (1: 25 E 4) in order to mature. Indeed, the Lilly symbolises the child-like spiritual joy that "revives" and "nourish[es]

[60] Blake re-introduces the image of the child guiding the old man on plate 84 of *Jerusalem*. In this larger image, the child is leading the old man past Christopher Wren's contemporary St. Paul's Cathedral, which had been newly completed in Blake's lifetime, towards the medieval Westminster Abbey. This direction towards a more primitive and less corrupt form of Christianity may be part of what Blake intended to convey in the earlier image in "London".

the innocent" (2: 5 E 4). For even as the lamb "crops [its] flowers", the Lilly sits "smiling in his face" (2: 6 E 4). However, Thel does not associate herself with this selfless or communal existence and continues to struggle to consider her "place" (2: 12 E 4) or purpose in the interactions of a society.

Thel's approaching loss of innocence also encompasses a sexual awakening, with the innocent Lilly flower also providing a symbol of Thel's threatened virginity. Blake's *Book of Thel* has often been read as a retelling of Milton's *Comus*, which praises female chastity. Milton's heroine, "Lady", is able to master her bodily desires and reject the physical gratification that is offered to her by a male tempter. Milton associates reason, located in the human mind, with divine enlightenment, and therefore "Lady" is considered virtuous because she uses reason to control the corrupt desires of her body. Blake disagrees with Milton's veneration of chastity and his consideration of the body as corrupt or fallen, believing that "creation" can only begin to "appear infinite" through "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (*MHH* 14 E 39). His *Book of Thel* offers a critical rewriting of Milton's *Comus* in order to reject "the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul" (*MHH* 14 E 39) and to emphasise the importance of the "sensual" operations of the body for the development of the imagination. Both female protagonists are tempted by a desiring male. Nonetheless, while Milton commends Lady for her refusal to engage in sensuous acts, Thel's choice not to engage her bodily senses in order to join with another is portrayed as a personal failure.

Thel is addressed by a sexualised male in the form of a cloud. She describes her own unsustainable innocence as a "faint" or "parting" cloud, an ethereal vapour that must evaporate. However, the male cloud descends and reveals to Thel his mature "bright form" (3: 5 E 4). He is a "fertilizing male" (Damon 401), who unites with nature's "balmy flowers" in order to "bea[r] food to all [their] tender flowers" (3: 12-16 E 5). The productive bond formed between the vaporous cloud and the flowers of the physical world symbolises the human body's existential unification of spiritual energy and organic corporeality. As a fertilizing male, the cloud is able to participate in the creation of new life and he urges Thel to do the same. However, Thel actively distances herself from any productive engagement with the physical world. She sees herself as a "shining woman...without a use" (3: 22-23 E 5). The cloud demonstrates to Thel that in

attempting to refuse the sexual and procreative purposes of her body, she is attempting to deny her embodied existence. Thel resists recognising her embodied condition because she does not want to accept a mortal existence in which she becomes the "the food of worms" (3: 23 E 5).[61] Moreover, Thel has failed to realise that "everything that lives, / Lives not alone nor for itself" (3: 26-27 E 6), but forms part of a larger human world based in intersubjective interaction.

When the cloud presents Thel with the "helpless & naked" (4: 5 E 5) infant worm, she pities it but does not attempt to help or calm it. The worm represents the human child that results from the cloud and the earth's sexual pairing. Thel identifies with the worm's need to be "cherish[ed]", but does not attempt to offer the worm any motherly comfort. Therefore, Thel still sees herself as a child in need of care and attention, and does not offer this affection or assistance to others. The "Clod of Clay" (4: 7 E 6) responds to the worm and comforts it as her own child. Once again, Thel is reminded that "we live not for ourselves" (4: 10 E 6). Each interaction emphasises Thel's potential to join with others and to help in creating a society. She is a fertile virgin with the potential to enter into a creative embodied interaction, but she is concerned with protecting her own spiritual purity and remains focused on her own self-preservation. The Clod is the symbol of motherhood and the generative womb, and therefore becomes Thel's gateway into the mortal world of experience. Thel is confronted with a "land of sorrows & of tears" (6:5 E 6) and a graveyard of decaying bodies and disembodied voices.

Thel, like Milton's "Lady", has been convinced that sensuous enjoyment is a sin of the mortal body; therefore she views the world of embodied experience as a hellish world of death and sorrow. The "voice of sorrow" that speaks to Thel from her "grave plot" (6:9-10 E 6) may well be the voice of her buried self (Johnson 271); her grave is empty, but what she hears is the vocalisation of her repressed fears. Thel is afraid that once she accepts the sensuous enjoyment of her body she will also be vulnerable to pain and death. Indeed, her eye cannot be open to joy and not also open to "its own destruction" (6:11 E 6). Thel cannot embrace her sexuality without leaving herself open to abuse. This is what happens to Oothoon, who many scholars have read as

[61] It is also in the state of *Experience* that one is faced with the transience of existence and human mortality. This is because the consequences of embodied existence are confronted in *Experience*. On the title page of *Songs of Experience*, two children (perhaps the same children who are depicted reading on the title page of *Innocence*) are confronted with the death of their parents who lie in coffins nearby.

Thel's counterpart in *Experience*.[62] Oothoon plucks her virginal flower in order to offer it to Theotormon, but is soon intercepted by Bromion who takes her for himself. However, Oothoon gains wisdom and spiritual growth from her trials and becomes a voice of revolution that is echoed by all of the "Daughters of Albion" (*VDA* 8: 13 E 51). In Thel's case, the voice from the grave invites her to consider her bodily senses and her creative purpose in the world. Frye notes that her grave plot provides an image of the fertile ground in which a seed must be planted in order to germinate (232). However, Thel is terrified by the confrontation with her own mortality and the embodied interaction encompassed by experience. She is not willing to forsake her "present ease" in order to develop her "genius or conscience" (*MHH* 13 E 39). She flees back into the vales of Har and into a puerile state of self-absorption.

Blake's vision of a successful society is one which recognises that it "is the God in *all* that is our companion & friend" (*Lav* E 599). Such a society does not view the experienced world as an obstructive object between self and other, but rather as the connective tissue of one intersubjective organism. In order to realise this, Blake calls for a re-evaluation of the experienced world and a reconsideration of the human body in order to eliminate the notion that human consciousness exists at a remove from the physical landscape in which human beings co-exist. For, the "Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself, The Divine Body, Jesus: we are his Members" (*Laocoön* E 273). As a member of the "Divine Body" every human being forms part of an imaginative community, whose members are aligned with one another through an embodied spiritual consciousness and a shared collaborative existence. A vital dimension of this intersubjective existence, and an integral aspect of the formation of a human society, is language, because it is the expressive medium of human consciousness and of interpersonal communication. For Merleau-Ponty, and similarly for Blake, it is through language that embodied experience finds expression, and therefore it is the medium through which experience can be understood. Moreover, like the body, language facilitates an interaction between the self, the world, and others, and is fundamentally linked to the creative powers of human consciousness. A consideration of Blake's account of the imagination would be incomplete without a consideration of language and its role in the creation of a communal world.

[62] Blake's unengraved work *Tiriel* is also a complement to *The Book of Thel.* Frye suggests that Blake may have intended to bind *Tiriel*, *Thel*, and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* together as a trilogy of tragedies (241-42).

This discussion of language will once again consider Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of consciousness in relation to Blake. For both thinkers, language is not a systematised transfusion of universal concepts, in which signs exist as arbitrary placeholders for ideas or abstract concepts. Instead, language is understood to be rooted in embodied human experience and as the "invocation of our own being in concert with others" (O'Neil xxvi).

Chapter 3

Parole, *Langue*, and Language as *Flesh*

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake states that "the notion that a man has a body distinct from his soul" must be dispelled, or "expunged", which he shall do by "printing in the infernal method" (14 E 39). This leads to Blake's description of the "Printing house in Hell" which can be analysed as both a striking description of Blake's own method of creating illuminated books and a vibrant image of artistic production. In this passage Blake separates books formed in the energetic interactions of "hell", such as his own, from those of Swedenborg who "has not written one new truth" (22 E 43), or from any text which offers no individual insight and appropriate the ideas of greater philosophers and poets. This energetic force of inspiration is expressed as "corrosives" which are not destructive but "medicinal" and erode "apparent surfaces" in order to reveal "the infinite which was hid" (14 E 39). This hidden value that Blake intends to expose, or awaken, within humanity is linked to the creation and dissemination of inspired "infernal" books that are housed communally "in libraries" on earth. The "Printing house in Hell" is concerned with the transmission of knowledge from "generation to generation", but Blake does not describe the records of empirical observation or even the writing of a putative holy text sent to man from an abstract spiritual realm. Instead, the Eagle – a "portion of genius", dominates the plate and causes the third chamber of the Printing House to become "infinite". Blake creates a direct connection between the elimination of the schism between soul and body, the realisation of an immanent creative spirit, and the production of a new interactive poetry.

This connection between a new understanding of the body and a new approach to language is of central importance to Blake. As a visionary poet, Blake emphasises the creative potential of language and its phenomenological rootedness in the subject. Robert Gleckner raised the issue of Blake's approach to language in 1974 when he set out to examine "Blake's conception of the language of Eternity," what the "linguistic implications of the fall from this condition" are, and how Blake conceives of "the redemption of language" (564).[63] Gleckner focuses on the inescapable problem Blake faced of attempting to use the "fallen elements" (559) of language to

[63] "Most Holy Forms of Thought: Some Observations on Blake and Language." *ELH* 41.4 (1974) , 555-77.

explicate a divine vision that is new and not integrated into the current Urizenic system of meaning. It is impossible for any poet or prophet to articulate an intellectual inspiration without a medium of some sort to convey it. The challenge then for Blake was to build "Worlds of Eternity" that are "true to our own Imaginations" (*M* preface E 95) by using the structure of Urizen's "Book/Of eternal brass", that was written in abstracted solitude, fixing "one command...one measure...one God, one Law" (*BU* 4: 32 – 40 E 72). In this respect, language presents Blake with a similar problem to that of the body. It facilitates a human being's interaction with the experienced world, and therefore is vital for the development of human consciousness, but it is also inherently limiting because of the conditions of its physical usage.

Merleau-Ponty offers many comparative discussions of the signifying processes of the body and of language, and in his considerations of language he once again proposes a return to origins which precede objective theorising in order fully to understand how the original human condition of being-in-the-world gives rise to systems of meaning and expression.[64] His studies of language draw on the work of Saussure to focus on the tension between *langue*, the given language system or spoken language, and *parole*, the individual uses of, and innovations within, that system or speaking language. He argues that language is a dimension of human experience and not a purely differential reference system. In his metaphysical consideration of the body in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty considers both the body and language as conjoining the *flesh* of the self and the social world. A comparative study of Blake's account of the imagination and Merleau-Ponty's theory of *flesh* is able to offer one potential answer to Gleckner's questions about the "language of Eternity" by considering Blake's concept of the "human form divine" as the starting point for his understanding of divine creative language.

The origin of language and its purpose was an important topic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Studies by theologians, linguists and mystics produced many conflicting theories of language. This chapter briefly summarises some of the main discussions regarding language from this period in order to position Blake in relation to the dialogue surrounding representation

[64] Not unlike Derrida, Merleau-Ponty is aware of the problematic nature of the notion of 'origin'. He locates 'origins' in primordial experience, describing them as 'mute', because they cannot be grasped or given expression at a pre-conceptual level; they can only be discussed indirectly and at a remove through the medium of language.

and the purpose of language and art during this time. Following this, Merleau-Ponty's account of language, which builds upon his theory of embodied consciousness, will be discussed in order to elucidate the linguistic dimension of Blake's account of the imagination, which proceeds from the "human form divine". The relationship between Urizen's "Book / Of eternal brass" and the language of poetic vision will be considered by examining the differences that Merleau-Ponty outlines between *langue* and *parole*. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm or *flesh* will be discussed as a means to explore the ability of language to express or manifest meaning in the world as a dimension of conscious embodied experience. The final section of this chapter offers an extended examination of *Milton a Poem*, in which Blake explores the role of the prophetic poet and poetic language in human society.

In his book *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, Robert Essick attempts to deal with the issues raised by Gleckner; he begins by considering the "Adamic" or "motivated" sign. When faced with the fundamental question of the origin of language, the early linguists hoped to find an answer in the book of *Genesis*, where the Word creates Eden and "Adam gave names to all" (2: 20). Essick notes that these analyses of *Genesis*:

> ...centre on the link between Adam's language and God's, the Bible's claim that all men spoke the same language...until its fragmentation at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1-9), and the foundation of this universality in a special relationship between the words of Adam's tongue and the things they designate." (*Language* 9)

Adam's words have a motivated relationship to the things which they name. He names the animals according to their nature; whether he generates the correct word to embody their individual essence or bestows a state of being through the act of naming, there is a causal link between word and thing. This act of naming follows from God's act of speaking the world into being by making "the world available to human consciousness", and in both cases language becomes the "medium of existence" (Essick *Language* 11). However, this motivated universality is destroyed at the Tower of Babel where the one divine language becomes many secular languages. After this, words hold only a conventional link with the things to which they refer. This fall into abstraction results in the loss of humanity's connection with the creative power of God and the disconnection of people from one another.

This understanding of a tragic rupture between signifier and signified (as well as between God and man) led to many attempts by linguists and philosophers to retrace the motivated sign. Essick notes that throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the myth of Adam's naming the beasts was a common trope in academic debates, and that the concept of motivated speech was discussed among both Biblical and secular scholars (*Language* 32). Most of these efforts were grounded in an etymological study of words and attempted to find a link between linguistic sounds and forms and the practical experience of things. However, as Essick observes, these studies remained situated within the "realm of language" (*Language* 29), and were concerned with re-examining the root forms of words, but were never able to return to an initial divine origin that precedes, and is therefore outside of, language.

The more spiritual and mythological linguists, such as Jacob Boehme, believed that Adam was able to produce this motivated language because he had been formed by the Word of God and could recognise the spiritual essence of each animal by its form. In *The Mysterium Magnum* (1623), which offers an investigation of the mysteries of *Genesis*, Boehme argues that this motivated language is directly connected to the natural world which God spoke into being, and that Adam's naming invoked the same divine sensibility. However, while this original language might have been lost at Babel, he maintains that both things and words still contain their spiritual essence. For Boehme, it is humanity which has changed and can no longer perceive or understand the spiritual meanings (Essick *Language* 49). In the Preface to his work, Boehme maps out the trajectory of his argument which explains the connection between visible objects and the invisible sustaining spirit of God. Visible "sensible things are an essence of the invisible" and make it possible for God's spiritual mysteries, which would otherwise remain incomprehensible, to be known to man. The invisible invigorates the visible and "works through the sensible life and essence, as the mind in the body" (*Preface* 7). Importantly, Boehme emphasises the intersection of words and things in human sense experience and argues that meaning is encapsulated in the act of articulation. He explains that when words are spoken they are "formed, or brought forth to Substance" and, so, we are able "to understand the sensual (natural or essential) Language of the whole Creation, and understand whence Adam gave Names unto all Things" (35.57). Here Boehme connects the human act of speech with God's utterances in Genesis that manifest meaning in substance and create the natural world.

