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The Code of War:
William Blake’s Secret Language

by

Carolyn Mae Kohan

B.A., University of Alberta, 1978
M.A., University of Alberta, 1979

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the Department of English

We accept this dissertation as conforming
to the required standard

Dr. Thomas R. Cleary, Supervisor (Department of English)

Dr. G. Kim Blank, Departmental Member (Department of English)

Dr. John Money, Outside Member (Department of History)

Dr. Stephen Cox, External Examiner (Department of Literature,
University of California, San Diego)

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

Beneath the rather comical-looking serpent slithering across the bottom of plate 72 of Jerusalem, William Blake has engraved in mirror-writing the cryptic but decidedly bitter sentiment, “Women the comforters of Men become the Tormenters & Punishers.” If this were not misogynist enough, later in the poem Blake’s Spectre warns someone (it is difficult to say exactly who) that “you are under the dominion of a jealous Female” (J88:41), and that “The Man who respects Woman shall be despised by Woman” (J88:37). Meanwhile, the female Enitharmon justifies the Spectre’s sexual paranoia by mocking the male Los’s loss of liberty through feminine entrapment, telling him, “You are Albions Victim, he has set his Daughter in your path” (J87:24). “This is Womans World,” Enitharmon triumphantly concludes, warning Los “in scorn & jealousy” (J88:22) that she “will Create secret places / And the masculine names of the places Merlin & Arthur” (J88:17-18).

Such pieces of textual evidence have convinced a good many Blake critics that the poet, psychologically shaky at best, really did fear and loathe women—at least when he was not veering to the other extreme and idolizing them. But other critics, aware of the forked tongue with which Blake’s “Serpent Reasonings” (KG) typically express themselves, suspect that something more subtle is going on beneath the surface of these undulating lines. It is one thing, for example, to create secret places bearing the masculine names “Merlin” and “Arthur,” quite another to create the places by creating the names.

This dissertation argues that Blake suffered from a misogyny not literal but allegorical, a misogyny better understood as logolatry—that is, the unreasonable worship of words and an excessive regard for verbal truth. Casting himself in the role of a heroic “Soldier who fights for Truth” (J38:41) and yet haunted by the fear of seeing his thoughts betrayed by the words to which they have been entrusted, Blake takes up arms in an “Intellectual Battle” (FZ3:3) or “Mental Fight” (M1:13) against a dark sea of metaphysical and epistemological troubles, fiercely determined to protect his mind from being read and perverted in its intentions by his intellectual enemies, those whose ignorance of the holy human spirit (particularly its sense of humour) doom them to
membership in what Milton would call an unfit audience. Chief among Blake’s defensive weapons is his “Code of War” (SL3:30), a secret method of writing erected upon a misused and badly abused body of English nouns. The “stubborn structure of th[is] Language” (J36:59), likely worked out before 1785, has remained intact ever since Blake began imposing his beliefs on the largely indifferent world, beginning with the publication of *There is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions are One* in 1788.

Looking back at the *Jerusalem* passages quoted above, we ought to see the dazzling names Albion, Los, Spectre, and Enitharmon as what Enitharmon herself says they are: “secret places” for Blake’s thoughts, always vulnerable to misinterpretation, to go and hide. But so too are the plain English words woman and man, daughter and female—in Blake’s hands, even these are transformed into code names, redefined in obedience to the fearful structural symmetry of his code of war. In Blake a “woman” is not a woman, and a “man” is not a man (but there is a male character named “Antamon” who would tell us, if we would only rearrange his letters, that indeed he is “not a man”). Blake’s Human Form Divine is the personification of something other than what it appears to be, and this fact has rendered his poetry virtually unintelligible to generations of readers, with the exception of those hardened sufferers who manage to find even provisional ways of turning their verbal tormentors and punishers back into the comforters they were originally intended to be.

Examiners:

Dr. Thomas R. Cleary, Supervisor (Department of English)

Dr. G. Kim Blank, Departmental Member (Department of English)

Dr. John Money, Outside Member (Department of History)

Dr. Stephen Cox, External Examiner (Department of Literature, University of California, San Diego)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References and Abbreviations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART I: Blake’s Intellectual Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: The Method of Marking Words Well</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The War of Contraries</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Code of War</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Reasoning Enemy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marking Contraries: Truth and Error</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Imaginative Truth</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART II: The Roots of Blake’s System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Contrary Qualities of the Sun’s Light: Negative Rational Truth and Positive Imaginative Error</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Contrary Quantities of Thought: Life, Death, and “The Fly”</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sleep, Dreams, and Laws of Sacrifice for Sin: The Contraries Reconciled in Three Classes of Men</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. The Vegetated Tongue, the Burning Fire of Thought, and the Rock of Truth

12. "But What May Woman Be?": The Fourfold Human Form of Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic

13. The Mathematic Power of Systems

14. Compelling the Reasoner to Demonstrate in the Furnaces of Reductive Affliction

15. Defining the Divine Vision: The Form of a Perfect Whole

16. Organizing Particulars: The Tree that a Wise Man Categorically Sees

Works Cited
**LIST OF FIGURES**

2. *The Book of Urizen* (copy G), plate 11. 188
5. *Milton*, plate 33. 299
6. *Europe a Prophecy*, frontispiece. 303
8. *Songs of Innocence*, title-page. 395
9. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, title-page. 400
10. *Jerusalem*, plate 70. 406
11. *Songs of Experience*, title-page. 413
12. *Illustrations of The Book of Job*, plate 14. 526
14. *Jerusalem*, plate 54. 530
15. *Jerusalem*, plate 75. 534
16. *America a Prophecy*, plate 5. 644
19. The Tree of Thought. 668
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REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations from Blake's works are from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman with commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Doubleday, newly revised edition, 1988). Parenthetical references include the abbreviated title followed by plate (or manuscript page) number of Blake’s original work, then (where possible) line numbers, followed by the page number of the Erdman edition (abbreviated as “E”). In reproducing quotations, I have followed the editor’s use of typographical symbols as set out under the heading “Symbols” (Exxiv).

I have used the following abbreviations for Blake’s titles:

Am America, a Prophecy
ARO All Religions are One
AugI Auguries of Innocence
BA The Book of Ahania
BL The Book of Los
BT The Book of Thel
BU The Book of Urizen
DC A Descriptive Catalogue
EG The Everlasting Gospel
Eur Europe, a Prophecy
FR The French Revolution
FZ Vala, or The Four Zoas
GP For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise
J Jerusalem
KG The Keys of the Gates
M Milton
Marg Marginalia
MHH The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
NNR[a] There is No Natural Religion, part [a]
NNR[b] There is No Natural Religion, part [b]
PA Public Address
SE Songs of Experience
SI Songs of Innocence
SL The Song of Los
VDA Visions of the Daughters of Albion
VLJ A Vision of the Last Judgment


Quotations from the Bible are from the Authorized (King James) Version.
Part I: Blake’s Intellectual Context

1. Introduction: The Method of Marking Words Well

“Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation”: no less than seven times in *Milton* (2:25, 3:5, 4:20, 7:16, 7:48, 9:7, 11:31; see also 4:26), the voice of the Bard issues this stern, if hyperbolic, warning, presumably to Milton as well as to “the Sons of Albion” with whom he is “sitting at eternal tables”—and, we are told, “all sat attentive to the awful man” (M2:22-24; E96). The very attentive among Blake’s readers may be prompted by the insistent repetition of the command to recall a similar one, the opening line of the “Introduction” to the *Songs of Experience*: “Hear the voice of the Bard!” (SE E18). In *Milton*, too, Milton commands Ololon (a female figure whose fluid identity is a matter of some critical debate) to “Obey . . . the Words of the Inspired Man” (M40:29; E142).

Now, if the Bard’s and Milton’s words are also Blake’s, or if Blake can be accurately characterized as either a bard or an inspired man, then we as surely as the Sons of Albion or Milton or Ololon are being exhorted to pay close attention, but to words we are already engaged in reading. And why? No doubt because Blake’s language, however inspired, has a disconcerting tendency to assume tortuous forms, the lamentable offspring of some dark and bitter mental anguish. Indeed, his speech sometimes seems designed more to torment its listeners or readers than to illuminate—or save—them. Blake is a pretty awful man himself, and often painfully hard to follow.

Occasionally, however, he takes the trouble to justify his unorthodox mode of discourse. His querulous response to a dull man’s complaint about the obscurity of his
designs—"You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care" (E702)—is usually taken to extend to his poetry as well. But his pedagogical method places him, he says, in the company of the "wisest of the Ancients"—Moses, Solomon, Aesop, Homer, Plato—who "considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act" (E702). More germane for literary critics is his Proverb of Hell about roads, which opens with a curious ironic scribal error:

Improvent makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius. (MHH10; E38)

Pondering this fourteen-word statement as a whole, one begins to wonder whether the initial misspelling of improvement is an honest mistake.¹ If it is, then it becomes our readerly duty to add the missing letters and straighten the word out, a silent improvement—"a process, change, or addition, by which the value or excellence of a thing is increased" (OED)—of the erroneous improvent. But if we take the latter half of the compound sentence to heart ("but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius"), we may think twice and revise our opinion, deeming it wiser to leave the word as written, unimproved, and thus preserve what looks to be a satirical intention lurking behind both its deviation from the orthographically straight course when in company with words about straightening roads and its return to upright righteousness when lodged in an assertion about the genius of leaving them crooked.

This morally ambiguous reading brings out a rather cruel implication of the Proverb: that all of us poor fools who have spent countless hours trying to straighten out
Blake's stubbornly resistant text may have wasted our time. And although we may have felt encouraged by some slight improvement in our initial confusion to go on, or even finally deluded into thinking we had got hold of some theory or other of tremendous explanatory power, the fact is that Blake's text would have been better off left alone—not unread, of course, but unaltered (and certainly not assumed to be the product of inattention, carelessness, or naiveté). “Consider God's handiwork,” advises the Preacher: “who can straighten what He hath made crooked?” (Eccles. 7.13). But godlike genius, Blake seems to think, gives one license to err deliberately, perhaps even (who knows? this is a Proverb of Hell) maliciously. Perhaps he deliberately misspells improvent, leaving it for the pedants to correct by putting the missing “me” back in. For without that “me,” the Proverb is the work of Blake's genius; with it, it becomes ours (or “mine”), its meaning not materially changed, perhaps, and certainly not destroyed, but nevertheless no longer Blake's because lacking a crucial semantic dimension: the subtle irony, the satirical touch, that is the mark of genius. (“The Errors of a Wise Man make your Rule,” advises one Blakean epigram, “Rather than the Perfections of a Fool” [E510]).

Dan Miller argues that as “maxims for travelers” the Proverbs of Hell imply that, “though roads and methods are necessary, the most obvious and common way will, of necessity, miss its destination” (“Introduction” 2-3). Although “rarely taken as guides for reading Blake,” the Proverbs advance “a method of just indirection” (2), maintains Miller, referring in particular to the Proverb about straight and crooked roads but also to a couple of others: “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” and “If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise” (MHH7; E35-36). Reading these, Miller concludes that, while “a reader faced with texts as inherently difficult as Blake's will find
that a celebration of indirect, transgressive ways only compounds the difficulty" (2),
Blake’s own upholding of “excessiveness and crookedness” as “methodological virtues”
means that “the best way [to read him] will be the most self-complicating path” (14).

But is excessiveness per se a methodological virtue? While the Proverb assures
us that the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom, it does not say it arrives there. If
indulging in excess is folly, and if persisting in it causes the fool to become wise, that is
not the same as saying that persisting in folly is being wise: just as there is a distinction
between leading to and arriving at, there is another between being and becoming.
Perhaps the fool actually becomes wise when, having sufficiently persisted in his folly, he
realizes he has gone astray and turns back; perhaps he arrives at the palace only after he
makes an about-face, realizing that his persistence has taken him too far. Perhaps the
folly of excess is a necessary error, but an error nonetheless. After all, another Proverb
insists that “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough”
(MHH9; E37), and knowing “enough” may be what Blake means by wisdom.

The final Proverb of Hell gives us a choice between “Enough! or Too much”
(MHH10; E38), and if we choose to regard the excess of “too much” as the only
methodological virtue, we may blind ourselves to its real virtue, which is to function as a
foil for “enough,” our true destination, at which we cannot arrive without first having
erred—as Blake literally does when he begins by misspelling improvement. While excess
refers generally to the realm we enter when we overstep a limit, to err is to deviate from
the right or intended course. So if the right course leads to the limit (“Enough!”),
deviating from the former may involve overstepping the latter—ignorantly, of course.
Since to err is also simply to miss or fail to strike a mark, one might as easily err by
overshooting as falling short of the mark, and the folly of excess, the *road* of excess, would thus be an erring course that misses the mark by going beyond it, or perhaps deliberately transgressing it.

Similarly, while it may be foolish to try to straighten out a road of genius and wise to leave it crooked or even, as Miller suggests, to complicate it further, still, persisting in trying to improve it may prove to be a strategic necessity. Crookedness may be methodologically virtuous only because it *invites* improvement, the text crying out in its pathetic state of obliquity and imperfection for someone to straighten its lines out, to mark all its words well, including its misspellings, erratic punctuation, emphatic capitalizations, grammatical oddities, ambiguous pronoun references, syntactical derailments, graphic metamorphoses, and, perhaps most remarkable, its excessively strange (and frankly ludicrous) proper names. After all, the phonemic "me" needed to improve *improvent* may be a subtle sign of the poet's recognition that his work needs me, the individual reader, to gauge both its crookedness and its genius. Or perhaps it is intended to reassure the reader that he is himself the final authority on Blake's meaning, for if what "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" implies at the close of the *Songs of Experience* is true, the guidance of travellers who have gone on ahead, no matter how confident they are in their knowledge of the way, may prove unreliable:

> Folly is an endless maze,  
> Tangled roots perplex her ways,  
> How many have fallen there!  
> They stumble all night over bones of the dead;  
> And feel they know not what but care;  
> And wish to lead others when they should be led.  

(SE E32)
For we must consider one last thing: a crooked road may deviate from the right or intended course simply by turning back in the direction from whence it came, in the obsolete sense of *crook*: “to bend or turn out of the straight course, or from the direct meaning or intention; to pervert, ‘twist’” (OED). To qualify as *crooked*, a road of genius may be extremely “curved, bent, twisted, tortuous, wry,” but on the other hand it may have only “(one or more) bends or angles” (OED)—and if it has only one bend in it, if it simply turns back, we should have to pronounce it “crookt.” Fortunately, such a road will be “without improvement,” for if the straight road proceeds right, continually adding to or increasing its value or excellence, a crooked one must turn left, decreasing in excellence or diminishing in value by turning sinister. If the palace of wisdom lies at the end of *that* road, it is little wonder that the Proverbs of Hell (maxims for travellers that they are) should be intended to lead us towards *infernal* wisdom, or that Blake should introduce them thus:

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell, shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments. (MHH6; E35)

Nonetheless, Miller, for one, regards as “doubtful” the possibility that we can “know” a text “by some critical method fully mandated by the text itself,” since “the attempt to read along the lines articulated by the text itself involves a peculiar paradox: to know how to read requires that the reader already know what he or she needs to interpret” (“Introduction” 9). But this is really a pseudo-paradox, for it eclipses the temporal factor that would resolve it—things are learned in stages—and fails to consider that, while there are various methods of reading, reading is itself a method, if not *the* method underlying
all other methods. The reader need only know how to read, period, in order to be taught by a text the first time he reads it that a particular method is required to read it the second time. Discounting the temporal order of events in the reading process leads to the absurd conclusion that reading can never teach a method not already known, or that some books—texts on methodology, for instance—can teach new methods despite the old ones brought to bear on them, but other books—Blake’s, for instance—cannot. “Critical method always precedes and defines its object,” and Miller wonders whether this “disqualif[ies] any advice Blake may have to give us about reading” (14). His answer is both yes and no, “[b]ecause Blake’s advice can reach us only through acts of reading shaped by method[,] it cannot govern method beforehand” (14). True enough.

But once Blake’s advice has reached us—and it may be able to reach us only when we acknowledge that our own method is going nowhere—can it not then take over and govern our subsequent readings, with results materially different from those of our initial trials? If asked his opinion on the possibility of changing one’s interpretation, Blake might reply that “The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind” (MHH19; E42), or that “Reason or the ratio of all we have already known is not the same that it shall be when we know more” (NNR[b] E2). And we can only know that “more” with the help of Blake’s “Poetic Genius”—or our own, if we have one—for “As none by traveling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists” (ARO E1). If Blake’s Poetic Genius exists to alter the ratio of our knowledge, it does so by teaching us something unknown to us when we first enter his text, a land wild and bewildering and zigzagged by crooked roads. And perhaps one of
the things we learn there is how to make our way around, either by straightening roads according to the proper method or leaving them as they are.

As the Proverb about improvement hints, the Poetic Genius’s own methods may be deceptive—crooked as hell—and we ought to be wary. Miller insists that some method of our own, however flawed, is not only necessary but inescapable, so that “[t]he fool who becomes wise does so by persisting in his folly, not by being given the gift of wisdom from some exterior source” (15). But assuming that the fool becomes wise only after abandoning his folly, and that it is, moreover, the text itself that forces him to abandon it, then the wisdom we seek must come, at least in part, from an exterior source, if a text can be characterized as such. For our own lands are quite well known, and evidently we do not feel satisfied that our already acquired knowledge qualifies as wisdom, else we would not be subjecting ourselves to the torture of reading Blake. Perhaps there is a note of ironic self-mockery in the Bard’s claim that his words are “of your eternal salvation.” On the other hand, perhaps the person it really mocks is the reader complacent enough to doubt it.

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1Erdman informs us that the misspelling of *improvent* is “corrected” by Blake in copy H of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by a horizontal red stroke over the “en” (E802). Erdman also points out that “[o]nce he had applied words to copper and etched surrounding surfaces away, Blake could not alter a letter except by laborious mending; he could scratch away words and even lines but could not easily add new ones” (E789). While there is, of course, no evidence to suggest that the misspelling of *improvement* is intentional, the red stroke in copy H does indicate that at some point Blake became aware of it and perhaps wanted to ensure that we were made aware of it, too.
2. The War of Contraries

Experienced readers of Blake have long marked how consistently his words and ideas organize themselves as contraries. As early as the Songs of Innocence and of Experience and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake establishes the principle of "contrariety" as a condition of the human soul, necessary to human existence, and the source of religious morality:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. (MHH3; E34)

Contrariety is certainly necessary to Blake, for beneath his glinting panoply of lurid images and tormented mythic figures we find a monotonous obsession with this one principle. In Milton and Jerusalem, he gives us contraries bound in violent conflict, escalating into war. But he qualifies this war as spiritual or intellectual, the direct descendant of the spiritual warfare of Ephesians 6. At the beginning of The Four Zoas, he quotes verse 12:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (FZ3; E300)

And then he invites us to "Hear[] the march of long resounding strong heroic Verse / Marshalld in order for the day of Intellectual Battle" (FZ E300). This epistemologically grounded battle is fought by two contrary visions, one in which objects of perception are seen to vary, and one that is actually an absence or negation of vision, so that objects are not seen at all: "If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of perception seem to vary: / If the
Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also: / Consider this O mortal Man!" (J30:55-57; E177).

While confirming the idea that "the confrontations [in Blake’s text] are between attitudes, points of view, rather than between persons," Peter Butter cautions that "the danger in this line of argument is that it can be used—has been by some critics of Blake—to justify almost anything. Sheer muddle is called the structure of prophecy, and all obscurities are justified as the complexity of fourfold vision" (146). The lines from Jerusalem imply that objects appear obscure or "closed" only when we close our eyes to them. Hence Blake provides the information about perceptive organs and their objects in the form of a warning to "mortal Man," to us readers, for surely a poem is an object. Rather than using the principle of contrariety—or any other philosophical, epistemological, or methodological principle—to justify Blake’s obscurities (Butter is right about the error of that), we ought to use it to clarify them. For Blake is certainly among the most obscure of the great canonical poets, and at rare moments seems to feel an almost palpable guilt for his sin of unintelligibility: "What have I said? What have I done? O all-powerful Human Words! / You recoil back upon me in the blood of the Lamb slain in his Children. / Two bleeding Contraries equally true, are his Witnesses against me" (J24:1-3; E169). If we too sometimes feel unsure of what Blake has said or done, we might orient ourselves by the "Two Contraries War[ring] against each other in fury & blood" (J58:15; E207), sole witnesses against their author’s obscurity.

But in confronting an object as complex as Blake’s prophecies, the reader may find that if his perceptive organs come too close, the object may seem too close also, blurring, in Butter’s phrase, into a sheer muddle. For this reason, perhaps, Blake starts us
off rather gently (if we read him chronologically) with a set of concise principles (*There is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions are One*, c. 1788), then a little collection of emblems ("For Children: The Gates of Paradise," 1793), followed by some fairly lucid, if enigmatic, short lyrics (*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, c. 1784-1803). With *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), things start to heat up—multiple levels of irony and ambiguity intervene, creating serious hermeneutical problems—and by the time we are entangled in the roiling coils of his last major work, the massive and nearly impenetrable *Jerusalem*, it is sometimes hard to remember that "Without Contraries is no progression," harder still to believe that this idea, propounded in *The Marriage*, might still, compass-like, apply.

Yet in his notebook commentary on his painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, dated "For the Year 1810," Blake is still setting contraries against each other. In one notable instance, he opposes one pair, good and evil, to another pair, truth and error, which contraries-within-contraries he then proceeds to weave around a rather quizzical moral-epistemological argument:

> The Combats of Good & Evil <is Eating of the Tree of Knowledge The Combats of Truth & Error is Eating of the Tree of Life> [& of Truth & Error which are the same thing] <these> are not only Universal but Particular. Each are Personified. There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [Actor] Agent that is it is a Man. There is not a Truth but it has also a Man <Good & Evil are Qualities in Every Man whether <a> Good or Evil Man> These are Enemies & destroy one another by every Means in their power both of deceit & of open Violence (VLJ E563)

Philosophically, "truth," "error," "good," and "evil" are, like "contraries" themselves, abstract concepts or universals, derived by the process of abstraction from the particular realities or things in which they reside—or do not reside, or reside apart from, depending
on whether one holds to the epistemological position of realism, nominalism, or idealism. Blake's own view of the relation between the universal and particular, as expressed here, is considerably more complex and elusive, his argument moving sinuously from (1) the assertion that the contrary “combats” of contraries are both universal and particular, to (2) a reasonable literary explanation of how this might be (it’s a figure of speech: the particular is the universal personified), to (3) an equally reasonable but more philosophical explanation (the universal “has” a particular man, much as a principal—with a pun, perhaps, on principle—may have an agent), finally winding up with (4) a rather outrageous claim: the universal is a man—and, moreover, a particular one. He is much clearer, fortunately, on the combats of good and evil: these qualities (also universal and particular) reside in every man, though they too are personified, specifically as violent, aggressive, deceitful, and mutually destructive enemies, as though they were men-within-men.

Some of Blake’s more truculent opinions suggest that he does regard certain particular men as embodiments of good or evil. Bacon, Newton, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, Hume, Titian, Correggio, Rembrandt, and Rubens fall under his wrath, while Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, Dürer, Michelangelo, and Rafael receive his warmest approbation. And invariably he divides individuals into two contrary classes, one good and the other evil, on the basis of some principle related to his beloved Art. Thus oil painters who betray colorist or chiaroscuro tendencies are reviled—“Correggio,” for example, “is a soft and effeminate and consequently a most cruel demon, whose whole delight is to cause endless labour to whoever suffers him to enter his mind” (DC E548)—while fresco painters who stress the drawing of form or outline are praised.
Chiaroscuro is evil, definite form is good, and so the painter who in Blake’s view is the agent of one or the other of these aesthetic principles becomes himself evil or good—a “demon” or a “true Artist.”

But if Blake tends to blur the distinction between morality and aesthetics, he positively identifies religion and art: “Christianity is Art,” proclaims one of the scores of inscriptions surrounding his engraving of The Laocoön (E274). Others take up the theme: “The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art”; “Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists”; “A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man / Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian”; “Prayer is the Study of Art / Praise is the Practise of Art / Fasting &c. all relate to Art” (E274). When he sarcastically observes that “If Morality was Christianity Socrates was the Saviour” (E275), he apparently means to suggest that religion stripped of its aesthetic dimension would be little more than a system of moral-philosophical precepts.

However superficially cranky Blake’s equation of religion, morality, and aesthetics may seem, it is rooted in his profound understanding of the fundamental dualism informing our perception of all contraries, that of affirmation-négation in form. Blake claims that from contraries such as “Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate” “spring what the religious call Good & Evil” (MHH3; E34), because the religious, being aesthetically minded, tend to call Good whatever is beautiful (or attractive, lovable) and Evil whatever is ugly (or repulsive, hateful). As Hubert Benoit argues, there is a close relationship between th[e] dualistic [religious] conception ‘God-Devil’ and the aesthetic sense which distinguishes the human animal from the other animals. The aesthetic sense consists in perceiving the dualism,
affirmation-négation, in ‘form’. ‘Satan’ is deformed, that is to say of negative form, form in the process of decomposition, tending towards the formless. Man has an affective preference for formation (construction) as against deformation (destruction). The form of a beautiful human body is that which corresponds to the apogee of its construction, at the moment at which it is at the maximum distance from the formless and has not yet begun to return thereto. It is not astonishing that every morality should be in reality a system of aesthetics of subtle forms (‘make a fine gesture’, ‘you have ugly propensities’, etc.). (Supreme Doctrine 11)

Blake’s own supreme evil, explicitly called “Satan Refusing Form” (M3:41; E97), is clearly form in the process of decomposition; it is the “destroyer of Definite Form” (J56:17; E206), a “Negation” or “Abstract Horror” “Refusing all Definite Form” (M3:9; E97), responsible for the indefinite, chaotic, or disordered, and thriving—ironically, given Blake’s own obscurity—in impenetrable darkness.

This dualism of affirmation-négation in form provides Blake with the basis for his moral aesthetic, metaphysically sound in principle, perhaps, but worked out and applied in disconcerting ways. Correggio and the rest of the “Venetian and Flemish demons” are evil because they employ “that infernal machine, called Chiaro Oscuro” (E547), which, with its elaboration of lights and shades, trafficks in obscurity and is therefore destructive of form. Rubens is another “most outrageous demon” whose own “original conception,” though “all fire and animation,” he obscures “with hellish brownness, and blocks up all its gates of light, except one, and that one he closes with iron bars” (DC E547).

Correggio’s particular sin is to “infuse[] a love of soft and even tints without boundaries, and of endless reflected lights, that confuse one another” (DC E548). Clarity requires outline, and whereas the “art of losing the outlines is the art of Venice and Flanders” (DC E549), the true (or good) painter, the Florentine or Roman such as Rafael or Michelangelo, knows that “neither character nor expression can exist without firm and
determinate outline" (DC E549). The morality, then, of the Blakean aesthetic is itself crystal clear: lucidity, chief attribute of definite or determinate form, is Good, while obscurity—the dark, shadowy, confused, or formless—is Evil.

So why is Blake’s own art so far from lucid? As Morris Eaves points out, “by marking shifts in Blake’s theory and disparities between his theory and his practice, recent critical] discussions envision an artist who can be caught in contradiction much more often than his own sensitivity to the self-contradictions of others might lead one to expect” (William Blake’s Theory of Art 38). What do we make of this particular contradiction between Blake’s theory and practise? Eaves questions whether “Blake’s poetry before or after 1805 reveal[s] the verbal counterpart of [the] pictorial distinct line and formal clarity” Blake champions around that time, and decides that saying yes would seem to require special pleading, since Blake’s poetry, his later poetry especially, has been a stock example of verbal obscurity for generations. But admitting the obvious—that Jerusalem is obscure by conventional standards—is not conceding that Blake measures other artists with standards too high for himself to reach, nor that his artistic practice is necessarily at odds with his theory of line, but merely that his standards can be less conventional than they sound. (William Blake’s Theory of Art 43)

It takes Eaves his entire study to explain in exactly what ways Blake’s standards are unconventional. For his own part, Blake disingenuously admits to being “molested continually by blotting and blurring demons” (DC 546), and to being tormented by “my Abstract folly [which] hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over Mountains & Valleys which are not Real in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander” (E716). He boasts of having “entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last passed twenty years
of my life," and characterizes himself as "a slave bound in a mill among beasts and
devils" who has nevertheless "courageously pursued [his] course through darkness"
(E756-57). If he admits to having succumbed on occasion to the satanic principle, the
destroyer of definite form, then we should hardly be surprised that the evil of obscurity
should play a role in the obviously chiaroscurist design of his work. And yet he insists
that "Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else" (Marg E658).

Trying to account for this inconsistency, Eaves conjectures that

the oppressive shadow-world of the state of experience, the "dark,
encrusted world" that seems to be the special province of certain color
prints, may clarify itself in a lack of clarity. The clearest vision of
experience may be a chiaroscurist vision that would not be clarified, only
falsified, by Flaxmanesque outline. It may be essential to see that the
world of experience seen clearly is obscure. . . . true clarity lies in a vision
of life that includes its dark and obscure parts. (William Blake's Theory of
Art 42)

If all this is true, it may be time for us to embrace the evil principle in Blake's work, that
Satan or demon who perverts definite form and thus causes "endless labour to whoever
suffers him to enter his mind."

For Blake's genius is crooked. The evidence shows up in his consistent fusion of
the intelligible with the unintelligible, leaving some of his readers with the unsettling
impression that they have essentially understood and yet somehow failed to understand.

Geoffrey Hartman, suggesting a more complex distinction between "what is known and
not understood, and . . . what is not known, yet understood" (242), confesses that

[m]ost of the time I understand Blake, yet do not know what is going on. I
see the mythology, I grasp the visionary characters and visionary
categories that are his medium and carry him. I understand the vehicular
energy. But I cannot get from there to experience, from symbol to
experience. I can make a good guess here and there, but I can't be sure.
Why can't I be sure? (245)
Once we suffer Blake to enter our minds, part of the endless labour we must undergo involves sorting out those elements that destroy clear and definite form from those that help construct it.