Blake had great respect for Boehme; during a conversation with Crabb Robinson he calls Boehme "a divinely inspired man". The translation of his works by Rev. William Law was attentively read by Blake and greatly influenced him (Damon 39-40, Bentley 414). His symbolic reading of Genesis is in line with Blake's own approach to Biblical exegesis, and, like Blake, he was in conflict with the rationalist studies of language that were popular in the eighteenth century. This trend followed from the scientific studies prevalent in the seventeenth century which saw the creation of the *Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge*. Here men met to find better ways to systematise knowledge. One of the Society's founding members was Bishop John Wilkins who argued that language would be more useful if it were based on a rational taxonomic system. In *An Essay towards Real Character and Philosophical Language* (1668) he invents a new language of ciphers in which each word holds its own meaning. These words are formed by "Real Characters", letter symbols that are combined to form or construct a concept and which would, therefore, allow for direct reference to specific concepts. [65] Through this system Wilkins hoped to recreate the order and transparency of an original universal language and to offer a supplement to existing languages that contain many ambiguities and inaccuracies (Essick *Language* 38-43; Clauss 539-41).

Sidonie Clauss notes that Wilkins' attempt to produce a universal language was a response to the religious divisions in England during the seventeenth century. Wilkins was concerned about the alienating potential of fallen language which caused tension between Catholics and Protestants and was deemed to no longer offer a direct connection to the divine. Clauss writes, "Wilkins' plaint is representative. In his age of religious faction and civil war linguistic misunderstanding seemed to instigate groundless strife." A "return to prelapsarian purity of speech" would allow for greater understanding and a united Christian community (531-532). Indeed, as Borges writes in his essay on Wilkins: "The impossibility of penetrating the divine pattern of the universe cannot stop us from planning human patterns," (Vázquez 3); thus Wilkins, together with other

[65] Clark Emery calls this "the most important work of the time". He also writes: "What Wilkins proposes to do with words is precisely what Linnaeus was later to do with plants" (176). By comparing Wilkins' universal language with a taxonomic system that has been challenged in terms of its oversimplified categorisation, Emery highlights the reductive principles of such a study.

scholars of his time, sought to reclaim a universal language in order to strengthen English society (Essick *Language* 39-41).

The rationalist linguistic studies of the eighteenth century approached language as a logical, genetic and philosophical study. Instead of considering a divine origin for language, these studies were concerned with the explication of mimetic linguistic evolution. This continued the tradition of progressing from motivated to arbitrary signification, but considered this change as a natural progression of language rather than a spiritual fall. In order to understand this progression, philologists attempted to isolate the primary motivated sign from which all subsequent signification evolved. These endeavours were based upon a belief in the inherent connection between words, ideas, and things. Different understandings of the organisation of these connections separated the rationalists into two distinct schools: those who privileged things and their impact on the senses (sensibilists), and those who privileged the mind's ability to name and distinguish between ideas (mentalists). McKusick separates these two schools of thought into the "Noun-Verb Controversy". He explains that while both "take it for granted that the mind's relation to the phenomenal world is reflected in the structure of language" (86) the sensibilists consider the noun to be the primordial linguistic sign, and the mentalists identify the verb as the original semiotic form. Within this controversy the sensibilists are aligned with Aristotle's argument that all verbs can be reduced to nouns because they are only nouns "to which has been added a determination of time" (McKusick 88) and, therefore, nouns are the most basic unit of language. The mentalists are connected with Platonic Idealism in which a thing's archetypal essence is revealed in its actions or being rather than its outward appearance. This essence exists as a mental concept and can be conveyed only through verbs that express a "process or becoming", and so are characterised by a "kinetic mimesis" (McKusick 87). Both rationalist schools surmised that, as language progressed and evolved, linguistic signs had become more arbitrary and refined as man moved away from a direct, primal, and emotional engagement with his surroundings.

Perhaps the most influential sensibilist philologist of the age was Horne Tooke whose *Epea Pteroenta*, or *Diversions of Purley*[66], offers an interpretation of the principles in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and applies them to a study of language. The second chapter of *Diversions* is devoted to "Some consideration of Mr Locke's Essay" in which Tooke explains that Locke's entire essay consists of a philosophical account of language. This is because Tooke believes Locke's "ideas" to be "terms" that are "general and abstract." (19) In his view it is this mistake that causes Locke to make the error of believing that there are complex ideas. Tooke considers it to be, "as improper to speak of a *complex idea*, as it would be to call a constellation a complex star" (19). Tooke's revision of Locke emphasises the importance Locke places on sense experience; he attempts to remedy the mentalist elements of Locke's philosophy and the importance he affords to ideas and reason.

Tooke argues that the mind is only a receiver for sense data and attempts to demonstrate that nouns, or the naming words of perceived objects, are the original building blocks of language (McKusick 91–92). Essick notes that Tooke's etymological attempts to trace words back to primal sense experience are also attempts to democratise language by affirming the role of all social classes in the development of language, and so to free language from intellectuals who sought to control abstract meaning, thereby maintaining "intellectual, moral, and political power" (*Language* 63). Tooke understood the political and social implications of a scientific language, such as the system suggested by Wilkins, and believed that a truly universal language would be able to unite the people of the world instead of creating new epistemological divisions between them. He provides a human history of language by rigorously tracing words back to their original sensible referent.[67]

[66] The first part of this was published in 1786 and the second in 1805.

[67] Essick notes that while there is no substantial evidence that Blake had read Tooke's *Diversions of Purley*, he would probably have been familiar with Tooke's view of language. Tooke's political views were well known and *Diversions* was regarded as a revolutionary text. Above and beyond this, George Cumberland (who was a good friend of Blake's for many years) was well acquainted with Tooke and wrote a biography of him. He even went so far as to suggest Blake as engraver for a frontispiece that he himself had designed for the second edition of *Diversions*. While Blake made no such engraving, Essick considers that this "hints at political sympathies shared by all three men" (*Language* 64).

Tooke criticised contemporaries such as James Harris and Lord Monboddo who gave prominence to the creative and logical processes of the mind (McKusick 91). In *Hermes*[68], Harris analyses language in terms of a "Philosophical or Universal Grammar" (2) in order to explain the development of human communication. He begins by arguing that verbs are only the attributes of nouns (which are substances) and, therefore, cannot exist without them. (Examples of this include an eagle's attribute "to fly" as well as man's attribute "to think" (29). This reduction of all actions into the "to be" formulation ultimately reduces all attributes to substances). However, later he asserts the primary importance of the "Imagination" which is able to retain the transient impressions retrieved by our senses. In the third book he writes:

> As the Wax would not be adequate to its business of Signature, had it not a Power to *retain*, as well as to *receive*; the same holds of the Soul, with respect to *Sense* and *Imagination*. Sense is its *receptive* power; Imagination, its *retentive*...so does the Soul in vain seek to exert its higher Powers, the Powers I mean of Reason and Intellect, till Imagination first fix the fluency of Sense, and thus provide a proper Basis for the support of its higher energies. (356-358)

Here, Harris adopts a Lockean understanding of ideas as the mental impressions of things captured by the senses; these may be reflected upon and reasoned about even when the objects of reflection are no longer perceived. However, at the end of *Hermes* Harris moves past Locke and aligns himself with Platonic mentalism in his discussion of the "Works of Nature" (377). Harris explains that when a person observes an object, such as a clock, the internal mental impression is a consequence of the external object and therefore the existence of the clock is *prior* to the internalised concept of a clock. However, when a person sets out to create an object, such as a clock, he or she carries out a process in which the "Intelligible Form", or archetypal concept, of a clock is used in order to form an external object. In this case, the object is the consequence of a mental impression and the creative powers of the mind. In this way, when Harris considers Nature he finds an intricate and beautiful design that in his belief must have been created by a Mind – it could not have occurred by chance. He does not offer any speculation as to the nature or location of the Mind that has created the natural world, but he feels that this is sufficient evidence to conclude that "we have plenty of Forms intelligible, which are truly previous to all Forms sensible" (381) and that "the whole visible World exhibits nothing more, than so many *passing* pictures of these *immutable Archetypes*" (383-384). As a result of this, *Hermes*

[68] The full title of this text, published in 1751, is *Hermes: or, a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Language and Universal Grammar*.

ultimately argues for Platonic mentalism and asserts the primacy of active thought rather than the simple reception of ideas.

Lord Monboddo, or James Burnet, had read Harris with keen interest and wrote his own exposition *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92).[69] In this work, Monboddo argues that language is not a natural attribute of man because neither the concept of a sign system nor the articulation that makes it possible is innate. These attributes are acquired and develop over time. Language is seen as a necessary human tool that originated and continued to evolve as man began forming social groups and attempted to communicate (Land 423-424). As a result of this emphasis on practical experience and the rejection of an innate ability to communicate, Monboddo is often aligned with Étienne Bonnot de Condillac whose *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* was published in English in 1756 (Land 425). Both argue that language evolved from primitive interjections (that convey immediate emotion, such as fear or happiness), to the association of articulated sounds with mental concepts. This illustrates a movement from particular motivated signs, such as crying out when a thorn pierces the skin, to abstract general terms, such as an articulated sound that can be understood to mean pain. Monboddo believes that these primitive languages can fulfil man's discursive needs only up to a certain point before a new language must be created to coincide with man's intellectual growth. Monboddo calls the new advanced languages deliberately created to allow for more complicated discourse the "languages of art"[70] (Land 426).

These mentalist, or idealist, studies of language attempted to move away from the emphasis which Locke places on the relationship between sense perception and sign creation; they were opposed to theorists such as Tooke who later seized upon this aspect of Locke's study and vehemently argued for it. In fact, these two opposing views are both evident in Locke's *Essay* which discusses both the fundamental importance of sense data, collected during perception, and the vital powers of the mind that analyse and interpret such data, without elevating one human

[69] McKusick calls Monboddo an "enthusiastic, though not uncritical disciple of Harris" (90).
[70] The influence of Harris on Monboddo is evident here when we compare this argument with Harris' claim in *Hermes* that "Interjections *coincide with no Part of speech*" and are not significant because these are the "Voices of Nature, rather than Voices of *Art* expressing those Passions and natural Emotions, which spontaneously arise in the human Soul, upon the View or Narrative of interesting events" (289-90).

faculty above the other. Sense experience is vital, despite the limits of human perception, because a person would otherwise lack any knowledge of the world. Objective phenomena are perceived by the senses and understood as an idea that the mind is able to retain, dissect and, importantly, abstract from its original context. However, words (as the arbitrary articulate sounds that humans are able to produce in consequence of a natural or God-given ability) signify ideas only, and are able to convey only the perception or subjective knowledge of an objective reality.

Locke dedicates the third chapter of his *Essay* to a discussion of language in view of its vital function as the medium that facilitates the dissemination, or exchange, of knowledge and the cultivation of understanding through discussion. He argues that words must refer to general ideas in order for language to function as a mode of communication. While people perceive particular things, a unique term cannot be assigned to every particular idea. "That every particular thing should have a name for itself is impossible," (3:3. 2) firstly, because people cannot retain particular ideas of each and every thing they come across and, secondly, because it would not be useful if they could. They would not be able to communicate their thoughts to anyone who had not had precisely the same experiences. As a result, the mind must abstract the qualities of objects from particular experiences in order to form general ideas and organise phenomena into sorts according to shared characteristics. General ideas are common qualities that are separated from objects as purely mental concepts which contain no particular values. These generalities, then, are meant to refer to all of the possible particularities of one type of quality and not to refer to any single quality specifically. Locke argues that our minds are able to consider general ideas because we are able to abstract, or remove, qualities from their particular forms. For instance, Locke believes that one is able to consider the idea of heat or cold apart from its occurrence in a body of water. The mind separates the "circumstances of real existence" from "particular beings" so that they can "become general representatives of all of the same kind" and their "outward marks" or names will refer to "whatever exists conformable to such abstract ideas." The abstraction of general ideas from "particular beings" allows for "precise, naked appearances in the mind" to which a sound can be ascribed and then used to communicate (2: 11. 9).

Locke argues that some of the ways in which language is used and taught has caused some misconceptions regarding language itself, which in turn has led to misconceptions about the

objective world. Some of the problems with language are inherent issues, or endemic to the "imperfection of words" (3:9); others are a result of "the abuse" (3:10) or misuse of words by people. The most problematic characteristic of language is the ambiguity of words. Words are not always able to evoke the same idea because they do not share an innate connection with ideas; their signification is arbitrarily determined and regulated by society. However, "common use" (3:9. 8) cannot rectify a lack of knowledge, or an inaccurate interpretation of meaning. Locke explains that problems generally occur when terms are learnt before a clear understanding of the referent is known, or when members of society disagree about the meaning of a term. When this occurs people resort to their own experiences and beliefs to define words and distort the "true" meaning. Locke cites the interpretation of moral and religious texts as the most salient illustration of this, because the interpretations are unlimited and cannot be agreed upon. The varied interpretations of terms occur because of a lack of knowledge of the "true" constitution of things (3:9. 22-23).

As a result of this, words cannot offer a precise definition of an idea. This makes it difficult to communicate ideas or to gain knowledge. Words "interpose themselves so much between our understandings and the truth" that they become like a "medium through which visible objects pass" and their "disorder...cast[s] a mist before our eyes, and impose[s] upon our understandings" (3:9. 21). Words obscure meaning in this way because they function at a double remove from the objective world and can, at best, clearly signify only a subjective perception. In this way, objective "truth" cannot be accessed because of the fallibility of human understanding and the ambiguity of man-made words. Locke, in fact, compares the limitations that words place on "truth" to the limitations that the human form placed on Jesus. He writes,

> The volumes of interpreters and commentators on the Old and New Testament are but too manifest proofs of this. Though everything said in the text be infallibly true, yet the reader may be, nay, cannot choose but be very fallible in the understanding of it. Nor is it to be wondered that the will of God, when clothed in words, should be liable to that doubt and uncertainty which unavoidably attends that sort of conveyance, when even his Son, whilst clothed in flesh, was subject to all the frailties and inconveniences of human nature, sin excepted. (3:9. 23)

Words are fallible because they are created and used by man. Locke argues against the notion that language was once motivated and that it has now fallen; instead he maintains that reason is the gift that God has given humanity to allow man to create a system of communication and to

avoid obscurity and ambiguity, which are an affliction of the human condition. For Locke, it is the imposition of a person's own "sense and interpretations" (3:9. 23) that exacerbates the "imperfection of words" and which, therefore, must be avoided.

Like other linguists and philosophers, Locke considers Adam's role in the origin of language. He theorises that Adam would have been "in the state of a grown man with a good understanding but in a strange country, with all things new and unknown about him; and no other faculties to attain the knowledge of them but what one of this age has now" (3:6). Equipped with his human senses and his "good understanding", or reason, Adam can assign arbitrary names to simple ideas; he can also construct complex ideas and assign names to them. These names become part of a language when they pass into general use, and are a valid means of communication so long as each word continues to signify the same common idea. Locke maintains that every person possesses the same ability, and "liberty", as Adam to form ideas of substances and to organise them into "archetypes of nature", as well as to "make complex ideas...by no other pattern but by his own thoughts" and to give them names. The principle challenge now is that words need to be socially accepted and commonly known (3:6. 48-51). This view of Adam opposes the theory that Adam possessed a divine knowledge and a motivated language that has been lost. For Locke, the only limit placed on human beings is the restricted access of sense perception and the constraints of individual logic. Indeed, the "whole extent of our knowledge or imagination reaches not beyond our own ideas, limited to our ways of perception" (3:11. 23). For him, it is the faculty of reason from which language springs and the creative imagination that hinders communication. Locke's final argument is that people would benefit from a conscious rejection of individual creativity, as this would allow for more precise communication.

All of these studies of language deal with one central concern: does humanity's capacity to use language originate from a rational or a divine faculty? Both the rational and the theological theorists suppose an external origin of language in which a certain understanding is bestowed upon man and hampered by the inherent weaknesses of human beings. Language is considered to be either the product of humanity's natural attributes of reason and sense perception, or it is the fallen and fractured likeness of the gift given to Adam by God in *Genesis*. Both schools of thought also agree that language is apt to become progressively more abstract. However, while

the rationalists believe this will improve communication, the theologians believe this will increase the distance between humanity and God, obscuring "true" divine meaning.

Wilhelm von Humboldt's phenomenological approach to language offers a link between the dominant theories of language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of language.[71] The linguistic studies of Humboldt are situated between the rational and mystical explications of language. Moreover, his phenomenological approach makes him a transitional figure, bridging the gap between these debates and emerging Romantic theories of language. A brief discussion of Humboldt's study of language will in turn will lead back to a comparative examination of Merleau-Ponty and Blake.

Humboldt began studying languages in 1799 as an anthropological endeavour in the hope of expounding the relationship between language and culture. He set out to research how language functions as a total mechanism for producing meaning and the relationship between words, the world they represent and the people who make use of them (Adler 9-12). Importantly, Humboldt did not begin studying language as an abstract structure outside of human interaction. He began by looking at linguistic communities and examining the total activity of human discourse. This initially socio-historical approach to language led Humboldt to a broader metaphysical consideration of language and its inherent role in human existence.

Humboldt approached language as a natural development that originates from humanity's instinctive engagement with the phenomenal world. While Humbodlt, like Monboddo and others during this period, regarded language as an essential constituting element of social interaction Humboldt did not believe that language was strictly a consequence of the formation of social groups. Instead, Humboldt argues that the use of language is intrinsic to human experience and totally inseparable from humanity's state of being. In the well-known introduction to his unfinished study of the Kawi language, Humboldt explains that he studies language as a primordial human attribute because:

[71] While Humboldt's approach can be broadly categorised as "phenomenological", it is different to that of Merleau-Ponty who specifically deals with the concerns of existential phenomenology.

> [the] *bringing-forth of language* is an *inner need* of man, not merely an external necessity for maintaining communal intercourse, but a thing lying in his own nature, indispensible for the development of his mental powers... (*On Language* 27)

Thus, speech is not a simple product of social organisation; it is the intuitive mechanism of human thought that satisfies humanity's "inner need" for personal expression and understanding by making comprehension and reasoning possible.

By taking this position, Humboldt disagreed with those, such as Locke, who posited that language is an invention of human reason. Seeing that language is "an immediate given in mankind", to regard it as a "work of reason" was "wholly inexplicable" to Humboldt (Humboldt *Humanist* 239). What is more he contends that it is not shaped or controlled by reason, and so is not simply a tool that the mind employs to mark or clothe its thoughts, because the act of thinking or reasoning *is* the use of language. Fellow German philosopher J.G Herder, who influenced Humboldt, offers one of the clearest explanations of this conception of the indivisibility of language and human thought:

> The human spirit thinks with *words*; it does not only utter its thoughts by means of *language*, but also in the same way symbolizes them to itself and arranges them...By means of language we learned to think, through it we separate ideas and tie them together, often many at a time. (Brown 63 -64)

By furnishing the mind with a medium that objectifies its thoughts, language signifies a person's thoughts to the thinker and allows for a consideration of what has been perceived or felt. Without this mechanism, a person would not be able to consider the world as a separate entity, nor could one reflect on concepts separate from one's own thoughts. For Humboldt, the mind does not merely receive stimuli from an existing object and form a "purely" objective perception of the external world. Outer sense experience is fashioned into thoughts by the inherently subjective inner activity of the mind. Language is the product of this synthesis of the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective and, therefore, exists as "the formative organ of thought" (*On Language* 54). These thoughts are then expressed as speech and return to the world as a new object which others can perceive and to which they may respond. Thus, each individual expression of thought joins the "common stock of the entire human race" and actively collaborates with others to create meaning. For Humboldt, the world can be known only through

a subjective interface and therefore there can be no "objective truth" besides that which "rises from the entire energy of subjective individuality" (*Humanist* 246).

Humboldt explains that initially language "flowed freely" as "speech and song", an "involuntary emanation of the spirit" that expresses a personal interaction between the self and the world (*On Language* 24). Linguistic communities, or national languages, were then (and continue to be) formed "according to the measure of inspiration" (*On Language* 24) of the people involved. Thus, a nation's language develops according to the participation of all its speakers and is inseparable from the development of the nation's culture, which informs the thoughts and feelings of all its members. Significantly, while language is "bound and dependent on the nations to which [it belongs]" and is "spun out of their mental individuality" (*On Language* 24), it evolves as an autonomous organic entity. This is because language is not deliberately created or taught; it develops "inseparably from man's inmost nature, and emanate[s] automatically therefrom" (*On Language* 42); once it is "given the threads" of "mental individuality", it "develops of its own accord." (*On Language* 44) However, once speech has evolved into a generally accepted national language, the "spiritual individuality" (*On Language* 30) of each person who makes use of it is more restricted and circumscribed by their community's cultural and social conventions. Therefore, language both facilitates and restricts thought. It objectifies thoughts and thereby distinguishes between subjects and their experience of the world they inhabit; yet, because it is the medium of both private thought and communal expression, it exists as a permeable membrane between persons and the society they inhabit.

Humboldt's consideration of language as the result of the interactive synthesis of the objective and subjective realms of human experience, together with his insistence that words and thoughts are indivisible, controverts the popular sensibilist and mentalist theories put forward by the linguists of this time. The twentieth-century phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, considers language similarly to Humboldt, but examines in greater depth the inherent relationship between human existence as the functioning of an embodied consciousness and the production of language. While it is difficult to extract a comprehensive theory of language from

Merleau-Ponty's writings[72], his consideration of language as an intrinsic dimension of human experience aligns him broadly with Blake, who describes the imagination as "Poetic Genius" (*AR* E 1) and who believes that the imagination "is the Human Existence itself" (*M* 32:32 E 132).

In his major work the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty considers language in his chapter on "The Body as Expression and Speech". In this chapter, Merleau-Ponty criticises empiricist and idealist notions of language (which can be broadly classified as sensibilist and mentalist viewpoints respectively), because both characterise language as a tool that is possessed by a human speaker. This characterisation of language separates the speaker's intention to convey meaning from the structure of the language he or she speaks. Merleau-Ponty argues that words and the production of meaning cannot be separated in the act of speaking, language arises out of incarnate gestures of the body. He argues that speech is not an outward indicator of thought but is its body, the physical medium through which thoughts come to be known and expressed. Speech is just one of many of the body's expressive gestures, which provide a physical manifestation of meaning, rather than merely representing solely mental ideas. Merleau-Ponty characterises language as another space that humanity inhabits and moves through, with each subject making use of words in the same way as the body makes use of its limbs (*PoP* 180). Therefore, he argues that one gropes for meaning in language as a hand reaches out for another part of the body. It is in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that Merleau-Ponty first outlines his theory that there is no pure thought or Ideality simply indicated by signs, arguing instead that emotions such as anger or joy are indivisible from the gestures that communicate them. However, Merleau-Ponty considers the explanation of linguistic sign systems expounded by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*[73] before dealing directly with the ways in which language is formed and evolves as a dimension of communal existence.

[72] This is because the issue of language is not directly considered in some of Merleau-Ponty's writings and his view of language developed over the course of his career. His work on language was influenced by other philosophers, such as Saussure and Heidegger, at different points in his life and he passed away before he was able to complete his examination of language in his final incomplete work *The Visible and the Invisible*.

[73] James Edie notes that Merleau-Ponty first mentions Saussure in his course on language given at Lyon from 1947-1948, after the *Phenomenology of Perception* was published in 1945 (xiii).

Saussure's structuralist theory of the linguistic sign is founded on two fundamental principles. Firstly, he considers words as signs that are composed of an arbitrary signifier, determined by social convention, and a conventionally accepted signified meaning or "concept". For example, English society has agreed that the collection of letters "m-o-u-s-e" and its utterance as sound refer to a small rodent, and therefore when the word "mouse" is read or heard the corresponding idea of a small rodent is evoked. This word, whether read or spoken, provides a physical mark for a general concept or idea. Another arrangement of letters or a different sound might have been assigned to this referent. However, once the signifier is accepted by a community of speakers as the arbitrary placeholder for a signified meaning, it forms a sign that can take its place in the accepted semiotic taxonomy of a language (65-78). Saussure's second principle is that language functions as a system of difference without positive terms. The lack of a motivated connection between words and the concepts or ideas they signify means that language forms a system of meaning based on the differences between signs. He argues that words are able to signify meaning because language is a diacritical system in which each word is considered against the background of all other words in that language (107-123).

Merleau-Ponty largely agrees with Saussure's argument that language is diacritical, and that signs come to have meaning according to their interaction within a system of language, but he does not agree that the relationship between a signifier and a signified meaning remains arbitrary. He argues that the complex relationship between the signs of an accepted language results in each signifier becoming inseparably bound to its signified. At the beginning of his essay "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" (1960), Merleau-Ponty credits Saussure with correctly defining language as a "unity of coexistence" (*S* 39), but goes on to say that it is "because the sign is diacritical from the outset, because it is composed and organized in terms of itself that it has an interior and ends up laying claim to a meaning" (*S* 41). Merleau-Ponty's assertion that language can "lay claim" to meaning rests on his belief that language exists as "a sort of being" that the embodied subject enters into, rather than an objective "means" that is used as a communicative tool (*S* 43). He argues that children do not learn a taxonomic list of words together with a complex set of grammatical rules, but rather assimilate a linguistic mode of being (based upon the language of their community) through which their own personal thoughts can find expression and contribute to a sustained exchange of ideas. This argument builds upon his

earlier assertion that language is gestural, or tied to the incarnate expression enacted by the body. He asserts that language, like the body, provides a dynamic medium which enables thoughts to take up a position in a shared world of ideas and to interact with the thoughts of others. Thus, language exists simultaneously as a conventional sign system and a living medium that each speaker inhabits in order to enter the experienced world as a thinking subject.

Merleau-Ponty also differs from Saussure in his understanding of *parole* and *langue*, or individual uses of language and language as a synchronic system that is available to a group of speakers at any given time. In his course, Saussure defines *langue* as the language inherited from previous speakers, the "fixed tradition" (72) that each new speaker is able to make use of once it has been learnt. New generations of speakers are able to alter language owing to the gap between the signifier and the signified; however the inherited sign system is too intricate and well established to give way to large-scale innovation or change. *Parole* refers to the idiosyncratic use of language by each individual speaker. Each speaker who participates in a linguistic community influences the spoken language that future generations of speakers will inherit. However, much like Humboldt, Saussure believes that language evolves as an entire movement of socio-historical usage and independently of any speaker's individual efforts (71-75). Merleau-Ponty agrees with the distinction Saussure draws between *langue* and *parole*, but gives precedence to *parole* because in his view it is the ontological gesture that posits meaning and gives rise to language. *Parole* is the expression of an embodied subject's interaction with the world; it does not simply point outward to a pre-established meaning. When one speaks to a friend over the telephone, language "brings us the friend himself" because it carries the inflections of an embodied consciousness. Thus, words gain some of their meaning from the broader vocabulary and grammatical system of an established, inherited language, and are understood according to a "silent" background of words that are not spoken. In addition, words give expression to the primordial meaning found in embodied gesture, which is "silent" until it can be accessed through the medium of language.

> Speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language. To understand it, we do not have to consult some inner lexicon which gives us the pure thoughts covered up by the words or forms we are perceiving; we only have to lend ourselves to its life, to its movement of differentiation and articulation, and to its eloquent gestures. (*S* 42)

The “life” of language exists as this “movement of differentiation” in which each word gains its signification at the juncture at which it intersects and interacts with all other speech. It gains this “life” from the embodied subjects who animate language.

In his late unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty considers the different dimensions of the “life” or “being” of human experience. In his chapter on “The Chiasm”, he discusses his concept of “reversibility” or “flesh” which he introduces to describe with greater precision each human being’s unique existence as an embodied consciousness simultaneously engaged in objective and subjective experience. He expands on the example from his earlier work of two hands’ touching each other. In this situation, the hands are both sensed and sensing, each alternating between touching and being touched, or acting and being acted upon. This is “an ambiguous setup” in which either hand alternates between existing as a sensed object and as a sensing subject, without being able to experience both modes of being at the same time. The sensation shifts according to the hand on which the embodied subject focuses (*PoP* 106). Merleau-Ponty argues that every human being exists in this state of “reversibility” as a combination of, and a crossing over between, subjective and objective modes of being. Moreover, he argues that the subjective and the objective are two dimensions of a single state of being as embodied consciousness, and cannot be identified as separate facets of a human being’s actions or experiences. Thus, human beings exist within a “chiasm”, as an “intertwining” or crossing-over between subjective and objective experience. It is this manner of existence that Merleau-Ponty terms *le chair* or the “flesh”.

By means of this existence as *flesh*, all embodied subjects are implicated in the *visible* world. Merleau-Ponty asserts that, “[t]hrough this crisscrossing...of the touching and the tangible, [the embodied subjects’] own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate” (*VI* 133). The *visible* is the term Merleau-Ponty uses to describe shared living space and is the physical “universe” that includes everything that can be sensed or acted upon. It is recognizable as separate from the body, but is also the space that the body inhabits, moves through, and to which it actively contributes. Therefore, the *visible* also shapes the interactive possibilities available to the body. The *visible* is the space in which all bodies can converge upon one another and interact, and it is the “tactile space” (*VI* 134) in which an idea or meaning is able to manifest

itself as a physical gesture that can be sensed or communicated. It is the body that "can bring us to the things themselves" in the *visible*, because the body is a "two-dimensional being" (*VI* 136) that both consciously perceives and moves through the *visible*.