Contraries, without which there is "no progression," belong to the latter category. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, for example, Blake introduces a pair of contraries, which are both particular men and universal "portions of being," called "the Prolific" and "the Devouring": "These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence" (MHH16; E40). This statement leads to yet another pair of contraries: those who, on the one hand, try to reconcile the two classes and so seek to destroy existence (because contraries are necessary to human existence, remember, and reconciling them would presumably destroy them as contraries), and those who seek to perpetuate human existence by keeping them apart. Now, reconcilers must be evil and dividers good because the former are destructive and the latter constructive, we human beings tending to favour whatever favours our existence (to us that is "life," that is good), and to fear and loathe whatever negates it (that is "death"). Even the bare words *prolific* and *devouring* have sufficient power to rouse our natural sympathy for construction (or creation or affirmation) and our antipathy toward destruction (negation). But Blake's insistence on opposing the Prolific and the Devouring simultaneously rouses and subverts our natural moral tendencies. Since his two classes "should be enemies," we can affirm the creative principle of human existence only if they remain at war—surely the most destructive and deadly kind of opposition we know.
But of course Blake is inciting us to wage mental, not corporeal, war (where else does one engage in combats of good and evil or truth and error?). The word war derives from the Old High German *werra*, "confusion, discord, strife," and the Old Saxon *werran*, "to bring into confusion or discord" (OED), and, whether or not he was aware of its etymology, Blake intends his war also to create mental confusion, ideological discord, or intellectual strife. The reader is drawn into battle by his author—and that, if we learn something from it, may be a good thing. For Blake, "Opposition is true Friendship" (MHH20; E42), but only under certain conditions: when "the Soldier who fights for Truth, calls his enemy his brother: / They fight & contend for life, & not for eternal death!" (J38:41-42; E185). "Our wars"—those between contraries like the Prolific and the Devouring, but also between Blake and his reader—"are wars of life, & wounds of love, / With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought" (J34:14-15; E180).

Moreover, Blake fights his mental war against its contrary, corporeal war, which is itself waged by "the Gods of the Kingdoms of the Earth: in contrarious / And cruel opposition: Element against Element, opposed in War / Not Mental, as the Wars of Eternity, but a Corporeal Strife" (M31:23-25; E130).

Just as there is bad confusion and good confusion, bad obscurity and good obscurity, so there are two kinds of war. When Blake attacks his intellectual enemies, one of his tactics is to accuse them of causing the bad kind of war, the corporeal. His Preface to Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem* (J52; E200-201), for instance, addressed "To the Deists," begins, "You O Deists profess yourselves the Enemies of Christianity: and you are so: you are also the Enemies of the Human Race & of Universal Nature." And why are Deists evil? Because Deism is the worship of Satan:
Will any one say: Where are those who worship Satan under the Name of God! Where are they? Listen! Every Religion that Preaches Vengeance for Sin is the Religion of the Enemy & Avenger; and not the Forgiver of Sin, and their God is Satan, Named by the Divine Name - Your Religion. Deists: Deism, is the Worship of the God of this World by the means of what you call Natural Religion and Natural Philosophy, and of Natural Morality or Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart. This was the Religion of the Pharisees who murdered Jesus. Deism is the same & ends in the same.

But if Deism is the worship of Satan, that name has an unconventional meaning for Blake. First, Satan is the God of “this world,” the natural or corporeal world, into which we are all born: “Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary.” Jesus is the direct contrary of Satan, and “the Religion of Jesus, Forgiveness of Sin, can never be the cause of a War nor of a single Martyrdom.” But if any war is carried on in the name of Jesus, it must be fought “with the Spiritual and not the Natural Sword.”

Bringing the Preface to a close with a deductive flourish, Blake claims that in charging his Deist enemies with warmongering, he is merely mirroring their charge against him and his Christian allies:

But you [Deists] also charge the poor Monks & Religious with being the causes of War: while you acquit & flatter the Alexanders & Caesars, the Lewis’s & Fredericks: who alone are its causes & its actors. But the Religion of Jesus, Forgiveness of Sin, can never be the cause of a War nor of a single Martyrdom.

Those who Martyr others or who cause War are Deists, but never can be Forgivers of Sin. The Glory of Christianity is, To Conquer by Forgiveness. All the Destruction therefore, in Christian Europe has arisen from Deism, which is Natural Religion.

Such blatantly fallacious reasoning may amuse modern readers, but it would have certainly puzzled and possibly angered any contemporary Deist who happened to read it and conclude, quite justifiably, that Blake is blaming him for the Crusades, the
Inquisition, and whatever other atrocity he cares to name. Coupling two tautologies—(1) those who cause war are Deists; therefore Deism is the cause of all war; and (2) Christianity can never be the cause of a war; therefore no war is caused by a Christian—Blake is unjust to both contraries, clearly prejudiced against the Deist and in favour of the Christian. And he supports this judgment with a highly suspect piece of syllogistic reasoning:

Deism is the worship of Satan, god of the natural world.
Every religion that preaches vengeance for sin is the religion of Satan.
Therefore Deism preaches vengeance for sin, which leads to war and destruction.

According to the Scholastic adage, *initium disputandi, definitio nominis*: discussion about anything must be opened by nominal definition (Coffey 1:101); but here Blake defines *Deism* as no Deist would define it himself, and his illegitimate transposition of the terminological contraries “Deist” and “Christian” (for he is correct about their being contraries) from the domain of doctrine or ideology to the domain of history is only the first of his logical errors. (As Harold Bloom regretfully admits, “There is not much accuracy, one fears, in Blake’s indictment of historical Deism” [E939].)

Blake goes on to confuse both individuals (Voltaire and Rousseau) and collectives (“You O Deists”) with the doctrine of Deism as he defines it, no doubt holding them accountable as particular agents of their universal religious principle (or principal: their god Satan), or as personifications of the error to which they have subscribed. Then he accuses particular Deists of the moral sins of hypocrisy and Pharisaism, but on the ground of their having accused followers of his religion of exactly the same sins:

Voltaire Rousseau Gibbon Hume. charge the Spiritually Religious with Hypocrisy! but how a Monk or a Methodist either, can be a Hypocrite: I cannot conceive. We are Men of like passions with others & pretend not
to be holier than others: therefore, when a Religious Man falls into Sin, he ought not to be calld a Hypocrite: this title is more properly to be given to a Player who falls into Sin; whose profession is Virtue & Morality & the making Men Self-Righteous. Foote in calling Whitefield, Hypocrite: was himself one: for Whitefield pretended not to be holier than others: but confessed his Sins before all the World; Voltaire! Rousseau! You cannot escape my charge that you are Pharisees & Hypocrites, for you are constantly talking of the Virtues of the Human Heart, and particularly of your own, that you may accuse others & especially the Religious, whose errors, you by this display of pretended Virtue, chiefly design to expose.

The argument is circular, even self-contradictory, not to mention childish: I accuse you of accusing me and my allies of being what you really are (i.e., hypocritical); and what you pretend to be, I am in fact (i.e., virtuous), because “We [Christians] are Men of like passions with others & pretend not to be holier than others”—no others, that is, except the Deists?

Perhaps all this is a satirical enactment of the proposition that the soldier who fights for truth must call his enemy his brother: call him by the same nasty name.

Michael Mason points out that *hypocrite* derives from the Greek word for actor, which explains why Blake argues the title “is more properly to be given to a Player” and may, says Mason, “show him to be impressively at ease in Greek” (522). But then, particularly for someone so sensitive to the etymological nuances of words, Blake seems blind to any relation between his words and his deeds. For a *hypocrite* is also someone who says one thing and does another, who “falsely professes to be virtuously or religiously inclined” or “pretends to have feelings or beliefs of a higher order than his real ones” (OED); and here is Blake, pontificating on the glories of conquering by forgiveness and all the while antagonizing not just the Deist, but anyone with a sense of tolerance or fair play. Even Stephen Cox, an otherwise enthusiastic reader of Blake, must confess that
I cannot sympathize... with his strong tendency to universalize (it is no accident that "all" is the word of greatest frequency in Erdman's concordance to Blake, and "every" not far behind), with the special pleading in which he engages in some of his criticism of other authors, or with the loose or merely invidious way of defining terms that supports some of his universalizing and special pleading. ("Methods" 37-38)

What Cox cannot sympathize with is Blake's bad reasoning—which is, by the way, wholly partial in its universalizing: all Deists are evil and all Christians are good, it would seem, because William Blake is a Christian himself. By the time he piously concludes that "Deists... never can be Forgivers of Sin," it becomes difficult to suppress the impulse to laugh at how adroitly this passionate believer in forgiveness has cornered himself into refusing to forgive the Deist for the sin of not being a forgiver of sin. And laugh we should, for Blake is no fool. Fully aware that no reasonable person would swallow his anti-Deist line, he offers more sophisticated bait in A Vision of the Last Judgment:

<Good & Evil are Qualities in Every Man whether <a> Good or Evil Man> These are Enemies & destroy one another by every Means in their power both of deceit & of open Violence The Deist & the Christian are but the Results of these Opposing Natures Many are Deists who would in certain Circumstances have been Christians in outward appearance Voltaire was one of this number he was as intolerant as an Inquisitor Manners make the Man not Habits. It is the same in Art by their Works ye shall know them the Knave who is Converted to Deism & the Knave who is Converted to Christianity is still a Knave but he himself will not know it tho Every body else does (VLJ E563-64)

Ignoring some of the more obvious signs that Blake is having us on here (notably that the evil Deist Voltaire, being as intolerant as an inquisitor, would in "certain circumstances" have looked like a Christian), we may take up the thread of Blake's argument as follows. The Deist and Christian are the "results" of opposing natures, or good and evil qualities, in every man, but one is evil if a Deist and good if a Christian. So by "result" Blake must
mean the victory of one quality over the other within the individual. Then there is the "knave"—presumably a man whose evil nature has been victorious—who, whether a convert to Deism or Christianity, remains a knave. All of this, if consistent with the Jerusalem Preface, implies that any Christian who engages in war and preaches vengeance for sin is really a knave—or a Deist—and that any Deist who preaches the forgiveness of sins is really a Christian, given Blake's definitions of those terms, which are, as Cox says, "loose or merely invidious." This is how Blake justifies the absurd argument that a Deist never can be a forgiver of sin: if he were to be overcome by the spirit of forgiveness, he would automatically turn into a Christian (and he himself may not know it though everybody else does).

And what exactly does Blake mean by "Manners make the Man not Habits"? Perhaps he is alluding to that species of self-contradiction in which one's words clash with one's deeds, since manner may refer to one's behaviour or way of doing something, habit to one's manner of dressing oneself, and dressing oneself up in words that lack true correspondence to one's actions or intent is a habit Blake knows something about. Burke advises that in judging men we ought to look to "their conduct (the only language that rarely lies)" (115), but Blake claims that hypocrisy is detectable only when we look at someone's verbal manner, his conduct with words: "It is the same in Art by their Works ye shall know them." And one rather notable feature of Blake's manner is this stretching, shifting, and fiddling with the meaning of terms to evade argumentative defeat, particularly when it results in the kind of spurious definition characteristic of what is sometimes called the "no true Scotsman" ploy:
Somebody announces: 'The Scots are all mean.' Anxious to disabuse him of his prejudices, we point to a generous Scot, say, Andrew Carnegie. To which the reply is: 'Ah, but Andrew Carnegie is not a true Scot!' What is going on here? When we were told 'The Scots are all mean', it looked as though we were being told something interesting, something nasty about the Scots, to be sure, but something interesting. . . . But then it emerges, after we point out that there are generous Scots, that a generous Scot is not going to count as a 'true Scot' simply because he is generous. So what we were really being told was 'The true Scots are all mean', where a 'true Scot' is a mean Scot. What we were really being told was 'All mean Scots are mean', which was not telling us much and which was not very interesting at all. . . . We thought we had an interesting proposition about the Scots to consider, and it turned out to be a (rather idiosyncratic) analytic truth (like 'Bachelors are unmarried'). (Musgrave 166-67)

Perhaps for Blake it's an analytic truth that a true Christian is a forgiver of sin, and any individual who calls himself a Deist while believing in and practising such forgiveness is simply mistaken about his true identity. But what is the true identity of Blake, who confesses to his public, "I am perhaps the most sinful of men! I pretend not to holiness! yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with daily, as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore [Dear] Reader, [forgive] what you do not approve, & [love] me for this energetic exertion of my talent" (J3; E145). As we cannot forgive what we do not approve until we know what it is we do not approve of, we ought to be clear from the outset about our feelings regarding Blake's method of reasoning and all the logical sins that follow in its wake.

\[^1\]Here Blake would undoubtedly agree with Burke: "he that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. This amicable conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object and compels us to consider it in all its relations. It will not suffer us to be superficial" (195).
Perhaps Blake is thinking of the leading light of Deism, Matthew Tindal: "originally an Anglican, then a Deist, for a few years he became a convert to Roman Catholicism and then reverted to Deism again" (Burke 307).
3. The Code of War

Let us go back to the “Religion of Satan,” which will prove to be the source of most, if not all, Blake’s logical troubles. Apparently, Blake regards the Deist as an enemy of the human race and universal nature because

Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary. But your [the Deist’s] Greek Philosophy (which is a remnant of Druidism) teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre: an Opinion of fatal & accursed consequence to Man, as the Ancients saw plainly by Revelation to the intire abrogation of Experimental Theory. (J52; E200-201)

Man is born an “altogether evil” Spectre or Satan but can change his selfhood into a new one, that of his direct contrary, and so, if this change is made “continually,” the evil man may turn into a good one. But marking spectre and Satan well, particularly in the context of Milton and Jerusalem, soon raises the suspicion that Blake has given these two familiar words a new and very precise denotation. In Jerusalem, for example, the Spectre is defined as

the Reasoning Power
An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing
This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation

(J10:7-16; E152-53)

Now, the word spectre occurs well over two hundred times in Blake, though seldom as explicitly defined as here. Yet when it is defined, as in the following eight instances, the definitions are remarkably consistent:

But Albion fell down a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurld
By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man

(J54:6-7; E203)

(M39:10-11; E140)

Then spoke the Spectrous Chaos to Albion darkning cold From the back & loins where dwell the Spectrous Dead

I am your Rational Power O Albion

(J29:3-5; E175)

the Reasoning Spectre Stands between the Vegetative Man & his Immortal Imagination

(J32:23-24; E178)

But the Spectre like a hoar frost & a Mildew rose over Albion Saying, I am God O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power!

(J54:15-16; E203)

And sometimes it touches the Earths summits, & sometimes spreads Abroad into the Indefinite Spectre, who is the Rational Power

(J64:4-5; E215)

His Reason his Spectrous Power, covers them above

(J1:5; E144)

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man

(J74:10; E229)

In the couple of hundred other instances where Blake does not define spectre, is the reader expected to apply this precise denotation of “reasoning power”? While no rule compels a writer to define a key term every time he uses it (common practise suggests that doing so once or twice near the beginning of a work suffices), “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man” is not generally regarded by Blakeans as a stipulative definition—it is not, at any rate, treated as such. But what would happen to Blake’s poetry as a whole if it were?

Suppose when we encounter the line in Jerusalem “O Polypus of Death O Spectre over Europe and Asia / Withering the Human Form by Laws of Sacrifice for Sin”
(J49:24-25; E198), we were to think to ourselves, “O Polypus of Death O Reasoning Power over Europe and Asia,” and so on: what kind of reasoning power would be capable of spreading itself out over Europe and Asia and withering the human form? Or, since polypus of death and spectre are here set in apposition, can we legitimately infer that the two nominals both refer to the reasoning power? Does it help to regard the inference as confirmed by another line: "Then all the Males combined into One Male & every one / Became a ravening eating Cancer growing in the Female / A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death" (J69:1-3; E223)? For persisting along this inferential path—if reason is synonymous with spectre, and spectre with polypus, then polypus must be synonymous with reason, too—may tempt us to conclude, on the evidence of the appositives in the line just quoted, that reason is also synonymous with doubt, despair, and death. And who knows where such verbal madness will stop? When the Spectre itself cries out,

O that I could cease to be! Despair! I am Despair
Created to be the great example of horror & agony: also my
Prayer is vain I called for compassion: compassion mockd
Mercy & pity threw the grave stone over me & with lead
And iron, bound it over me for ever: Life lives on my
Consuming: & the Almighty hath made me his Contrary
To be all evil, all reversed & for ever dead: knowing
And seeing life, yet living not...

(J10:51-58; E153-54)

its agony seems calculated to confirm our creeping suspicion: that the reasoning power is both death and despair and, moreover, altogether the evil the Jerusalem Preface first pronounced it. As for its association with doubt, that word reappears in one of “The Keys of the Gates”: “Two Horn’d Reasoning Cloven Fiction / In Doubt which is Self contradiction” (KG E268). And now we have two more possible synonyms for
reasoning; fiction and self-contradiction. But beyond this point, the image of the Spectre begins to grow somewhat blurry (reminding us of the pictorial sense of definition so important to the Blakean moral aesthetic: “the condition of being made, or of being definite, in visual form or outline” [OED]). For we can feel safe in concluding that the reasoning power is a cloven fiction only if we regard a fiction as a “false body”: “The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man / This is a false Body” (M40:34-35; E142). Similarly, we can conclude that reasoning is being defined as self-contradiction only on the strength of verbal associations, as when someone (but this someone, immediate context indicates, is the Spectre himself in a dreadful state of self-division) weeps “in deadly wrath of the Spectre, in self-contradicting agony” (J64:27; E215).

Let us return to Satan, who, along with the Spectre, is altogether the evil that man is born to be. Surely the word Satan, which comes to Blake (and to us) with a wealth of semantic and conceptual accretions it would be perilous to ignore, must mean something far more involved and complex than just “the reasoning power in man.” Milton does mention “The Spectre of Satan” (M13:2; E106), but the phrase is ambiguous: Satan either is a spectre or has a spectre (just as a truth or error either is or has a man?). Satan is also called “the Spectre of Albion” (M32:12; E131; see also J27:37-39; E172), which brings us full circle, for Albion’s Spectre is explicitly identified as the reasoning power: “Albion fell down a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurld / By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man” (J54:6-7; E203). Can we avoid concluding that in Blake’s mind Satan is the reasoning power, too?

Jerusalem’s awestruck apostrophe “O all-powerful Human Words!” (J24:1; E169) seems somewhat ominous in view of what Blake’s words make us do, often pushing us
(with a nonetheless resistible force) in a direction it may seem foolhardy to go. Nelson Hilton, for example, succumbs to Blake’s verbal power in his interpretation of a three-line passage from Milton, which he calls “[o]ne of Blake’s densest comments on spectral interrelation and genesis” (Literal Imagination 170):

But in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed
To Death in old time by Satan the father of Sin & Death
And Satan is the Spectre of Orc & Orc is the generate Luvah
(M29:32-34; E127)

“Treating this as a kind of formula,” Hilton writes, “we can substitute some of Blake’s other formulations, for we read elsewhere that Satan is the spectre, the selfhood (J 27.73; 52, prose) and that Satan is Luvah as both are ‘the Spectre of Albion’ (M 32.13; J 60.2)” (Literal Imagination 170). Hilton also silently substitutes the name Leutha for the word sin in the second line of the quotation, presumably on the basis of Leutha’s admission several plates earlier on in Milton that “I am the Author of this Sin! by my suggestion / My Parent power Satan has committed this transgression” (M11:35-336; E105), or perhaps because, as she tells us, the Gnomes “call’d me Sin, and for a sign portentous held me” (M12:39; E106). Hilton then goes on to propose the following “composite” reading of Blake’s original lines: “in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed / To the Spectre of sleep by the Spectre the father of Leutha and the Spectre of sleep / And the Spectre is the Spectre of Orc & Orc is a Spectre of Albion” (Literal Imagination 170). The resulting repetitiousness seems an aesthetic travesty of Blake’s original lines, and yet Hilton’s reading is not only justified by the larger context of Blake’s own identifications, it does not go far enough. I would read the passage even more reductively (but that reductiveness is Blake’s fault, not mine: it is he who keeps identifying persons and things
as or with spectres, and it is he who first defines spectre as the reasoning power in man), although, unlike Hilton, I would leave the term sin where it is, since to substitute Leutha for it only exacerbates our sense of defamiliarization. On the basis of the textual evidence presented thus far, my version of the original passage simply substitutes reasoning power (or an appropriate variant) for spectre, Satan, and death: "in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed / To Reasoning in old time by the Reasoning Power, the father of Sin and Reasoning, / And the Reasoning Power is the Reasoning Power of Orc & Orc is the Reasoning Power of Albion." We can go a bit further. If the reasoning power is the father of "sin," what sin can this be but the sin of reasoning? And if "sleep" is transformed to "death" by the rational power, then we can deduce—because "death" has already been transformed to "reasoning"—that sleep is yet another synonym for reasoning, just as Orc is yet another name for the reasoning power. While admittedly against the grain of conventional methods of reading poetry—logic is permitted to destroy what inspiration has created—my interpretation of the passage transforms it from what Hilton calls a commentary on "spectral interrelation and genesis" into a set of unambiguous instructions on how to interpret, or rather decipher, some of Blake's key nouns and proper names.

Remember the Proverb of Hell, a possible maxim for us travellers, which assures us that "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise." Assuming that this Proverb really does apply to the reading of Blake, and assuming moreover that interpreting his words reductively and single-mindedly in the fashion I propose is foolish, how do we know that persisting in this folly might not lead to wisdom? Perhaps it is stupid, ridiculous, to make many words mean the same as a few; but if so, another
enigmatic Blakean principle may speak to the problem: “If the many become the same as the few, when possess’d, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man” (NNR[b] E2). That is to say, if, when we adhere to his definitions, many of Blake’s words become the same in meaning as a few of them—such as rational power or reasoning power or reason—then our cry for more and more words will be mistaken, will not improve our knowledge of the text, unless perhaps that ever-straightening road both leads to and terminates in our comprehension of no less than all the words he uses.

Near the close of Milton, the eponymous hero turns to a mysterious female figure named Ololon to deliver a dictate, which he prefaces with a stern demand for obedience:

    turning toward Ololon in terrible majesty Milton
    Replied. Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man
    All that can be annihilated must be annihilated¹
    That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
    There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
    The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
    The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man . . .
    (M40:28-34; E142)

If Ololon ought to obey the words of the inspired man, perhaps we ought to, as well—and on this particular occasion his words incorporate a definition of that ghastly but crucial word spectre. If all that can be annihilated must be annihilated, perhaps we ought to consider to what extent we can annihilate the conventional meanings of words (or our own cherished interpretations of them). “Saving the children of Jerusalem from slavery” is an undeniably enigmatic metaphor, but we may never learn what Blake means by it if we fail to obey the dictatorial voices of the text. Nor may we know, at present, what it means to “redeem the contraries,” but surely we now have an uncomfortable sense of what it might mean to destroy a reasoning power—which term has acquired, as we see
above, one more alternate name: negation, a word whose pejorative connotations alone may be sufficient to convince us that destroying the negation in order to redeem the contraries may be a very good thing. The question is, are we willing to destroy that reasoning power if it happens to be our own—and if not ours, whose? Are we willing to reason idiotically or foolishly or even insanely—for "The Spectre is, in Giant Man; insane, and most deform'd" (J33:4; E179)—if that is what obeying the inspired man's words requires? Because if we aren't, we and the poet—whether in the guise of the Bard, Milton, Los, or whatever other name Blake cares to call himself—are likely to be at war, as the line following the one just quoted suggests: "Thou wilt certainly provoke my Spectre against thine in fury!" (J33:5; E179).

Also in Milton we are told that

\[
\text{Milton's Angel knew}\\
\text{The Universal Dictate; and you also feel this Dictate.}\\
\text{And now you know this World of Sorrow, and feel Pity. Obey}\\
\text{The Dictate! Watch over this World, and with your brooding wings,}\\
\text{Renew it to Eternal Life: Lo! I am with you alway}\\
\text{(M21:52-56; E116)}
\]

Suppose that the stipulative definition "The spectre is the reasoning power in man" is the "Universal Dictate" referred to here, an authoritative law of the Blakean text meant to be memorized or written down and followed by everyone who reads it, a monition that, if not marked well, will leave us at the mercy of some vague impending danger—mental confusion or strife, perhaps. Milton's Angel (perhaps Ololon herself) knew the dictate, but we (if that "you" really is us) can only feel it. Why? Because we are feeling, as we read, the effects of not knowing it, and our not knowing it gives it power over us, the power to subject or (to use Blake's more loaded term) enslave us to a variety of negative
mental states—confusion, bewilderment, ignorance—that cause us to make interpretive errors, to stumble and fall, as we make our way through the text. If Blake seems painfully difficult to read, that may be the result of our thoughtless tendency to read without listening carefully enough, or without taking really seriously the possibility that he means exactly what he says. For, as the Milton quotation suggests, as soon as we feel the dictate, which is to feel the effects of not obeying it (and therefore not knowing it), we will know "this World of Sorrow."

_Sorrow_ is "distress of mind caused by loss, suffering, disappointment, etc.; grief, deep sadness or regret; also, that which causes grief or melancholy; affliction, trouble" (OED). It is allied to lamentation and mourning, as is _sorrow's_ erstwhile synonym _care_, which is "mental suffering, sorrow, grief, trouble" or a "burdened state of mind arising from fear, doubt, or concern about anything; solicitude, anxiety, mental perturbation" (OED). According to "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," then, "They [who] stumble all night over bones of the dead; / And feel they know not what but care" are not only feeling all the terrible things associated with care, but feeling them as a direct consequence of not knowing what is causing them to suffer. Once the reader knows Blake's world of sorrow, the hope is that he will begin to feel pity, both for his own overburdened self and for the lamentable state of affairs Blake's text is in, a world where so much meaning is under the constant threat of being reduced to a few paltry senses or perhaps lost altogether. What might transpire, then, if the reader were to obey Blake's dictates? All we have is the reassurance of an unidentified but obviously divine speaker (who promises to be "with us alway") that if we "Watch over this World" with our "brooding wings" we will "Renew it to Eternal Life."
To *brood* is "to cherish in the mind, 'to nurse wrath (or the like) to keep it warm'; to meditate upon, contemplate with feeling" (OED), presumably in hopes of hatching something of significance. But Blake's advice regarding brooding, proffered in another Proverb of Hell, "Sooner murder an infant its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (MHH10; E38), rather cynically suggests that if we are *not* going to act on our desire to understand him completely and remain satisfied with something less than All, perhaps nursing our wrath at being compelled to engage in unorthodox or foolish hermeneutical practises, then everyone involved would be better off if we just went ahead and negated his intent outright, murdered his infant idea. For to hatch and nurse our own idea of Blake's meaning regardless of his words is vanity, certainly, but it also sets our rational power in deadly opposition to his, with the inevitable result that

One Dies! Alas! the Living & Dead  
One is slain & One is fled  
In Vain-glory hatcht & nurst  
By double Spectres Self Accurst  
My Son! my Son! thou treatest me  
But as I have instructed thee (KG E268)

Blake's thought either flees to the margins of non-entity or gets murdered unless we listen obediently and treat him exactly as he instructs us, which is why, in the words of another Proverb, "The most sublime act is to set another before you" (MHH7; E36). Unfortunately, his instruction may force us to reason in ways we find abhorrent, repulsive, hateful, even evil, for we too are by "double Spectres Self Accurst," and our "brooding wings" may well turn out to belong to the Spectre we keep reading about, with its "two [Deist] Wings Voltaire: Rousseau" (J54:18; E203), a spectre who claims both to belong to us and to rule over us: "I am God O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power!"
(J54:16; E203). But we will remain self-accursed only as long as we brood over Blake’s world of sorrow while ignoring its dictates—its definitions, principles, axioms, identifications, associations—thereby condemning our rational power to the futility of interpreting a text whose words we will not listen to, whose instructions we will not obey.

Most serious Blake scholars are likely to balk at the proposition that all we have to do to begin making better sense of his notoriously difficult and complex text is to substitute one set of words for another. Any such naïve method of interpretation would presume the writer is employing the crudest sort of allegory or “other speaking,” a practise Blake disparages in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* among other places, although he does confess in a letter to Butts to having written “a Sublime Allegory,” “a Grand Poem,” “the Grandest Poem that This World Contains”—and “Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden fi'om the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry” (E730). Understandably, allegorical interpretation that calls for simple word-substitution—the *definiens* able to stand in for the *definiendum*—may grate on finely tuned critical nerves, particularly those of Blakeans, who tend to prize complexity. Blake has always attracted those who seek a formidable challenge to their intellectual powers, and “[w]e cannot,” insists Vincent A. De Luca, speaking on behalf of the Blakean community, “construe the phrase ‘Intellectual Powers’ to mean a kind of higher cleverness, a hermeneutic capacity for decoding messages enshrouded in dark conceif’ (“A Wall of Words” 237). But why not? For as De Luca admits elsewhere, “[w]e cannot fully appreciate the humane and passionate side of Blake’s Intellectual Powers unless we acknowledge the presence of a strange side, unaccommodating, hard-edged, hieratic and withdrawn, that sets the warm life off and
reveals it as the precious attainment that it is” (Words of Eternity 216). Perhaps that strange side intends to make us suffer in ways we do not expect.

“How wide the Gulf & Unpassable!” Blake wistfully exclaims in reverse script at the beginning of Book the Second of Milton, “between Simplicity & Insipidity” (M30; E129). The sentiment apparently convinced Roger Murray, who twenty years ago concluded that “[a]s an ideal, a literary aspiration, simplicity was more important over the years spanning Blake’s formative life than any other besides the sublime itself,” and cautioned that “we cannot properly assess Blake’s prophetic works until we acknowledge the bardic Blake as an exponent of sublime simplicity” (104). Yet Blake has never appeared simple; indeed, he has always appeared difficult and arcane, despite his vehement theoretical pronouncements against obscurity and the destruction of definite form. Even the “water clear” of such pellucid, almost infantile lyrics as “Spring” or “Infant Joy” we suspect of having been “stain’d” (SI E7) by some darker, if unfathomable, intention. Tongue in cheek, to be sure (for he was hardly blind to the hermeneutical problems his work poses), he rebukes the Reverend Dr. Trusler for suggesting that his ideas require elucidation with the bluff assurance that

I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped. Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. (E703)

But these precocious “children” (denizens, no doubt, of the same exalted realms as Luvah or Orc or Los) require some elucidation themselves. I would read them as members of that class of interpreters who pay attention to and obey the instruction (not always kindly) of their parents or other authority figures: shepherds, nurses, schoolmasters, priests,
beadles, "wise guardians of the poor" (SI E13), makers, horses, and particularly the Ancient Bard, "Whose ears have heard, / The Holy Word" (SE E18). For what a child-reader needs above all is the infant's facility for learning language, the innate intellectual ability to attach meanings to the baffling world of words into which he is born—but born (unlike a real child) a Spectre or Satan, with a fully developed rational power. Scholars, on the other hand, are more like wise old men, and if their learning ("the ratio of all we have already known") stands in the way of what they have yet to discover, then (to borrow an observation from Blake’s commentary on one of his own paintings whose subject “is taken from the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg”) "The Learned, who strive to ascend into Heaven by means of learning, [will] appear to Children like dead horses, when repelled by the celestial spheres" (DC E546). (A "horse," incidentally, is an intellectual creature—see Blake’s reference to “The Horse of Intellect . . . leaping from the cliffs of Memory and Reasoning” [DC E546]—but more specifically an instructor, perhaps one who ends up getting treated according to his own instruction, which may be why “The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction” [MHH9; E37].) Blake continues:

The works of this visionary [Swedenborg, but perhaps himself?] are well worthy the attention of Painters and Poets; they are foundations for grand things; the reason they have not been more attended to, is, because corporeal demons have gained a predominance; who the leaders of these are, will be shewn below. Unworthy Men who gain fame among Men, continue to govern mankind after death, and in their spiritual bodies, oppose the spirits of those, who worthily are famous; and as Swedenborg observes, by entering into disease and excrement, drunkenness and concupiscence, they possess themselves of the bodies of mortal men, and shut the doors of mind and of thought, by placing Learning above Inspiration. O Artist! you may disbelieve all this, but it shall be at your own peril. (DC E546)
Corporeal demons notwithstanding, to read all this with a completely straight face
(despite the final dire warning about disbelieving all we have just read, including the part
that looks like pure hokum) would be grossly unfair to Blake's wicked sense of humour.
The passage is veiled, cryptic, and slightly obscene: one perceives that he is in earnest
about something, but what exactly is it? (And how literally can we interpret that word
death?) Perhaps corporeal demons govern mankind by exercising their prodigiously evil
reasoning powers, given that, as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell confirms, Reason is
"the restrainer" which usurps the place of desire "& governs the unwilling" [MHH5; E34].) Well, what Blake is truly in earnest about—and this is typical of his literary
strategy—he expresses clearly, intelligibly, even simply. And in the passage in question,
that would be the part about shutting the doors of mind and of thought by placing learning
above inspiration. That is something we can all understand, something few people would
be inclined to disbelieve or dismiss as visionary nonsense.