In order to explain the dynamic relationship between the conscious body and the *visible*, Merleau-Ponty discusses vision. He does this because vision is often considered to be a more passive or receptive sense than touching; the visible world "seems to rest in itself", presenting itself to the viewer for "naked" reception. However, vision arises from the interaction between a perceiving subject and an object, both of which belong to the *visible*; therefore neither the qualities of the object nor the powers of perception of the subject are pre-eminent in the act of vision. Within the *visible* "one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command" perception, because both the ordering gaze and the sensual things are impressed upon each other, and so sustain one another (*VI* 133). The embodied subject is able to view visible objects because it is *of* the *visible* and objects can be perceived because "their being" is "more than their being perceived" (*VI* 135). This is because objects always come to be known in accordance with an embodied subject's gaze and attention, but their "being" also extends beyond this personal perception (*VI* 135). For,

> ...if [the embodied subject] touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visible before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure...If [the body] touches and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh. (*VI* 137)

While objects are not sentient, they exist as *flesh* because they act upon the perceiving subject, determining his or her perceptual possibilities; they are only conceived as objects in view of their relationship to the subject.

As a result of each human being's existence as *flesh* and this relationship between the perceiving self and the *visible*, perception can also be explained as a diacritical system without positive terms. In order to explain this, Merleau-Ponty considers the colour red. He argues that there can be no pure experience or understanding of "red", only specific instances in which "red" has been seen and interpreted. A subject's current perception of "red" is defined according to its position

in the individual's history of perception, which gives rise to an awareness of a graduated system of different reds:

> The colour is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colours it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and successive...A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution...the dresses of women, robes of professors... (*VI* 132)

The exact meaning of "red" is produced by the interaction between an embodied subject and a perceived object in the *visible* world in which they co-exist, and each new experience of "red" is defined according to a personal lexicon based upon all previous experiences of colour. Thus, each experience of "red" forms part of a self-referential and co-existent system of ideas. Merleau-Ponty argues that this system of ideas is a *dimension* of the *visible*, which he terms the "invisible *of* this world" in that it encompasses a conceptual understanding of the perceived world that precedes all scientific or philosophical abstraction (*VI* 151-152). Ideas such as "red" are implicit in the conscious body's chiasmic interaction with the experienced world; this is why they "cannot be detached from sensible appearances and erected into a second positivity" (*VI* 150).

However, these ideas lack a perceivable *flesh* because they are intangible concepts that arise from a perceiving subject's conscious orientation within the *visible*. This inherent *invisibility* means that ideas exist as an "absence" or "negativity" which an embodied consciousness does not possess, but is possessed *by* (*VI* 151). These ideas are given expression through the diacritical system of language in order to be sustained in the *visible*. Merleau-Ponty argues that ideas pass "from the flesh of the body to the flesh of language" (*VI* 153) when they are expressed through the gesture of speech or *parole*. By gaining the *flesh* of language, ideas are restored to the *visible* from which they arose, and the conceptual "lining" or "depth" (*VI* 153) of the *visible* is discerned. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's argument is that speech is a gesture that imbues the conceptual understanding gained from embodied perception with the individual style of embodied action. This embodied gesture posits meaning as *parole*; the established meanings of *langue* develop as the intersubjective exchange of *parole*, and *langue* comes to be defined according to the

conceptual experience of a community of speakers. In consequence, Merleau-Ponty argues that in fact there is no separation of *langue* and *parole*, but one language that is always in a state of "becoming" (*PW* 39) or constant evolution.

Merleau-Ponty's argument characterises language as a particular dimension of human experience, an organic meaning-making process that springs from humanity's unique engagement with the world. Language develops as an integral part of a human being's chiasmic, reciprocal, interaction between self and world and self and others; it originates from the "reversibility" of thought and embodied perception and develops as a communal exchange of expression. Through this argument, Merleau-Ponty contests the notion that there is "some Spirit of the World which allegedly operates within us without our knowledge and perceives in our place, beyond the perceived world". He explains that expression "begins with our incarnate life" and that "the spirit of the world is ourselves, as soon as we know how to *move ourselves* and *look*" (*S* 66). When mind and body are considered as separate entities and the body is abstracted from the world which it perceives and inhabits, each person's role in the creation of a shared communal world is overlooked. For perception is not an "imitation" of "reality"; it is "the invention of a world which is dominated and possessed through and through in an instantaneous synthesis" (*S* 50). It is neither a pure objective reflection, nor a solipsistic creation, and it is by virtue of humanity's primordial synthesis of body and mind that expression is possible.

In light of this, attempts to purify language in order to make it more transparent and less ambiguous fail to recognise the "living use of language" (*S* 77) and are ultimately unhelpful. The use of language "opens up a discussion", and invites new conversation rather than conveying a fixed abstract or idealist meaning. This is because language "contains...*matrices of ideas*", the ever-increasing intersection of meaning in a dialectical system, and "provides us with symbols whose meaning we never stop developing" (*S* 77). It is this capacity to invite and share new perspectives that makes language so valuable. Literature is the result of the "conquering, active, creative" (*S* 153) use of language; it is what comes of understanding language to be a palette that may be used to introduce or create meaning through each new brush stroke. In this way, it is literature that is able to "introduce us to unfamiliar perspectives instead of confirming us in our own" (*S* 77-78). To attempt to separate out the living elements of language is to subject

expression to "the prose of the senses or of the concept" when it "must be poetry; that is, it must completely awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said or seen" (*S* 52). It is poetry that expresses the fecundity of language and in poetry that humanity finds the creative and spontaneous source of ideas.

Blake also approaches language as a dimension of human experience, which evolves as the result of humanity's incarnate existence and orders the perceived world, rather than simply representing a separate objective world. Blake outlines his view of language in plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city and country, placing it under its mental deity.
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of and enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began Priesthood.
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (E 38)

The passage describes a history of language. The "ancient Poets" call the "sensible objects" by their "names" as Adam does in *Genesis*, endowing these objects with qualities known to them because of their embodied experience and ordering their perceived world by naming what they encounter. The poets externalise their own constitutive power by animating the objects they perceive "with Gods or Geniuses", attaching this mythical quality to the names they give. As a result of their chiasmic existence,[74] the poets participate in the *flesh* of the *visible* and engage in an interactive creation of the world they perceive, connecting the sensible world with their intellectual experience through *parole*.

[74] The term "chiasmic" is adapted from Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "chiasm" which refers to humanity's unique existence as a crossing-over between or an "intertwining" of objective and subjective experience. I make use of this term as an adjective in order to allow for a comparison between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of human experience and Blake's notion of an embodied spiritual humanity.

Over time the poets' *parole* sediments as *langue* and "a system [is] formed" which can be used to communicate and provide a vision of a collaborative, shared living space. However, this systemisation of language opened it to exploitation by abstracting the "mental deities" from "their objects". Words were given fixed and abstract meanings; no longer referring to the embodied spiritual experience of the poets. They were thus reduced to their narrowly referential function. Blake's plate explains that, as a result of this corruption of language, human beings no longer recognise their participation in the constitution or creation of the experienced world. Thus, they no longer acknowledge their immanent spirituality, forgetting "that All deities reside in the human breast." The separation between man and God, and self and world, opened up a space for selfish exploitation that resulted in the formation of "the Priesthood". The collaborative "poetic tales" that had been cultivated over time through the shared voices of the "ancient Poets" were broken down into "forms of worship" that convey the fixed perspective of "the Priesthood". The "Priesthood" presented this as the work of an external deity. Like his contemporaries, Blake suggests that language has undergone a fall into abstraction that coincides with Man's postlapsarian condition. However, for Blake it is a fall of perception. The Priesthood's abstraction of the "mental deities" from their "objects" and the separation of the "properties" of the world experienced by the poets results in the separation of a constituting deity from "the human breast". Blake takes up the role of visionary poet in order to re-establish language as chiasmic *flesh* and to reinstate what Hazard Adams calls "myth" or the "constitutive power" of language (*Literary Criticism* 3); thereby redeeming language and re-engaging the immanent creative spirituality of humanity.

Like Merleau-Ponty, Blake draws a distinction between the ancient poets' "living use of language" as constitutive language and the Priesthood's "prose" which posits language as a fallen referential system and not as an embodied subject's expressive response or incarnate gesture.[75] Blake characterises humanity's spiritual imagination as the "Poetic Genius". This is the living expression of God in man and the source of human inspiration. Blake clearly defines the Poetic Genius in his early illuminated printing *All Religions are One* (E 1). His assertion that "the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius" and that the "true faculty

[75] "Constitutive language" refers to the creative or formative powers of language that are rooted in embodied human experience. Referential texts are predicated upon the assumption that language refers to or represents an abstract meaning that is external to the words and the composition of a text.

of knowing" is "the faculty that experiences" (E 1) echoes Merleau-Ponty's assertion that human understanding is the product of the integrated experience of an embodied consciousness, and that understanding is shaped through language. For, "one must see or feel in some way to think" because "every thought known to us occurs to a flesh". While "our body commands the visible for us...it does not explain it" (*VI* 146; 136), so that "[s]ignification arouses speech as the world arouses [one's] body" and "language appears as an original way of intending certain objects, as thought's body" (*S* 84-85; 89). While Blake, unlike Merleau-Ponty, characterises humanity's creative linguistic faculty as the product of an immanent spirituality; both recognize the formative and interpretive power of language.

In the *Marriage* Ezekiel tells the narrator that

> ...we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests and Philosophers of other countries, and prophecying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours and to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius... (12-13 E 39)

Ezekiel explains the belief that the Poetic Genius is the "first principle" – the original fact of our human existence that orders or circumscribes experience, creating meaning from humanity's interaction with the sensible and knowable world, or Merleau-Ponty's *flesh* of the *visible* and *invisible*. The "Priests and Philosophers" have derived their own "Gods" from the Poetic Genius and disregarded its origin. Much like the mentalists and sensibilists, the Priesthood does not recognise the process of meaning-making inherent in embodied human experience and claims that humanity merely receives sense stimuli or ideas. Blake viewed the history of the Priesthood as one of abstraction and oppression, beginning with the ancient druids and culminating in the Church of England. The term "Priesthood" in his work invokes an entire history of social laws based on institutionalised theocratic spirituality in Britain. Blake's opinion of Britain's Priesthood is tied to the popular and liberal concerns of his society. A brief account of these opinions is necessary in order to understand Blake's view of the language of Priesthood and its damaging effects on British society.

During the eighteenth century in England there was a resurgent interest in ancient British society, due in large part to William Stukeley's writings which claimed that the famous heritage sites

Stonehenge and Avebury (as well as others) were druidic temples where a primitive form of Christianity had been practised. A further impetus was provided by the "ancient" poems of Ossian which James Macpherson claimed to have found and translated.[76] Blake makes many references to the "Ancient Britons" (*DC* E 542) encompassing both "the Patriarch Druid" (*J* 98: 48. E 258) whom Stukeley venerates, and the ancient bard represented by Macpherson. Blake believed that Ossian's poetry was the product of a divine imagination and that it offered a glimpse of the instinctive inspiration of the original "Natural" men of Britain (Damon 109).

The character of primitive Britain and of its druidic practices became a contentious issue. Antiquarians, such as John Toland, had presented the druids as a "heathen priesthood" that was "calculated to beget ignorance" in order to "procure power and profit to the priests" (Mee 56).[77] He believed that this was the "reverse of religion" and termed it "priestcraft", both because it conveyed the cunning and "superstition" of the druids and because "the coining of the very word was occasioned by the Druids" (Mee 57). Stukeley's thesis was meant to controvert such claims and reaffirm Britain as an ancient patriarchal state. He portrayed the druids as the original proponents of Christianity in Britain, arguing that they had directly received the "religion of Abraham", the "Patriarchal Christianity" of the Old Testament, from a Phoenician colony that had arrived in Britain. (Mee 92-93) This was, for Stukeley, a patriotic effort to present Christianity as the natural religion of the British state and to reinforce the authority of the Church of England, as well as an attempt to rescue druidism from the realm of esoteric barbarism. It further reaffirmed Britain as an ancient patriarchal state, tracing a direct line from the Old Testament patriarchs through the druids to the Church of England, leaving the religious principles unchanged (93-94).

[76] These poems have never been authenticated and it is widely accepted that Macpherson constructed them himself, drawing on fragments of other poems and stories that he had found. Owing to the renewed interest in ancient British culture, Macpherson's discovery of Ossian's original verses seemed convenient. While his translations were very well received by the British public, he also received a lot of criticism (most notably from Samuel Johnson). Howard Gaskill notes that, although Macpherson's reputation and the popularity of his works did deteriorate, his translations of Ossian were very popular in Britain for a century and a half, and his influence on the Romantics was immense. (See *The Reception of Ossian in England*. Ed. Harold Gaskill and "'Ossian' Macpherson: Towards a Rehabilitation," by Harold Gaskill in *Comparative Criticism* 8).

[77] See *History of the Druids*. Ed. R. Huddleson (Montrose, 1814).

This claim was widely accepted and other antiquarians were reluctant to criticise Stukeley.[78] Edmund Burke reinforced Stukeley's notion of a natural British religion by representing England as the "Tree of Liberty" whose Christian values had evolved naturally from the primitive religion of the druids and become more civilised (Mee 101). This characterised the Church as an institution intrinsic to the natural progression of Britain rather than as an instrument of political and social control. Both Stukeley and Burke attempted to discount the ritual of human sacrifice practised by the druids, dismissing it as the unfortunate error of a primitive and underdeveloped society. Blake, like Toland, focussed on this central tenet of druidism because it illustrates the absurd conclusion that is reached when human beings are subjugated to an external deity. In *Jerusalem* he condemns "the Druids golden knife" that "Rioted in human gore" and "In Offerings of Human Life" (*J* 27: 30-32 E 172). Blake accepted Stukeley's conclusion that the "priestcraft" of the ancient druids had succeeded in Britain as the religious doctrine of the Church of England, but unlike Stukeley believed that it had resulted in turning "allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command" (*DC* E 543). The poetic inspiration of the bards that Blake believed to be intrinsic to humanity's existence as embodied consciousness and chiasmically entwined with the *flesh* of the world is "erected into a second positivity" (*VI* 149) by the Priesthood, and their outward "worship" becomes the empty representation of ideas.

The Priesthood's abstract moralising and systemised oppression informed the political environment of Blake's Britain. Other liberals such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, who were members of Joseph Johnson's circle of artists and writers along with Blake, also make note of the connection between institutionalised religion and socio-political oppression. In *The Age of Reason* Paine writes that Christianity "was a corruption of an ancient system of theism" (432) and that "all national institutions of churches were set up to terrify and enslave mankind" (400). His opinions were considered to be an attack on Christianity by religious leaders such as Bishop Watson, who accuses Paine of "unsettl[ing] the faith of thousands", and producing "a state of corrupted morals" (4). Paine however claimed that "the Church ha[d] set up a system of religion very contradictory to the character of the person whose name it bears," because Jesus

[78] Cook's *Enquiry into the Patriarchal and Druidical Religion* (1754) supported Stukeley's thesis. As attacks such as Toland's and Paine's were levelled against the Church, the priests responded with vehement sermons on the eternal punishment that follows Christian disobedience (Mee 96).

"founded no new system of religion" (415; 417). Blake agrees with Paine in this regard,[79] labelling Watson's attacks as "Priestly Impudence" and "Serpentine Dissimulation" (E 612; 614). Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) agrees with Paine's assessment of the Church, characterising religion in Britain as superstitious and exploitative. These eighteenth-century liberals viewed the rhetoric of the Church as an attempt to justify social strife in Britain. In the case of Paine and Wollstonecraft this denied the natural "Rights of Man", and in the case of Blake this denied each human being's embodied spiritual existence.

The Priesthood of the druids, which Blake connected with the Church of England, discounted humanity's knowledge and understanding as "fallen" and denied humanity's ability to constitute or express new meaning. Human language was therefore said to refer only to meaning constituted by a transcendent deity, outside of any physical situation. Much like Locke's systemised approach to language, this referential language of the Priesthood was critical of polysemy and metaphor; it prescribed Christian morality as the only correct understanding of human experience. This division between physical experience and spiritual understanding instituted a separation between mind and body, and soul. Stukeley and the Church presented this as the natural state of man, and the Church maintained language to be a man-made tool used to point towards meanings human beings could not know. This view of human experience did not recognise the role of human beings in the experienced world that Blake believed to be fundamental to human experience, and creates a binary between subjective and objective experience that neither Merleau-Ponty nor Blake believed to exist.

In contrast to the druids, the bardic society presented by Ossian did not believe in a transcendent deity and associated the creative activity of man with the divine (Mee 107). Macpherson's translations depicted a society free of the class-determined stylisations of eighteenth-century art and poetry. Primitive Britain is shown to be unfettered by the economically driven politics and exploitations of the capitalist state. There is no private property or class structure, and stories are shared verbally in communities rather than sold as books for a price (Mee 87). Thomas Gray also wrote a poem depicting the ancient bards of England. His popular "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode"

[79] For a discussion of the similarities between Blake views and Paine's attack on priestcraft see Robert Essick "William Blake, Thomas Paine, and Biblical Revolution." *Studies in Romanticism* 30: 2 (1991) 189-212.

(1757) inspired Blake to create his picture "The Bard, from Gray" for his exhibition in 1809 (E 541-42). Blake also illustrated the poem for his friend John Flaxman. Gray's poem is based on the traditional Welsh account of Edward the First's conquest of Wales, in which he ordered all the bards to be killed. "The Bard" reaffirms the importance in the United Kingdom of poetic genius which must always seek to "celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression" (Mason in *Poems of Gray* 91n). Gray's Bard assures the king that the tradition of inspired poetry, the legacy of the Celtic bards, will continue in Britain and therefore that his attempt to destroy this tradition has been futile. Blake identifies with Gray's "Bard" who stands against socio-political oppression as the public voice of a nation, and seeks to incite others to recognize the spirit of inspiration in humanity. Ancient bardic society, as represented by poets such as Ossian and Gray, was predicated upon humanity's shared experience of the world and the exchange of poetic narrative. However, the druidic priests were deemed to have ushered in Britain's first organised religion that impeded individual freedom and denied poetic myth in the name of an omniscient and omnipotent deity.

The Priesthood's corruption of language is evident in the change in dialogue and linguistic interaction that occurs in the progression from *Songs of Innocence* to *Songs of Experience*. The *Songs of Innocence* exemplify the creative power of language, including its capacity to facilitate collaboration and to forge new meanings. In *Innocence*, humanity's embodied-spiritual imagination is shown to be rooted in poetic language. The poetic language of *Innocence* facilitates spiritualised human connections and these interactions are shown to stimulate personal imagination and vision. In *Songs of Experience*, there is a division between the experiencing subject and the experienced world; words no longer exist as a crossing-over or an interaction between the subjective and objective realms of experience. Instead, words are considered to be empty representations of objective "reality" and therefore are disconnected from the meanings they convey. Language becomes a tool used by humanity to point toward abstract meaning instead of a dimension of human experience, and subjective interactions with the experienced world are disregarded as fallen human illusions. The Priesthood's corrupt system of language found in *Experience* gives rise to the "dismal shade / Of Mystery", the tree that bears the "fruit of

Deceit" (E 27). To Blake's Priest in his "trembling zeal" (E 28), poetic language is a selfish indulgence that is contrary to the communication of truth.

This change is evident in the verbal exchanges that occur in the introductory poems of *Innocence* and *Experience*. Both sets of poems begin with a dialogue that characterises the type of language informing the poems that follow. Blake's "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* (E 7) offers another narrative about the human production of poetic language. The song begins with a free and unfixed creative energy that is "Piping down the valley's wild". Both "Piping", which is used here without an object, and "wild" suggest an unrestricted creativity that realises its expression through "songs of pleasant glee". The rest of the song progresses as a reciprocal exchange between the Piper and the child fuelled by the spontaneous "joy" that is the product of their interaction. The Piper's songs enthral and move the child because they are not abstract representations of the Piper's "merry chear". The Piper's emotions are embodied in his song as an incarnate human gesture. As a result, the floating child becomes increasingly emotional, beginning their encounter by laughing and later weeping with joy when the Piper has "sung the same [song] again". The child's ethereal presence is similar to the Eagle from the *Marriage* (and reminiscent of Humboldt's human "spirit"), the "portion of genius" that fosters personal vision.

The child entreats the Piper to pipe and sing "a song about a Lamb", and then to record the song in a book. Each time the Piper responds to the child's request, inspired by the child's engagement with his music and poetry. This song about "The Lamb" (E 8-9) is found later in *Innocence*, suggesting that the Piper and the child have authored the *Songs of Innocence*. In addition, the intertwining trees that frame "The Lamb" are similar to the trees that surround the Piper and the child on the frontispiece to *Innocence*, and both plates depict a herd of sheep. This also suggests a connection between the two scenes and characterises "The Lamb" as the product of the interaction between the Piper and the child. The lively exchange between the Piper and the child is so spontaneous and unexpected that it does appear to issue from the speakers as an "involuntary emanation of the spirit" (Humboldt 24), bursting from them as immediately as the "joy" and "merry chear" that they feel. Through their collaborative exchange, the Piper and the child constitute their environment and the *Songs* emerge as a product of their shared voices.

Blake's choice to characterise the creation of the *Songs of Innocence* as an intersubjective collaboration separates his book for young readers from other popular publications of his time. John Bunyan begins his *Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) by directly addressing the "Reader" and clearly explaining his authorial intent to engage in the same "dotterel play" as children in order to "mount their thoughts from what are childish toys,/ To heaven for that's prepared for girls and boys" (A2). Bunyan's introduction instructs his readers to accept the meanings found in "heaven" and not in the worldly "toys" they enjoy. His introduction is meant to prepare his young readers to accept Christian lessons, rather than inviting them into a poetic interaction. Anna Barbauld's famous *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) begins with the instruction to "Come" and "praise God" because God is responsible for all of creation. The child's "voice" is meant only to "praise God" and speech is the result of "reason" which "come[s] unto" (7-10) the child through an adherence to Christian principles, rather than being an inherent dimension of its human existence. By contrast, Blake's "Introduction" to *Innocence* is non-prescriptive; it validates the child's poetic voice, inviting their interaction in the landscape of *Innocence* and encouraging the development of an individual Poetic Genius.

However, as the Piper sits down to write the songs so that "all may read" and enjoy them, the child vanishes because their spontaneous interaction must now be represented by a social medium, the *langue* or system that the Priesthood is able to exploit and deprive of some of its unique circumstantial meaning. *Langue*, as manipulated by the Priesthood, emerges as both the "Book of Iron" in which Urizen records his laws, and the dialectical system that allows for the exchange of ideas. Additionally, if Blake's "happy songs" do not get put into a book "Every child" would not be able to hear and enjoy them. He attempts to overcome the Priesthood's Urizenic *langue* by trying to capture some of the immediacy and originality of oral poetry, and invoke the voice of his reader. The tradition of oral poetry, to which Ossian adhered (Mee 90; 104), allows the poem or poetic tale to be granted new impetus and life by each individual voice that shares the original words. As a result, the creative freedom of each individual voice is emphasised as opposed to the chiefly one-way transmission of written didactic texts. The nature of Blake's texts is antithetical to the structure of a strictly referential or representative written text. His composite text of words and illuminations demands a new style of interactive reading

and his method of printing resulted in each plate being coloured and finished individually.[80] This allowed for any changes Blake may have wished to make and ensured that no two plates are the same. Therefore, Blake's texts capture some of the individual performance of oral poetry as with each work "no original as such exists, only different performances" (Mee 106).

The "Introduction" to *Experience* is very different. There is a lack of spontaneity and collaborative exchange despite the Bard's urgent appeals to Earth and her subsequent response. Blake adopts the "voice" of Ossian's poetic society and takes on the role of Britain's holy "Bard". Blake's Bard addresses Earth as the voice of human Poetic Genius but also speaks as a national authority because of the popular patriotic association of the ancient druids with Ossian's bardic poetry. Blake champions the unrestricted spiritual energy of the "Ancient Britons" (*DC* E 542) in order to rouse the slumberous Earth, who has been lulled into slavery by the "Patriarch druid" (*J* 98: 46-50 E 258).[81] However, Earth receives the Bard's message as the prescriptive message of the ancient Priesthood whose abstracted language has left her unable to recognise Poetic Genius.

The Bard and Earth fail to communicate effectively partly because the Bard's "voice" is ambiguous, conflating the spiritual imagination of the bards with the prescriptive systemisation of the Priesthood (as Stukeley does). When the Bard instructs Earth to "Hear the voice of the ancient Bard!" and calls on her to "[t]urn away no more", he echoes the introductory passages of Barbauld and Bunyan. His commanding tone does not invite conversation and his message seems prescriptive. In addition, the Bard appears to be disconnected from the world in his omniscient capacity to see "Present, Past, & Future". Indeed, the Bard's phrase invokes Milton's God in *Paradise Lost* who "from his prospect high...past, present, future" sees (III 77-78) and who sends his Son, his "word", "wisdom" and "effectual might" (*PL* III 170) to judge Adam and Eve. As "The Holy Word" who "walk'd among the ancient trees", Jesus carries out his Father's will on

[80] A recent dissertation by Carla Douglas entitled "Image and Poetry in Selected Early Works of William Blake: Producing a third Text" deals extensively with the ways in which Blake's illuminated texts demand the reader's active engagement in order to discover the "Third Text" in which the different elements of Blake's text interact to create ever-changing meanings.

[81] It is important to note that Blake does not make use of the word "druid" until *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, but this opposition seems to occur implicitly in his earlier writing.

Earth. This Edenic imagery, as well as the reference to Milton's abstract and autocratic God, refers to the concept of Eden from which the practice of judgement originated, and which druids and priests have come to exploit. However, the Bard's intention is not to judge "Earth", or to revoke a divine existence, but instead to call to Earth to "renew" her unfallen state. This line, therefore, also invokes the "Eden" outlined by Blake in *A Descriptive Catalogue*: the original state of man in which an immanent divinity was recognised and free creative expression was able to develop.[82]

The song takes the form of the Bard's increasingly urgent appeals to the "lapsed" Earth. The word "lapsed" is carefully chosen to convey both the error committed by Earth and the passing of time. The Earth has literally "lapsed"; she has turned away from the sun and is in the darkness of "evening". Her "weeping" of "dew" suggests a mourning for her lost liberty and creative energy. The Bard does not mention Earth directly until the third stanza and here refers to Earth as a "Soul". The reference to Earth's soul echoes the Priesthood's division of soul and body, and its separation of spiritual and physical existence. However, a disembodied "Soul" cannot be called because it has no physical capabilities in the world of experience. Therefore, the "lapsed Soul" must be incarnate in order to be able to hear the Bard's words. Unfortunately, Earth believes that her "Soul" is being held to ransom by the "Selfish father of men" (*EARTH'S Answer* 10 E 18).

The "starry pole", which the Bard hopes "Earth" may once again "controll", is also linked to Milton's portrayal of prelapsarian Man. The unfallen Adam and Eve view the "starrie Pole" (*PL* IV 724) with devoted admiration as they behold the night sky and the universe created by God.[83]

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[82] "All these things are written in Eden. The artist is an inhabitant of that happy country; and if every thing goes on as it has begun, the world of vegetation and generation may expect to be opened again to Heaven, through Eden, as it was in the beginning" (E 543).

[83] In later poems, the "starry pole" is more directly linked to England's druidic temples and the Priesthood. In *Milton*, Blake's "Druid temples...reach the stars of heaven & stretch from pole to pole" (9: 14-15 E 103). Later, in *Jerusalem*, Blake describes Stonehenge as

> ...labyrinthine arches (Mighty Urizen the Architect) thro' which
> The Heavens might revolve and Eternity be bound in their chain.
> Labour unparalelld! a wondrous rocky World of cruel destiny
> Rocks piled on rocks reaching the stars: stretching from pole to pole.
> The Building is Natural Religion and its Altars Natural Morality
> A building of eternal death, whose proportions are eternal despair (*J* 66:3 E 218)

Within *Paradise Lost* the "starrie Pole" is considered from the safety of their "shadie Lodge" (IV 720) in Paradise and represents the Heaven and the spiritual existence to which Adam and Eve aspire. Barbara Lewalski notes that in *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve are given the opportunity to develop according to their own achievements and choices.[84] By choosing to cultivate themselves correctly in Eden, Adam and Eve can

> ...*open to themselves* at length the way
> Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
> And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth,
> One Kingdom, Joy and Union without End.[85] (VII 157-160)

For Milton, it is this opportunity for spiritual development that is lost in the Fall. Postlapsarian Man is no longer in control of his spiritual life, and is only saved by the sacrifice of Jesus. Blake's Bard, conversely, wishes to remind Earth that her spiritual development *is* still in her control even though she has passed from *Innocence* into *Experience*.

The Bard's song is predicated upon the concept of divine communication. In the first stanza the Bard claims prophetic authority because his "ears have heard,/ The Holy Word,/ That walk'd among the ancient trees." The Bard's human "ears" are emphasised together with the act of hearing the incarnate, walking deity. His prophetic wisdom springs from an interaction with "The Holy Word", and therefore differs from the Priesthood's systematic dissemination of "truths". The Bard's statement that he has "heard" and "walk'd" with "The Holy Word" does not mean that he has walked in the historical Eden, the garden inhabited by man at the beginning of worldly time as the Priesthood teaches. Blake's Bard has entered Eden through an interactive reading of *Genesis*, hearing the "Holy" voice of God through a reading of the holy text. This suggests that the Bard has the same divine sensibility as Adam possesses in Eden; his human understanding has not fallen and become separated from a spiritual world. His call to Earth is for her to realise that it is only her perspective and understanding that have "fallen" due to the corrupt teachings of the Priesthood.

These druid temples do not celebrate human experience on Earth, and bind visions of "Eternity" with "Natural Morality".