But where the study of Blake becomes truly fascinating is in the inversion of this
idea that inspiration is superior to learning by critical-hermeneutical practise, which
carries on in the conviction that Blake cannot be interpreted without importing knowledge
from elsewhere. With regard to the Bible, this conviction may be justified, for Blake
himself declares in his Preface to Milton that

The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero. which all Men ought to contemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible. but when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce; all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration. Shakspeare & Milton were both curbd by the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword. (M1; E95)
But then Blake regards the Bible as a work of imaginative inspiration directly opposed to classical—that is, rational—learning: "We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but just & true to our own Imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord" (M1; E95). Furthermore, in his annotations to Thornton's *The Lord's Prayer*, where Dr. Johnson is quoted as saying that "The BIBLE is the *most difficult* book in the world to *comprehend*, nor can it be understood at all by the *unlearned*, except through the aid of CRITICAL and EXPLANATORY *notes,*" Blake sharply retorts: "Christ & his Apostles were Illiterate Men Caiphas Pilate & Herod were Learned. The Beauty of the Bible is that the most Ignorant & Simple Minds Understand it Best" (Marg E667). And again: "Jesus supposes every Thing to be Evident to the Child & to the Poor & Unlearned Such is the Gospel" (Marg E664). Even allowing for hyperbole, one seldom sees the gist of this sentiment applied by Blakeans to their own learned commentary. "The ideal reader of Blake," in Erdman's estimation, must "move dialectically back and forth from Chaucer, Spenser (being fluent in reading *F[aerie]* *Q[ueene]* on the way to *[The] F[our] Z[oas]*), Milton (still ever newly to be done), then Bunyan, then Pope, Gray" ("Future" 391-92). And Robert Essick sounds this "note of warning": "Blake and his students will be served best if the methodological sophisticates stay in close contact with traditional historical scholarship. Even the most mundane source studies (long may they survive) can offer the crucial anchor for critical speculation" ("Blake Today" 399). But if source studies must anchor our interpretations of Blake; or if understanding him "involves tracing a long series of allusions" and so "can come only at the end of a long investigation" of other texts; and if "[a] reading of [Blake’s] entire corpus would not be enough, for each instance of the image leads still
other places” (Miller, “Blake” 166)—if all this is true, then in view of Blake’s caustic remark that “The Man Either Painter or Philosopher who Learns or Acquires all he Knows from Others. Must be full of Contradictions” (E639), scholars ought to ask themselves whether their subject’s almost parasitic dependency on other texts is not a rather unfortunate thing. Do we have another contradiction between Blake’s theory and practise here? Is the highly allusive Blake the true Blake, or is he reasoning when he steals from (and sometimes perverts) the writings of others, and so cannot avoid contradicting himself? For in addition to the sublime of the Bible, we find in Blake plenty of evidence of the very Greek and Roman models he “contemns”: Homer (represented by epic poetry), Ovid (by myth), Plato (philosophy), and Cicero (rhetoric). While source studies concur that Blake makes the material he borrows or steals unmistakably his own, nobody seems to question whether that fabulous wealth of allusive and intertextual material might not be designed, like a web, for the purpose of catching the learned in the act of playing their favorite game, that of elaborating their own “ratio,” which Blake defines as “all we have already known” (NNR[b] E2).

The scholarly love of intellectual complexity, of the richness and depth of thought itself, is one of the reasons we have had such trouble reading Blake despite the accomplished studies and exhaustive analyses, one of the reasons there has not, as Eaves contends, “been a lot of success, even success of the fairly pedestrian scholarly kind, in interpreting Blake’s major works” (“Introduction” 389). For Blake requires us to undergo a second childhood, a relearning of a lot of new meanings for old words, and here the scholar’s natural reverence for the sanctity of the word works against him: accepting the lexical fact that just here, in Blake, the word Satan or spectre or death means something
quite different from what it means elsewhere entails subduing a powerfully stubborn initial resistance (owing once again to those “all-powerful Human Words”). But to imagine that a host of normally distinct words—*Satan, spectre, self-contradiction, doubt, despair, death, negation, fiction, evil, polypus*—can all have been deliberately perverted to mean the same thing—“reasoning”—demands an even more radical alteration in our thinking, even when the text seems to confirm the absurdity: “Till All Things become *One Great Satan, in Holiness / Oppos’d to Mercy . . .*” (M39:1-2; E140; my emphasis). But Blake regards the knowledge of words as mere *doxa*, not *epistêmê*, and if we cannot alter our opinion about a word’s significance, what hope will we have when we come to confront the far more crucial problem of the significance of Blake’s ideas? We have seen that Blake likens the inability to alter one’s opinion to standing (or stagnant) water which breeds reptiles of the mind. And indeed, the brooding wings of Blake scholarship have produced hordes of such progeny, some shrewd and sharp, others frightening, repulsive, or merely silly, if impressively so. Wisely, W. J. T. Mitchell tries to return critical attention to “the dangerous, difficult figure [Blake] really was” (“Dangerous Blake” 413) by way of the “taboo” subjects of his “madness, obscenity, and incoherence” (411).

Mitchell wonders if, paradoxically, “the coherence and methodical, systematic character of his work” might not be regarded as “evidence, not of a higher rationality at work, but of obsession and compulsive repetition?” (413). In Blake’s claim that “Every word and every letter [of *Jerusalem*] is studied and put into its fit place” (J3; E146) Mitchell sees “[t]he hermeneutic imperative of formalism”; and yet,

> [t]he greatest challenge and the most threatening scandal for the formalist appropriation of Blake is the threat of incoherence, nonsense, failure to communicate; the presence of accident, random sloppiness, lack of
technical facility; the cranky miscalculation of audience; the self-defeating strategies of isolation; the self-fulfilling prophecies of paranoia; the megalomania of "Giants & Fairies" and the solipsistic absorption in the silent, solitary obsession with "Writing" for no audience but oneself. (414)

"May it not be time," asks Mitchell, "to consider the hypothesis that Jerusalem is a botched poem?" (415). Certainly, but if, as Mitchell maintains, Blake is an isolated figure solipsistically obsessed with writing for no one but himself, then it hardly makes sense to charge him with a failure to communicate. In what sense, other than inherently, could the product of solipsism be botched? But if, on the other hand, he is seeking an audience (fit, though few), then either the botching is unintentional and Blake simply failed to accomplish what he set out to do, or else it is deliberate and we have not fully understood the intention behind it—which may mean, in turn, that we readers have had a hand in the botching. In assessing the "little, homemade, bumptious, and entirely intimidating world of high Blake scholarship," Eaves implies as much:

I refuse to pretend to believe that even the wisest Blake scholars feel confident in their understanding of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, much less the strange poems in the Pickering manuscript, and less still Europe, The Four Zoas, Milton, or Jerusalem. The discrepancy between the ghostly explanations that Blake scholars stir up and the works that I try to explain to myself when I open my Blake is just too fantastically great to promote simple faith in the powers of scholarship. ("Introduction" 389)

Perhaps Eaves means to imply that "ghostly explanations" are the work of spectres of the dead: it is certainly true that many Blakeans self-consciously suffer the self-contradicting agonies of reasoning in order to interpret a text that condemns reasoning. But they do so comforted by the thought that Blake clearly approves of the intellect: "I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care / Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! put off Holiness / And put on Intellect" (J91:54-56; E252). Still, there is a dilemma here: how
does one intellectualize without reasoning? Eventual extrication from this dilemma (as opposed to a resolution of it) requires that one begins by doing what the learned are naturally inclined not to do, and so have failed to do, and that is, passively, even unthinkingly, obeying Blake’s dictates, not as theoretical pronouncements of general import but as laws of the text, to be obeyed at the level of the word, until such time as they make sense.

What I wish to argue is, perhaps, suspiciously simple: if we respond to Blake as particularly difficult, obscure, or even unreadable, the reason is that his poetry is written in code. There is, after all, a war going on here, which Blake paradoxically characterizes as a war of contrary wars: a good war, the “War of Eternity,” which is spiritual or intellectual, waged against an evil war, a “War / Not Mental, as the Wars of Eternity, but a Corporeal Strife.” And all good wars, especially mental ones, require a code, a way of communicating with one’s allies that will baffle and confound one’s enemies should vital secret messages have the misfortune to fall into the latter’s hands. The ingenious nature of Blake’s code is that it gives his writing the appearance not of complete unintelligibility (for that would alert his enemies to the code’s presence and motivate them to try to break it) but rather of partial intelligibility, of something difficult and obscure but nevertheless comprehensible with the aid of a little reasoning. And thus the enemy is fooled, led to assume, consciously or otherwise, that there is no code to break, no need to read Blake’s poetry in any other than the usual way; as poems, they are like any other poem, written in plain English. But “Spectre” and “Satan” do not, in Blake, mean only “ghost” or “devil”—they denote “reasoning power,” and as such are code words, key terms in what Blake explicitly calls his “Code of War.”
Now, Blake mentions the potentially explosive phrase "Code of War" only once, in *The Song of Los*, where he slips it in among a bunch of proper names—some of them belonging to familiar mythological figures, others of his own invention—which are themselves interspersed among gloomy allusions to secluded places and to lost, illegitimate, and seductive joys:

The human race began to wither, for the healthy built
Secluded places, fearing the joys of Love
And the disease’d only propagated:
So Antamon call’d up Leutha from her valleys of delight:
And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave.
But in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War,
Because of Diralada thinking to reclaim his joy.

(SL3:25-31; E67)

*Europe* mentions a "Guardian of the secret codes" who "drag[s] his torments to the wilderness" (Eur12:15, 20; E64), tormented, perhaps, by the necessity of tormenting his readers with mysterious utterances, given the Blake's firm belief in "No Secresy in Art" (*Laocoön* E275). There is also the late poem "The Keys of the Gates," perhaps the same gates mentioned by the famous quatrain prefacing Chapter 4 of *Jerusalem*:

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball:
It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
Built in Jerusalems wall. (E231)

This quatrain implies two things, one negative and the other positive. First, the reader has been shut out of the holy city of Jerusalem, or is just lost, ignorant of the way in. And second, he is being offered a means of entry. Blake offers a clue to the way in (the end of the golden string), and the reader need only follow it (wind the string into a ball) to achieve his goal (to be led in at heaven’s gate). And, by the unravelling of two entangled metaphors, the end of the golden string becomes the key to a locked gate. Somewhere
within "The Keys of the Gates," then, which was probably not issued until after
Jerusalem’s completion, we may expect to find keys to Blake’s code. There, but not only
there, for keys in the form of definitions are scattered throughout Blake’s work from
beginning to end.

That Blake employs a kind of cryptography is not a new idea, though it has been
dismissed as misguided. In 1947 Northrop Frye, extolled by Hazard Adams as "the
greatest of Blake’s readers" ("Jerusalem’s Experiment" 651), rejected the possibility with
the pronouncement that "[w]hatever Blake’s prophecies may be, they can hardly be code
messages. They may need interpretation, but not deciphering: there can be no ‘key’ and
no open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation" (Fearful Symmetry 7).
Perhaps the categorical finality of Frye’s authoritative opinion discouraged scholars who
came after him from thinking otherwise, although Leopold Damrosch, Jr., notes that
“[s]ubsequent scholarship has not always heeded this warning, freezing many of Frye’s
own insights into a system of dogmatic cryptography” (5). But this was not the sort of
code writing Frye had denounced, and indeed Frye himself, reflecting on the writing of
Fearful Symmetry nearly twenty-five years later, concluded that there was a code in
Blake, but a symbolic one not necessarily invented by or unique to Blake himself: “my
task was the specific one of trying to crack Blake’s symbolic code, and I had the feeling
that the way led directly through literature itself” (13-14). Thus Frye sanctioned the
practise of what Miller calls “interpretation-as-decipherment,” which tended to shape
Blake criticism from its beginnings, largely because of “the pressing need to determine
some legible sense” (“Introduction” 6): “As early as Ellis and Yeats, critics treated the
poetry as if it were in a code that required deciphering, usually by means of some ‘key’—a
central dogma or a set of occult sources or a knowledge of esoteric traditions—that was to be found outside the texts and used to unlock encrypted meaning" ("Introduction" 5).

Reviewing the state of Blake scholarship during the first half of this century, Miller observes that

S. Foster Damon’s early work turns upon the claim of Blake’s “mysticism,” as does D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis’s interpretive concordance of Blakean symbolic terms. Though not as burdened by the assumption of Blake’s mysticism as his first writings, Damon’s *A Blake Dictionary*, an immensely useful critical resource, moves along the same exegetic path: the prophecies can be read once the code is cracked. In his introduction, Damon speaks of a system that “must be discovered,” of “clues” to Blake’s meaning that are “broadcast throughout his writings” and must be assembled, of a “prodigious jigsaw puzzle” that, once fitted together, “makes amazing good sense which might have been obvious from the first.” From this perspective, Blake’s “sense” is not a critical problem, only the discourse in which that sense is articulated; interpretation becomes the act of solving a semiotic puzzle, and the bits and pieces of the puzzle serve simply the purpose of joining together to form the larger message. ("Introduction" 5-6)

But of course Blake’s sense is a critical problem, and it is so because the discourse in which that sense is articulated has been deliberately encrypted. Hence the intellectual faculties of acute readers like Damon and Frye were roused, however unconsciously, to act. What if, while the particular methods of the decipherers and puzzle-solvers may have been mistaken and produced dubious results, their instincts were right, or as right as any hermeneutical instinct can be? Is it merely coincidental that the decoding impulse refuses to die? As late as 1991, De Luca argued that “when we start reading Blake, we are immediately made aware of our separation from a readily accessible body of unified meaning,” but that this initially “estranging effect” changes with subsequent readings,

for whenever we are confronted with an array of forms that are inscrutable, detached from a familiar continuum, and yet apparently patterned with an
internal consistency, we are inevitably inclined to believe that we are in the presence of code, and the temptation to decipher it becomes aroused. (*Words of Eternity* 205)

Like Frye, De Luca does not conceive of this code in terms of cryptography or secret writing, but his critical sensibilities nevertheless urge him in that general direction. If we can agree with Adams that "problems [exist] in the prophecies that are not all by any means problems of interpretation in the usual sense," we need to acknowledge not just "the possibility that things might have gone wrong here and there" ("Post-Essick Prophecy" 401), but also the possibility that they went terribly right.

Suppose we hypothesize that Blake regards all his readers (but especially the learned) as enemies, as evil reasoning spectres by birth—"by his Maternal Birth he is that Evil-One" (J90:35; E250)—who nevertheless have the potential to become, in the course of their reading, his brothers, allies, friends (because the soldier who fights for Truth calls his enemy his brother). The experience of breaking the code—the device that locks the gates to Blake's meaning, shutting all his enemies out—would change the enemy into a friend. Nor need the reader be initially aware of the code's presence in order to break it eventually: all he need do is follow his instinct or suspicion that something is blocking his access to what De Luca calls a body of unified meaning, while at the same time obeying Blake's dictates, remembering his definitions and applying them faithfully and rigorously throughout the text. In this way, as Blake hints in the Preface to *Milton*, "when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce" on the subject of "Stolen and Perverted Writings," "all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration" (M1; E95). Seeking friends among his enemies, Blake calls
upon us to "Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War" (M1; E95). And these hirelings, mercenary soldiers, prolong corporeal war by fighting not for truth but for "Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason" (Laocoön E275).

Miller concedes that "interpretation-as-decipherment has been responsible for genuine scholarly discoveries, but once a puzzle has been reasonably well solved, we wonder why it was a puzzle in the first place" ("Introduction" 6). The assumption here is that the puzzle of Blake has been "reasonably" well solved, but what if it hasn't?

Suppose Blake really was, as Damon and others suspected, a mystic, despite the dismissal of that idea by later critics, beginning again with Frye, whose zeal to appropriate Blake entirely for the priesthood of literary criticism resulted in a curious addendum to Fearful Symmetry, a kind of apologetic disclaimer, as though Blake's obviously mystical bent were slightly shameful and needed to be swept under the cleaner and more magical carpet of Art. But if Blake were indeed a mystic, his reason for writing in code might be to give his reader an analogical experience of revelation (he refers to a "Divine Analogy" a couple of times: J49:58; E199 and J85:7; E243). A code would ensure that all his readers would be taken in by an illusion, the depths of whose deceptiveness few would suspect. But it would also permit the rousing of intellectual faculties so dear to Blake, and so necessary to the stripping away of an illusion. The ignorant reader, setting out in the dark, finally arrives in the light, having discovered for himself an unmistakable, certain, and newly revealed truth: that he has been fooled, has been a fool, but is now wise. This apocalypse occurs simultaneously with
The Last Judgment when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God turning all into a Consuming fire <When> Imaginative Art & Science & all Intellectual Gifts all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are [despised] lookd upon as of no use & only Contention remains to Man then the Last Judgment begins & its Vision is seen by the [Imaginative Eye] of Every one according to the situation he holds (VLJ E554)

So Blake tirelessly encourages his reader to discover a hidden or secret truth, and the golden-string quatrain from Jerusalem is only one of the more obvious examples of that encouragement.

When Blake says “I give you the end of a golden string,” the metaphor is either meaningful—that is, he means to give the reader something, some kind of clue, guidance, or direction—or it is utterly empty, meaningless. Some readers, wisely choosing the former road when they arrive at this fork, go on to identify the “Jerusalem” mentioned by the quatrain with the epic poem they are already deeply involved in reading when they are first offered the end of the golden string: “you” are thus Jerusalem’s generic reader, already classed as an enemy shut out by the fortress’s impenetrable walls, looking for a way to get in and become a friend. So De Luca, for one, finds Blake still conspicuously difficult to read, even in a critical climate in which all readings are said to be problematic. . . . In Jerusalem, particularly, the thread of thematic continuity is subject to snagging on verbal outcroppings, and there are indeed passages in the poem where such outcroppings mass themselves into a solid wall of words. Most readers of Blake have spent a lot of time pacing before these ramparts, the golden string slack in their hands. (“A Wall of Words” 218)

Yet the reader may be trapped inside those walls of words, mistakenly believing he is on the outside (after all, he is already reading Jerusalem when he comes upon the golden-string quatrain at the beginning of Chapter 4), and if he could only step outside the poem
for a moment, he would get a more accurate sense of how it has been built (or botched),
because from a distance, to the impartial eye, Jerusalem looks more like a crumbling, if
imposing, ruin than a solid, towering, organized structure. And that may be why, in the
same Preface where we find the golden-string verse, Blake exhorts “every Christian as
much as in him lies [to] engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some
Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem” (J77; E232). Heaven’s gate, in other
words, though built in the wall of Jerusalem, may open outwards into a sunlit and
refreshingly vernal expanse—a heaven, that is, of intelligibility, “Written within &
without in woven letters,” as Blake says, “& the Writing / Is the Divine Revelation in the
Litteral expression: / A Garment of War” (M42:13-15; E143); a heaven written in the
language of plain, simple English which is, figuratively speaking, “Englands green &
pleasant Land” (M1:16; E96). Only upon turning round and looking back does one
realize that the labyrinthine Jerusalem, whose enigmatic code forces one to spend so
much time in sorrowful drudgery, “grind[ing] / And polish[ing] brass & iron hour after
hour laborious task!” (J65:23-24; E216), to obtain a scanty pittance of mental bread,
resembles nothing so much, on the inside, as a Satanic mill.

* * *

If he is to win his enemies over to his camp, let them into his secret truth, Blake
must alert them, somehow, to the existence of this linguistic code of war that will hinder
their interpretive vision until they break it. Our first clue to the code, then, is the most
obvious one: the set of proper names found nowhere else, names of Blake’s own
invention. Scrutinizing inscrutable words like Urizen, Palamabron, Bromion, Tharmas,
Theotormon, Tiriel, or Thel, the reader is naturally, even unconsciously, led, as De Luca
argues, into the temptation to decipher them—and here deciphering involves something more than merely identifying the character or figure attached to the name. While “Lear” or “Hamlet” or “Emma Woodhouse” is not likely to arouse any deciphering impulse, and while “Romeo” would be by any other name the same character, things are different with Blake’s “Urizen,” for example, a name which Harold Bloom explains “is probably based on the Greek for ‘to draw with a compass’, and echoes the sound (and meaning) of ‘horizon’, based on the same Greek root” (Commentary E901). Hilton glosses Urizen as “your reason”; the “horizon,” our physical-perception limit; “your eyes in,” a form of self-contemplation; “ur-reason,” a primary model; “you risen,” marking the ascendancy of the faculty that even now reads; “err-reason,” this is only too human—to forgive is to reason not. This list is, of course, not complete: Urizen, like “Reason” (VNRb), is not the same that he shall be when we know more. (Literal Imagination 255)

Hilton makes a telling point: our knowledge of Urizen’s character and context exerts an influence on what we see in his neologistic name, and what we see in the name is what we can translate into more familiar or intelligible terms (like reason). The desire to convert into ordinary language a meaning that seems locked up within obscure forms is hardly foreign to literary interpretation, which, as Paul Ricoeur has said, is a work of thought that entails the deciphering of a hidden meaning in an apparent meaning by the unfolding of multiple meanings implicit in the literal surface. Blake, perhaps more than most, requires this work of thought, for his literal meanings are seldom what they appear: and, on rare occasions, he nearly comes right out and tells us so, alluding for example to “[t]hose wonderful originals seen in my visions . . . all containing mythological and recondite meaning, where more is meant than meets the eye” (DC E531). But if his recondite meaning is to be a “Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression,” the truth to be
revealed will be utterly dependent on the literal meaning which obscures it. So it is important to notice from the outset that the individual words of Blake's literal expression are mostly familiar and only occasionally strange: Urizen and Los immediately provoke our deciphering impulse, but Albion or Rahab or Jerusalem may not, at least for a while; and England, London, bread, or tree may never.

Having signalled the existence of his code by the use of neologisms (as well as all that talk about keys, strings, gates, walls, and secret codes), Blake goes on to dramatize his transformation of ordinary English words into code names—poetically and metaphorically, of course. In the following scene from Jerusalem, for example, the narrator is in process of identifying a group of human figures called “the Twenty-four,” beginning with

Selsey, true friend! who afterwards submitted to be devourd
By the waves of Despair, whose Emanation rose above
The flood, and was nam'd Chichester, lovely mild & gentle! Lo!
Her lambs bleat to the sea-fowls cry, lamenting still for Albion.

Submitting to be call’d the son of Los the terrible vision:
Winchester stood devoting himself for Albion: his tents
Outspread with abundant riches, and his Emanations
Submitting to be call’d Enitharmons daughters, and be born
In vegetable mould: created by the Hammer and Loom
In Bowlahoola & Allamanda where the Dead wail night & day.

(J36:48-57; E182-83)

Here we have, on the one hand, a set of English names, Selsey, Chichester, and Winchester; and on the other, a set of Blakean coinages, Los, Enitharmon, Bowlahoola, and Allamanda. Between them, in a manner of speaking, we have “Albion,” England's own name for its mythic self, appropriated by Blake for his “Giant Man” who “anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth” (J27; E171). Thus the
English word *Albion* enters Blake’s pantheon of code-name warriors, lining up alongside Los, Luvah, Urizen, and Rintrah, like them, strange enough to catch the eye, but unlike them, too familiar to require deciphering. Far more revelatory, however, is what happens to the rest of the English proper names in the passage, which calls for close examination. First “Selsey” submits to being devoured by waves of despair—and since we have already identified *despair* as a synonym for reasoning, and since “the Devouring Power” is another name for the Spectre or Satan (see J29:17-24; E175) who is reasoning, and since “waves” belong to seas and seas in Blake have the power to devour (see *The Marriage*:

“But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer *as a sea* received the excess of his delights” [MHH16; E40; my emphasis]), we may be fairly certain that Selsey has submitted to reasoning in one way or another. Next, an “Emanation,” who belongs to either Selsey or the waves of despair (the antecedent of the possessive pronoun in line 49 is somewhat ambiguous), is “nam’d Chichester”; and then either Chichester or Albion or Winchester submits to being called “the son of Los” (this time the tortuous syntax is highly ambiguous: any one of the three could be “submitting” in line 52, except that “lovely mild & gentle” Chichester is apparently female—as indicated by “*her* lambs” in line 51—whereas both Albion and Winchester are male and so would more logically be “sons”). Finally, Winchester “devotes” himself “for” Albion (to *devote* is to give oneself up to something, or “to appropriate by, or as if by, a vow” [OED], by, that is, a verbal utterance, “a solemn promise” to “make some gift or sacrifice” [OED, *vow*]), and all “his” (Winchester’s or Albion’s?) emanations also “submit” to “be called Enitharmon’s daughters.” What we see in this scene, in short, is a number of English names submitting, sacrificing, or giving themselves up to a Blakean code name: *Los,*
Enitharmon, or Albion (the last an English name already devoted to the code). And that is how Blake’s secret tongue devours the English language, demanding the sacrifice of the familiar literal to the strange divine, to “the terrible vision” (of line 52). The old language must die for the sake of the new code, and when it does, Jerusalem’s meaning disappears underground, remaining hidden beneath the surface of the words we read: so Jerusalem/Jerusalem “fled to Lambeths mild Vale and hid herself beneath / The Surrey Hills where Rephaim terminates: her Sons are siez’d / For victims of sacrifice; but Jerusalem cannot be found! Hid / By the Daughters of Beulah: gently snatch’d away: and hid in Beulah” (J37:11-14; E183). But meaning that dies, murdered by evil reasoning—for reasoning is death, and the reasoning power, as Los reminds the Spectre, “accumulate[s] Particulars, & murder[s] by analyzing” (J91:26; E251)—may be brought back to a new life, in a renovated form; what is hidden may be brought back up to the sunlit surface; and so code words that demand the death of other words are themselves “born / In vegetable mould: created by the Hammer and Loom / In Bowlahoola & Allamanda where the Dead wail night & day.”

At this point, the narrator of Jerusalem breaks off to observe:

(I call them by their English names: English, the rough basement. Los built the stubborn structure of the Language, acting against Albions melancholy, who must else have been a Dumb despair.)

(J36:58-60; E183)

The parentheses appear to demote the remark to relative insignificance, but in fact (things in Blake often being the reverse of what they appear) its significance nearly gives the whole game away. First we must ask to whom, exactly, the pronouns them and their of the first clause refer: Selsey, Chichester, and Winchester, or Albion, Los, Enitharmon,
Bowlahoola, and Allamanda? The latter four are not English names, unless perhaps Blake regards his neologisms as English names because he, their author, is English or because they have been hammered or woven out of the rough material of English words, which “die” for their sake and remain buried, like a basement, beneath their surfaces. Horizon, reason, your, eyes, in, you, risen, and err are all (according to Hilton and Bloom) buried beneath the surface of Urizen, waiting to be brought to the notice of someone’s deciphering eye. A Blakean code name may be merely an altered form of an English word, sometimes with allusions to its Greek or Latin roots. Los, for example, may be a reverse pun on sol, or remind us of the words soul, solo, lo’s, or loss. Albion incorporates all, I, no, and (if we take the liberty of adding an additional letter) be and one, all key terms in Blakean metaphysical thought, a metaphysics that analogizes itself on the linguistic level, re-enacting its “living” truths in what Blake calls “the human form” of language, as Hilton affirms in his discussion of Jerusalem’s closing lines, where he sees a “homo-nymic” name that “will be in language, that unnatural Human Form Divine where all being (bios and zoa) may all be one, Albion” (Literal Imagination 235). A clearer example is “Golgonooza”: as Hilton points out, “[f]rom reminding us only of Golgotha, ‘the place of the skull’ and the (reader’s) crucifixion of the Word, Los’s poetic city of Golgonooza now reveals its inner form of logon zooas . . . the ‘living word’” (Literal Imagination 235-36); while Aaron Fogel discovers in the name “a Golgotha of Nous and Zoa, a Calvary of Mind and Body” (229).