[84] See "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden" in *New Essays on Paradise Lost.* Ed. Thomas Kranidas, Berkeley: U of California P, 1971, pp. 86-117.

[85] My emphasis.

Importantly, while the Bard may seem to be the implied speaker of the poem, it is unclear who is calling to Earth. Both the Bard and the Holy Word are mentioned in the first stanza, and Biblically it is God who walks through Eden calling to Adam and Eve to come out of hiding. This ambiguity aligns the Bard with the "Holy Word" in the act of "Calling" and engaging the "Earth" as part of an oral history of Britain. The Bard is also linked to God as the Creator of Earth because of his omniscient claim to see "Present, Past, & Future", thus reinforcing his claim that the world can be renewed through poetic vision.

When Earth lifts her head in recognition of the Bard's message and prepares to deliver her answer, the reader is initially hopeful that she will heed his call to "[t]urn away no more", especially following the fulfilled verbal exchanges found in *Innocence*. However, it soon becomes apparent that Earth does not believe she can free herself; she has been in darkness for too long, and has accepted the rhetoric of the Priesthood. In both the "Introduction" and "EARTH'S Answer" (E 18) "light", together with "day", represents creative spiritual energy in the physical world. It is "light" that invigorates the "buds" and "blossoms" of "spring" and brings the "sower['s]" and "plowman['s]" efforts to fruition. Light is like the "Prolific" that creates, and night is the "Devourer" that receives "the excess of [the Prolific's] delights" (*MHH* 16 E 40). Both are necessary for the development of the spiritual imagination. The "Devourer" is the outward "bounding line" (*DC* 64 E 550) that prevents the energy of the "Prolific" from becoming chaos. However, the prolonged darkness has left Earth without any vitality. She lives in fear of "the Father of the ancient men" whose oppressive laws restrict her and cast the world into a perpetual state of night. Her light has "fled", forced out by fear and sadness, and her once vibrant and beautiful "locks" are "cover'd with grey despair."

In the second stanza "Earth" addresses the Bard with bitter resentment. As a result of his invocation of an incarnate deity, she mistakes the Bard for the "Selfish father of men" who rules over "Earth" from afar by keeping her in spiritual darkness. This is the "ancient" Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament, the "Jealous" law-maker and punisher whom Stukeley links to the druids through Abraham and who Blake calls Nobodaddy. Blake aligns the druids with the Judaeo-Christian Nobodaddy, drawing on Stukeley's association, in order to emphasise the oppressive patriarchal practices of priestcraft in Britain. Earth's conflation of the Bard with the

druids reflects what was occurring in Blake's society, where Stukeley's romanticised representation of the druids valorised oppressive priestcraft.

In "To Nobodaddy" (E 471) Blake rebukes the "Father of Jealousy" whose "darkness and obscurity" produces the "words and laws" of doctrine. It is this doctrine that causes "the vigrous joys of youth" to be "[a]shamed of the light". Earth has accepted these "words and laws", and in this respect is responsible for her own imprisonment. She is bound by the sexual guilt and shame that enforce chastity, as well as a total distrust of the material world as that which is other than and opposed to the spiritual. Blake criticises these patriarchal religious laws which persecute the free expression of "joy" and "[l]ove" as a result of "jealous" and "selfish" possessiveness, in addition to a "fear" of loss of control. By promoting chastity and characterising sex as a shameful act, Nobodaddy demands that the "virgins of youth" reject their embodied existence and attempt to live as disembodied spiritual entities in the material world of Earth. In a similar way, Blake's Sunflower in "AH! SUNFLOWER" (E 25) "pine[s] away with desire" because it is focused on the "sweet golden clime" of a spiritual existence in heaven and dismisses its current physical life. Earth has fallen because she has accepted an abstracted and intangible deity, as well as a naively referential or representative language that denies the formative ability of language and can no longer recognise the poetry of the Bard.

It is significant that neither plate depicts the frozen world that Earth describes. If it is indeed Earth who reclines at the bottom of the "Introduction"[86], she does not appear to be bound with a "heavy chain" or frozen in place. Moreover, the plate of "EARTH'S Answer" is filled with the imagery of Eden, including the tempting fruit and the deceiving snake. The drooping vegetation suggests that this is the once lush vegetation of Eden that has now fallen. The snake on Blake's plate reverses religious convention and represents priestcraft rather than the temptation of Satan (Damon 365). It refers to the Priesthood's understanding of Eden where Adam and Eve were first made to be ashamed of their bodies and resist the fruit of sexual desire, and thus represents the

[86] This figure could be the Bard represented as an old man with a long beard and ensconced on a cloud and peering down on the Earth. The presence of the Bard here could be meant to connect "the voice of the Bard" with a human source. However, "EARTH'S Answer" indicates that the figure could be "Earth" gazing at the "Starry Jealousy" that imprisons her. The fact that the figure is turned away from the reader reinforces this reading, and the hair that flows from the chin of the figure may well be the long hair of a woman, whipped past her face in the strong winds of the night sky.

Priesthood as the deceiver of human beings. Nelson Hilton notes that Blake's use of the word "locks" is central to this poem, because it describes both the physical hair that clings to Earth's head and the mental shackles that keep Earth imprisoned. A third referent could also be Locke, who believed that human beings could not perceive spiritual essences in the material world and that poetic language was detrimental to communication and study (66-67). Earth's head, and by extension her consciousness, is emphasised in the first stanza when the head is "rais'd" and it is made clear that she has heard the Bard and will offer a reply. Following this, Earth describes her own imprisonment herself and the reader has access only to her conscious perspective. This suggests that Earth is mentally imprisoned, bowing to an imposed belief in chastity and the reasoned oppression of human energy, as she is trapped in the language of her oppressor. Her pleas to the Bard to free her are misplaced; the Bard may call to Earth, but she must respond with her own poetry that expresses her immanent creative spirit.

Earth is unable to see a way out of her imprisonment because her "thought crawls along" (*S* 43) in the Priesthood's abstracted language and she therefore cannot recognise the Bard's imaginative vision. This representative language considers meanings separately from the world and provides one fixed definition for terms, allowing no space for imagination or vision. Blake reconsiders and redefines the symbols of Eden and the druids, but Earth is able to consider the Bard's words only according to the lexicon of her society. As a result, Earth remains asleep or blind to her role in the world she creates. The failed conversation between Earth and the Bard is the first of many instances of disconnection in *Experience*, where exchanges fail to engender vision as a result of the subject/object binary implicit in representative language.

In "Infant Sorrow" (E 28), for instance, the newborn child receives no verbal interaction or encouragement from his parents. The child enters the world in a state of energetic leaping, "piping loud" like the Piper of *Innocence*. His cries are the result of his first interaction with the experienced world and issue from him instinctively in his uninhibited, "naked" human state. Unlike the Piper, however, the child finds no reciprocation or collaboration in this setting and is considered a potentially dangerous "fiend hid in a cloud". He is soon overpowered by his father and subdued by "swaddling bands" in order to civilise his primitive moans and to begin the process of integrating him into British society. His indiscriminate energy is at odds with the

sophisticated interior in which the child finds himself in. His parents are completely absent from the song's illumination, which depicts the child with arms and head upraised in a gesture of supplication and protest, resisting the nurse's efforts to calm him. Thus, the child's initial attempts to express his own emotion and thought freely are quashed, and he is forced to recognise the "dangerous" oppositional world he has just entered. He is immediately set against his father with whom he struggles, and as a result is unable to connect with either of his parents. He "sulk[s] upon [his] mothers breast", turning away from his parents in the same way as Earth turns away from the Bard. The setting of Blake's plate and the description of the infant's birth make it clear that the child has been born into a carefully controlled environment where he will be taught the "correct" use of language in order to repress his fallen human characteristics. The imagery in the poem is of restriction and control. The unbound inspiration of the child "On a cloud" in the "Introduction" becomes a "fiend hid in a cloud", separating its own existence from the world in which it finds itself in conflict with social convention.

The longer version of "Infant Sorrow" found in Blake's Notebook (E 797) continues the speaker's story into adulthood where he is taught by the Priesthood to separate his personal embodied experience from the world in which he lives according to the doctrines of the "holy book". As the child grows, he seeks out the sexual "delight" of the "fruit or blossoms" of the myrtle tree. Damon notes that the myrtle is both a symbol of sex, because of its associations with Venus, and a symbol of marriage. Therefore the myrtle becomes a symbol of a bound and officially sanctified sexual relationship (282). The "Priest" denies the speaker his "delight" and, as a Priestly "serpent", takes the speaker's "mirtle bright" for himself in secret. The speaker's youth is lost in jealousy and frustration. His physical energy finds release in his violent attack on the Priest, but as a result his innocent affections are tainted by selfish oppression and he can no longer hope to engage in embodied spiritual interaction. Similarly, the child in *Experience*'s "A Little BOY Lost" (E 28) is also not afforded the opportunity to develop his own voice or perspective. The "Priest" has "heard the child" but does not reply, and once again the child becomes a "fiend" whose personal perspective and creative energy must be stamped out. This also occurs when we meet the priests in "The GARDEN of LOVE" (E 26), where the cherished play and shared creative energy of the children and adults of "The Ecchoing Green" (E8) has become the macabre "Garden of Love". The priests of *Experience* systematically impose the

"Thou shalt not" laws of Nobodaddy to bind personal "joys and desires" and shut out imaginative vision.

By contrast, the child of "Infant Joy" (E 16) is encouraged to find its own voice and its inherent joyful energy is welcomed and celebrated in the pastoral setting of *Innocence*.[87] The mother and child engage in a reciprocal collaboration, born out of the same mutual recognition and shared emotion that is evident between the child and the Piper of the "Introduction". Their call and response is imbricated in the *flesh* of the experienced world through the *chiasm* of their embodied imaginative existence. The newborn infant's current state of being is innocent happiness, which Blake's poem suggests is inherent in human life. This is recognised by its mother and it is named "Joy". The playful slippage between "Joy" as noun and "joy" as verb results in the child's becoming the incarnate embodiment of spiritual joy. The definition of "joy" also develops over the course of the poem, defining both the child's "smile" and the mother's song, and therefore is defined by its active use rather than simply referring to an abstract and intangible concept. The child of *Innocence* is able to integrate itself into the world in which it finds itself, with all the implications of the *flesh* of the *visible* and the *invisible*, because of its mother's reverence for the child's own voice.

In her book *Vision and Disenchantment*, in which she compares Blake's *Songs* with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Heather Glen argues that Blake's illuminated books for children directly responded to popular eighteenth-century children's literature, creating songs that are free of the didactic instruction prevalent in texts published by authors such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld and John Bunyan. She explains that in songs such as "Infant Joy" Blake purposely resists providing a rational argument and instead engages the voice of his reader, encouraging their own imaginative interaction rather than dictating a viewpoint. In "Infant Sorrow" the child provides the reader with bitter reasoning to explain his need to "sulk", and in the longer version in Blake's Notebook to justify killing the priest, ignoring all perspectives but his own. The lack of poetic vision can be attributed to the fact that the song is written in the past tense, after the child has

[87] This poem is also discussed in Chapter 2 "The Imagination as Embodied Spiritual Consciousness and Intersubjective Society" pp.73-74. The subsequent discussion here is concerned with the task of naming and the use of language in the poem.

entered *Experience* and has withdrawn from a shared social world to focus on selfish desires. His distressing future seems fixed from the moment he is taught that the world is "not to be acted upon but reacted against" (Glen 181). Glen argues that by doing this "the Songs draw attention to the gap between actual experience and its fixed embodiment in language" and "to the way in which language may be used to mystify and control". However, the *Songs* also draw attention to the "liberating and creative potentiality" of language that can "continue to be realized" because of the human imagination (72 - 73). The rational language utilized by the "priesthood" can only be overcome by the language of poetic creation which recognises the shared vision of multiple voices and reinvigorates the imagination (69).

In "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow" it is clear that the linguistic system to which each child is introduced affects how that child understands and constitutes its own identity, and how each child constitutes its relation to other people and the experienced world. Blake, like Merleau-Ponty, emphasises the constituting power of language. In "Infant Joy", the child's consciousness is given form by language and it begins to cultivate a self-aware identity. Its joy becomes knowable to the child, and can be shared and developed through language. Here we can recognise Merleau-Ponty's assertion that language functions as "thought's body" and that language allows thoughts to "acquire intersubjective value" (*S* 84-85). Merleau-Ponty's assertion that language does not point outward to a meaning separate from a speaker's experience, and that the use of language is the process by which speakers express and constitute their own existence, is put into practice here. In "Infant Sorrow" the child's *parole*, or living experience of speech, is discouraged and his identity as well as his understanding of his experience are prescribed. This results in his imagination being stunted and renders him unable to recognise the vision or poetry of others.

Blake warns his readers against the dangers of prescriptive texts and narrowly referential language, in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" (E 31-32). Such texts do not allow for personal engagement and position one perspective above all others. Blake frequently moved this song between *Innocence* and *Experience* and it serves as a connecting poem that brings the two contrary perspectives together to describe an informed *Innocence*. The "youth of delight" that he summons in the text are the playful children of *Innocence*. They are called to come and "see" the

same “opening morn” described by the Bard in the “Introduction”. “Doubt” and “reason” are part of the darkness, the oppressive semiological system that obscures the unimpeded creation of fresh meanings, and have been chased away by the morning light. Understanding is no longer an “endless maze”, but a set of open relations to a dynamic life-world.

In his close examination of this song, Paul Miner notes that Blake may be referring to Lockian doubt in “The Voice of the Ancient Bard”.

> Locke in seeking Truth through doubt speaks ‘Of wrong Assent or Errour’ in his *Essay* (IV.20.6, p. 711), and he resolves that ‘They who are blind, *will always be led by those that see, or else fall into a Ditch*”, relating to Matthew (15:14) and Luke (6:39), where if ‘the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch’. (2)

Locke’s use of the metaphor of the seeing and the blind is meant to assure his readers that he is enlightened and able to lead others to understanding. Through the “Ancient Bard”, Blake undermines Locke’s claim to “truth”, and his investigative use of doubt as the basis of his enquiry, in his critique of all didactic texts that categorise knowledge and dismiss poetic language. Locke’s *Essay* becomes a “maze” of “Doubt”, rather than presenting the set of guiding principles he hoped it would offer, in consequence of the restrictions Locke places on perception and words: believing human beings to be incapable of spiritual sensibility and denouncing all poetic, or ambiguous, words which “perplex” (3). Lockian doubt “is fled”, and “clouds of reason” are dispersed. Readers are invited to experience enlightenment for themselves, rather than being prescribed a “truth” that they blindly accept. It is in traversing these seemingly enlightened texts that Man has “fallen” by being made to view humanity and the world from a limited perspective.

When Blake writes in “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” that “They stumble all night over bones of the dead”, he echoes the Proverb of Hell: “Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead” (*MHH* 7:6 E 35). In the Proverb Blake suggests that the traditions and teachings of those who have come before should not be passively accepted, but should be built upon and used as nourishment for new creations, in much the same way as Merleau-Ponty suggests that poetic insight should form new meanings from the established tradition of language. These past traditions can become a stumbling block when they are not ploughed over by fresh creative

minds. Ultimately, the Bard leaves the "youth of delight" with the experienced warning that those who believe themselves able "to lead others" are often those who "should be led", and calls on the youth to cultivate their own personal vision rather than accepting the perspective propounded by society.