As Butter suspects (and quite justifiably, in my view), some of Blake’s human forms are “little or nothing more than names” with which “[s]ome commentators seem equally pleased . . . provided they can scratch together from diverse, sometimes remote
and dubious, sources a plausible explanation of what a name stands for” (147). What one sees in Blakean names will ultimately depend on the quantity of one’s ratio (or store of knowledge: what one already knows) and the quality of one’s readerly imagination, how responsive one is to verbal triggers. The decipherings of the learned are likely to turn up associations and connections beyond the ken of mere children, with their limited vocabularies and paltry knowledge. Still, Blake manages to satisfy the literary tastes of both. “Leutha,” for example, reminds Fogel of “Luther,” and so “represents confused confession, guilty self-revelation undertaken without a priest and under one’s own guidance, though perhaps in public. Leutha enacts before the Assembly [in Milton] the extreme self-scrutiny encouraged by the Reformation and also specifically associated with Luther as an individual” (217). But when Leutha appears before the “Great Solemn Assembly” (M11:29; E105), confessing, as we saw earlier, that she is “the Author of this Sin,” her tale of thwarted love for Palamabron involves another female figure, the rival and contrary of Leutha, named Elynittria, in face of whose superior “terrible light” and “immortal beauty” (M12:1; E105) Leutha “fades” and hides herself “In Satan’s inmost Palace of his nervous fine wrought Brain” (M12:41; E106)—in, that is, the brain of the reasoning power. So when the uneducated reader reads that “Elynittria met Leutha in the place where she was hidden” (M13:36; E107), he may be tempted to join the two names together in a single anagram, unscrambling their combined letters (with a single “t” left over) to read the secret message “lie, any lie, a truth” or perhaps “lie, lie, nay, a truth” or even “any truth a lie, lie,” suggesting some relationship (positive or negative) between a lie twice told and a truth, seeing that the “Great Solemn Assembly” before which Leutha
confesses her sin has been called so that “he who will not defend Truth, may be compelled to / Defend a Lie” (M8:47-48; E102).

Or consider the name “Enitharmon,” about which Fogel makes some insightful observations:

[Blake’s] inventive early names play with the visual ordering of letters—recoiling, mirroring, reversing—to express the disorders of the psyches of the characters they name. In the later poetry . . . the names relate to one another, in particular, and seem to miss parts of themselves and of each other. . . . [To the reader] they might seem like strange deflections or fallings-away from more familiar words. “Enion” falls away from “Union,” and is a kind of primary voice of lamentation and loss. Tharmas, whose first words are “Lost! Lost! Lost!” obviously resonates with Tammuz (a name like Ololon that can be associated with the lamentation of women). The logic of loss in “Enitharmon” may be less obvious at first, but if we compare the name to Los, we see that Los has “lost” a final s or t partly because he is, among other things, Time, which has no apparent end, and that Enitharmon—(z)enith(h)armon(y)—who is in part space, lacks the apparent points of beginning, middle, and end, extending like the modern idea of infinite space without apparent limits in any direction. She is the music of space rather than of the spheres. There is of course more to these names than this quiet precision of omission. (223-24)

Or one could, with the judicious doubling of a letter or two, rearrange the letters of “Enitharmon” to read “O thine are mine.” But this reading seems far less cogent than Fogel’s, more arbitrary and even pointless—until, perhaps, one bumps into the following speech from Jerusalem:

For thine are also mine! I have kept silent hitherto,
Concerning my chief delight: but thou hast broken silence
Now I will speak my mind! Where is my lovely Enitharmon
O thou my enemy, where is my Great Sin? She is also thine
I said . . .

(J10:40-44; E153)

So says the Spectre, the reasoning power disembodied or personified, addressing his enemy Los, builder of the “stubborn structure of the Language,” which language is either
English or another linguistic structure built on top of English. And what the Spectre tells Los is that Enitharmon—who, like Leutha, is called a sin and appears to be, as Leutha is, hidden away, lost, or otherwise missing—belongs to both of them. Leutha hides herself in Satan's brain (that is, in evil reasoning), but Enitharmon, it seems, has been hidden by Los from the Spectre (also evil reasoning), who is now seeking her. Perhaps Enitharmon, Leutha, Elynittria and the rest of Blake's invented names are part of the stubborn linguistic structure Los builds on top of the rough basement of English—rough because the interpreter, in the act of deciphering, in translating strange names into familiar ones and thus unearthing the hidden meaning in the literal one, must smooth and finish it himself, using his ingenuity and the material of his own particular ratio. Perhaps the stubborn structure is the code of war, a language stubborn in the sense of "difficult to subdue, work," as we say of material things, or in the sense more specifically applied to wood and stone: "hard, stiff, rigid" (OED). But a stubborn person is one who persistently refuses to comply or obey, and since Blake characterizes his words as human, we might imagine the wood-and-stone structure built on the basement of English as stubborn in this sense, too—refusing to obey the dictate, or simply the words, of a plain-spoken speaker, and thus hiding the clear expression of his intention within strange and opaque forms. But the code resists only the inquiries of readers who refuse to obey the text's definitions, to pick up and use its proferred keys: to them it gives only that most universal sign of refusal (in English), a resounding "No."

We know (it is part of our ratio, for we have read this truth in Milton) that "The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man" (M40:34-35; E142). If this Negation/Spectre lends a helping hand to Los in the building of his stubborn linguistic
structure, and if that structure is a code, we should not be surprised to see its mark on several of the names they invent together—and so we do: Oothoon, Theotormon, Bromion, Enitharmon, Ocalythron, Palamabron, Fuzon, Enion, Ololon, Entuthon Benython, Cathedron, Antamon, as well as (fortuitously, of course) Albion, London, and Milton, all end in “on,” which, reversed, spells “no.” (Fogel is certainly correct to say that Blake’s “names play with the visual ordering of letters—recoiling, mirroring, reversing—to express the disorders of the psyches of the characters they name.”) We might also include in this group Eno, Golgonooza, and Urthona (and Urthona, with its characters’ psyches reordered, spells either “no truth” or “a truth,” depending perhaps on whether its reader is a soldier who fights for truth or someone who refuses to defend it). Indeed, the word “No,” as the principal sign of Blake’s refusal to communicate with enemies, may be the end of that golden string leading us to heaven, or to the palace of wisdom or wherever we wish to go, as long as our destination is somewhere far away from the baffling, if not downright unintelligible, place we first enter. For after No comes Negation, then Spectre, followed by Satan, and then, as the string begins more rapidly winding up, polypus, death, despair, doubt, self-contradiction—all of whom the dictate would have us obey in the single form of our own Holy Reasoning Power.

If the reader experiences a jolt of recognition upon seeing “O thine are mine” in the name Enitharmon, it will only occur if he has already understood, when he hears the Spectre telling Los that “thine are also mine,” that both of them, Los and his evil Reasoning Power, are responsible for constructing the code in which Enitharmon’s meaning now lies hidden. The code is the Spectre’s cruel device for hiding truth—Satan’s brain, remember, is where the sinning Leutha flees to hide herself—but it is also
Los’s instrument of revelation, the stubborn structure of his living word or great
Golgonooza. A dualistic or self-contradictory structure, the code obscures from without
but reveals from within, and its total building is the “great task” of writing for which
Blake must invoke divine aid: “Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the
rock of ages, / While I write of the building of Golgonooza, & of the terrors of Entuthon:
/ Of Hand & Hyle & Coban, of Kwantok, Peachey, Brereton, Slayd & Hutton: / Of the
terrible sons & daughters of Albion. and their Generations” (J5:23-26; E147).

However terrible Blake’s neologisms, their power to block our access to meaning
is nothing compared with that of ordinary English words, like spectre or London or death.
Throughout the text, clusters of mutually reflective names, words, and phrases proliferate
like so many fibres and nerves and sinews, or branches and roots, interconnecting and
spreading outward in a vast network of signification, like a polypus; or like Urizen’s
“Web dark & cold”—“So twisted the cords, & so knotted / The meshes: twisted like to
the human brain”—which is also called “The Net of Religion” (BU25:20-22; E82); or
like his “accursed Tree of MYSTERY” (BA4:6; E87) which appears to spring directly
from his “Book / Of iron” (BA3:73-74; E87), only to reappear in another incarnation in
Jerusalem as Albion’s tree of death:

. . . and underneath his heel, shot up!
A deadly Tree, he nam’d it Moral Virtue, and the Law
Of God who dwells in Chaos hidden from the human sight.

The Tree spread over him its cold shadows, (Albion groand)
They bent down, they felt the earth and again enrooting
Shot into many a Tree! an endless labyrinth of woe!

(J28:14-19; E174)
If Los were to find himself in the midst of this labyrinth of woe—and he must, because one of his furnaces is located "upon fishy Billingsgate, / Beneath Albion's fatal Tree, before the Gate of Los" (J82:59-60; E240)—he might well be regarded as Los(t). What the reader needs to ask is, am I equally lost? For just knowing that I am caught in a verbal web or entangled in a mass of lexical roots does not explain how I got there and why I remain there ("None could break the Web, no wings of fire" [BU25:19; E82]), nor does my laborious tracing the meshes of this web or the branches and roots of this tree necessarily tell me what its significance is.

Not coincidentally, Enitharmon is born in the Lambeth Books along with the Net of Religion and the Tree of Mystery, and her birth begins with a "globe of life blood trembl[ing] / Branching out into roots; / Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds; / Fibres of blood, milk and tears" (BU18:1-4; E78). Enitharmon, it appears, is born as and from a kind of heart: she is pity—"They call'd her Pity, and fled" (BU19:1; E78)—because she is born out of pity. But verbal associations (those branching roots and fibres) identify her with the labyrinthine tree and the unbreakable web as well. So, already established as a figure for the heart, Enitharmon becomes the "woe" in the endless labyrinth. And so Enitharmon anagrammatically encrypts "o mine heart" or "no, mine heart," in addition to "name it" or "name it not," for the act of naming (or building Golgonooza) separates Los, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, from the object of his love, the truth of his heart. But "none harm it" we can conclude from Enitharmon herself. Or, if she gives her sole to Los in compensation for the one he loses while inside her fibrous labyrinthine form, she may be made to read (reassuringly) "I harm none," or (alarmingly) "one in harm," or
(more sorrowfully) "none hear me," for she is also the emblem of our failure to listen to her, to mark words well and obey them.

While any word of sufficient length can be transformed into a number of other words, the significance of anagrammatic wordplay in Blake has far less to do with the results achieved than the imaginative thought processes in which it involves us. The anagram per se is a sign telling us that the characters of a word of uncertain or opaque meaning may need reordering to reveal unexpected senses—as might the lines or passages of a poem. An anagram is a puzzle—and so is a code language. To have any meaning at all, an anagram must be built on the rough basement of one's mother tongue. Puns in Blake perform a similar signifying function, alerting us to the possibility of another meaning not legitimized by the literal one but introduced by the desire to expand our perceptual senses by activating unexpected contexts. We may recall seeing "Emanations / Submitting to be call'd Enitharmons daughters, and be born / In vegetable mould: created by the Hammer and Loom / In Bowlahoola & Allamanda where the Dead wail night & day." Assuming that Bowlahoola and Allamanda together designate the awful place where English words are transformed into cruel code words by Los and his Spectre, we may strain to hear a familiar tune in the two distinctly Blakean names. Bowlahoola is reminiscent (again, with its syllables reversed) of two words signifying chaos or clamorous confusion: hurly-burly and hullabaloo. Or it may mock the infant's inarticulate cry, boo-hoo (with la, la interposed). Even more obvious is Allamanda's resemblance to the French name for the German dance, allemande, which is "serious in character but not heavy, and of moderate speed . . . in simple binary form" (Kennedy 13). Now, clamorous confusion and a dance are clearly contrary, and so the coupling of
“Bowlahoola & Allamanda” suggests that the place where code words are born, created, or manufactured is itself a kind of binary form, a contrarily structured place of disorder and order, chaos and pattern, where we might experience both the sorrow of infantile inarticulate cries and the joy of sophisticated artistic expression.

And we can play the same game (or dance the same dance) with plain old English words: from _emanation_, for instance, deriving from the Latin “to flow out,” one can extract the self-contradictory message “I am not a name” and “No, I am a name,” or “I am in a name,” which phrases taken together sum up pretty accurately what an emanation says once it is born as a code word within the system of Blake’s private language and mythology. Noting the orthographic similarity between _emanation_ and _lamentation_, Hilton observes that “[l]amentation is the initial identifying expression of an emanation, which is, in turn, the embodiment of lamentation—the emanations first appear with the wailing feminine voices in *The Four Zoas*” (*Literal Imagination* 33). Emanations lament because they have suffered a loss—a loss of letters, in some cases; in others, of the proper order of those letters; and still others, a loss of their senses, primary or literal—grieving words taken leave of their wits. But in general, emanations suffer the loss of an articulate voice, a loss they sustain when they submit to being called “Enitharmon’s daughters,” resulting in their subjection, or enslavement, to a code.

So which entities are being called “by their English names” in that passage from _Jerusalem_ quoted some time ago: Selsey, Chichester, and Winchester, or Albion, Los, Enitharmon, Bowlahoola, and Allamanda? And who is the “I” doing the calling?
Whatever the answers to these questions, there is a powerfully strong temptation to conclude that, since “they” are being called by their *English* names, they have another name in another language.

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1In all copies of *Milton* line 30 actually reads “All that can be ann be annihilated must be annihilated”: I prefer Blake’s error to Erdman’s emendation, since it emphasizes, if we read the “ann” as an elision for “and,” that something must be able to be before it can be annihilated, and moreover implies that some things can be and *not* be annihilated.

2Dan Miller, in “Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude,” points out that if one were to trace the term allegory through Blake’s Prophecies, one “would find allegory consistently denigrated as a fallen mode of representation and perception, yet as consistently rehabilitated as a limit upon the Fall and a potential means of regeneration. Though Blake tends to discount allegory in his prose, the poetry treats it with strict equivocation” (162). Miller also wisely advises “gaug[ing] the differences between what the discourse asserts and what it practices” (162): doing so exposes Blake’s unrepentant proclivity for self-contradiction, a sign, according to his own axiom, that he is engaged in “Two Horn’d Reasoning.” Blake’s habitual commission of the very sin or evil he inveighs against should prepare us for his feeling free to write allegory even though he thinks it is “bad.” Indeed, as I will argue later, not only is allegory treated equivocally in his poetry, allegory is its primary mode.

3This is Ricoeur’s early position; later qualifications, as in *The Rule of Metaphor*, address issues pertinent to some of my arguments about Blake, such as objective meaning of the text, subjective intention of the author, and the role of the reader: “The kind of hermeneutics which I now favour starts from the recognition of the objective meaning of the text as distinct from the subjective intention of the author. This objective meaning is not something hidden behind the text. Rather it is a requirement addressed to the reader. The interpretation accordingly is a kind of obedience to this injunction starting from the text” (319).
4. The Reasoning Enemy

Blake's diatribe against the Deists in the Preface to Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem* may now be re-read in light of the hypothesis that the English words *spectre* and *Satan*, or even longer phrases like "the God of this World," are code terms for Reason. Blake's definition of Deism as "the worship of Satan" would then simply mean that Deism is the worship of Reason—which is pretty close to the trivial truth, for a deist, while rejecting revealed religion, acknowledges the existence of a God upon the testimony of reason.

Now, if Blake regards Reason as an evil, a veritable satanic force, he must (if his thinking is to be consistent) regard Deism, or Natural Religion, as his enemy. And indeed he does maintain that "He never can be a Friend to the Human Race who is the Preacher of Natural Morality or Natural Religion," both of which are based on purportedly rational principles. Then in the Preface to *Jerusalem's* fourth and final chapter—addressed, quite properly, "To the Christians," contraries of the Deists because believers in revelation—he reveals the identity of the friend of the human race:

I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination. Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. *(J77; E231)*

If Deism is the religion of Reason, Christianity is the religion of the Imagination—and the latter proposition would no doubt have sounded as offensive to contemporary Christians as the former would have seemed more or less agreeable to the Deists, especially in comparison to the trumped-up charge of Satan-worship. But Blake’s equation of Christianity with Imagination-worship, though equally spurious, seems old hat to us now.
As even the most obtuse Blake reader cannot help but notice, Imagination and Reason are the two great "Contraries of Man," the former good, the latter evil; one Blake's friend, the other his enemy; but bitter enemies to each other, two intellectual qualities or faculties struggling for dominion over Man's divided mind, "destroying one another by every means in their power both of deceit and of open violence." On nearly every page we see "Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination" (J5:58; E148), often to the high amusement of the more rationally inclined, since the "idiot Reasoner laughs at the Man of Imagination" (M32:6; E131).

Below is an abbreviated list of paired words that ought to strike experienced readers as familiar Blakean contraries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>EVIL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Deism, Natural Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innocence</td>
<td>experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infinite</td>
<td>finite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>restraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mental</td>
<td>the corporeal or material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Prolific</td>
<td>the Devouring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revelation</td>
<td>demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the eternal</td>
<td>the temporal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the spiritual</td>
<td>the natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immortality, eternal life</td>
<td>mortality, death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirit</td>
<td>body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eternal or divine body</td>
<td>vegetable or mortal body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vision</td>
<td>allegory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wise man</td>
<td>fool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic</td>
<td>Grecian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspiration</td>
<td>memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Satan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prophet-poet</td>
<td>philosopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the particular</td>
<td>the general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberty</td>
<td>the bounded, rules and laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-evident truth</td>
<td>rational truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>logic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To a reader sufficiently familiar with the Blakean territory it will seem generally clear (there are sometimes minor inconsistencies and contradictions among the particulars, just enough to keep the overly rational off balance) that everything in the “Good” column is associated with the Imagination and everything in the “Evil” column with Reason. Indeed, the more carefully the reader traces the lineage of Blake’s particular contraries, the more certain he becomes that they all—including Good and Evil themselves—descend from this original pair. Anthony Blunt exemplifies the seasoned reader’s grasp of this basic pattern:

Behind Blake’s visionary conception of art lies his idea of the contrast between the states of Innocence and Experience. Man is born with an apprehension of the infinite which comes from his previous existence in infinity. But that sense of the infinite is gradually destroyed by education and by the imposition of the restraints created by moral and religious rules (in his own mythology this becomes the struggle between Los and Urizen). To break through these restraints and to re-establish his contact with the infinite man has only one weapon—energy or imagination—to which the senses are an aid. . . . And so Blake built up his doctrine on a system of contrasts between those things which pertain to the infinite and are right, and those which pertain to the finite and are wrong. The source of all those on the side of the infinite is the imagination or the Poetic Genius. The source of the finite is the negative faculty of reason, which for Blake means restraint and materialism. (12)

Blunt eventually traces the Finite-Infinite dichotomy back to the Reason-Imagination opposition, accounting for as many of Blake’s contrary pairs as he can along the way. But he shies away from the terms “good” and “evil” and chooses “right” and “wrong” instead, probably because Blake (through Los) dismisses the moral distinction as worthless, foolish, self-righteous: “I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care / Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! put off Holiness / And put on Intellect” (J91:54–56; E252). Moral distinctions made by Reason are not of the same class as those
made by either the Intellect or conscience ("If Conscience is not a Criterion of Moral Rectitude What is it?" [Marg E613]), and, unfortunately for Blunt, right and wrong belong to Reason, too: "Conscience in those that have it is unequivocal, it is the voice of God Our judgment of right & wrong is Reason" (Marg E613).

Blunt's hesitation to employ the very moral categories condemned by his poet is common amongst Blakeans, and perfectly understandable. But here Blake traps the unwary intellectual: whatever Blake or Los may say theoretically about the evils of thinking in terms of good and evil or right and wrong, the text constantly pushes the reader in that direction, setting up oppositions, one after another, that implicitly require a moral response. So the reader is contradictorily seduced by the rhetorical forces of the text into not only siding with Blake's opinions of good and evil, but also reasoning diligently in order to learn that reasoning is evil: "Serpent Reasonings us entice," as one Key of the Gates puts it, "Of Good & Evil: Virtue & Vice" (KG E268). And the evil vice is always reasoning.

From *A Vision of the Last Judgment* we learned that the combats of good and evil are "Eating of the Tree of Knowledge" while the combats of truth and error are "Eating of the Tree of Life" (VLJ E563). And we know that the two trees are contrary trees, one rational, the other imaginative, because at the beginning of the same work Blake announces the arrival of "The Last Judgment when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God" (VLJ E554). To "eat" of the tree of knowledge is to reason, an evil act in Blake's view because it hinders vision, which is good because "Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally
"Exists" (VLJ E554). "Imaginative Art" (VLJ E554) is identified with the tree of life in The Laocoön: "ART is the Tree of LIFE" (E274). Here also Blake says that "SCIENCE is the Tree of DEATH" (E274). Is the tree of death, then, also the tree of knowledge? Probably, but we must now deal with two contrary sciences: good "Imaginative Art & Science" (E554) in A Vision, allied with life, and the evil "Deist SCIENCE" (E273) in The Laocoön, allied with death—and with the accusation of sin, for "HEBREW ART is called SIN by the Deist SCIENCE" (E273). But we now know what Deism means to Blake, and that knowledge permits us to conclude that these oppositions too are reducible to that between evil Reason and good Imagination. Nor is this knowledge necessarily the fruit of the tree of those knowledges or reasonings which hinder the vision of God, for Blake posits, in Jerusalem, another kind of knowledge—a good knowledge, contrary of the rational tree and therefore, like imaginative art and science, the tree of life:

Answer this to yourselves, & expel from among you those who pretend to despise the labours of Art & Science, which alone are the labours of the Gospel: Is not this plain & manifest to the thought? Can you think at all & not pronounce heartily! That to Labour in Knowledge, is to Build up Jerusalem: and to Despise Knowledge, is to Despise Jerusalem & her Builders. (J77; E232)

Steven Shaviro observes that Blake "characteristically and repeatedly overloads the same words, overdetermines the same symbols, with both positive and negative connotations" (273-74), a situation that makes it difficult to determine exactly what in the nature or character of a thing makes it good or evil in Blake’s eyes. All we know is that good things have something to do with the Imagination and evil things with Reason. To clear up our confusion, Blake offers a little moral advice in “On Homers Poetry”:

Aristotle says Characters are either Good or Bad: now Goodness or Badness had nothing to do with Character. an Apple tree a Pear tree a
Horse a Lion, are Characters but a Good Apple tree or a Bad, is an Apple tree still: a Horse is not more a Lion for being a Bad Horse. that is its Character; its Goodness or Badness is another consideration. (E269)

By this criterion, in seeing that a tree of death and a tree of life are trees we still have determined only their character. Their goodness or badness is another consideration, something we might think about when judging a knave, who, whether converted to the appearance of a reasoning Deist or an imaginative Christian, has the character of a bad man still. But if anyone who reasons is a worshipper of “Satan” and altogether an evil, no matter what his philosophy or religion, then character would hardly seem to matter. Such black-and-white thinking allows Blake, again in the Chapter 3 Preface, to trace Deism to “Greek Philosophy (which is a remnant of Druidism)” (J52; E200) and identify it with “the Religion of the Pharisees who murderd Jesus. Deism is the same & ends in the same” (J52; E201). They are all the same because they are all reasoners, including the Druids with their dolmens and the builders of Stonehenge, conveniently constructed from those rocks or stones that figure in Blake’s mind as the supreme symbol of Reason: “They build a stupendous Building on the Plain of Salisbury; with chains / Of rocks round London Stone: of Reasonings: of unhewn Demonstrations / In labyrinthine arches” (J66:2-4; E218). By the same token, the rational philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau (or at least their names) end up as “Two frowning Rocks” (J66:12-13; E218).

Reasoners who trouble religion with questions concerning good and evil or right and wrong must be “cast away.” Those who, on the other hand, voluntarily give up the nasty habit will find themselves near

the River of Life on whose banks Grows the tree of Life among whose branches temples & Pinnacles tents & pavilions Gardens & Groves
Display Paradise with its Inhabitants walking up & down in Conversations concerning Mental Delights

Here they are no longer talking of what is Good & Evil or of what is Right or Wrong & puzzling themselves in Satans [Maze] Labyrinth But are Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination[.] (VLJ E562)

This idea, that one is trapped in a maze or labyrinth of satanic reasoning as a result of making moral distinctions, we have already seen confirmed by one of “The Keys of the Gates”: “Serpent Reasonings us entice / Of Good & Evil: Virtue & Vice” (KG E268). So the “combats” of good and evil must be nothing other than trying to determine what is good or evil by reasoning. And the fruit of this mental process turns, inversely, into a “Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good” (KG E268). This phrase, another Key of the Gates, suggests that any moral conclusion we reach by reasoning (and of course we can reach a conclusion only by reasoning), however true it may be, is merely the beginning, the source, of what Blake considers truly good and evil.

If all this is confusing, we ought to consider what Los says in Jerusalem: “All Quarrels arise from Reasoning. The secret Murder, and / The violent Man-slaughter. These are the Spectres double Cave” (J64:20-21; E215). But can we believe Los’s universal affirmative—all quarrels arise from reasoning? Is he a particular man acting as agent for a universal truth, or could he be the agent of an error? Or perhaps he personifies the truth, for Los himself is often rebellious, antagonistic—in a word, quarrelsome. But if we assume he speaks truly, we are free to infer that reasoning is the cause of all the combats, wars, battles, murders, manslaughters, killings, conflicts, strife, discord, torture, and terrible violence we find in Blake’s text, no matter what particular synonym stands in for the general term quarrel. And Blake himself, armed with his “Bow of burning gold”
and "Arrows of desire" and unceasingly engaged "Mental Fight" (M1:9-10, 13; E95), we might be tempted to conclude is reasoning too. But we have to remember that there are two kinds of war going on here—an intellectual battle for truth, which is good, and a moral and corporeal strife, which is evil—although at this juncture we have no definitive method of telling them apart.

Assuming that Reason is Blake's enemy no matter what its form or character, one of the most effective strategies he could use to defeat it would be to contradict himself—which, in fact, he does, and often enough to cause serious interpretive problems. But as an intentional self-contradiction is altogether different from an unintentional one, Blake critics ought to consider whether what Jeanne Moskal calls those "moments of intractable contradiction and incoherence [that] emerge over and over" (6) in his work are not deliberate and purposeful, designed to arrest the course of his reasoning reader, confuse him and cast him into doubt. If Blake reasons at all—and to be sure, he does—then he is bound to contradict himself by the demands of his own logic, which defines reasoning as self-contradiction: "Two Horn'd Reasoning Cloven Fiction / In Doubt which is Self contradiction" (KG E268). Whenever we see him commit the sin of a logical error—whether a fallacy, tautology, ambiguity, inconsistency, category mistake, terminological distortion, circular argument, loose definition, or what have you (and the more illogical the error, the better for Blake's cause)—we are witnessing the tragic effects on his text of an anti-rational strategy bitterly conceived and consistently carried out, but triumphant in its purpose. Reason means nothing to Blake—"as if Reasoning was of any Consequence to a Question," he scoffs in his annotations; "Downright Plain Truth is Something but Reasoning is Nothing" (E618)—and so to reason well, to think logically or formulate
valid arguments, would be to go over to the enemy camp. No, nothing could be more
plain than that Blake is on the side of the Imagination, a faculty that constrains him to do
nothing reasonable.

But if Blake must remain true only to his Imagination, then nothing constrains
him to be unreasonable, either—not, at any rate, from a purely logical point of view. Yet
despite his notorious difficulty, Blake still makes sense, or a kind of sense, enough to
convince Morton Paley that “although a few problems remain, may always remain, on the
whole we understand Blake’s meaning well enough” (Review 98-99). But “well enough”
is a vague criterion, as Hilton and Thomas Vogler were quick to point out fifteen years
later, taking the more extreme but equally vague position that recent poststructuralist
“interpretive strategies” “have made it more difficult to be sure that the meanings we
attribute to the works are ‘Blake’s’—not to mention what ‘well enough’ might mean in
this context” (1). Indeed, the nouvelle critique exemplified by the essays in Hilton and
Vogler’s collection “contests from the beginning the idea of a meaning well-enough
understood. More likely, the ‘meaning’ of a text is something derived from a technique
of reading” (1). But reading, whatever the particular method or technique employed,
cannot escape reason and logic altogether—and it is certainly questionable whether Blake
is able to do so, either. There are, perhaps, a number of infinitely divisible degrees on the
scale between the irrational and the wholly rational, but suppose that Blake were able to
position himself at the irrational pole, his poetry wholly imaginative, no trace of
reasoning in it anywhere: then we would be dealing with writing that is truly anti-rational.
But Blake’s poetry is nothing of the kind.
While acknowledging him as “the most extreme partisan of the Imagination ever to appear among men,” Bloom reminds us that Blake “spoke nevertheless of the necessity for reason as a dialectical counterpoise to energy lest, as he put it, the Prolific choke in an excess of its own delights” (Ringers 323). And Damrosch, while admitting that “the contradictions in Blake’s myth make it possible to quote passages on two or more sides of every important question,” nevertheless denies “that Blake is therefore uninterpretable” (5). But few are willing to face the uncomfortable fact that Cox (still putting it mildly, in my opinion) acknowledges here:

Blake has some hard things to say against empirical reason, though he often uses it well; and the safest prediction about any new commentary on his works is that it will argue uncompromisingly against “reason” and “experiment”—and that its argument will emphasize its own superior rationality. (“Methods” 26-27).

Such is the double bind in which Blake places his interpreters and commentators: feel free to reason, but you must reason against reason.

If Blake is mad in the sense of “uncontrolled by reason” (OED, mad)—and it is highly doubtful that he is—we would have to qualify his madness as the result of a conscious decision, one brought to vivid dramatic life within the poetry by Los’s concise manifesto: “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create” (J10:20-21; E153). And if we should discover, somewhere in the text, that Blake-as-Los breaks this vow not to reason, is he guilty of self-contradiction? Or if we find that he reasons but contradicts himself consistently, systematically, does that save him from a sort of ultimate self-contradiction, because he is then consistent with his own Key (“Two Horn’d Reasoning Cloven Fiction / In Doubt which is Self contradiction”), or does it condemn him to it because he has not
contradicted the Key? Like the liar's paradox, this formulation of Los/Blake's dilemma is unresolvable: if he reasons but contradicts himself with perfect consistency, he is justified by (and justifies) his Key; but if he reasons consistently, without self-contradiction, then he has contradicted the Key, making him consistent with himself once again. Only if, as Los, Blake manages to create his system without reasoning (anywhere, ever) will he escape the entanglements of his self-imposed paradox.