In line with this, in the Preface to *Milton* (E 95) Blake calls on the artists of the "New Age" to create art that is not contingent on social trends and conventions but that is "true to [their] own Imaginations", in order to combat his society's exploitative or outworn use of language. For this is "the general malady & infection" that even "Shakespeare & Milton" were afflicted by, inheriting it "from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword". It is this malady of abstraction and prescription that Blake wishes the new artists to remedy. This can be accomplished only if artists create the "Worlds of Eternity", that is the living human worlds, that they inhabit and foreground the way in which human experience actively creates a shared living space. Then, at the beginning of the first book of *Milton*:

> Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song
> Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms
> Of terror and mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions
> Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
> His burning thirst & freezing hunger! Come into my hand
> By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of the right arm
> From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
> The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise (2: 1-8 E 96)

In this passage Blake once again responds to established literary convention, reworking the long-established tradition in which poets invoke the guiding inspiration of a holy muse.[88] Within the Christian tradition, the Muse is necessary because holy knowledge and inspiration are considered to be separate from the fallen human poet, and inspiration is required in order to transform his fallen language into poetry that expresses divine "truth". Thus, Milton's "Heav'nly Muse" sings to him (*PL* I 6) and Shakespeare calls for a "Muse of fire" that can "ascend" to the "brightest

[88] This tradition does not include only Christian poets. The Roman poets Virgil and Ovid also invoke a muse, as do their Greek counterparts, such as Homer. However, my discussion is focused specifically upon the invocation of a holy Christian muse.

heaven of invention" (*Henry V* Prologue 1: 1-2).[89] Through the Muse the poet's words take on the same creative power as God's words in *Genesis*.

Blake calls on inspiration to "come" to him, but it is not from a heavenly realm outside of himself or which he cannot enter. He describes inspiration as an embodied action, moving from his "Brain" into his "right arm" and then into his illuminated texts. The use of the words "Brain" and "Nerves" emphasizes the physical conduits of thought; Blake does not write "mind" or "imagination". In the brain "Paradise" is found – the place from which creative language originated, and where man is aligned with God. The "Daughters of Beulah" addressed by Blake are not representatives of a separate spiritual plane. Beulah is a state of the experienced world; the state of repose and uncontested creativity. In Beulah "Contrarieties are equally true" (*M* 30:1 E 129), and it offers a respite from the requirements of rationality and the rigorous conflict of contraries in Eternity. It is also the gateway from Ulro, the state in which the world is viewed as "poor mortal vegetations" (*M* 24: 24 E 120) or fallen matter, to Eternity. Damon argues that Beulah is "the realm of the Subconscious" (42), a creative dream state. Blake's invocation distinguishes his Muse as a state of inspiration into which he must enter, and is not a plea for the recitations of a spiritual messenger. Thus, Blake subverts the "priestly" Christian language that separates spiritual inspiration from human poetry.

In *Milton*, Blake is directly concerned with the negative effects of referential or objectified language and the restorative capacity of poetry and prophecy. He immediately calls his reader's attention to this by entitling his work *Milton a Poem*, foregrounding the poem's exploration of its own form and the relationship between poetry and the creative spiritual imagination. The figure on the title page, who is probably Milton but may also be Blake[90], splits the title word *Milton* into two halves and appears to be about to enter the poem. Standing in profile with his hand upraised, he seems to be leading the way into the poem and inviting readers to do the same. This represents the reading of poetry as a spatial activity that is both informed by, and contributes to,

[89] Shakespeare and Milton's treatment of the muse in these two works is not identical, but Blake's Preface collapses the two approaches together in order to make his argument.
[90] The figures in Copies A, B and D all have similar facial features and hair, resembling other representations of Milton. However, the figure in Copy C is noticeably different and his facial features are more compatible with Blake's.

the lived space of the experienced world, a dimension of human experience that humanity traverses. It also suggests that the poet is breaking through the surface appearance of language to consider its constituting form. The poem that follows offers a rewriting or a re-envisioning of Milton's poetry and his legacy as a poet. The choice to focus on Milton as a central British figure and to create a poem in which he becomes the hero underlies Blake belief in the creative and transformative power of poetic language.

The tension between established language (Merleau-Ponty's *langue*), and the active use of language as creative linguistic innovation (*parole*) is present throughout *Milton*. During his invocation of the "Muses who inspire the Poets Song", Blake outlines a need to "Tell also of the False Tongue" who sacrifices "Jesus" as "a curse, an offering, and an atonement" even while he is "the image of the Invisible God" (*M* 2: 10-13 E 96). This is immediately contrasted with the "Bards prophetic Song" that moves Milton to descend "into the deep" to redeem his "Sixfold Emanation"[91] (2: 19-23 E. 96). The Bard's song is proactive and inspires Milton's redemptive actions in the poem, while the "False Tongue" remains "vegetated" and achieves only abstraction, or the representation of things that have already occurred; the "False Tongue" represents "Memory" and the Bard's song embodies "Inspiration". This seemingly dualistic separation of oral song and written "vegetated" language is then brought together by the Bard's echoing refrain "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" (2: 25 E 96). As in Blake's "London" (E 26), the word "mark" is polysemous, meaning both 'to take account of the Bard's words aurally' and 'to record his words in the visual marks of writing'. Blake's Bard brings these two definitions together, suggesting that writing and orality need to be paired in the interest of poetic vision and supersede the simplistic separation of subjective experience and objective law. The Bard's song is engaged in the same creative labours as Los when he "Subdu[es] his Spectre" by creating the forms of his vision. Los moves from personal vision into public language, "Within labouring. beholding Without: Particulars to Generals" (*M* 3: 37-38 E 97); when his efforts to create form out of chaos are not successful, Satan comes into being. Satan represents the unformed and corruptible "abstract.

[91]This "Sixfold Emanation" is comprised of the six women from Milton's life: his three wives and his three daughters. These women are included in Blake's illuminations at the top of plate 16. Damon believes that this represents "the truth underlying [Milton's] errors about women" (307).

In plate 18 the "Shadowy Female" describes a garment of "Cruelty" that encompasses all the afflictions of the "Human Form". It is composed of fallen human failings including "sighs & heart broken lamentations", the "misery of unhappy Families" and the "dire sufferings poverty pain and woe" (*M* 18: 6-8 E 111). The garment she describes is an outer covering that conceals the divine human form and oppresses free human expression. In addition to having "Famine" as its "clasp", "Pestilence" as its "fringe" and "War" as its girdle, the garment

> ...will have Writings written all over it in Human Words
> That every Infant that is born upon the Earth shall read
> And get by rote as a hard task of a life of sixty years (*M* 18: 12-17 E 111)

The garment that the Shadowy Female describes is, in one of its aspects, the language attributed to fallen humanity, the language of the Priesthood. It is an external covering that obscures rather than reveals meaning, and that cannot offer any meaning beyond its own fallen material nature. These writings are "Human Words" and therefore do not have access to divine "truth". This hollow language is characterised as one of the afflictions of fallen humanity. Every infant must learn this language "by rote as a hard task" because it is a system of meaning inherently separate from human imagination. Blake's emphasis on the difficulty of learning these "Writings" suggests that their meanings are outside of human understanding and must be systematically inculcated. Moreover, this suggests that these "Writings" will contain the laws of Nobodaddy and the Priesthood, and that every child's imaginative energy will be "subdued" as with the child of "Infant Sorrow" and the boy of "A Little BOY Lost" in *Experience*. The Shadowy Female accepts these failings because she is the "material world" (Damon 369) and does not believe that Milton can accomplish his spiritual mission.

Orc's response to this lamentation also suggests that the Shadowy Female's garment is a danger to imaginative energy:

> Wherefore dost thou Create and Weave this Satan for a Covering[*?*]
> When thought attemptest to put on the Human Form, my wrath
> Burns to the top of heaven against thee in Jealousy and Fear
> Then I rend thee asunder, then I howl over thy clay and ashes
> With a Garment of Pity and Compassion like the Garment of God
> His garments are long sufferings for the Children of Men
> Jerusalem is his Garment & not thy Covering Cherub O lovely
> Shadow of my delight who wanderest seeking for the prey (*M* 18[20]: 30-38 E. 111-112).

The Shadowy Female perceives the "Human Form" to be a state of physical frailty, emotional hardship and moral corruption. When she attempts to "put on the Human Form", she distorts and oppresses the living human form that is divine embodied consciousness. She weaves "Satan", who is the abstract, as her "Covering" and creates a "Covering Cherub" that oppresses inspiration with material experience like the cherub that encumbers the Piper in the frontispiece to *Songs of Experience*. The "Covering Cherub" obscures spiritual understanding, as does the doctrine of the Priesthood, and prevents humanity from entering Eternity (*M* 37[41]: 60 E 138).

The revitalisation of language, and the task of reconnecting it to human experience is evident in Milton's call to "wash off the Not Human" and to "cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration" (*M* 41[48]: 1-7 E 142). In plate 40 Milton gives this as his reason for undertaking the journey into "Self-annihilation". He has become encumbered by "Negation", which is the elimination of the interaction of "Contraries". "Negation" therefore denies the interaction of meaning as a form of dialogue with the *flesh* of the world. He describes Negation as

> ...a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
> Spirit: a Selfhood, which must be put off and annihilated alway (*M* 40: 34-35 E 142)

In contrast to Priestly doctrine, this "Incrustation" is not a human failing but a false covering that restricts the spiritual energy and inspiration of Milton's embodied existence. Milton wishes to "wash off the not Human" (*M* 41[48]: 1 E 142) that has been imposed on him in order to "cast off the rotten rags of Memory" and the "filthy garments" of the thought-systems of "Bacon, Locke & Newton" and to be clothed in "Imagination" (*M* 41[48]: 4-6 E 142). Once again, Blake compares systematised knowledge and established referential language systems to a covering that attempts to hide or deny the human imagination; thereby restricting poetry and vision. Indeed, Milton wishes to "cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration" (*M* 41[48]: 7 E 142) because,

> These are the destroyers of Jerusalem...
> Who pretend to Poetry that they may destroy Imagination;
> By imitation of Natures Images drawn from Remembrance
> These are the Sexual Garments, the Abomination of Desolation
> Hiding the Human Lineaments as with an Ark & Curtains (*M* 41: 21-26 E 142-143)

Blake's "Jerusalem" is both his vision of an inspired and collaborative society, as well as the poetic city he must create in his great epic *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*[92] as he acknowledges in the Preface to *Milton*.[93] Memory is aligned with referential language because it refers to or *re*presents events of the past. Memory is passive reproduction, whilst Imagination is active creation. Therefore, it is opposed to the creative efforts of "Jerusalem" because it does not recognise the formative role of consciousness in the experienced world.

In *Milton* the "Sons of Los" are the artisans, the artists, and the poets who forge the world by wielding humanity's creative spiritual imagination. In plate 28 Blake describes the poets' constitution of the world through language:

> Some Sons of Los surround the Passions with porches of iron and silver
> Creating form and beauty around the dark regions of sorrow,
> Giving to airy nothing a name and a habitation
> Delightful! With bounds to the Infinite putting off the Indefinite
> Into most holy forms of Thought: (such is the power of inspiration)
> They labour incessant; with many tears and afflictions:
> Creating the beautiful House for the piteous sufferer. (28: 1-7 E 125)

Urizen's seemingly immovable and unchangeable "Book / Of eternal brass" (*BU* 4:32-33 E 72) has become the "iron and silver" the "Sons of Los" take up as their creative medium. The image of these artisans labouring against the "stubborn structure of Language" (*J* 36: 59 E 183) in order to recast the metal by using their creative energy to form new meaning is particularly resonant. This is because it is an image of Blake's work as an etching artist and his use of copper plates in his illuminated printing. The "iron and silver" is shaped into "porches" that "surround the Passions" to create an outline that distinguishes the "Passions" from chaotic energy, shaping the "Passions" in the experienced world. A "porch" is an outside covering that often forms a covered approach to a doorway; this commonly refers to the covered entranceways to English churches. Thus, by creating these "porches" or beautiful "forms", the "Sons of Los" create an arena or "House" of meaning that is traversed by humanity's spiritual consciousness.

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[92] These are just two of many philosophical, spiritual and poetic concerns that inform the complex intersection of ideas in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

[93] "I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land." (1: 13-16 E 95-96)

The “Sons of Los” save human beings from the undefined and unknown “dark regions of sorrow” by creating this “House for the piteous sufferer”. In “[g]iving to airy nothing a name and a habitation” the “Sons” constitute or shape a human understanding of the experienced world; without this creative act the world would remain “nothing” and would be unknowable. Thus, the “Sons of Los” work to accomplish what Los labours to do in *Jerusalem*, which is to save humanity from the “Dumb Despair” (36: 60 E 183) of knowing and saying “nothing”. Their labour is “Delightful” or joyful creation and is contrary to the unformed “dark regions of sorrow”. The “Infinite” and the “Indefinite” are also contraries. The “Indefinite” is ill-defined or chaotic and lacks meaning, often being confused with the “Infinite”. However, infinity in Blake’s mythology is not the unending continuation of time; the “Infinite” is outside of chronological or measurable time and is the state of constant collaboration or communal creation. The “Infinite” is the polysemous interplay of meaning that is implicated in the *flesh* of the world and expressed through language. The “Indefinite” is put off like a cloak by the “power of inspiration” (the “incessant labour” of creative energy from the embodied spirit) to reveal words to be the “most holy forms of Thought”. As the “holy forms” of human thoughts words act as the *flesh* of thoughts, bridging the *invisible* and the *visible* so that these dimensions of experience are inter-implicated in order to constitute the sensible and knowable world.

The final events of *Milton* offer one of Blake’s most powerful images of the connection between the divine chiasmic body and the *flesh* of language. The abstract “Starry Eight” take form as “One Man Jesus the Saviour”. Then Ololon, Milton’s “Sixfold Emanation” or the “Six-fold Miltonic female” that he has redeemed through self-annihilation, descends as a cloud that envelops Jesus:

> Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felphams Vale
> In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thundering
> ...The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
> Written within and without in woven letters: & the Writing
> Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression (42[49]: 7-14 E 143)

Ololon descends from ethereal abstract existence into Blake's physical furnace of creative production in "Felphams Vale" (42[49]: 7 E. 143) to become the physical body of Jesus;[94] she transforms into the "Clouds of blood" that allow Jesus to "enter into Albion's bosom" (42[49]: 20-21). This Garment facilitates Jesus' entry into the visible world of human experience, rather than encumbering him like the garment described by the Shadowy Female. When Jesus enters into Albion's bosom clothed in flesh, Blake is describing the whole of humanity's entrance into the world as embodied spiritual consciousnesses. Part of the "woven" form of this garment of flesh is the language of thought written "within" and the language of speech written "without". Merleau-Ponty does not believe in the existence of the separation between thought and language that is implied in Blake's image of the distinction between "within" and "without". However, like Merleau-Ponty, Blake's image describes the use of language as a creative act that proceeds from human experience. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood" (19:13) for his marriage to the world. Clothed in this vesture, Jesus is "called The Word of God" and is the physical incarnation of the heavenly "voice of mighty thunderings" (19:6). Thus, the divine is joined to the physical world as the constituting "Word". The spirit of poetry, imagination and prophecy, the "Divine Revelation", becomes "Litteral expression" as the incarnate body.