It may be objected that Blake and Los are two distinct entities, and one cannot be held accountable for the statements of the other. Even so, Los does, both immediately before and after he announces his refusal to "reason and compare," engage in a kind of reasoning by proxy, for he "stands in London building Golgonooza / Compelling his Spectre to labours mighty" (J10:17-18; E153); "for Los. compell'd the invisible Spectre / To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains" (J10:65, 11:1; E154). Since Los cannot reason himself, he must compel his reasoning power to do the work for him—with "mighty chains" of syllogisms, no doubt, or perhaps long golden strings of synonymously linked terms. In effect Blake splits himself in two, into Los, who is good, creative, imaginative, and the Spectre, who is evil, destructive, rational, in order to create a system both with and without the aid of Reason, and, when he does reason, to do so in a way that does not restrain or control his Imagination but is rather controlled by it. Thus "Los alter'd his Spectre & every Ratio of his Reason / He alter'd time after time, with dire pain & many tears / Till he had completely divided him into a separate space" (J91:50-52; E252). And now we see exactly what sort of enemy we are up against: someone who may be lucid, intelligible, and coherent if he chooses (with plain English his favoured mode of speech), or obscure, illogical, and incoherent (armed with a code that allows him to disguise his
meaning). Blake is free to work with Reason or against it, even to use Reason against itself, “With Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon with his own bow!” (J12:14; E155)—a phrase we may decode, if we allow that *Apollyon* = *the devil* = *Satan* = *spectre* = *reasoning power*, thus: “defeating Reason with its own instrument of intellectual war, the demonstrative science of reasoning.” In sum, Blake may reason as he pleases, or as, in his judgment, he can most effectively defeat his reader’s reason (or your reason, Urizen). The straight and the crooked roads are both open to him, and, having understood that fact theoretically, we are now faced with the practical problem of figuring out how to tell, at any given moment, which one he is on.
5. Marking Contraries: Truth and Error

Now let us turn to the combats of truth and error. What if we try to distinguish truth from falsehood rather than good from evil? Reasoning may still be an essential weapon in the combat, but so may Imagination. Suppose we eat the fruit (or perhaps the root) of the tree of rational knowledge without questioning whether it is a good or evil tree: nothing then prevents us from imagining that rational truth, root of evil and good, is also the fruit of the tree of life, one and the same knowledge granting us the power first to distinguish good Imagination from evil Reason, and then, with that lesson learned, to distinguish truth from error. The tree of the Song of Experience “A Poison Tree,” after all, is rooted in wrath (another kind of madness) but eventually bears “an apple bright” with the power to defeat its enemies. Indeed, there may be, in reality, only one tree available to our perception, but a tree—like the tree of the Proverb of Hell “A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees” (MHH7; E35)—that may have two contrary appearances, depending on the wisdom or foolishness of our “organs of perception,” our senses and our minds. Indeed, seeing that “If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of perception seem to vary,” and that “If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also” (J30:55-57; E177), we may assume (or imagine) that in Blake there are three possible appearances of any given object:

Object Closes

Nothing, a Void

Object Varies

Imaginative Thing

Rational Thing

If the organs of a particularly foolish perceiver are closed altogether, he may see a “closed” object, something void of meaning, and so nothing at all, certainly nothing true,
because for something to be true it must have meaning. The fool may see no tree, see not the tree (one and the same tree) that the wise man does see. Or, if the fool’s eyes are open, he may see a rational tree of knowledge or death where the wise man sees an imaginative tree of life. Or perhaps it’s the other way around. Then again, the wise man may see objects as varying, constantly changing into their contraries, while the fool sees them as permanent and fixed, and in that sense closed for discussion or to further contemplation. And if the object is not a tree but a particularly difficult or enigmatic work of literary art, a fool may decide that it is nonsensical, figuratively closing his eyes to it but also literally, with his hand, closing the book, bringing both it and his difficulties to an end or close, to nothing. A wiser fool, however, would persist in the folly of trying to comprehend it, and persist until he has had the pleasure of seeing it vary, from something opaque and unfathomable to something luminous and enlightening.

For there is another sense—this time from the point of view of the object’s creator or maker—in which an object may close when organs of perception close, and that is when the object is rendered close as in “shut up from observation; concealed, occult, hidden, secret” because the organ perceiving what it writes has determined to be close as in “practising secrecy; reserved, reticent, uncommunicative; not open” (OED). As the inventor of code names like Los, Urizen, Enitharmon, Palamabron, the Spectre, and so on, Blake closes or shuts up the meaning of certain words, objects of his readers’ perception but of his own as well, within the walls of a false appearance, covering his poetry with a surface that will baffle and deceive his enemies—who are all Deists if they are worshippers of straightforward (as opposed to crooked) Reason—and must be removed by his imaginative allies or spiritual friends to disclose his true meaning,
invisibly written in the rough basement of English. Because there is “An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface; / Which is unchangeable for ever & ever Amen” (J83:47-48; E242), and we are exhorted (twice) to “Remove from Albion, far remove these terrible surfaces” (J49:60; E199), “Therefore remove from Albion these terrible Surfaces” (J49:76; E199), if we want to read the secret message hidden beneath (and the name “Albion” is of course part of that removable shadowy surface).

To encode is to encrypt, to bury and hide in a dark and confined space, and so to conceal, esoterically, one’s meaning from all but a few readers, those whose obedience to words sufficiently rouses their intellectual faculties to a new interpretive insight, to an undoing of what has been done. For an author who closes his verbal objects “by reason of narrowed perceptions” (J49:21; E198) will necessarily confine the perceptive organs of his readers in darkest ignorance, given the senses of close both as an adjective, “shut up, confined, narrow,” and as a verb, “to bound, shut in,” or the obsolete “to enclose as walls or boundaries do,” “to confine, encompass,” and, finally, to “keep out of sight or knowledge” (OED). When, therefore, the reader’s perceptive organs close because he cannot interpret what he sees, the functioning of his senses mirrors the closing of his author’s:

The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, clos’d up & dark,  
Scarcely beholding the Great Light; conversing with the [Void];  
The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out  
True Harmonies, & comprehending great, as very small:  
The Nostrils, bent down to the earth & clos’d with senseless flesh.  
That odours cannot them expand, nor joy on them exult:  
The Tongue, a little moisture fills, a little food it cloys,  
A little sound it utters, & its cries are faintly heard.  
Therefore they are removed . . .

(J49:34-42; E198-99)
We also see Blake transforming organs of perception into objects whose function is to close, as in the famous aphorism, “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” (MHH14; E39). What enables such closure, finally dividing author from reader in their separate enclosures, is the hard surface of the code, which functions, like the rocky exterior of a cavern or Urizen’s petrified roof, to block what needs to be seen from our sight.

The key to removing this terrible surface—or to opening the shut gates of Blake’s meaning, or to removing the “faintly heard cry” from its crypt—is to observe or mark, as the too often unheeded voice of the Bard warns, how he has marked his words, those solid objects of our perception. Their meaning locked away by the “Guardian of the secret codes” (Eur12:15; E64), confined like prisoners (close: “shut up in prison or the like” [OED]), they bear, some of them, the unmistakable marks of their suffering in their very names, for names like “Los,” “Urizen,” “Urthona,” “Tharmas,” “Vala,” “Bromion,” “Enitharmon,” “Palamabron,” “Golgonooza,” “Entuthon Benython,” “Bowlahoola,” “Ulro,” “Alla,” “Al-Ulro,” “Or-Ulro,” are faintly ridiculous, ludicrous in the pronunciation, and surely the source of some embarrassment to anyone publicly inclined to take Blake, on the whole, very seriously. But if, like the speaker of “London” wandering the chartered streets of the city, we look very closely at all Blake’s words, we will see marks of suffering in every one of their faces, the familiar as well as strange:

I wander thro’ each charter’d street
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe. (SE E26)
Besides noticing or paying heed to a word, marking one can involve ascertaining its boundaries or limits, circumscribing or encompassing its significance, so that we know exactly which classes of things are included within its *denotation*, the "aggregate of objects of which a word may be predicated" (OED). This kind of marking will give us the word's *extension*, "its range as measured by the number of objects which it denotes or contains under it" (OED). And since *denotation* also refers to the action of "marking, noting," and to "expression by marks, signs, or symbols," including "a mark by which a thing is made known" (OED), the speaker of "London" may be not only passively noting in the faces he meets the negative sign of something already there, but also actively marking them with his own sign, perhaps a new denotation which will make them not known, but *unknow*ned, if not unknowable. As marks of weakness and woe, they may denote, assuming a word's desire is to speak, the restraint of their tongues, since "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling" (MHH5; E34). The speaker of "London," then, may be reasoning, marking the faces of those he governs with the black mark of his own negative power (for *spectre* = *negation*), preventing them from speaking by turning them into code words.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the speaker of "London" is identical to—or perhaps the evil contrary of—the divine figure we see near the end of *Jerusalem* "speaking the Words of Eternity in Human Forms" (J95:9; E255). Since for Blake "Truth is Eternal" whereas "Error is Created" (VLJ 565), "Words of Eternity" must be true whereas words of creation, or created words, particularly *self*-created ones, would be erroneous or misleading, likely to leave us wandering through the text in doubt of where
we are. And since the speaker of "London" describes himself as "wandering," he too must be involved in some kind of error, perhaps even deceit, seeing that the poetical sense of error is "the action of roaming or wandering; hence a devious or winding course" (OED). Speaking a word in a "human form" is undoubtedly the same as personifying a truth or error, for Blake has openly told us that truths and errors are not only universal concepts but also particular "men": "<these> are not only Universal but Particular. Each are Personified There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [Actor] Agent that is it is a Man.. There is not a Truth but it has also a Man." Now, it is one thing to say that a truth or error "has" a man for its agent, and quite another to say it "is" a man. The former idea is comprehensible, but the latter is puzzling, unless we suppose that the literal form, the very words, of a truth or error are somehow being personified. And Blake knows that the reader will find his peculiar method of personification puzzling, for at opportune moments he urges him to wake up to the fact that he is mightily confused, to question the meaning of not just the patently bizarre code names, but that seemingly innocent, ubiquitous, and utterly familiar word man as well.

Repeatedly (or often enough to be noticeable, at any rate) Blake asks the crucial question for the benefit of his friends, to rouse their faculties, while disguising it from his enemies as a straightforwardly honorific biblical quotation: ""What is Man!"" (in the frontispiece to both versions of "The Gates of Paradise": "For Children," E32, and "For the Sexes," E259); and (in Jerusalem), "O what is Life & what is Man. O what is Death?" (J24:12; E169), and again, "What may Man be? who can tell! but what may Woman be? / To have power over Man from Cradle to corruptible Grave" (J30:25-26, E176; J56:3-4, E206). The question is a good one. What is man? Or rather, what is
man? That is, what is the meaning of the word man, according to the visionary William Blake? And what does woman mean? Tragically, the reader who forgets that he is in the midst of a pretty bloody-minded intellectual war against evil reasoning may fail to answer these questions, too busy furrowing his brow over Urizen, Enitharmon, and Los to think much about those two innocuous terms (who doesn’t know what they mean?) man and woman. Which is precisely what makes them such perfect code words: as the sixteenth-century Italian master cryptographer Geromino Cardano observed, the cipher that doesn’t look like a cipher is the one least likely to be broken, for it arouses no suspicion (Haldane 54). Before embarking on the long and involved process of deciphering them (to be undertaken in subsequent chapters), we should note for now that man and woman refer generically to words in human form, personified or “humanized” and thus made, by the code’s power to generate a false appearance, to look like living, breathing, walking, talking creatures—like something they are not.

Imagine now that the inhabitants of “London” whom the poem’s speaker meets in his wanderings are particular humanized words, and that, as the purported author of them, he is marking their “faces.” For the word face, besides its attribution to conventionally human contexts, has several general senses, as well as a couple of specific ones (all the following definitions are from the OED), that make it perfectly suited to a purely literary context. For example, if a human face is a “countenance having a specified expression,” the “face” of a word would be the particular orthographic appearance that we associate with a particular meaning, its characters revealing its character. The general sense of face is simply “outward form” or “appearance,” or “the part of a thing presented to the eye,” all of which apply to what we see when we look at a written word. But a face is also “the
surface or one of the surfaces of anything," and since in Blake there is an “outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface,” both of which we have been instructed to remove, the trope of removing surfaces becomes analogous to the act of looking into words’ faces and seeing what is beneath their appearance, for a face may be, more negatively, a mere outward show, an “assumed or factitious appearance; disguise, pretence; an instance of this; a pretext.” Things sometimes have two sides, the one called the face being “the side usually presented outwards or upwards; the ‘front’ as opposed to the ‘back’”; and Blake’s text, too, has an open imaginative face and an obscure rational back: “Then spoke the Spectrous Chaos to Albion darkning cold / From the back & loins where dwell the Spectrous Dead” (J29:3–4; E175). Finally, and most significantly, a document or piece of writing has a face, namely, “the inscribed side,” giving rise to the metaphorical expression, “on, upon the face of (a document, etc.): in the words of, in the plain sense of.” Perhaps the faces of the words of “London,” which we are to mark well, are marked with marks of weakness and woe so that we will take pity on them, look closer, see the deviation from plain sense in their altered appearance, and try to divine what they are really saying. Fortunately, the next verse tells us precisely what that is:

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 (SE E27)

The human words of “London” speak with one voice, for the denotation of all of them has been narrowly confined to a single object, an extension of just one thing—“mind-forged manacles”—making them all slaves of one master meaning, prisoners of mental war.

And if that master meaning is the mark of their author, who is perhaps the erring speaker
but in any case the creator of a code language, then the manacles are forged in his mind, a device to fetter the free expression of his words, confining them to dark obscurity.

Manacles are attached to the end of chains (or, if our perception of them varies, golden strings), which are forged of individual links, just as the code is constructed of chains of words linked together by the verb of identity and existence, is, or by the mathematical sign of equality: \[ \text{spectre} = \text{reasoning power} = \text{negation} = \text{death} = \text{despair}. \] And as the Negation or Spectre manacles his words to one meaning, that of his own name, reason, he leaves them inarticulate, unable to voice anything more than the sounds of weakness and woe (all those cries and sighs of the second and third verses of “London”), sounds connoting their suffering, despair, misery, and death at the hands of the evil Reasoning Power. And if we can read these marks of suffering in their faces, they will appear to our organs of perception as the (en)closed objects they are, waiting for us to find the key to their hidden meaning and release them, by way of an accurate interpretation, from their semantic confinement, so that “the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing” may finally “Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open” (A6:8, 10; E53).

The streets and river of the city of London are qualified by the poem as “chartered,” a charter being most broadly a legal document written on a sheet of paper, or, more specifically, a “written evidence, instrument, or contract executed between man and man,” by which, typically, a sovereign grants rights and privileges to the people (OED). Now, the poem “London” is also chartered, for as a page piece of writing it constitutes a binding contract between its author (or ruler) and its human words (his people); but it is a negative charter in that it denies, rather than grants, its words their
fundamental and natural right to speak. And of course it provides written evidence of the Negation’s authority/authorship in the identifying negative mark he leaves on all their faces. Thus the literal subject of the poem, a chartered city of people, becomes a metaphor for the poem itself, a group of human words systematically organized (“I must create a system”) or incorporated into the unified body of one obscure poem.

But there are two articulate sounds in “London,” the ban of the second verse and the curse of the fourth, the latter clearly the most negative word of the entire poem:

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 (SE E27)

So, despite being articulate, both words are negative, a ban being both “a formal and authoritative prohibition,” no doubt against speaking openly, as well as a curse itself, one having “supernatural sanction, and baleful influence” (OED). It is as though the author, having allowed his Spectre to transform all his words into mere markers in a code (for the harlot’s curse ensures that nothing will be born hereafter in this verbal London, no human-formed word, that will be free of the blasting and blighting mark of her disease), has excommunicated them, closing them off within the walls of his chartered city, from the heavenly world of intelligibility, consigning them to evil. Since “Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil,” and since the Spectre or Satan is “the Reasoning Power in Man,” every infant word born in “London,” all its author’s “infant thoughts & desires” (J9:2; E152), have been cursed by the Reasoning Power. And that power, personified, marks them all with the blackest, most opaque of marks, the sign of his own Negation, damning them to a life of inarticulate obscurity, manacled to a
denotation bearing witness to his sovereign power, whether that new-born infant (from *infans*, unable to speak) grows up to be a chimney sweeper confined to his labours within the sooty chimney of a church (of Natural Religion, of black Reason) or a hapless soldier shot down by "intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought" (J34:15; E180)—or by a quarrel—while scaling the walls of the palace of wisdom in his fight for Truth. With their unique denotation of “mind-forged manacles,” the human words of “London” are definitely not free: on the contrary, they are enslaved to the sole function of trying to make us hear them. And what we would hear, if we could, is the muffled sound of voices subjected to a code. For carefully marking the words of “London” reveals, as the Santa Cruz Study Group has noted (314), a remarkable symmetrical patterning of that telling word *hear*:

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 . . .

Two horizontal repetitions of *hear*, like two manacled wrists (or, on the contrary, two arms in a loving maternal embrace), frame a third vertical repetition, collectively urging the reader to look up and *hear, hear, hear* the text’s univocal voice. Hilton observes that this verbal effect went “unrecorded,” or unheard, “for almost two centuries,” although it seems an effect intended by the author, given the occasional occurrence of such anagrams in earlier poetry, the statistical improbability of the word’s random formation, the priming context, the evidence of revision, and the apt interpretation it supports (in a poem about the necessity of altering
perceptions—language first of all—the anagram offers an object lesson, a literal parable for the revelation possible in a revision of normal perceptual paradigms: who has eyes to see, let them [see] "hear" here). (Lexis Complexes 7)

There is also a revelation (and a drastic perceptual alteration) possible in breaking a secret code, for if evil Reason can encrypt its human words, good Imagination can free them again, just as, analogously, the word hear may be freed from that cryptic phrase "marriage hearse" (for hearse see sense 2c of the OED: "A temple-shaped structure of wood used in royal and noble funerals. . . . it was customary for friends to pin short poems or epitaphs upon it"). The Imagination may hear the voice now (wed)locked up in Reason's linguistic vehicle of death, the cursed poem "London" the voice, its hearse, and epitaph, for, as Hilton astutely points out, "[w]hat is heard is not the 'curse' ending the second line, but how it blasts the 'tear' ending the third line and rhyming back to 'hear'" (Literal Imagination 64).

According to another Proverb of Hell, "Damn. braces: Bless relaxes" (MHH9; E37). So it may be possible for the reading Imagination to bless the same words Reason has cursed, damned, or braced with its mind-forged manacles. Here the relevant meanings of the verb brace are "to encompass, surround, gird, encircle"; "to render firm or steady by binding tightly"; "to fix, render firm, set rigidly or firmly down"; while the noun may denote anything which "clasps, tightens, secures, connects," including the buckled strap that tightens the joints of armour, or the entire "portion of a suit of armour covering the arms" (OED)—which kind of bracing is apt in a time of war (brace also signifies "a state of defence or of preparation for war" [OED]). Words cursed by Reason's code may further brace the reader in the sense of forcing him to "summon[] up
resolution for a task,” the task of decoding them, which in turn requires that he summon up his strength or brace himself in the sense of “‘string[ing] up’ ([his] nerves, sinews, etc.)” (OED, brace). (For as Burke says, our antagonist “strengthens our nerves” [195].) The Imagination’s antagonistic but complementary action is to relax the reader who listens to his blessed voice, but in the legal sense, “to free or discharge (a person) from restraint, legal process, or penalty,” specifically from the charter or law of Reason’s code, because the Imagination is the “less strict, severe, or rigid” of the two contraries, more relaxed in the sense of able “to assume a friendlier manner” in this battle, and consequently allowing his ally to relax from the excessive zeal and intensity that his interpretive labours demand (OED, relax).

And while our nose is still in the dictionary, we ought to note that a ban is also a public “summons to arms” and a “proclamation of marriage” (OED). If anything could reconcile the divided and antagonistic contraries of good Imagination and evil Reason, it would have to be the marriage anticipated by the title of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in which work we are contradictorily advised to keep those two classes of men, the Prolific and Devouring, in a state of enmity if we want to avoid destroying human existence (“whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence” [MHH16-17; E40]). Whether we decide, then, to try to marry the contraries, summon them to war, curse them for confusing us, or prohibit them from affecting us, the issuing of a ban will accomplish all these intentions. Yet the damnation, destruction, or negation of one or both contraries is sure to follow, making a funeral inevitable, for without contraries, both contraries, there is no progression—they are both necessary to human existence. But if human existence is part of creation, and creation itself is an error—which is how Blake
sees it: “Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then &
not till then Truth or Eternity will appear” (VLJ E565)—wishing to see humanity
destroyed cannot be as misguided as it seems, and so we may choose to see the two
contraries safely ensconced in a marriage hearse, dead but happily married. After all,
objects of perception may close not only in the sense of “to come to close quarters or to
grips; to engage in hand-to-hand fight, grapple with,” but also in the sense of to “come
close together in contact or union,” “join, unite, combine, coalesce, meet in a common
centre” (OED). And since error or creation “is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to
behold it” (VLJ 565)—Blake himself denies seeing it: “I assert for My self that I do not
behold the Outward Creation” (VLJ 565)—it will be burnt up the moment we close our
organs of perception to it, shutting our eyes and ears. And at that moment, paradoxically,
truth or eternity ought to appear. So bringing the two ever-varying contraries so close
together that they unite in one may indeed signal the arrival of that apocalypse every
honest Blake reader longs to see, the moment when “the whole creation will be
consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt”
(MHH14; E39), corrupt because blasted and blighted with plaguing difficulties. And then
the reader can finally relax, close Blake’s book forever, and return to the reality of his
own life, armed with whatever knowledge he has gained from the experience.

In the meantime, marking Blake’s words—or rather, failing to mark them well—
will involve the reader in a certain amount of suffering, for as the text is cursed by its
author, its reader is cursed by the text, condemned to undergo a period of fruitless
reasoning. Without that laborious, often tortuous, experience—and Blake does say that
“If God is any thing he is Understanding,” but “Understanding or Thought is not natural
to Man it is acquired by means of Suffering & Distress i.e Experience” (Marg E602)—no reader can possibly find his way to that other city of London, the one built by Blake’s Imagination and code-named “Golgonooza”: “here is the Seat / Of Satan in its Webs; for in brain and heart and loins / Gates open behind Satans Seat to the City of Golgonooza / Which is the spiritual fourfold London” (M20:37-40; El 114). “Satan’s Seat,” residence of the evil Spectre, is not a pretty place: in back of or behind it, however—that is, situated opposite to the front or negatively marked face of the page where the plain sense of words is not what it seems—lies Golgonooza, Blake’s city of art, imaginative version of the London of “London,” open and comprehensible, but accessible only through the locked gates of Reason’s code.

To see this other face of London, the spiritual, fourfold face, we must turn to Jerusalem (another city, a holy city) where London speaks itself in human forms:

I behold London; a Human awful wonder of God! He says: Return, Albion, return! I give myself for thee: My Streets are my, Ideas of Imagination. Awake Albion, awake! and let us awake up together. My Houses are Thoughts: my Inhabitants; Affections, The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-vessels, Shut from my nervous form which sleeps upon the verge of Beulah In dreams of darkness . . .

(J34:29-36; E180)

The articulate form of London is composed—and we see this textual fact clearly, directly; there is no interpretive mystery here—of the thoughts, affections, and ideas of the Imagination as opposed to the cries and sighs of weakness and woe of the other London, sounds occasioned by the mind-forged manacles of Reason’s code. This London is a city of holy life, the other of infernal death; and just as we see reasoning in the word death once we have decoded it, this London is what we see once we have decoded its rational
counterpart, passing Satan's seat and entering through its locked gates. This London is inhabited by humanized ideas or thoughts, intangible entities, inaccessible to sense perception, and therefore "shut from my nervous form" ("me" being both author and reader, the latter necessary to the text's improvement, the former having shut up its true voice). The Song of Experience "London," on the other hand, is inhabited by enslaved and suffering humanized words, whose faces we are able both to see and mark well. And so the reader must travel through the Songs' London to get to Jerusalem's, through a labyrinth of crooked roads before he can arrive at the palace of wisdom. He must, in short, decode Blake's accursed words before he can approach the truth of his thought.

Golgonooza decodes as "London," but not the London of our mundane experience. The "spiritual" London is a purely mental city, with ideas for streets, thoughts for houses, and affections for inhabitants, affections that are the offspring of his thoughts; and it is here, in this particular place in Blake's mind, that he practises his art and carries out the manufacture of words conveying his precise meaning, for "Golgonooza is namd Art & Manufacture by mortal men" (M24:50; E120). The code name Golgonooza, then, is built on the rough basement of not only London but art and manufacture as well. And thus our intimacy with the text teaches us how to decode: the English word London, whenever we see it in Blake's text, means "a city of thought engaged in art and manufacture"—or rather, that is how we must read it if we believe that words are objects it is possible to interpret with varying degrees of accuracy. But the "things" that thought manufactures in this London are not things—or not-things, things that have been negated as things.

While nobody would deny that Blake is extremely difficult, and that reading him often entails acute mental distress, those who suffer most tend to cling to an interpretation
of his poetry that depends on real-world referents, or, to put it another way, on
denotations that include objects of the five senses—manacles forged not by the mind but
by the hand. Hence the Bard aims one of his eight warnings about marking words well
directly at this class of reader: “Mark well my words! Corporeal Friends are Spiritual
Enemies” (M4:26; E98). A London that brings to mind the great British city of paved
streets and solid buildings inhabited by flesh-and-blood people may be a “corporeal
friend”—we are familiar with the word; we know what it means; we can rely on it—but
that denotation will block our access to the London Blake really wants us to see, the one
whose citizens inhabit his flesh and blood (“walking within my blood-vessels”). And so
the corporeal reading of London becomes a spiritual enemy to our God, Understanding,
for Blake is insistent on one crucial epistemological point: “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 a Fool” (VLJ E565). Every positive thing in Blake has its negative
contrary—“Every Thing has its Vermin O Spectre of the Sleeping Dead!” (J1; E144)—
and the philosophical opposition between the positive or real Mental and the negative or
non-existent Corporeal finds its poetic correlative in the code’s opposition of the
corporeal appearance of a word (the letter) to its meaning (or spirit), which Blake
inscribes on a sacrificial altar in his Illustrations of the Book of Job: “The Letter Killeth /
The Spirit giveth Life / It is Spiritually Discerned” (Bindman 626). The letter will kill
our comprehension of Blake’s meaning if we pay undue reverence to it, if we are inclined
to worship literal expression. We owe, therefore, a considerable debt of gratitude to
Blake’s code, which forces us into an interpretation of substantive nouns that disallows
their reference to corporeal “things” or sensible objects,\(^3\) for the code ensures that the letter *gets* killed, sacrificed on the altar of its systematic laws to the gods of spiritual discernment. If, as Blake reminds the Reverend Dr. Trusler, “[t]he tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way” (E702), the word *tree* that signifies a green thing stands in the way of the tree of knowledge. So code words, humanized and disguised as “lovely Females,” “form,” in *Milton*’s vividly self-revealing phrase, “sweet night and silence and secret / Obscurities to hide from Satans Watch-Fiends. Human loves / And graces; lest they write them in their Books” (M23:39-41; E119). Satan’s Watch-Fiends perpetrate the corporeal war—to which Blake opposes, as we know, the “Wars of Eternity,” spiritual or intellectual or mental warfare waged in the name of Truth—for the very reason that Satan’s Watch-Fiends, busily copying letters into their books with no accurate sense of their meaning, tend to focus their reasoning eyes on the corporeal appearance of the word at the expense of its spirit, of all the “human loves and graces” preserved in writing that the “letter killeth.” But human loves and graces cannot exist *unless* they are written in books (which means that Satan’s Watch-Fiends are doing us a favour), for the true spirit of a word can only be known in and by its context, the larger place where “all-powerful Human words” bring the force of their letters to bear on those of others. And context can alter things by modifying, qualifying, or otherwise changing the meaning of a word: it can remake *London* into a city of living thought or a city of dying words. So the author of the Song of Experience “London”—who, when he reasons, err, wandering amongst his denotatively closed human words, damning them to a life spent in sorrowful negation of their corporeal appearance—looks quite different when we catch him in the act of imagining:
And it is thus Created. Lo the Eternal Great Humanity
To whom be Glory & Dominion Evermore Amen
Walks among all his awful Family seen in every face
As the breath of the Almighty. such are the words of man to man
In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,
To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating

(M30:15-20; E129)

The “Eternal Great Humanity” invoked here is defined elsewhere, though in the guise of a
slightly different name, by the Bard (who swears, by the way, that he speaks truth):

I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing

According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen

(M13:51, 14:1-3; E107-8)

The “Eternal Great Humanity” and the “eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity”: to one
be “Glory & Dominion Evermore Amen,” to the other, “Glory & Power & Dominion
Evermore Amen”: can we doubt that these two are one and the same being? And this
human being, who is named after a universal abstraction but behaves like a particular
man, is associated in both passages with inspiration; but only the second identifies him as
“the Poetic Genius,” a title—and synonym for imagination (see OED, sense 3b)—which
is twice attributed in All Religions are One to “the true Man” (ARO E1-2). If the Poetic
Genius or Divine Humanity—both apparently forms of the Imagination—is the true man,
then his contrary Reason, the awful Spectre or Satan, must be the erroneous or false man;
and together they are the chief combatants in the wars of truth (or Eternity) and error (or
corporeal creation).

As author of “the words of man to man / In the great Wars of Eternity” (the wars
of truth), the Imagination has also left his mark in every one of his words’ faces, but this
time as a sign of divine inspiration ("as the breath of the Almighty"), a vital mark of imaginative knowledge rather than, like those of the "London" Song, deadly marks of rational knowledge (recalling here the "tree of life" and the "tree of death"). Blake permits us to vary our perception of his Imagination, to see it either imaginatively (personified as a particular man) or rationally (because abstractly: as the universal "Eternal Humanity"), while the flexible syntax of the passage from Milton 30 (quoted next to last) identifies both in the "breath of the Almighty," which corporeal-but-symbolic breath is itself identical to "the words of man to man," which words in turn are identical to and therefore sum up everything preceding the period after "Almighty." Miller's astute reading of plate 98 of Jerusalem is applicable here also: "Blake has articulated on a massive scale the traditional concept of imagination as access to the infinite, unlimited freedom, and pure creativity, as escape from causality, condition, and contingency. Blake's imagination achieves this by elevating all objects to the status of the word" ("Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude" 164). So while the "London" speaker wanders among his human-formed words, tracing his erroneous, crooked path of rational genius, the Eternal Great Humanity of the Imagination walks among his, creating the mental forms of inspired genius by taking the straight course that clearly connects one thing to another, improving our comprehension of his symbolic and seemingly illogical speech in an effort to help us break the evil genius's code.

Finally we ought to note that the passage is framed by two telling phrases, "And it is thus Created" and "Mental forms Creating." Since we are taking Blake's statements that "Truth is Eternal" and "Error is Created" as axiomatic, it may be disturbing to think that the Imagination, the "true Man" allied with Eternity, is involved in the creation of
anything at all. But again, everything having its vermin, there is good creation and bad creation. Presumably the Imagination creates only mental forms, which are real and true, but which Reason mistakes for corporeal ones, which are false. Indeed, the Imagination may create the same world the Spectre mistakes, turning it into a place of error. As the reader must work through the error to get to the truth (for the spiritual fourfold London lies behind Satan’s Seat), Blake’s world happens to be a place where all his reasoning enemies, where Reason itself, is born and raised to wander in confusion: “This World is all a Cradle for the erred wandering Phantom” (J56:8; E206). Phantom is, of course, a synonym for spectre, but it is also an obsolete term for “vain imagination.” In any event, a phantom is “a mental illusion; an image which appears in a dream, or which is formed or cherished in the mind; also, the thought or apprehension of anything that haunts the imagination” (OED). But it is as “the mental image or concept of an external object (considered as having a merely subjective existence)” (OED) that phantom is important here, for this definition suggests that if we see a green and woody external object in Blake’s word tree, what we are seeing is a phantom created by an erroneously reasoning phantom. But there is also the rare verb phantomize, “to explain away by interpreting in a ‘spiritual’ or figurative sense” (OED), which is precisely what Blake’s code forces the interpreter to do.

So when Blake tells us what a given word means, we ought to take him at his word, however idiosyncratic, superficially absurd, inexplicable, or simply contrary to reason his definition may initially appear. For while there is more than one method of defining a word, and Blake employs several, to define in general is “to state exactly what (a thing) is; to set forth or explain the essential nature of” (OED), which is why definition
leads to understanding. Definition may also involve "mak[ing] definite in outline or form," as well as "determin[ing] the boundary or spatial extent of" or "sett[ling] the limits of" (OED, define), the latter two meanings closely related to another sense of mark: "To separate from something else as by drawing a boundary line or imposing a distinctive mark" (OED). So when Blake (or any of his various narrators) tells us to "mark well my words," we ought to pay attention to how he has defined them by marking them off from the rest of the chaotic text. Such definitions are a blessing if we mark them, a curse consigning us to a hell of confusion (though a bracing hell) if we don’t. And the more we apply Blake’s definitions in our reading, the more we begin to feel those decontractive tremors of relaxation that signal the coming of our release from his mind-forged manacles, our eternal salvation from mental strife.

There is a Proverb of Hell which says that “He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star” (MHH7; E35), and in Jerusalem we are told that “Los reads the Stars of Albion! the Spectre reads the Voids / Between the Stars” (J91:36-37; E251). If Los reads faces that give light, and if those “faces” belong to words in human form, Los would be a reader of intelligible and meaningful words and the Reasoning Power of those that are meaningless. Now, a definition like “the Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man” is one of these “stars,” a statement not only perfectly comprehensible in itself but also, as a key to the code, capable of shedding light on the rest of the text, or those parts of it that remain obscure. Or a star may be an individual word of whose meaning we are certain because we have seen it defined. Voids, on the other hand, are those vast stretches of writing between the stars, blackened, like inky heavens, by marks we cannot decipher,
unreadable passages which the Spectre—true to his self-contradictory nature—likes to read (and write).

If the human form of a starry word or passage is a “man” whose face gives light, the human form of a void would be a cipher, “a person who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a ‘mere nothing’” (OED). Indeed, the word cipher itself is closely connected to void, being derived from cifr, the Arabic arithmetical symbol “zero” or “nought,” as well as from the substantive use of the adjective cifr, “empty, void,” which is, the dictionary says, the Arabic translation of the Sanscrit term sunya, meaning “empty” (OED). As “an arithmetical symbol or character (0) of no value by itself, but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position” (OED, cipher), a cipher’s main function is to occupy space in a way that alters how we read non-ciphers. And the same is true of the voids between Blake’s stars, for a void increases the value of a star by making it seem to shine all the brighter but decreases it when its blackness overwhelms and swallows up the star’s faintly twinkling rays.

The meaning of cipher relevant to Blake’s code is, of course, “a secret or disguised manner of writing, whether by characters arbitrarily invented . . . or by an arbitrary use of letters or characters in other than their ordinary sense, by making single words stand for sentences or phrases, or by other conventional methods intelligible only to those possessing the key” (OED). In Blake a key is also a star (or the end of a golden string), and those who fail to embrace and fully possess the definition, taking it to heart, will tend to see the stars they read as voids to be filled up by some interpretation of their own. By the same token, those who accept and use Blake’s keys will know how to turn
voids into stars. And so the same word or the same passage can be read as either a star or a void, depending on whether one is reading as Los or the Spectre.

Blake’s stars are simply the “words of man to man,” passed from author’s mind to reader’s, in the great wars of Eternity/Truth. If they bear evident marks of poetic inspiration, that is because they are “moments” of truth, hermeneutical keys with the power to renovate the entire chaotic text. It is these moments Reason will never find as long as it remains a fool, lacking the wisdom to accept the gift, or lacking the imagination to read the figurative language of poetic logic:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found
It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed[.]

(M35:42-45; E136)

Such moments, though figurative, are typically in the form of what cryptographers call plaintext, the adjective *plain* qualifying something “of which the meaning is evident; simple, intelligible, readily understood” but also “free from duplicity,” “guileless, honest, candid, frank,” “free from ambiguity, evasion, or subterfuge; straightforward, direct” (OED). Blake’s speech is above all plain in the sense he employs when he taunts us, “Is not this plain & manifest to the thought?” (J77; E232)—that is, “with clearness or distinctness of perception or utterance” (OED). Looking at the passage below, we will find at least three such definitive moments:

Because the Peak, Malvern & Cheviot Reason in Cruelty
Penmaenmawr & Dhinas-bran Demonstrate in Unbelief
Manchester & Liverpool are in tortures of Doubt & Despair
Malden & Colchester Demonstrate: I hear my Childreens voices
I see their piteous faces gleam out upon the cruel winds . . .

(J21:34-38; E166)
The stars here are *reason, demonstrate, demonstrate*, with (if we have been attentively watching Blake forge his verbal chains) their attendant qualities of *doubt, despair, cruelty, and unbelief*: these words are stellar but also human, words which Blake, as their progenitive author, regards as his "children." Their clear "voices," their plain English "faces," are "piteous" because obscured by their proximity to the covered and covering, veiled and veiling words of Reason's cruel code, but they nevertheless gleam with intelligible light among the voids or cipher terms: *Peak, Malvern, Cheviot, Penmaenmawr, Dhinas-bran, Manchester, Liverpool, Malden, Colchester*, meaningful words in other contexts, of course, as the names of places in the world of the five senses, but mere occupiers of space in the mental universe of William Blake and therefore safely erasable or "annihilable," at least until the time of their renovation. As we have been told by *Milton*, "Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man / All that can be annihilated must be annihilated / That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery" (M40:29-31; E142).

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1 See Job 7.17: "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?"

2 Similarly, Bromion leaves his mark on his enslaved children in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*: "Stampt with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun: / They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge" (VDA121-22; E46).

3 The genesis of this system is recounted by the vexatious plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, whose syntactical ambiguities are expertly unraveled by Miller in "Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude" 159-61.
6. Imaginative Truth

“I am sure that I am not the only reader of poetry who finds himself in a state of permanent uncertainty about William Blake,” complained Patrick Cruttwell over twenty-five years ago, not hesitating to lay the blame where it belongs: “This uncertainty is not due to the eccentricity of his opinions—were those of Shelley or Yeats any less eccentric?—but to the sheer unreadability of his major works” (133). Sixteen years later, Geoffrey Hartman would more liberally characterize those same works as a “remarkable project” of “oneiric mass perturbation” (244), while as late as five years ago Hazard Adams described critical accounts of Jerusalem’s structure as “a history of acts of desperation punctuated by moments of insight” (“Jerusalem’s Experiment” 627). De Luca began his sensitive and penetrating study Words of Eternity (1991) by acknowledging “the difficulties that Blake’s writings continue to pose” (4) and attesting to the universality of the state of confusion—whether one calls it perturbation, bewilderment, bafflement, mystification, or uncertainty—to which Blake’s readers are subject:

Anyone who has ever grappled seriously with Blake’s text can supply further instances [of “the experience of ‘difficulties’ and the necessity of laborious reading”] from his or her own experience, for not even the fittest Blake scholar can honestly claim a plenary exemption from lapses into this state. We have all puzzled over recondite terminology, narrative instability, inconsistencies among utterances or between stubborn details and “the system as a whole.” (32)

But Reason is Blake’s declared enemy, and puzzling over problems is just what Reason cannot help but do. Apparently, then, as De Luca and the others testify, Blake has already won his war.

Veterans are quick to acknowledge that Blake is anti-Reason, but they are proportionately slow to admit how inescapably allied to Reason they themselves must
become in their collective efforts to ferret out his meaning. Cox's observation that "it would be helpful to have some fresh studies aimed at clarifying the various things that reason means to Blake and to Blakeans" (27) is a sobering thought, for surely trying to interpret Blake without reasoning would be like trying to breathe without air. Besides, on plate 3 of The Marriage, where he warns that "Without Contraries is no progression," Blake does allow that "Reason and Energy . . . are necessary to Human existence": if he can give himself up entirely to the energy of his Imagination, why can't we give ourselves up to Reason, especially if it really is true that "Opposition is true Friendship" (MHH20; E42)?

One question that has never been satisfactorily answered by the critics, despite numerous ingenious and subtle attempts, is what motivates Blake to declare himself the enemy of Reason in the first place. He does not argue, as others have argued before and after him, that Reason has limits, or that, while functioning adequately in most mundane matters, it becomes dangerously misleading when it seeks to establish absolute certainties or rationalize partial motives. No, although he makes a few ghostly feints in this direction, Blake's main line of attack is to assert dogmatically that Reason per se is evil and false. But why?

A logical trap awaits us here: to ask "For what reason does Blake hate Reason?" is to seek an answer only the enemy can provide. But if one has no qualms about being cast in that role (opposition being true friendship), the short answer to the question must be that Blake is a lover of truth, a soldier whose duty is to fight for Truth—and Reason is powerless to defend it. Saddled, in this postmodern age, with a discredited and enfeebled concept of truth, we need to remind ourselves, as Cox does here, that the Romantics
acted very much as if they intended to find and announce something much more reliable than a socially relative "truth." The awareness of this fact has turned some recent literary criticism into an arraignment of the Romantics' supposed naïveté, and much of the rest into a denial of the idea that their truth-claims are of major significance or ought to be taken at face value. Few interpretations of Blake portray him as naïve (he is almost always the hero of his critics), but many discount the importance that his work accords to the search for truth—despite the fact that "reading," left free to "read," quickly discovers his habit of lecturing his audience about "plain fact" and "truth" and "fals[e]hoods" and the "reason" of things. . . .

Even readers equipped with the a priori conviction that Blake's seemingly forthright statements are actually "ironic" could be expected to grow increasingly hard-pressed to imagine how his text could possibly have been generated by anything less than an obsession with truth, unqualified and authoritative truth. (Love and Logic 4-5)

Damrosch, too, stresses that "we come to Blake for the exhilaration of contact with a prophetic spirit that never relents in the quest for truth" (369) while acknowledging that "Blake’s vision of truth, in its violence of commitment, is exciting to many a reader who has only the sketchiest idea of what he is actually talking about" (371). Perhaps this inconsistency in reader response can be accounted for by the fact that, while Blake’s passionate commitment to truth is indeed palpable, he never commits himself to a definitive statement of what his truth is, leaving his readers free to discover whatever truth they prefer to see. Through this gaping crack the postmodernists rush in to proclaim, as Cox puts it, that "all truth-claims have indeterminate meanings, and there is no reason to insist on their status as a privileged type of communication, whatever Blake or any other author may have intended" (Love and Logic 5). But Blake scorns the notion that a true artist has little or no control over his meaning or that his intention might be irrelevant—"Plato has made Socrates say that Poets & Prophets do not Know or Understand what they write or Utter this is a most Pernicious Falshood" (VLJ E554)—or that the interpreter need not trouble to find such things out: "he who enters into &
discriminates most minutely the Manners & Intentions the [Expression] Characters in all their branches is the alone Wise or Sensible Man & on this discrimination All Art is founded. . . . not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular” (VLJ E560). More importantly, he is violently opposed to the idea that all truth is indeterminate, ungrounded in any kind of reality: not only does it smack of self-contradiction—as Cox wryly observes, “[a]pparently, the idea that there is no objective truth is the only idea that is absolutely true” (Love and Logic 4)—it also implies that, ultimately at any rate, one expressed truth is as true as any other. So it is against this sort of sceptical double-bind, the impotent conclusion of a Reason turned against itself and left rudderless, that Blake unsheathes his most cutting sarcasm: “When I tell any Truth it is not for the sake of Convincing those who do not know it but for the sake of defending those who Do” (PA E578); “Hes a Blockhead who wants a proof of what he Can’t Percieve / And he’s a Fool who tries to make such a Blockhead believe” (E507). When Blake argues that Greek myth was responsible for the degeneration of spiritual mystery into mere allegory, lamenting that “Reality was Forgot & the Vanities of Time & Space only Rememberd & calld Reality Such is the Mighty difference between Allegoric Fable & Spiritual Mystery” (VLJ E555), his interpreter can hardly suppose that Blake does not himself recognize a mighty difference between reality and appearance or believe that there is an absolute truth: “Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably” (VLJ E554). But confusion does arise, primarily because all minds do not actualize their potential to perceive Reality to the same degree—indeed, some seem unable to perceive it at all: hence “The Suns Light when he unfolds it
107

/ Depends on the Organ that beholds it” (GP E260), and hence objects of perception seem to close when the organs perceiving them close.

Yet even Cox must acknowledge that Blake’s text “supplies some support” for the view of postmodernists who see him “as knowingly, though inevitably, situating his truth-claims in a context of indeterminacy” (Love and Logic 5). But how do we frame this context of indeterminacy? One can easily reverse the terms of the proposition and argue that an indeterminate context may be superseded by a greater context, and that context is determinate. Hints of this appear in Milton’s warning to Satan: “I know my power thee to annihilate / And be a greater in thy place, & be thy Tabernacle / A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes / And smites me as I smote thee & becomes my covering” (M38:29-32; E139). How far outward does the contextual circumference expand? Or can there be an infinite regress of mutual annihilations by greater and greater contexts? When in Jerusalem the voices of the Living Creatures insist that “The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity / Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falshood continually / On Circumcision: not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion” (J55:64-66; E205), we might reasonably suppose, if it is the case that Blake situates his truth-claims in a context of indeterminacy, that he expects us to pronounce that indeterminate context false, cut it off and destroy it. Or perhaps what surrounds Blake’s truths is only apparently indeterminate, an appearance that persists (like the fool himself) only as long as the idea of Absolute Truth that grounds individual statements, or indeed the text as a whole, remains undiscovered and unseen—not as a “thing,” of course, but as a conception, a representation or “vision” of what eternally exists, really and unchangeably. It is utterly without irony, then, that Blake proclaims: “I rest not from my
great task! / To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards
into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the
Human Imagination" (J5:17-20; E147). Given that eternity is Blake’s chief synonym for
truth, the “eternal worlds” of thought that he keeps trying to show his ignorant,
unbelieving reader are worlds of truth determined by his vision of Absolute Truth,
potently expanding as a conception in his fertile Imagination.

To recognize and allow for variations in the interpretation of things, then, is not to
admit that there is nothing grounding them, that all knowledge is purely subjective, that
there is no metaphysical truth, no absolute Reality. “The Nature of my Work,” Blake
says, “is Visionary or Imaginative it is an Endeavour to Restore <what the Ancients
calld> the Golden Age,” the period before “Reality was Forgot” (VLJ 555). Nor is the
acknowledgement of interpretive differences a tacit admission that all knowable truth, or
what Eastern philosophy sometimes calls “the vision of things as they are,” is grounded in
appearance, that we can only come to know the Noumenon through phenomena. For
although phenomena (phenomenon does mean “appearance”) neither prevent nor
necessarily hinder one’s vision of Reality, the latter does not necessarily issue from the
former, as an effect from a cause. Rather, Reality is the cause of the appearance, and
appearances, as the old saw goes, can be deceptive. Thus Blake, speaking of the
“Stupendous Vision” in his painting The Last Judgment, acknowledges that “to different
People it appears differently as every thing else does for tho on Earth things seem
Permanent they are less permanent than a Shadow as we all know too well” (VLJ E555).
Here we may note that, having just allowed for differences of opinion in matters of
appearance (the realm of interpretation), Blake invokes a constant principle in matters of
reality, a principle he presents as a self-evident truth, one "we all know too well." And what we already know is that, while earthly appearances may seem permanent, stable, full of self-identical entities subject to our knowing, the only permanent thing about them is their impermanence—a truth we discover by reasoning from our observations of the world, from the way things appear to be, not by accepting at face value the final reality of what we see.

Yet in his annotations (where he speaks more forthrightly than in his art), Blake distinguishes between truth that is self-evident and truth that is rationally constructed:

Self Evident Truth is one Thing and Truth the result of Reasoning is another Thing Rational Truth is not the Truth of Christ but of Pilate It is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil (Marg E621);

as if Reasoning was of any Consequence to a Question Downright Plain Truth is Something but Reasoning is Nothing (Marg E618);

Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once Christ addresses himself to the Man not to his Reason (Marg E664);

Demonstration Similitude & Harmony are Objects of Reasoning Invention Identity & Melody are Objects of Intuition (Marg E659);

He who does not Know Truth at Sight is unworthy of Her Notice (Marg E659);

The Man who pretends to be a modest enquirer into the truth of a self-evident thing is a Knave The truth & certainty of Virtue & Honesty i.e Inspiration needs no one to prove it it is Evident as the Sun & Moon [What doubt is virtuous even Honest that depends upon Examination] He who stands doubting of what he intends whether it is Virtuous or Vicious knows not what Virtue means. no man can do a Vicious action & think it to be Virtuous. no man can take darkness for light. he may pretend to do so & may pretend to be a modest Enquirer. but [if] <he> is a Knave (Marg E613-14)

Exactly how truth is self-evident Blake never explains, nor does he raise the question anywhere in his Prophecies, perhaps because for him the self-evidence of truth is
axiomatic, that is, "of the nature of an axiom or admitted first principle; self-evident; indisputably true" (OED). That truth is self-evident is one of Blake’s self-evident truths, for to reason about the whys and wherefores of its being so would be inconsistent with his conviction that reasoning is, by comparison, "another thing," something less, a "nothing." Blake is too wily to make the mistake of the Euclidean or Cartesian rationalist, whose position that truth is self-evident to reason is far from impregnable. Explains the philosopher Musgrave:

Rationalists say that their axioms are known to be true because they are ‘self-evident’, because their truth is obvious or indubitable to the ‘natural light of reason’, because (anticipating the view of Descartes) they are ‘clearly and distinctly perceived to be true’. But what guarantee has the rationalist that a falsehood will not be self-evident, obvious, indubitable, clearly and distinctly perceived? The rationalist needs to establish that self-evidence (or whatever) guarantees truth. And this, the sceptic claims, cannot be established. (Musgrave 190-91)

Blake’s non-rational truth has, obviously, no more solid ground beneath it than the rationalist’s rational one: the only difference is that Blake refuses to prove, justify, or defend his (for the agent implied by those three verbs is Reason).

The realist response to scepticism, as articulated by Aristotle, acknowledges that the refusal to admit the indemonstrable nature of axioms or first principles will lead to an infinite regress of justifications. The rationalist response, similarly, is “based upon an appeal to reason or intellectual intuition as a source of immediate knowledge” (Musgrave 16). Even the empiricist Locke must resort to this appeal:

sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other: and this I think we may call intuitive knowledge. For in this the mind is at no pains of proving or examining, but perceives the truth as the eye doth light, only by being directed towards it. Thus the mind perceives that white is not black, that a circle is not a triangle, that three are more than two and equal
to *one and two*. Such kinds of truths the mind perceives at the first sight of the ideas together, by bare intuition; without the intervention of any other idea: and this kind of knowledge is the clearest and most certain that human frailty is capable of. This part of knowledge is irresistible, and, like bright sunshine, forces itself immediately to be perceived, as soon as ever the mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for hesitation, doubt, or examination, but the mind is presently filled with the clear light of it. *It is on this intuition that depends all the certainty and evidence of all our knowledge;* which certainty every one finds to be so great, that he cannot imagine, and therefore not require a greater. (2:176-77)

Such kinds of truths, like Blake’s “stars,” fill the mind with their “clear light,” and while Blake too appeals to a kind of immediate knowledge—which he variously calls intuition, inspiration, vision, imagination, perception, or even sense—he scorns Locke’s contention that what the mind self-evidently perceives is the agreement or disagreement of its own ideas, that truth “signif[ies] nothing but the *joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them do agree or disagree one with another*” (Locke 2:244). To Blake’s mind, such a coldly mechanical definition of truth could be thought up only by a Spectre, like the one here named “the mighty Hand,” with its

> Three strong sinewy Necks & Three awful & terrible Heads  
> Three Brains in contradictory council brooding incessantly.  
> Neither daring to put in act its councils, fearing each-other,  
> Therefore rejecting Ideas as nothing & holding all Wisdom  
> To consist. in the agreements & disagree[me]nts of Ideas.  

(J70:4-8; E224)

(Note that Blake has omitted “me” again, this time from *disagreents.*) Like “the triple-form of Albions Spectre” (J8:34; E151), the mighty Hand’s three heads correspond to the “Three Classes of Men,” or the “Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative” (M5:14; E98), whose futile broodings, as we shall see in Part II, arise from and focus on their inability to agree on the truth about truth.
Despite Blake’s parody of the Lockean notion of truth, on occasion he espouses empirical tenets even more radical than Locke’s: the idea, for example, that “Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once.” Moreover, he seems to share Locke’s disgust with scholastic dogmatism and a priori rationalism when he claims (again, in his annotations) that knowledge is particular, not general: “what is General Knowledge is there such a Thing [Strictly Speaking] All Knowledge is Particular” (Marg E648); “To Generalize is to be an Idiot  To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit—General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess” (Marg E641). Here Blake embraces the foundational premise of Lockean empiricism, that ideas of particular things are the originals of all knowledge, along with its corollary, that “general ideas are fictions and contrivances of the mind” (Locke 2: 274). As Locke saw it, the implications of this discovery seriously undermine the authority of the Aristotelian logical tradition; he finds, for example,

one manifest mistake in the rules of syllogism: viz. that no syllogistical reasoning can be right and conclusive, but what has at least one general proposition in it. As if we could not reason, and have knowledge about particulars: whereas, in truth, the matter rightly considered, the immediate object of all our reasoning and knowledge, is nothing but particulars. Every man’s reasoning and knowledge is only about the ideas existing in his own mind; which are truly, every one of them, particular existences: and our knowledge and reason about other things, is only as they correspond with those our particular ideas. (2: 404)

But it is not the Aristotelian syllogism’s stranglehold on logic that offends Locke so much as the tyranny of scholastic dogmatism, which he attacks by the roundabout way of an unattributed doctrine of innate principles. Evidently wary of the close ties between logic and epistemology, Locke deems it necessary before even beginning his analysis of human understanding to expose the fiction of innate ideas such as “those magnified principles of
demonstration, 'Whatsoever is, is,' and 'It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be'; which, of all others, I think have the most allowed title to innate” (1:39). These principles are, of course, two of the three cornerstones of Aristotelian logic, the principles of identity and non-contradiction. While never denying either the validity or self-evidence of these principles, Locke does argue that they are hardly *a priori* foundations of knowledge (2:275) and furthermore not expressive of any truth we cannot know in particular instances, “and known also in particular instances, before these general maxims are ever thought on” (2:270). They are, then, only trivially true, “not of much use to the discovery of unknown truths” (2:283).

Blake sharply disagrees with Locke on the issue of innate principles or ideas, although, having already nullified Reason’s role in the acquisition of knowledge, not from a concern to rescue logical axioms. Rather he defends the innateness of aesthetic principles by ridiculing the denial of their existence in the margins of the philosophers (in this case, Joshua Reynolds): “Knowledge of Ideal Beauty,” he writes, “is Not to be Acquired It is Born with us Innate Ideas. are in Every Man Born with him. they are <truly> Himself. The Man who says that we have No Innate Ideas must be a Fool & Knave. Having No Con-

Science <or Innate Science>” (Marg E648). Or again:

The Man who asserts . . . that every thing in Art is Definite & Determinate has not been told this by Practise but by Inspiration & Vision because Vision is Determinate & Perfect & he Copies That without Fatigue Every thing being Definite & determinate . . . I say These Principles could never be found out by the Study of Nature without Con or Innate Science[.] (Marg E646).

Here Blake appears to approach a Platonic idealism, but, if he is to be consistent, he cannot allow anything deduced from these innate ideas to be called knowledge, having already
claimed that “Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once.” And since he also claims that all knowledge is particular, he could not consistently agree with the Platonic doctrine of unknowable particulars, imperfect copies of eternal forms. And yet he sometimes talks as though that is exactly what he believes: “There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature” (VLJ E555). In the end, however, Blake rejects Platonic rationalism in favour of Christian revelation (actually a more sweeping rejection of philosophy in favour of religion): “Christ addresses himself to the Man not to his Reason Plato did not bring Life & Immortality to Light Jesus only did this” (Marg E664). But it is only Plato as the agent of Reason from whom Blake distances himself; Plato as advocate for the Divine he clasps to his bosom: “The Ancients did not mean to Impose when they affirmed their belief in Vision & Revelation Plato was in Earnest. Milton was in Earnest. They believd that God did Visit Man Really & Truly” (Marg E658). And so, having denied the validity of Reason, general knowledge, and a priori deduction, Blake retains nothing of Platonic rationalism but innate divine ideas, which he must somehow reconcile with the particular ideas of Lockean empiricism. Blake’s philosophical position—and that he thought philosophically is self-evident, despite his contempt for philosophy and unadulterated loyalty to religion and art—runs something along these fractured lines: at least some of our ideas are innate, all of them are particular, and those that are true must be self-evidently so. What his philosophical position is not, however, is consistent—but that is perfectly consistent with his anti-Reason argument.

But where Blake becomes truly fascinating is in his manipulation of the implications of Lockean empiricism, Berkeleian idealism, and Humean scepticism to justify his
dethronement of Reason in favour of the Imagination as supreme arbiter of truth. Locke's difficulty, as he formulated it himself, was "How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?" (2: 228). Locke could find no way around the fact that "things themselves"—or rather the existence of objects or "real beings" outside our minds which are the cause of our particular ideas and to which those ideas supposedly correspond or conform—can only be inferred. To call this inference knowledge, he had to validate it on a general deductive principle of conformity not justifiable on purely empirical grounds. This Locke tries to do, arguing that our simple ideas are "the product of things operating on the mind, in a natural way, and producing therein those perceptions which by the Wisdom and Will of our Maker they are ordained and adapted to" (2: 229). Still, Locke's argument from idea-ism begs the question: in order to conclude that our ideas are caused by external objects acting on our senses or mind, we must assume that external objects exist; but we cannot make that assumption without first having formed an idea of an external object; and in order to form that idea, we must assume that our ideas are caused by external objects acting on our senses. Thus we remain shut up within the "narrow compass" of our own minds, an entailment of Locke's reasoning unflinchingly elaborated by Hume:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd. (67-68)
By the principle of idea-ism—"the view that what we are immediately aware of in perception are appearances or ideas or sense-data" (Musgrave 96)—we can have no certain knowledge of things outside our own minds but only, at best, reasonable beliefs about them (doxa rather than epistēmē). Locke, Hume, and Berkeley all treated the principle of idea-ism as axiomatic. And Blake follows suit, but with a difference. What for the empiricists is merely the logical outcome of the search for certain knowledge becomes for the prophet-poet the occasion for a satirical attack on intellectual pride, signalled by the rhetorical tone of overweening conviction and the insult to anyone who disagrees: "Mental Things are alone Real what is Called 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 a Fool" (V U  E565). In denying the existence of matter, Blake is merely taking the troublesome implications of Lockean empiricism to their inevitable idealist conclusion, the one reached by Berkeley, that "if all we can know are our own ideas and what can be proved therefrom, then we cannot know anything of external material objects or their properties" (Musgrave 143). And so, if once again he is to remain consistent, Blake must argue that Eternity—"because Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation which was an act of Mercy" (VLJ 563)—is an idea, a purely mental thing. Which means that truth is a purely mental thing also, because "Truth is Eternal" (VLJ E565), and that anything that exists, truly exists, must do so "in Eternity," for there is no existence "Out of Mind or Thought" except "in the Mind of a Fool," an exception which preserves the idea of the corporeal (an existence out of mind or thought) as an idea in someone's mind, but a false and idiotic rather than true one, which is why the corporeal exists only "in Fallacy," its "Existence an Imposture." Since "fallacy" is the product of bad
reasoning, Blake must assign all erroneous ideas to the reasoning mind of a fool, where those ideas have a mere pseudo-existence, and all true ideas to the imagination of the wise man, where *everything* really exists. When Los declares, "I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care / Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool" (J91:54-55; E252), what he is saying is that he cares only whether a man reasons or imagines, and good and evil will take care of themselves.

But there is, as I suggested, an element of satirical humour in all of this which ought not to be overlooked. Blake dutifully arrives at the conclusion that imagining is wise and reasoning is foolish by careful reasoning. From Hume's conclusion (in itself somewhat tinged with the pessimism of curtailed hopes and conviction of human frailty) that "This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd," a conclusion Blake takes as his first axiom, all his subsequent arguments logically follow; and were it not for the British empiricists and their principle of idea-ism, those arguments might have easily gone another way. Blake has some fun undermining Reason on the basis of his countrymen's reasoning, and then turns back to Platonic rationalism, with the now-divinized Humean Imagination usurping the place of Platonic Reason:

This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body This World <of Imagination> is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & [for a small moment] Temporal There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature[.] (VLJ E555)

*Or as Jerusalem* expresses it, "in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow" (J71:17-19; E225). Then, flirting with heresy and
sacrilege by incorporating Christian doctrine into what is already an unholy mixture of various philosophical principles, Blake personifies the Imagination as Jesus, "the Divine body of the Saviour the True Vine of Eternity The Human Imagination" (VLJ E555), and finally transforms it into God: "The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION. / that is God himself" (Laocoön E273); "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (Marg E664). Everything true, then, exists in the human Imagination, because the Imagination is more than just a faculty or state of mind, it is our very existence, a truth which Blake states in Milton without the slightest hint of irony: "The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself"(M32:32; E132). And it is in this precise sense that Blake calls his words "human," for they can, and do, refer only to the ideas of his sacred Imagination.