Blake's image of the garment symbolises the ambiguity of humanity's existence as a chiasmic body that integrates and crosses-over between objective and subjective experience. In his essay on Blake's garment imagery,[95] Morton Paley argues that the image of the garment suggests that both language and the body facilitate and simultaneously limit humanity's engagement with the experienced world. Without a body, the spirit becomes a destructive spectre; but the body can become restrictive and bind the spirit through physical limitations such as unfulfilled desire. The dangers of giving either body or mind priority can be seen throughout Blake's works, not least in *Experience* in figures such as "Earth". Objective limits placed upon the body and language simultaneously oppress and restrict spiritual consciousness, and therefore works of the spiritual

[94] This is similar to the descent of the Angel of Prophecy in the Book of Revelation "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow *was* upon his head, and his face *was* as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire" (10:1).
[95] "The Figure of the Garment in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*." *Blake's Sublime Allegory*. Eds. Stuart Curren and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1973. 119-40.

imagination are able to work against these limitations. Jesus' appearance in the woven garment unites the "Divine" with the "Litteral" and physical, mental and spiritual experience are shown to be indivisible in the chiasmic human body. It is in this manner that Blake's "energetic exertion of [his] talent" as a visionary poet is able to unite "Thunder of thought & flames of fierce desire" (J 3: 6 E 145) in the flesh of language and the body. Such acts of creation seek to inspire similar acts such as "to love, to see, to converse with daily as man with man" (J 3 E 145), and thus to remind humanity of their constitutive role as a community of embodied spiritual consciousnesses mutually involved in the creation of the world they experience.

Blake's illuminated texts consistently remind the reader that "Every Word and Every Character [is] Human" and that the visionary or imaginative "Translucence or Opakeness" of the text varies "as the Organs of Perception vary" (J 98: 35-38 E 258). Language emerges as the "body" of thought, not simply the vehicle of meaning but the *flesh* of the imagination that is involved in a consistent intersubjective creation and recreation of humanity's "Worlds of Thought" (J 5:19 E 147). For Blake, therefore, language does not reflect or represent an objective world, or an abstract world of ideas. Language becomes the medium by which the world is shaped and understood, thus shaping how the world is known and experienced. It is for this reason that Blake can assert that "Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race" (J 3 E 146) and state that his aim is to dispel "the notion that a man has a body distinct from his soul" (MHH 14 E 39) by printing illuminated books that invite his readers to traverse language and constitute meaning through their embodied spiritual existence as *flesh*.

Conclusion

"If someone says 'I have a body', he can be asked 'Who is speaking here with this mouth?'"
— Ludwig Wittgenstein[96]

"But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human Form
Because we were combind in Freedom & holy Brotherhood"
— William Blake[97]

Responding to the promptings of some postmodern studies of Blake, as well as Edward Larrissey's suggestion that a consideration of the "phenomenological idea of the bodily situatedness of the subject" (268) may offer a constructive contribution to contemporary Blake scholarship, this dissertation has presented a phenomenological examination of William Blake's account of the imagination and his understanding of language. While other studies have briefly mentioned some of the useful comparisons that may be made between Blake and phenomenology[98], this study offers a detailed examination of Blake's spiritual philosophy in relation to the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

There has been a large body of recent Blake criticism that has applied twentieth-century theoretical models to his work in an effort to understand his unique mythology, his attitude towards language and art, as well as his account of human consciousness. The essays published in *Critical Paths: Blake and the Argument of Method* (1987) mark a shift in Blake studies. These accounts derive new approaches to Blake by considering his ideas in relation to theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, thus presenting alternative readings to the established scholarship of Frye, Erdman, Damon, and others. Dan Miller, for instance, offers a deconstructionist reading that examines the problems entailed in an idealist consideration of Blake. Thomas A. Vogler's contribution presents a revisionist "Un-Reading" of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* that draws upon Foucault in order to situate Blake's representation of Oothoon in relation to eighteenth-century attitudes to sexuality. This trend is continued in later publications such as *Palgrave Advances: William Blake Studies* (2006). In the introduction to this collection, Nicholas Williams provides a brief overview of the

[96] *On Certainty* §244.
[97] *M* 32[35]: 13-16 E 131
[98] These studies are discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, p.16.

history of Blake criticism, identifying the emergence of two different schools of thought in twentieth-century scholarship. The first group includes the "systemizers", as represented by S. Foster Damon and Northrup Frye, who examine Blake's works as an "internally coherent" system of beliefs based in a complex mythology.[99] For these scholars, "Blake's poetic goals are the highest imaginable: to describe humanity's relationship to the divine" (11). The second are the "historizers", who investigate Blake's thought in light of the social and political environment in which he created his illuminated poetry. The most influential study of this type is probably David Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954). The essays in the *Palgrave* collection respond to current concerns in Blake scholarship, which arise "in the wake of Frye and Erdman" to consider the ways in which Blake's system and his socio-political context are mutually implicated in his work (19). These contemporary investigations highlight changes in the literary-critical landscape by engaging with postmodern approaches to the text, as well as the possibilities offered by such theoretical perspectives as gender studies or psychoanalysis.

Much of this critical material, then, explicates Blake's attitude towards eighteenth-century tropes and ideas by providing a new theoretical approach to his works. For instance, Helen Bruder's study situates Blake in relation to certain sexual debates that were current in his society, but also reads his treatment of gender through the lens of contemporary feminist theory. She believes that "a concern with the social construction of gender identity is not an anachronism foisted on [Blake] by feminist critics but is, rather, a profound preoccupation that [they] share with him" (135). Angela Esterhammer is concerned with Blake's approach to language. In the *Palgrave* collection, she examines Blake's work in relation to speech-act theory, locating her investigation in terms of recent post-structuralist readings of Blake, in order to explain his attitude towards "the traditional language of English poetry" (64). Mark Lussier's contribution is to reassess Blake's attitude towards science, which earlier Blake criticism has read as primarily hostile. He considers Blake's treatment of science in light of contemporary theory in Physics in order to offer a more nuanced reading of Blake's complex view of the sciences.

[99] This is briefly discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, p.9.

My investigation contributes to a contemporary rereading of Blake by introducing the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty as a means to clarify the complex relations between his spiritual philosophy, the empiricism of John Locke and the idealism of George Berkeley. The existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides an apt lens through which to examine Blake because both thinkers situate themselves in tension with the ideas of empiricism and idealism, and both attempt to reconsider human experience outside of the dualistic categories of mind and body. The philosophies of Locke and Berkeley were widely read in Britain during Blake's lifetime and offered important contributions to the ideological environment in which he lived and worked. Blake's direct engagement with Locke and Berkeley reveals his resistance to the separation of mental and physical experience that underlies their respective philosophies and outlines his belief in an embodied spiritual imagination. Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodied consciousness provides fresh insight into Blake's account of the "Imagination or the Human Eternal Body" (*Berk* E 663), which describes the human "body" and "mind" as two aspects of one creative consciousness or incarnate "Soul" (*MHH* 4 E 34). This comparative examination of Blake and Merleau-Ponty thus reveals the problematic consequences of Locke and Berkeley's dualistic understanding of human experience, which positions the human subject outside of the experienced world as a spectator. For both Blake and Merleau-Ponty, this results in the subjugation of the objective world to the gaze of a perceiving subject and the hierarchical distancing of the experience of others from the personal experience of the self. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's account of the conscious body locates the perceiving subject *within* the experienced world, which is seen to be composed of the co-existent interactions of embodied subjects. His examination of the ontological position of the embodied illuminates the ways in which Blake's account of the imagination also encompasses a belief in an intersubjective world mutually created by a community of perceiving subjects.

The objections to dualistic interpretations of human experience raised by Blake and Merleau-Ponty are encapsulated by Wittgenstein's aphorism: *"If someone says 'I have a body', he can be asked 'Who is speaking here with this mouth?'"* The quoted statement implies a fundamental separation between physical existence and mental reflection. The word "have" also suggests that the mind possesses the body as an object, which carries out the commands put to it by a thinking self. This view therefore privileges the mind, and assumes that human identity is predicated upon

a mental existence that acts through the mechanical processes of the body. Furthermore, this mentally perceiving self is predicated upon an assumed possession of an objective world. However, Wittengenstein's "I" can make a statement about possessing a body only because he or she is situated in a physical world *as* a conscious body that is capable of physically articulating certain thoughts. By speaking of "having" a body instead of *being* a conscious body, the speaker suggests that he or she is a disembodied mind. Blake and Merleau-Ponty both assert the body's central role in human experience and in the development of human consciousness, seeking to dismantle hierarchized separations between body and mind. Moreover, Blake recognises the problematic consequences of such an attitude towards the body and the attempt to live as a disembodied mental spectator of the world. This view insidiously distorts any understanding of lived human engagements, because it permits the abstraction of the value and meaning found in experience and their attribution to an external or abstract source. It also positions other human beings as objects whose individual experiences are disengaged from the conscious self. This disconnection between self and other leaves human society open to the exploitation and oppression in which a single "I" may assume dominance over an objective world; thus the ability to form collaborative and dynamic human communities is lost.

A number of well-known commentaries have focused on Blake's central idea of the "Divine Body" (*Laocoön E 273)*. Two of the most notable studies of this kind are Anne K. Mellor's *Blake's Human Form Divine* (1974), and Tristanne J. Connelly's *William Blake and the Human Body* (2002). Although these two studies adopt very different approaches, with Mellor focusing on Blake's iconography and his changing attitudes to the body and Connelly examining the cultural influences that served to shape Blake's consideration of the body, both uncover its paradoxical role as both physically limiting and the facilitator of all interaction with the world. Connelly writes that although the physical body "binds us in muscles and fibres", it "also plays an important part in making sympathy possible" (67). This is because the limitations of the body enable the self to identify with the experiences and physical hardships of others, and therefore to form human connections based on sympathy. Mellor's study considers these fundamental questions:

> How can the individual achieve the divinity of which Blake believed he was capable while bound within a finite, mortal body? Contrarily, how can the divine

> artistic imagination survive and manifest itself in the mortal world, if not in bounded perceptible forms? (92)

This dissertation offers its own considered contribution to such scholarly discussions about the significance of the body in Blake's spiritual philosophy. The dialogue that is established between Blake and Merleau-Ponty offers a fresh perspective on the body's existence as both a finite organic form and a vital aspect or "portion" (*MHH* 4 E 34) of the divine imagination. Moreover, the conceptual understanding that arises from embodied perception in the "human form divine" is investigated through an examination of Merleau-Ponty's account of the *flesh*. This notion encompasses an "invisible" dimension of each human being's existence as a conscious form that is implicated in a nexus of material, sensory and intellectual relations with the world. Language emerges as the *visible* or knowable gesture that facilitates the communication of individual understanding arising from the embodied experience of a perceiving subject. Merleau-Ponty's examination of *langue* and *parole* reveals that the dialectical system of language is maintained by the conventions of a community of speakers. However, it also facilitates the expression of personal understanding or vision, and brings this vision into being with the personal experiences of others. When this account of language is considered in relation to Blake, it becomes clear that the experience of the "Divine Body" or human imagination culminates in its expression in language, which communicates one's divine vision and sets up a dialogue of ideas with a human community.

The examination of language as the *visible* body of the imagination in the third chapter of this dissertation builds upon several studies of Blake that directly address his approach to language. Nelson Hilton's *Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words* (1983) comments that for Blake the "word becomes more than the mark of an idea; it becomes an eternal living form with its own personality, family and destiny" (3). Robert Essick's *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (1989) locates Blake within the long history of debates concerning the nature of the linguistic sign. These philosophical discussions attempt to explicate the relationship between language and consciousness and to consider whether language has, or ever had, "an ontologically intimate relationship to the world" (Wilke 670). This dissertation carefully assesses the implications of viewing language as a fundamentally representational sign system, rather than regarding linguistic endeavour as formative and creative. A representational view of language assumes that

language can only reflect or represent value or meaning external to it, thus treating language as straightforwardly referential. The deficiencies of such an account are exposed by Wittgenstein's speaker, whose statement is predicated upon the assumption that he is disconnected from a world of *things* to which his words refer. Contrary to this, a creative understanding of language views it as the formative medium of personal expression that arises from the interaction between the experiencing self and a meaning-laden world. It therefore views words as the embodiment of concretely anchored conceptual constructs that are implicated in the interaction between self and world. Blake's belief in his role as a prophetic poet is based upon a creative understanding of language. Traditionally, prophets have spoken on behalf of a divinity who has dictated visions imbued with a transcendent "truth". Blake, however, believed in an immanent divinity, so that prophecy becomes "the words of the Inspired Man" (*M* 40[46]: 29 E.142) who seeks to bring a personal vision into being in the world. The poet-prophet brings this vision into being through formative linguistic expression and seeks to inspire the same vision in others.

Blake continued to define and nuance his account of the "Imagination" throughout his work, calling it the "Poetic Genius" (*AR* E 1), "Divine Body" " (*Laocoön* E 273) and the "Human *Existence* itself" (*M* 32[35]: 32 E 132).[100] This complex definition is elucidated by a comparison with the *existential* phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, which considers the ontological position of human experience, one's being-in-the-world, as the basis of consciousness, language and aesthetic production. Merleau-Ponty's argument that consciousness cannot function separately from its embodied existence that both defines its limits and gives it experiential purchase is shared by Blake's account of the "Divine body" or human imagination. Moreover, the "bodily situatedness" of the perceiving subject that Merleau-Ponty describes locates the "human form divine" *within* a communal landscape in which self and other are mutually implicated as co-creators of a shared world. For,

> [t]hrough phenomenological reflection [one] discover[s] vision, not as a 'thinking about seeing,' to use Descartes expression, but as a gaze at grips with a visible world, and that is why for me there can be another's gaze. (*PoP* 409)

In addition, Merleau-Ponty's consideration of the relationship between language and the structures of human consciousness, as well as the central role that language plays in the

[100] My emphasis.

development of human community, serves to illuminate Blake's belief that "Poetic Genius" is vital for the development of communal vision. The body and language exist as the living media, or *flesh*, of the imagination, which facilitate a creative exchange between a perceiving self and a shared life-world. Within this framework, my study underscores Blake's belief that one requires "the liberty of both body and mind to exercise the divine arts of the imagination" (*J* 77 E 231), and that "the Human Imagination" is the "Divine Vision...[i]n which Man liveth Eternally" (*M* 32 [35]: 17-18 E 132).

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