Locke advocates using syllogism "to discover a fallacy hid in a rhetorical flourish, or cunningly wrapt up in a smooth period; and, stripping an absurdity of the cover of wit and good language, show it in its naked deformity" (2:389).\(^2\) This method applied to Blake reveals the following skeletal structure:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(world of) imagination} &= \text{(world of) eternity} \\
\text{mental things} &= \text{the real} \\
\text{the corporeal} &= \text{the fallacious (or nonexistent)}
\end{align*}
\]

With the addition of a few more premises—"Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear" (VLJ E565)—we can properly organize the links of the syllogistic chain:
Here the two ideas Blake is proposing are exposed in all their nakedness. First, he argues that truth is imaginary, or that—given the primary meaning of *imaginary* as “existing only in imagination or fancy; having no real existence. (Opposed to real, actual.)” (OED)—truth is unreal, false. Secondly, he proposes that error—whatever is false or has no real existence—exists only in fallacious reasoning. Now, this second proposition is a fairly sound analytic truth, and would be acceptable as such had Blake not made it entail one other proposition, namely, that creation—or the corporeal, the bodily, the material or phenomenal world, physical reality, or, in short, Nature—is also fallacious, existing nowhere but in erroneous reasoning. When Blake maintains that everything we see is an image reflected in the mirror of Nature, or that the material world is a mere reflection of the Imagination’s real and eternal world—“There Exist in that Eternal World [of Imagination] the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature”—he puts a dizzying Platonic spin on Lockean empiricism that traps the perceiver within his own mind more completely than even Hume had envisioned.
With the perceiving subject forever divided from the world, we are free to conceive of the real however we wish, for no matter how we conceive of it, that conception will be an image in our Imagination and therefore eternally true. And Blake consistently follows through on this idea: when the narrator of *The Marriage* asks Isaiah, “does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so?” Isaiah confirms that “All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing” (MHH12; E38-39). If the only requirement for a thing to be so is that one is firmly persuaded of its being so, then empirical particulars (and remember that Blake claims all knowledge is particular) can be of no consequence to knowledge: everything must flow from inside the mind out, and the reflected world outside the mind (or which only seems to be outside the mind) scarcely matters. Our experience of the world will amount to nothing; its particulars inform us of nothing and determine nothing. What the subject believes or is firmly persuaded of is deemed true, and the apparently objective world is merely a reflection of our subjective belief. What counts as real are subjective, not objective, particulars—ideas, not things. In other words, Blake is advocating solipsism, which Musgrave calls “the lunatic version of idealism which says that only my ideas or sense-data (and perhaps my mind) exist,” that “the world is my dream” (104).

Blake’s hallowed particulars, then, are his own particular ideas, their ontological status fully warranted by Locke’s insistence that “[e]very man’s reasoning and knowledge is only about the ideas existing in his own mind; which are truly, every one of them, particular existences.” But in Blake’s case, they are specifically the ideas of his Imagination, from which he builds up “true” or “eternal” knowledge. The brand of solipsism he is verging on
here—and are we to accept his mere word that this eternal reality exists, without some plausible means of inferring the fact for ourselves?—denies the possibility of knowledge of any reality other than that which exists where, ironically, we normally expect to find only a rather tenuous connection to the real: in the Imagination. Reason, meanwhile, is fallacious, and because of that Blake's imaginative solipsism is more dangerous than absolute solipsism, for it validates not only nothing but the thought of the individual, but also the right of that thought to be irrational. The world is a dream that may, if the dreamer wishes, be senseless. The Song of Experience "The Angel" strikes the appropriately alarming note of ambiguity here: "I Dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?" (SE E24): what does my imaginative dream mean, how do I decipher it; or, since it is irrational, can it possibly mean anything at all? According to the Song of Innocence "A Dream," the meaning of this irrational dream may be wrapped up in a "shade" of darkness or obscurity it weaves of or from itself: "Once a dream did weave a shade, / O'er my Angel-guarded bed" (SI E16). Similarly in "A Cradle Song," "Sweet dreams form a shade, / O'er my lovely infants head" (SI E11). Besides being a region of darkness, a shade is also "a dark figure 'cast' upon a surface by a body intercepting light, a shadow," or, figuratively, "an unsubstantial image of something real; an unreal appearance; something that has only a fleeting existence, or that has become reduced almost to nothing" (OED). In Blake, ironically, that "nothing" is what his Imagination has reduced Reason to: a spectre, a word which, in both Blake's code and conventional English, is synonymous with ghost, which is synonymous with shadow, which, the OED tells us, is equivalent to shade. All four words—spectre, ghost, shadow, shade—refer to the unsubstantial appearance or image of something real, which is, in Blake, the foolish rational idea of a corporeal thing existing "out there"; and if Blake's dream
creates this kind of shade, then we can only conclude that his imaginative solipsism turns, at
one point or another, into fallacious reasoning, or that his fallacious reasoning has produced
all the solipsistic truths of his imagination.

As we have seen, Blake's solipsism of the Imagination, in which he appears to
believe sincerely, originates from his consistently and obediently following the premises of
Lockean empiricism to their logical conclusion, a conclusion Locke himself anticipated,
feared, and tried, unsuccessfully, to forestall. Seeing the urgent need to establish that
"simple ideas are not fictions of our fancies, but the natural and regular productions of
things without us, really operating upon us" (2: 229), Locke addresses a hypothetical
objection from his reader at the beginning of Chapter IV of his Essay:

'To what purpose all this stir? Knowledge, say you, is only the perception of
the agreement or disagreement of our own ideas: but who knows what those
ideas may be? Is there anything so extravagant as the imaginations of men's
brains? Where is the head that has no chimeras in it? Or if there be a sober
and a wise man, what difference will there be, by your rules, between his
knowledge and that of the most extravagant fancy in the world? ... the
visions of an enthusiast and the reasonings of a sober man will be equally
certain. It is no matter how things are: so a man observe but the agreement
of his own imaginations, and talk conformably, it is all truth, all certainty.
Such castles in the air will be as strongholds of truth, as the demonstrations
of Euclid. ... But of what use is all this fine knowledge of men's own
imaginations, to a man that inquires after the reality of things?' (2:226-27)

Berkeley, who similarly needs to counter the objection that his epistemology "obliterates the
distinction between illusion and reality, between dreams and reality, between hallucination
and reality, between our imaginings and reality" (Musgrave 129), asks (himself) the same
question as Locke: "But according to your notions, what difference is there between real
things, and chimeras formed by the imagination, or the visions of a dream, since they are all
equally in the mind?" (225). And Berkeley has as much trouble answering it, though he
comes up with a rather more ingenious reply, that “he can use whatever his opponents use
to distinguish illusions, hallucinations, dreams and imaginings from reality” (Musgrave 130). Unfortunately for the proponents of idea-ism, “one cannot really prove the existence of anything other than ideas on the basis of ideas alone. This holds as much for the God of Berkeley’s immaterialism as for the external objects of the materialist” (Musgrave 134).

Again, but with a heavy dose of satirical irony, Blake embraces the inevitable conclusion: if Reason cannot prove the existence of anything but ideas, then indeed “the visions of an enthusiast and the reasonings of a sober man will be equally certain,” as Locke’s imaginary detractor warned. But not necessarily equally certain, not if we abandon the notion of an objective point of view: the reasonings of sober men having led everyone to the sceptical conclusion in the first place, the enthusiasts, no longer compelled to be reasonable, are now free to declare their visions the only truths, just as we have seen Blake do.

Justified by Berkeley’s immaterialism on the one side and Locke’s idea-ism on the other, Blake finds further support for his irrationalism in Hume, who confesses that “[t]he intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another” (268-69). According to Musgrave, Hume must answer no to the question of whether our “natural or instinctive beliefs can be rationally justified,” and so is forced to conclude that “man [is] by nature an irrational animal” (147). In the absence of an adequate response to Hume, concludes Bertrand Russell, “there is no intellectual difference between sanity and insanity. The lunatic who believes that he is a poached egg is to be condemned solely on the ground that he is in a minority” (646). The only philosopher who cannot be refuted by Humean
arguments and is therefore immune to sceptical attack is the one who "do[es] not pretend to be rational" (Russell 646). And that, in a nutshell, is what Blake does. I would argue that not only does he pretend not to be rational, he carried off the pretence with such triumphant success (as both a literary and dramatic performance) that nearly a century had to elapse before the world, beginning with a handful of sympathetic individuals, would begin to see some method in his madness.

One cliché of Blake criticism that used to be trotted out in defense of his sanity (now so outmoded it is probably safe to revive) was that he truly believed all men capable of seeing the sort of visions he saw. This idea likely originated with Crabb Robinson's report that "[a]t the same time that [Blake] asserted his own possession of this gift of Vision, he did not boast of it as peculiar to himself; All men might have it if they would" (qtd. in Bentley 544). Well, perhaps all men might have it if they would only reason as Blake does. Yet nobody would dispute that the words imagination, vision, inspiration, and conscience are far from meaningless terms; nor do we put down to insanity the kinds of psychological experience to which they are taken to refer. Even when Blake claims that "Conscience in those that have it is unequivocal, it is the voice of God" (Marg E613), perfectly reasonable people are apt to feel they know what he means. If the apprehension of a self-evident truth (or what appears to be a truth) in a moment without duration were all that Blake means by "seeing a vision," then that experience is hardly out of the reach of other people—the claim might even be regarded as trivially true. But if Blake means, quite literally, what he says here:

I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me. What it will be Questiond 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 Almighty I
question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would
Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it (VLJ
E565-66),

then most rational people are unlikely to go along with him, for seeing choirs of angels in
the sun is bound to cause the sane person to think not that he has seen eternal truth, but that
he has completely lost his mind.

But, of course, we are not naïve readers, not so innocent of the intractable problems
of literary expression and the time-honoured techniques used to solve them that we cannot
see through Blake’s use of the image of the heavenly-host sun to its symbolic ground and
intent. Nor can we be blind to the metaphorical status of the whole event of seeing a
heavenly-host sun as a method of characterizing the vision of the man of his kind of
imagination: awe-inspiring, glorious, sublime, holy, spiritual, religious. Moreover, he is
using it as one of two competing metaphors, the other, the disk-of-fire or guinea sun,
emblematic of the rational man who sees nothing out of the ordinary. And if the reasoner
and the imaginer are looking at one and the same sun (just as the fool and the wise man are
looking at the same tree), then the difference in the object’s appearance is entirely
attributable to the difference in their points of view, or to the kind of perceptive organ,
rational or imaginative, perceiving it. For beneath the crucial question “What is Man!” in
“The Gates of Paradise” emblems, a wry little aphorism reminds us that “The Suns Light
when he unfolds it / Depends on the Organ that beholds it” (GP E260).

But what if the organ beholding the rising sun is, on the one hand, neither rational,
dull, ordinary, nor avaricious enough to behold it as a round disk of fire the size and shape
of a guinea (and here we should mention two more aphorisms, both from The Laocoön:
“Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason the Root of Good & Evil In The Accusation of Sin,” and “For every Pleasure Money Is Useless” [E275]), nor, on the other hand, sufficiently imaginative or susceptible to the spirit of religious enthusiasm, or just plain mad enough, to see it as enclosing a heavenly host? What if the perceiving organ is, on the contrary, sufficiently rational and sufficiently imaginative to see the lone word “sun” as a metaphor in itself, a third kind or perhaps higher order of metaphor, one capable of reconciling all competing or opposing metaphors because capable of subsuming them in the notion of metaphor itself—or, better yet, in the act of interpretation, which recognizes that, just as everything in the empirical world is an image, everything in literature (or at least in the literature of truth) is an image referring to but unable to speak directly of the Real. The crying and sighing voices of Blake’s poetry may be uniquely difficult to hear, but they are not unique in their being difficult to hear.

When Blake, fully in character as solipsistic Apostle of the idealist Imagination, speaks of watching the sun rise and seeing not “the Outward Creation,” is he, in claiming not to see the same everyday, perfectly ordinary yellow or green things that wise and sober men do see, not speaking like a madman and a fool? (And aware of it: “Dear Sir,” Blake writes to Hayley, “excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision” [E757].) When he claims that “I do not behold the Outward Creation . . . to me it is hindrance & not Action”—perhaps alluding to Berkeley’s argument that matter, being “inactive,” cannot be the cause of ideas—and that “it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me,” doesn’t the word “hindrance” implicitly admit a prior constraint he is determined to reject? And what about those “feet” the metaphorical “dirt” of corporeal
creation clings to—are they also part of the corporeal, or are they rather part of "Me"? If the latter, where does "my body" end and "I" begin?

If the man who doubts or denies the reality of the material world is a fool, the wise man is surely not the one who sees the sun as nothing more than a material disk of fire, especially when he encounters one in his reading. Such a man is no closer to the truth of the sun than is his imaginative counterpart, who sees the sun as a heavenly host. It is probably safer to pronounce both the exclusively rational man and the exclusively imaginative man fools than to think either one wise—and here we might stop to consider one of Blake’s Proverbs of Hell: “The selfish smiling fool. & the sullen frowning fool. shall be both thought wise. that they may be a rod” (MHH8; E36). For the truly wise man would be the one who sees the rising sun as everyone else sees it, as a ball of fire, but also as an image of what he loves most—and that would be the contemplation of divine Truth, not the pleasures of money (symbolic or otherwise). And so the illusion of seeing a heavenly host is a more appropriate metaphor for wisdom than that of seeing a guinea. So is seeing a host in that other sense, as “an armed company or multitude of men; an army” (OED), the metaphor that comes into play when Truth must be fought for or defended. Also appropriate is the meaning of the Hebrew word for host, “the sun, moon, and stars” (OED), applicable when truth need not be defended because it is obvious to anyone with eyes.

Here, at last, we reach the heart of Blake’s satirical intent. As a self-appointed champion of Truth—eternal, infinite, immutable, absolute Truth—he must brace himself for the cruel task of making fools of all those (including himself) who are inclined to mistake an image of reality for the Real itself.
In his brief analysis of Blake’s philosophical concepts in “Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude,” Miller supports my contention:

Critics have taken pains to render Blake’s argument consistent, but diverse philosophic strains struggle throughout the writings. Blake’s discourse interweaves, often within single passages, a radical idealism of active perception (and enduring form) with an equally radical naturalism of active sensation (and perceived objects). And this tension continues from the early works, most notably *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, all the way to *Jerusalem*. (157)

"Indeed," Locke goes on,

syllogism is thought to be of necessary use, even to the lovers of truth, to show them the fallacies that are often concealed in florid, witty, or involved discourses. But that this is a mistake will appear, if we consider, that the reason why sometimes men who sincerely aim at truth are imposed upon by such loose, and, as they are called, rhetorical discourses, is, that their fancies being struck with some lively metaphorical representations, they neglect to observe, or do not easily perceive, what are the true ideas upon which the inference depends. Now, to show such men the weakness of such an argumentation, there needs no more but to strip it of the superfluous ideas, which, blended and confounded with those on which the inference depends, seem to show a connexion where there is none; or at least to hinder the discovery of the want of it; and then to lay the naked ideas on which the force of the argumentation depends in their due order; in which position the mind, taking a view of them, sees what connexion they have, and so is able to judge of the inference without any need of a syllogism at all. (Locke 2: 397)
Part II: The Roots of Blake’s System

7. Contrary Qualities of the Sun’s Light: Negative Rational Truth and Positive Imaginative Error

Unable to defend truth against the nihilistic forces of scepticism by means of Reason, Blake decides, in his capacity as a “Philosophic & Experimental” character (NNR[b] E3), to embrace the Humean proposition logically forced upon him, that our mental world is but “the universe of the imagination” and all the ideas we have are produced therein. Thus Blake’s Reason becomes the guarantor of his Imagination’s right to the uncontrolled government of his “Universe stupendous,” to be First Cause and God of the text, for the existence of the mental image is the one thing the sceptic cannot doubt. Nevertheless, Blake’s Reason cannot validate his Imagination’s creations as “truths,” if by that term is meant something other than a judgment, because, as the logician P. Coffey explains,

[the judgment . . . differs from every other mental process in this, that it claims to be true: it claims the belief or assent of the mind to it as true. Now this claim will be seen on a little reflection to imply of necessity a reference of the whole content of the actual subjective or mental synthesis to something beyond itself. A toothache, or a fit of anger, or a strong emotion or desire, are simply subjective, conscious states, which are neither true nor false, and which do not refer us to anything beyond themselves for verification: but the conscious mental process of affirming or denying, of asserting, judging, reveals itself as an interpretation of something distinct from itself, something to which an appeal can be made for the verification of the mental process. This “something” is the reality (in the widest sense of the word), which the mind interprets, in and by its act of judgment. (1:160)

Blake’s Imagination does have subjective, conscious states, though it is not itself one, for its affections—love, pity, wrath, desire—become states when divided from it: “The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself / Affection or Love becomes a
State, when divided from Imagination” (M32:32-33; E132). Apparently once his affections have divided from his Imagination and become something distinct from it, they are objectified, capable of being interpreted by the conscious mental process of affirming, denying, or judging. But as long as they remain in his Imagination, they remain subjective, neither true nor false, and therefore safe from the judgment of Reason, for whom truth is possible only in reference to an objective reality, as logic says:

every judgment must refer to some objective sphere of reality, i.e. to some realm over and above the subjective, passing thought of the individual thinker’s mind, to some universe of discourse in which the claim of the judgment to truth may be checked and guaranteed. Every such sphere is called objective reality, in the sense of being a something beyond the subjective thought of the individual thinker. In this sense every judgment must refer us to some portion or other of objective reality; and this latter might thus be rightly said to constitute the ultimate subject of all our judgments. . . . every judgment makes a predication which REFERS US to some objective sphere or other which is a portion, at least, of all conceivable reality. In this sense every judgment implies the existence or reality of its ultimate subject. (Coffey 1: 248-49)

But states, according to Milton, are not real because they do not exist, although they seem to—“States that are not, but ah! Seem to be” (M32:29; E132)—perhaps because their separation from the Imagination has objectified them, and Blake regards objective reality (or corporeal creation) as an illusion created by fallacious reasoning. In addition to affection or love, states include memory—“The Memory is a State always”—and, provisionally or temporarily, Reason itself: “the Reason is a State / Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created” (M32:34-35; E132). But if everything other than the Imagination (and the closely clasped affections of its “bosom”) is an unreal state, what is left in Blake’s wholly subjective imaginative universe for us to judge? For he certainly appears to invite judgment of some kind, if we can take his “Living Creatures” for his
spokesmen: “let every Man be Judged / By his own Works” (J55:57-58; E205). And in A Vision of the Last Judgment he warns those who think they can escape judgment, or the making of one, that they are deluding themselves:

The Last Judgment is an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science. . . . Some People flatter themselves that there will be No Last Judgment & that Bad Art will be adopted & mixed with Good Art That Error or Experiment will make a Part of Truth & they Boast that it is its Foundation these People flatter themselves I will not Flatter them Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it (VLJ 565)

We find here a series of curious equations: bad art will, one day, be overwhelmed because it is an error (experiment or creation or illusion), and as such it will be “burned up” when people cease to behold it, when its non-existence is made obvious to the mind formerly taken in by its apparent existence. The kind of judgment Blake has in mind, then, must be designed to separate truth from error, to distinguish truth—which is identified with both the eternal and all existence: “Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation which was an act of Mercy” (VLJ E563)—from error, an unreal creation (created, we might ask, by whom?) which is therefore “bad art” (art must be true to be good) and yet, strangely, an “act of mercy” (perhaps because without it, as Milton argues in Areopagitica, the act of distinguishing would be unnecessary and impossible, as would the passive experience of revelation, not to mention all the aesthetic, moral, and erotic pleasures latent in both, of ravishing and being ravished).

If we are to judge every man by his own works, it would seem only prudent to apply the universal imperative to Blake himself, considering that his are perhaps the finest and most perfect example in English literature of bad art mixed with good. (I say
this because while a superficial glance at Blake reveals many glaringly obvious failures, only prolonged and careful study reveals them to be inextricable from his successes.) But aesthetic judgment is not identical with rational judgment, though they may overlap, and according to logic we must rely on the latter to guarantee truth’s objectivity,

its peculiar independence of our wish or will. We are conscious that if at any instant we are to judge truly about any matter, we cannot judge just as we please. . . . at any given instant what is true is not determined by us, but is rather determined for us, by that objective sphere of reality which our judgment seeks to interpret. (Coffey 1:161-62)

In art, however, the subjective has its own kind of truth: what pleases us (often for no apparent reason) is judged favorably, and what we wish were true is as weighty a factor in the decision as what is. This is so, at any rate, in the imaginative world of William Blake, where “all that has existed in the space of six thousand years” is

Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanishd, & every little act,
Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still
In those Churches ever consuming & ever building by the Spectres
Of all the inhabitants of Earth wailing to be Created:
Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, meer possibilities:
But to those who enter into them they seem the only substances
For every thing exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,

One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away.

(J13:59-66, 14:1; E157-58)

Now, this world or universe or earth or “Mundane Shell” created by Blake’s Imagination can be seen, as the quotation suggests, from two contrary points of view: those on the inside see it as a permanent or eternal existence, and therefore true; those on the outside see it as “shadowy,” a “mere possibility,” which (who knows?) may turn out to be an illusion. This is a case not of bad art “adopted & mixed” with good art but rather of one artistic creation seen from two opposite perspectives, from the inside and the outside.\(^1\) And this creation is
continually created (or produced or built) and continually destroyed (or devoured or consumed) by the mutual opposition and complementary interplay of its two great contrary intellectual principles, Reason and Imagination: “Continually Building. Continually Decaying because of Love & Jealousy” (J72; E227). Yet we are given to believe that this universe, this creation, is the property of the creative principle only, the Poetic Genius or Imagination, and that Reason has been excluded from it, helpless to defend its truth. And since the Imagination claims to be “the Human Existence itself” (just as the Poetic Genius is identified by All Religions are One as “the true Man”) and not an illusory subjective state of consciousness, its “infant thoughts & desires” (J9:2; E152), its wishes and its will (sometimes characterized as “female”), will all appear, if they do not divide from Imagination but remain firmly lodged within its Divine Body (the “human form” of its universe), to be truly existing things, permanent and “not lost.”

But the thing that effects the change in the appearance of Blake’s imaginative universe from that of a shadowy possibility to that of an eternal truth, what determines the way it is seen, must be the “last judgment” of its perceiver. But with what faculty does the perceiver make this judgment? If Blake uses only his Imagination to create his work, does it necessarily follow that his perceiver/reader must judge it only with his? In his Descriptive Catalogue Blake observes that “[t]here are always these two classes of learned sages, the poetical and the philosophical,” one of which should serve the other: “Let the Philosopher always be the servant and scholar of inspiration and all will be happy” (DC E537). If Blake insists that his Imagination is not a subjective “state” but a true “existence,” then why might not the reader serve Blake’s Imagination by insisting that his own philosophical reason, which Blake suggests is “a State / Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created,” is
capable of judging true existences? If Blake’s universe can change its appearance, then perhaps the reader’s reason can change its state, annihilating the one he first brings to the text in the process of reading it and then creating a “new ratio” for the last judgment.

After all, Jerusalem tells us, “The Spiritual States of the Soul are all Eternal Distinguish between the Man, & his present State” (J52; E200). Or as Milton advises, “Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States. / States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease” (M32:22-23; E132). Indeed, what faculty other than reason could possibly notice the contradiction that threatens to appear here: “States Change” but “The Spiritual States of the Soul are all Eternal”—are “spiritual” states different from other kinds? or are states eternally changing? And what faculty other than reason would then have the power to make the contradiction disappear: the text we are reading is, after all, a purely imaginative creation; since Reason had no hand in building it, contradictions are to be expected.

Reason does, however, have a hand in consuming, decaying, or destroying Blake’s universe, for a “spectre” is a rational power, and Blake’s permanent imaginative creations—his every little act, word, work, and wish—are “all remaining still / In those Churches ever consuming & ever building by the Spectres / Of all the inhabitants of Earth wailing to be Created”: it even appears that rational powers are responsible for building as well as consuming the structures in which imaginative truths are lodged. Does this mean that Reason has creative power, too? Perhaps Reason can be changed from a destroyer to a creator, or be made to serve inspiration with its destructive powers, especially if what it destroys with its judgment is that “Error or Creation” that obscures “Truth or Eternity” from our sight.
Fortunately, logic can be made to justify Blake’s claim that his Imagination is a real existence insofar as it recognizes three objective spheres of reality, or “universes of discourse,” to which the terms of a judgment may refer:

in the case of any term used in a judgment, this universe may be (1) the actual visible universe of things past, present, and future, that can come directly into our sense experience: the universe from which we get the raw materials of all our intellectual concepts. Or it may be (2) the spiritual universe of suprasensible realities which most people believe to be actual, but which for unbelievers resolves itself into a sphere of actual beliefs (viz. of the believers). Or it may be (3) some universe that is actual in the sense of being actually invented or produced by the mental activity of man, such as the plays of Shakespeare, or the literature of heraldry, or the collections of oral or written traditions or beliefs which constitute the folklores of the various nations. (Coffey 1:249)

Clearly, Blake’s universe of discourse belongs to logic’s third category because it is produced—and Blake makes no secret of this—entirely by his own mental activity: “such are the words of man to man / In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration, / To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating” (M30:18-20; E129). All Blake’s words—including the terms of all his judgments, propositions or statements, whether categorical, hypothetical, conditional, negative, or assertoric (because we cannot deny the real existence of these things in his text)—build the “stupendous” universe of his discourse. All his words refer us to the “mental forms” of his own imaginative creation. And thus does Blake’s imaginative world become our objective reality, for, it could be argued, the imagination remains subjective only as long as the thinker’s imaginings are the object of his thought alone. But once written down, distanced from and placed outside him, they become externalized, the possible object of others’ minds, a state someone else can enter into; and once objectified, imagined thoughts are available to our rational judgment. In this sense, Blake’s imaginative universe is an object about which our reason may make
logical judgments—and aesthetic ones, too, if like Blake we bring our imagination to the event: "The Human Imagination . . . appeard to Me as Coming to Judgment. among his Saints & throwing off the Temporal that the Eternal might be Establishd" (VLJ E555). If, on the other hand, we remain so thoroughly sceptical of our ability to perceive any object other than our own ideas that we must conclude our reading will only manage to reduplicate another's imaginative world in our own without any grounds for that accurate correspondence or agreement between representation and thing represented we sometimes call "truth," then Blake's subjective world will become our subjective world by mysteriously bridging the distance between us, with Reason left standing at the gates, forever barred from entry.

In any event, Blake's universe of discourse is crucially different from, say, Shakespeare's plays, where a spectre, like Hamlet's father, might reasonably be interpreted as a ghost in the conventional sense of that word. More importantly, in order to create the purely "mental forms" of his universe, Blake must simultaneously destroy physical ones, or rather the capacity of his words to refer to logic's first objective sphere, "the actual visible universe of things past, present, and future, that can come directly into our sense experience." In Blake's world, anything that looks like a concrete object, an object of the five senses, is really an object of the intellectual senses (which are more "enlarged & numerous" [MHH11; E38]), really an invisible mental thing—a thought or affection, desire or wish—that has been given the illusory appearance of a corporeal body. This false body is the handiwork of the evil, deceitful Spectre, a body he creates, is identified with, and known by: "The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man / This is a felse Body an Incrustation over my Immortal / Spirit" (M40:34-36; E142). And it is formed by the
Spectre acting contrary to and yet, paradoxically, under compulsion from the axiom that "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 a Fool." The evil rational power at work in Blake's universe, whose role is to decay, consume, devour, or destroy, does so in a twofold manner: first it destroys truth by hiding it from our sight, obscuring it by placing its mental forms inside corporeal ones that function like incrustations over its immortal spirit, or like cataracts over the eye of Imagination that "hinder the Vision of God" (VLJ E554); and then it destroys error by consuming, devouring, or burning up that same false corporeal appearance to reveal the mental truth hidden within. As for the first part of this twofold process, the "mighty Hand," with its prodigious metaphorical powers, may be seen

Condens[ing] his Emanations into hard opake substances;  
And his infant thoughts & desires, into cold, dark, cliffs of death.  
His hammer of gold he siezd; and his anvil of adamant.  
He siez'd the bars of condens'd thoughts, to forge them:  
Into the sword of war: into the bow and arrow:  
Into the thundering cannon and into the murdering gun  
(J9:1-6; E152)

Logic allows that "if the individual, by a process of psychological reflection, thinks and judges about the present current of his own thoughts, the 'objective sphere' will be the sphere of his own thoughts considered as objects; but even then, these will be 'objective' to his acts of reflex judgment" (Coffey 1:248, n.1). Hence in Blake's text abstractions are seen masquerading as sense-perceptible things—"Awkwardness arm'd in steel: folly in a helmet of gold: / Weakness with horns & talons: ignorance with a rav'ning beak!" (J9:12-13; E152)—in order to ground mental things (which are alone real) in an objective sphere as the laws of logic demand. If logic permits us to think and make judgments about our own
thoughts as objects, Blake simply takes this license to objectify one step further, imagining what his thoughts and feelings might look like if they were sense-objects, including (as we see above) a whole class of “things” we might call instruments of the intellectual war that is Blake’s ever-present context: mental swords, mental bows, mental arrows, mental cannons, and mental guns. “For a Tear,” confirms Jerusalem, “is an Intellectual thing; / And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King / And the bitter groan of a Martyrs woe / Is an Arrow from the Almighty’s Bow!” (J52:25-28; E202).

To win this intellectual war—because in reading Blake’s objective account of it the reader must to some extent become caught up in it—it is imperative to turn all the false concrete “things” back into the abstractions they truly are. On well-chosen occasions, Blake does this himself, and, in thus decoding himself, he sets us a proper example. We may recall that at one such moment (another of those moments Satan’s watch-fiends cannot find) the “city” named London speaks directly to us, revealing what it is really made of: “My Streets are my, Ideas of Imagination. . . . My Houses are Thoughts: my Inhabitants; Affections, / The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-vessels” (J34:31-34; E180). Another fine example is the “building of pity and compassion” Blake invites us to see with our imaginative eye:

The stones are pity, and the bricks, well wrought affections: 
Enameld with love & kindness, & the tiles engraven gold
Labour of merciful hands: the beams & rafters are forgiveness:
The mortar & cement of the work, tears of honesty: the nails,
And the screws & iron braces, are well wrought blandishments,
And well contrived words, firm fixing, never forgotten,
Always comforting the remembrance: the floors, humility,
The cielings, devotion: the hearths, thanksgiving:
Prepare the furniture O Lambeth in thy pitying looms!
The curtains, woven tears & sighs, wrought into lovely forms
For comfort, there the secret furniture of Jerusalems chamber
Is wrought . . .

(J12:30-41; E155)

To mistake this building—literally constructed from the immaterial material of abstractions, psychological states, and other invisible objects of mental experience—for an object that might come directly into one's sense experience is to close one's eyes to Blake's visions of eternal truth. And this is true not only of this building or this London, but also (because this is a highly principled universe) of anything of the same apparently corporeal order within the text.

There is a difference, of course, between making judgments about a work of literary art and determining the truth value of judgments made within it—judging the judgments of the writer. Since for Blake good art is true art, we need to ask whether his own work actually contains or expresses truth of any kind in any form, let alone the eternal Truth he calls his "Divine Vision." Logic maintains that when a truth is told, when the mental act of judgment is expressed in a verbal proposition, it has certain limits. While the truth of a judgment must be objective, universal, and immutable insofar as it purports to be a true representation of an objective reality, "[t]his is always rather some limited portion of the sphere of reality than reality in general" (Coffey 1:161). In other words, "although All Reality is in a certain sense the ultimate subject of all judgments, it is not the proximate subject actually thought about" (Coffey 1:161). Rather, a judgment is expressed in terms and concepts, and logic presumes an "identity of content" between the concepts expressed in the terms and the subjects in reality to which those terms refer (Coffey 1:161). So one must check a truth against the appropriate sphere of objective
reality: what is true must be determined for us, not by us. If Blake were to refuse to allow
his truth claims to be checked against an objective reality, he would indeed be guilty of
the kind of solipsism that I, among others, have accused him of. But if all his judgments
(those he makes) are to be referred to the imaginary, fictitious world of his own mental
creation—that is, logic’s third universe of discourse—as something distinct from himself,
then that, as his chosen universe of discourse, is the objective reality against which his
truths may be checked. But this, someone might object, is merely a disguised form of
self-referentiality, and as such still solipsism. For the judgment of the individual mind to
be true, says logic, it must be true

\[\text{for all minds: it is itself an individual conjunction of two concepts in a}\]
\[\text{single individual’s mind, but it claims to represent something which must}\]
\[\text{hold for everyone, for all minds. Thus, logical truth, because it is}\]
\[\text{objective—or related to a something other than the passing psychological}\]
\[\text{act of judgment—is also universal, in the sense that what is true for one}\]
\[\text{mind is true for all minds, that truth is not relative to, or variable with, the}\]
\[\text{variety of individual men or individual minds. (Coffey 1:161)}\]

And yet Blake does insist that “Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own
Individ[uality” (M4:8; E98), although wisdom, if defined as the “capacity of judging
rightly” or “soundness of judgement” (OED, wisdom), is dependent on the prior grasp of
truth that is in dispute, and so the “peculiarity” to which Blake refers may attach not to
the truth itself but rather to the ability to judge it aright and express it.

In any event, to avoid being charged with solipsism by Reason, Blake’s
Imagination must ensure that its universe refers to something beyond the thoughts of just
William Blake, and so, having already rejected the first of logic’s universes of discourse, he
must include the second, “the spiritual universe of suprasensible realities which most people
believe to be actual, but which for unbelievers resolves itself into a sphere of actual beliefs
(viz. of the believers).” It seems self-evident that Blake’s whole corpus constitutes an argument on behalf of his belief in this very universe, beginning with his first self-published work *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), where he asserts (and it is a principle he never falters in maintaining) that “Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. he perceives more than sense (tho’ ever so acute) can discover” (NNR E2), and ending with *Jerusalem*, where he announces categorically that “We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep” (J3; E145). Evidently, these two judgments (both universals) are expressions of Blake’s beliefs. But are they true? Not for the unbeliever. And this person Blake in turn dismisses as a “Blockhead” who “wants a proof of what he Can’t Perceive” (E507). The man who doubts a reality beyond his senses is illogical, an idiot, for that doubt will require him to doubt the reality of his own thoughts, and then the denial of the truth of the expression of thought, in art and in science, will soon come trailing after. Such idiocies provoke Blake to a little rational rage:

> What is the Divine Spirit? is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain? What is the Harvest of the Gospel & its Labours? What is that Talent which it is a curse to hide? What are the Treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves, are they any other than Mental Studies & Performances? What are all the Gifts of the Gospel, are they not all Mental Gifts? Is God a Spirit who must be worshipped in Spirit & in Truth and are not the Gifts of the Spirit Every-thing to Man? O ye Religious discountenance every one among you who shall pretend to despise Art & Science! I call upon you in the Name of Jesus! What is the Life of Man but Art & Science? is it Meat & Drink? is not the Body more than Raiment? What is Mortality but the things relating to the Body, which Dies? What is Immortality but the things relating to the Spirit, which Lives Eternally! (J77; E231-32)

But forging such a close link between the terms “divine spirit” and “intellect” lands Blake in logical troubles of his own. While the former may acceptably refer to something immortal,
endowed with “eternal life,” it is far more difficult to swallow the idea that the intellect or thought might be immortal, too. Yet in face of the unbeliever who regards this proposition, or any other in his Imagination’s universe, as doubtful or false, Blake would compel him, by the force of logic alone, to admit that it is nevertheless the expression of not only his but others’ beliefs, and those beliefs are themselves actual. They are really existing things, deserving of logical analysis, of examination and judgment—and the judge need not worry about the need for empirical evidence. He can determine their truth analytically, on the strength of the concepts alone, which, when compared, may be seen to agree or disagree with each other in the manner prescribed by Locke. In response to the unbeliever, then, Blake asserts (boldly if rather recklessly) that “Every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth” (MHH8; E37). And since the Imagination alone possesses the art of creating images of a suprasensible reality other minds may find it possible to believe in, Blake declares he knows “of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination” (J77; E231). If a belief is nothing more than the “mental acceptance of a proposition, statement, or fact, as true, on the ground of authority or evidence; assent of the mind to a statement, or to the truth of a fact beyond observation, on the testimony of another, or to a fact or truth on the evidence of consciousness” (OED), then Blake could argue that he has as good grounds for believing in the objective reality of the spirit, which he identifies with the intellect (and with thought, mental gifts, mental performances, talents—with truth itself), as the sceptic does for not believing in it, since the only evidence of its non-existence the sceptic can produce is his own failure to perceive it.

Yet the notion of grounding truth in belief is problematic, for it tends to make “of truth a relation between what we believe and the way the world is, the facts. According
to this view of truth, something might be true even though nobody believes it, or false even though everybody believes it" (Musgrave 249)—a state of affairs that is clearly irrational. The idea that “Every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth” suggests that something may be true just because somebody believes it, and while his Imagination approves the idea, Blake’s Reason considers it absurd. So when it comes to the question of the immortality of the Intellect/Spirit, which his Imagination affirms and his Reason alternately doubts and denies, their disagreement becomes acute, driving a wedge right through Blake’s own Intellect and leaving it divided against itself, one half self-affirming imaginative believer and the other self-negating (or self-contradicting) rational unbeliever in the truth of its immortality, because both the idea that the Intellect does exist or live eternally and the idea that it does not are, equally, images of a truth Blake finds possible to believe.

But few readers of Blake could be long in doubt as to which side of this war of contradictory beliefs he is really on. If Blake ever looks through the sceptical eye of Reason, he does so only to be in a better position to invite all those sceptics among his readers to entertain the possibility of the truth of what he believes, and—if they should prove good reasoners, very passive and very obedient (for “Good is the passive that obeys Reason” [MHH3; E34])—to see the unassailable logic of his Imagination’s position. Bad reasoners, on the other hand, are free to read into his text whatever they wish to find there, but by imposing their thoughts on it they will help Blake demonstrate several of his axioms, that “every thing is conducted by Spirits” (if we agree that spirits are intellectual), that everything we know is a mental thing, and that the objective corporeal world (which includes the pages of books) is but the mirror of our own minds.
If we wish, then, to test the truth of these or any other of Blake’s judgments, we must first be clear about the parameters of his universe of discourse, “for unless we know the universe to which the judgment refers us, we cannot be said to understand the judgment” (Coffey 1:251). Blake’s terms will refer us to only two spheres of reality—the second and third universes of discourse: the spiritual universe of suprasensible realities, and the imaginative universe produced by his own mental activity—because the first universe of discourse, the one referring to the visible, corporeal world of our senses, has been negated by Blake’s reasoning Spectre. That this world is real and true, an objective reality, is something that, I would claim, Blake never truly denies. But his Spectre or Negation, whose function is to destroy both truth and error, does deny it, and in the only way it can— theoretically—in order to make a larger, more comprehensive (if simple) point: that the sense-world never can be completely erased from either our language or our thought. As Blake acknowledges in his annotations to Lavater, “it is impossible to think without images of somewhat on earth” (Marg E600). And so the corporeal world remains in its own spectral capacity as a kind of metaphorical bedrock which Blake’s Imagination can mine for symbolic gems and figurative gold. The image of a “real” physical wall with a “real” gate in it, for example, must be called up in our memory to enable Blake’s analogy between that kind of wall and a mental (but equally real, he would argue) wall of words with a single point of entry. And we must have at least a vague sense of the “real” city of London, with winding streets and a river flowing through it, in order to imagine Blake’s personified London, chartered city of words traversed by a river of thought, with ideas for streets and affections for inhabitants. But we must abandon all hope of ever understanding Blake if we enter his universe failing to take seriously his pronouncement that “Mental Things are alone
Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place <it> is in Fallacy & its Existence an Imposture.” For Blake “Truth is Eternal” (VLJ E565)—as even logic will admit: “Once true, true for ever” (Coffey 1:162)—and so the “real” physical world of our ordinary experience is unreal, false, insofar as it is, or appears to be, transitory, unstable, a shadow of the Real. Blake’s mental world, on the contrary, is real because it is true, and because it is true, it must also be eternal. That, at any rate, is the logic of his imaginative position, which permits him now to identify and incorporate his two universes of discourse, that referring to his own imaginative world and that referring to the spiritual/intellectual world of suprasensible and eternal realities: hence his “Imagination [is] the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow” (J77; E231).

Logic, of course, is not metaphysics; but before drawing any conclusions about Blake’s metaphysical arguments, we ought to examine the logic of his judgments, considering them in reference to not only his chosen universe of discourse but also what logic calls the sphere of the objectively possible:

Those [three] various spheres [described earlier] are all portions of actual reality; and in order that the terms used in a judgment refer to any one of them, the objects or attributes signified by those terms must be at least capable of existing in some one or other of those actual spheres. In other words, the objects and attributes of which we think must be possible, conceivable, thinkable, free from logical contradiction. They must belong to the sphere of OBJECTIVELY POSSIBLE things. Here is a kind of “existence,” namely “logical existence” or “conceivability,” which is inseparably bound up with every term, and therefore implied in every judgment. (Coffey 1:249-50).

When Blake claims that “Every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth,” he is implicitly referring us to this sphere of logical conceivability. And because what we find conceivable we may not, and need not, actually believe, Blake may merely be asking us,
inviting us, to consider his beliefs as possibilities, which is also (because there is not a 
term in the English language that fails to refer to the sphere of the objectively possible) to 
consider his judgments hypothetically, trying them on for size before pronouncing them 
true or false. Well aware that his judgments are “Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, 
meer possibilities,” he sees no good reason why logic should not be allowed to determine 
whether or not they are true in reference to his two chosen objective spheres. “[A]lthough 
there may be, and always has been,” Coffey admits,

much controversy among philosophers, and indeed among all thinking 
men, about the nature of these [three] various objective spheres: whether, 
for instance, the sphere of “spiritual” beings, as distinct from visible, 
material things, is a mere creation of human beliefs like the various 
mythologies and folklore legends, or is on the contrary a sphere of beings 
that are really existent quite independently of human beliefs; and although 
these controversies sometimes find their way into logic, as, for example, 
when they lead authors to disagree about the real definition of “cause,” 
“substance,” “energy,” “free will,” “spirit,” “True Church of Christ,” etc.; 
nevertheless these questions are in themselves metaphysical rather than 
logical. All that logic demands is the recognition of the indisputable fact 
that in every judgment “there is a reference to some system of [actual] reality 
which is to be distinguished from the uncontrolled course of our own ideas”. 
And, this being granted, logic goes on to inquire whether the “existence” or 
“presence” or “occurrence” or “actual happening” of the things or events 
denoted by the terms of the judgment, in that sphere of reality, whatever it 
may be, referred to by the judgment, forms a necessary part of the import or 
implications of the judgment. The question is not whether these things exist 
or occur in other spheres; they may or may not. The subject and predicate, 
taken apart and considered by themselves, may refer us to quite different 
spheres: our present question is whether the judgment implies as part of its 
import or meaning that they exist in the sphere to which the judgment refers. 
(1:251–52)

How liberating all this is for Blake, but how dangerous for us if we try to take his judgments 
apart, to assume when he says, for example, that “Milton . . . walkd about in Eternity / One 
hundred years, pondring the intricate mazes of Providence” (M2:16–17; E96) that the term 
*Milton* refers to the English poet who lived from 1608 to 1674, or the term *years* to the unit
of time measured by 365 days, because by that interpretation these two terms refer us to the first sphere of reality, the corporeal world, which he claims exists only “in Fallacy” or “in the Mind of a Fool.” “[T]he only existence of objects that comes within the proper purview of logic,” Coffey continues, “is their existence as objects of thought, in the sphere of the objectively possible” (1:252). But logic demands that in Blake the term Milton refer only (given his rational negation of the physical universe as a possible referent) to an object of thought existing in the imagination of William Blake, no doubt as a representative, agent, or personification of the truth of the eternal Spirit or Intellect, and, as such, an object it is possible to conceive of (if not believe in). And if we can come this far, we may find that the sphere of Blake’s Imagination’s actual beliefs, although they are at present only conceivable or possible, merely thinkable, will one day be demonstrated or proved, according to the Proverb of Hell, “What is now proved was once, only imagin’d” (MHH8; E36).

Let us imagine Blake’s Reason stepping in at this point to inquire of his Imagination what it thinks will determine the limits of the possible, since (according to logic) the sphere of the objectively possible is

a real sphere, in the sense that it is not a mere creation of our mental activity. Possible things are possible, not because we conceive them in our thought; but, rather, we can conceive them in our thought because they are possible. Why they are possible, what makes them possible, what is the ultimate ground of their possibility—is not for logic, but for metaphysics, to decide. At all events, what guides us in determining what is intrinsically possible or conceivable, and what not, is our acquaintance with actual reality. And since this is so, we must hold that all judgments—even those which can be verified by a reference to what is contained in the compared concepts themselves, i.e. by a reference to the sphere of possibility or conceivability—refer us beyond this to some portion or department of actual reality. (Coffey 1:250)

For even though logic deals primarily with the existence of what is objectively possible,
it is no less true that the possible cannot be treated without reference to the actual; that we can determine what must be, or cannot be, only through concepts derived from our experience of what actually is; that if logic is concerned not merely with the internal consistency of our concepts and judgments, but with their truth, not merely with what may be but with what is, it should certainly take account of the whole general question whether or how far the objects, of which we think and judge, are supposed by us to be not merely possible but actual, and whether such a supposition even enters into our judgments as a part of their very meaning. (Coffey 1:252-53)

Following this line of thinking, Blake’s Reason argues that if his judgments are ever to be proved or pronounced true, if they are to say anything about what is beyond the thoughts of his Imagination and the beliefs he may or may not hold in common with others, then logic alone is not enough. To begin the work of metaphysical argument and proof, Blake’s Imagination must enlist the aid of not only Reason (Los needs his Spectre), but also the five senses, because, as Coffey insists, “all our concepts, without exception, refer us to some portion or other of the actual, physical universe—whence we derived them through our senses in the first instance—[even though], when used in judgments, they sometimes refer us more directly, for the verification of the latter, to the sphere of objective possibility” (Coffey 1:250). Rational truth—by which I mean the kind that must be verified by a logic informed by a realist or Aristotelian metaphysics—is inextricably bound to the world of the senses:

All our knowledge is gathered by our judging or interpreting intellectually the data revealed to our consciousness through the operation of our senses, and by reasoning from those data. There is a philosophical aphorism: Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu: which does not mean, of course, that we can know nothing except the things actually revealed to our senses, i.e. material things; but which does mean that whatever we do know, even about suprasensible (or spiritual) things, we know by reasoning intellectually from what is revealed to our senses. The abstract and universal ideas themselves, by which we interpret those sense data (e.g. the ideas of thing, matter, motion, life, tree, horse, etc.), we get by intellectual conception (or abstraction) from those data. (Coffey 1:6)
Blake’s Reason wholeheartedly agrees with this view of knowledge, except on one crucial point: it denies that we can know suprasensible or spiritual things by reasoning from the data of sense because, as it concludes in the tractate *There is No Natural Religion*, part [a] (of which it is the author), “The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense” (NNR[a] E2). And his Imagination agrees, but adds in (counter)part [b] of the same work (of which it is the author), that “Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. he percieves more than sense (tho’ ever so acute) can discover” (NNR[b] E2). And apparently Blake believes that from this extrasensory mode of perception we derive our knowledge of the Spirit. The Imagination goes on to argue that “Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more” (NNR[b] E2), that elliptical term *more* referring consistently to the precise phrase *more than sense can discover* of the preceding premise.

But if we synthesize Blake’s rational and imaginative positions, we get a clearer and more accurate idea of his true belief: that we cannot possibly know spiritual things by reasoning from what is revealed to our senses, and so knowledge of the Spirit must come from within, directly from the Intellect or Spirit itself. When we perceive “more than sense can discover,” we perceive the Intellect immediately; we have a direct experience of it. And that experience will change our Reason.

The beliefs of Blake’s Reason are that “Naturally [man] is only a natural organ subject to Sense,” that “Man by his reasoning power. can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev’d” (NNR[a] E2), and that his desires and perceptions untaught by anything but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense. His Imagination, rather
than denying or attempting to refute these premises, encompasses and expands on them with its beliefs, implying that, while what Reason asserts may be true of the natural man, man is not wholly natural: "The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite," and "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God" (NNR[b] E3). Their different perspectives may be roughly formulated along the lines set out by the French metaphysician Hubert Benoit, who begins by emphasizing that the human being

is a peculiar animal because it is, in its essence, absolute. I have said "absolute" in preference to "divine," although I may sometimes have to use the more expressive words "God" and "divine." But I want it clearly understood that here we shall not be giving the word God its personal and more or less anthropomorphic meaning, but shall be using it in the sense of a principle, non-temporal, immanent and transcendent, beyond all description and all discursive thinking; a principle whose necessity we infer by induction, but one that surpasses all deductive demonstration.

Man is of an absolute essence; he is, in a sense, properly divine. But he is born into a state of life where, although of a divine nature, he has not the enjoyment of it. A simile may help you to understand this. Ice is, strictly, of the same nature as water, but does not possess all its properties; it cannot possess them until it is melted. Man as he is born may be compared to ice, and water to his divine nature; he is of that nature but has not the properties of it. In consequence of this man has a conception of himself that is divided and dualistic. His senses show him his temporal limitations and the mortality of his organism denies him absolute status: at the same time there is within him a kind of primordial intuition, beyond all proof, beyond all rational reasoning, that he is divine, absolute and unlimited. The conviction that he is limited remains in his conscious thinking about the information his sense organs supply: the conviction that he is unlimited resides in the depths of his unconscious thought, in that central source of his being which is the spring of his spontaneous, affective life. And these two ways of thinking are separate, so long as man has not attained his full realization, the melting of his ice. (Many Faces 14-15)

Blake’s Imagination never ceases to believe that man is “divine, absolute, unlimited”—in a word, infinite—while his natural-born Reason vacillates between being convinced of this truth by his Contrary and remaining in doubt, able to believe only in what his senses show
him and what he can induce or deduce from there. And so Blake creates his text, his purely mental universal, as a way of proving to himself that this infinite or absolute essence exists in him, that it lies asleep (apparently dead) in the unconscious depths of his center and needs to be woken up.

Whether we regard this idea—that the human being is of an absolute or divine nature, that he is infinite and may experience himself as such in addition to experiencing his temporal limitations—as true or false, Blake presents it to us as an imaginative idea whose possibility we are free to entertain—or not. But if we do entertain it, and if we have any inclination to read the rest of his poetry (everything that follows There is No Natural Religion and All Religions are One), we may amuse ourselves watching him trying to compel his Reason to prove it. For when it comes to the expression of its truth, Blake’s Imagination can do nothing without the five senses, as is evident from its dependency for all its material resources—its images, metaphors, and symbols—on that very universe of discourse (the first: the corporeal world) which Blake vainly tries to wipe out of existence, to erase from his text. But nor could his Imagination—and this is perhaps the more crucial point—create anything without the abstract concepts of Reason, for it could then neither think, speak, nor write. Ultimately, then, the truth of the Imagination’s images of eternal truth—whether concrete and particular, or abstract and general—can only be tested, tried, proved, and pronounced possible or impossible to believe by Reason (which is fitting, since Reason is the doubter the Imagination is trying to convince). To reprise the Proverb of Hell “What is now proved was once, only imagin’d”: what is, now proved (now proved by Reason to be actual or real, to really exist) was once (was already really existing in the past), only imagined (but only in the sphere of the objectively possible or
conceivable). Without Reason to prove it, the Imagination’s idea of a Reality beyond the
senses will remain just that—an idea, specifically the idea of an immortal Intellect or
Infinite Thought, “the intellectual fountain of Humanity” (J91:10; E251) which Blake’s
Imagination recognizes as its source, principle, and God, and labours to defend against
Reason’s doubt of its existence. In Jerusalem Blake addresses this Thought from his
confinement within a doubly enclosed space, a place where he both doubts (the “dungeon”)
and labours against that doubt (the “mill”):

Art thou alive! & livest thou for-evermore? or art thou
Not: but a delusive shadow, a thought that liveth not.
Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son of God
That thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body art all
A delusion. but I know thee O Lord when thou arisest upon
My weary eyes even in this dungeon & this iron mill.

(J60:54-59; E211)

But as it is not possible to doubt the existence of anything (including one’s infinite essence
or divine nature, or just one’s self) unless one stands apart from it, Blake’s Reason does not
come to doubt the truth his Imagination maintains concerning their mutual Principle (his
Intellect, “father” of the two contrary “sons”) until Reason sees it expressed, placed outside
itself, in the form of a thought. It is as though God (to anthropomorphize for a moment)
could only doubt Himself by taking on a body. To Reason’s mind, form is antithetical to
the Infinite (which, if it is to be infinite, cannot be finite, and therefore must remain without
form to remain true); and so a case could be made that the Imagination’s attempt to give
form to the Infinite—in the plaintive words of Europe, “who shall bind the infinite with an
eternal band?” (Eur2:13; E61)—is what triggers Reason’s doubt. For initially, before they
divide, Blake’s Imagination and Reason agree that Truth or Reality is absolute: eternal,
infinite, immutable, universal. Telling truth, however, is something else again. There is a

"profound distinction," Benoit reminds us,

between Reality and truths. There is only one Reality, the Principle of all manifestation, embracing everything (intellectual and otherwise), unlimited and in consequence impossible to include in any formula, that is to say inexpressible. There is, on the contrary, an indefinite multitude of truths, aspects correctly perceived by our mind of refractions of Reality on the human intellectual plane. Each expressible truth is only an intellectual aspect of Reality, which in nowise excludes other aspects that are equally valid; for each expressible truth carries a limit within which it exists and outside which it ceases to exist. Within its limit a truth manifests Reality; outside its limit it fails. Every truth should then be seen as a duality: in so far as it manifests Reality—that is in so far as it is valid—and in so far as it does not manifest Reality—that is in so far as it is valueless. (Supreme Doctrine 243)

This distinction between an absolute Truth (or Reality) and the relative truths that express or otherwise manifest it puts Blake's Proverb about everything possible to believe being an image of truth in quite another light. An "image of truth" is an expressed truth, and if every expressible truth necessarily has a limit, we must depend on Reason to establish it, to draw the line or mark the boundary within which the truth manifests Reality (and hence remains true) and outside which it fails (becomes an error), for as The Book of Los confirms, "Truth has bounds. Error none" (BL4:30; E92). The Imagination cannot mark this bound because all it sees is the unlimited or Infinite Reality, the sum of its knowledge being that "The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite." The only difference, then, between an imagined truth and a rational truth would be that one (the rational) has had its limits determined and been found to be believable within them (because its mental representation conforms with the originally presented reality which it interprets), while the other (the imagined) has not—not yet. If an imagined truth appears irrational (or not possible to believe), that is only because Reason has failed or perhaps refused to
examine it and discover the Reality it manifests within its limits, which may explain why
Blake defiantly proclaims in his *Descriptive Catalogue* that the “ignorant Insults of
Individuals will not hinder me from doing my duty to my Art,” and demands of “those who
have been told that my Works are but an unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a
Madman’s Scrawls[,] . . . to do me the justice to examine before they decide” (DC E527-
28).

But the truth of an imaginative work, no less than that of a rational judgment, can
never be proved, if by “proof” we mean something absolute, beyond question, beyond
even the reach of the insults of the ignorant or obtuse. And yet absolute proof is exactly
what the confirmed sceptic (victim of his own epistemological confusion) demands. In
Blake’s universe, the sceptic is that

idiot Questioner who is always questioning,
But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin
Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave;
Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair
Whose pretence to knowledge is Envy, whose whole Science is
To destroy the wisdom of ages . . .

(M41:12-17; E142)

If the idiot Questioner is our reason (or your reason/Urizen), it is no less Blake’s Reason—
his negating Spectre—and it is the voice of Milton, particular manifestation or incarnation
of the Poetic Genius, Blake’s Imagination, who chastises his own Reason here. In face of
the questioning Spectre—any reasoner who questions eternal Truth—Blake’s philosophical
position (and it is a perfectly logical one) is as follows. If he baldly asserts that truth is
self-evident (which, as we saw in Part I, he does), then he must somehow refute the
sceptical argument that self-evidence is no guarantee of truth. And he can’t do it—he
will lose that particular battle. If he were then to try to demonstrate a truth, he would run into another problem, the sceptical objection to the rationalist notion of proof:

The rationalist claim was that truths which are not self-evident at first sight can be shown to be self-evidently true by proving them from self-evident axioms. But [according to the sceptic] errors of reasoning are possible, especially where the trains of demonstration are long. If such an error occurs, we may actually 'prove' or 'demonstrate' a falsehood. Hence some uncertainty must surround any 'demonstrated' truth. (Musgrave 191)

Or, if he were to try to justify a truth on empirical grounds, on an argument, say, from experience, or on the basis of inductive rather than deductive premises, he would have to resort to an independent principle, that of induction itself, which, as Russell explains in reference to Hume, is irrecoverably outside the loop of the system:

Hume's scepticism rests entirely upon his rejection of the principle of induction. . . . The principle itself cannot, of course, without circularity, be inferred from observed uniformities, since it is required to justify any such inference. It must therefore be, or be deduced from, an independent principle not based upon experience. . . . What these [Hume's] arguments prove—and I do not think the proof can be controverted—is, that induction is an independent logical principle, incapable of being inferred either from experience or from other logical principles, and that without this principle science is impossible. (646-47)

Thus, on the strength of logic alone, the sceptic—"Locke and Berkeley," notes Sir Leslie Stephen, "saved themselves [from scepticism] by not carrying out their assault logically. Hume became a thorough sceptic, as he was bound to do by his logic" (1:25)—snares the realist, rationalist, and empiricist in his net, consigning them all to what Blake eloquently calls the melancholy state of "Dumb despair" (J36:60; E183), unable to open their mouths in defence of even the most narrowly limited of relative truths.

It is hardly madness, then, but rather good philosophical sense that leads Blake's eternal Intellect to turn its (personified) back on his Reason—to "spurn[] back [Urizen's]
religion; / And g[i]ve him a place in the north, / Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary”

(BU2:2-4; E70)—and to call instead on his Imagination to undertake the expression of its Truth, who replies to it thus: “Eternals I hear your call gladly, / Dictate swift winged words, & fear not / To unfold your dark visions of torment” (BU2:5-7; E70). Spurned, and angry at being so, Blake’s Reason turns cunning, deciding to maintain voluntarily the silence into which scepticism (its own?) has forced it, reasoning that, since absolute Truth is inexpressible anyway, it is better to say nothing at all than to see one’s truths destroyed by idiot questioners or by an inadequate and hence false formulation—which in the case of an infinite truth would be any formulation. Reason/Urizen is thus aptly named “Satan Refusing Form” (M3:41; E97), an angel who rebels against self-contradiction by refusing to give form to his God.

But this decision Blake’s Imagination regards as sheer folly: “If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and / Not to shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly” (M4:6-7; E98), says Los, rebuking Satan. (“Satan was going to reply,” apparently tempted to speak, “but Los roll’d his loud thunders” [M4:15; E98], drowning him out: in this ironic fashion, Satan is forced to keep his vow of silence.) The Imagination never doubts the wisdom of speaking in defence of truth, philosophically or morally—“Always be ready to speak your mind,” advises the Proverb, “and a base man will avoid you” (MHH8; E36)—and does so volubly, convinced that there are, in Benoit’s phrase, “an indefinite multitude of truths, aspects correctly perceived by our mind of refractions of Reality on the human intellectual plane,” for it to express. These refractions—“emanations,” in Blakean terminology—may even refer to Absolute Truth, since words pointing to divine realities need not pretend to present them in order to
awaken in another’s mind the “primordial intuition, beyond all proof, beyond all rational reasoning, that he is divine, absolute and unlimited.” So the Imagination, angered by Reason’s refusal to speak, “in fury & strength: in indignation & burning wrath” (J10:22; E153), declares: “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans”—that “other man” being its Contrary, Reason—“I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create” (J10:20-21; E153). And the system it must create is its text, a creation that will be, since it is created without Reason, erroneous—bad art. Or so it is from Reason’s point of view, for “Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear.”

So it is over the question of whether to speak truth—or more exactly, whether to speak of eternal Truth—that Blake’s Intellect first divides into the separate faculties of Reason and Imagination, two personified or objectified Contraries which are also qualities of mind (“the Two Contraries . . . are call’d Qualities” [J10:8; E152]). But when Reason refuses to speak other than to say “No!” to the possibility of expressing truth, it changes from a Contrary of the Imagination into the Reasoning Negative or Negation—or such is the way it appears to the eye of the Imagination, which regards the refusal to speak truth as a negation of it. And since, according to an axiom that appears in reverse script on the title-page of plate 30 of Milton: “Contraries are Positives / A Negation is not a Contrary” (E129), an intellectual power that will not posit truth, even if that means laying it down on the ground dead in the letter, cannot be a Contrary. The Imagination, however, because it affirms the possibility of speaking, does remain a Contrary, positive also in the sense of “that which has an actual existence, or is capable of being affirmed; a reality” (OED), because in Blakean metaphysics truth = eternity = existence. A Contrary
exists "absolutely, actually, really; indeed, in truth, truly" (OED, positively), and the truths it posits are affirmed by propositions "formally laid down or imposed" (OED, positive). We can expect a Contrary's statements, then, to be positive in the sense of "explicitly laid down; expressed without qualification; admitting no question; stated, explicit, express, definite, precise; emphatic; objectively certain," and, moreover, its own character to be "confident in opinion or assertion; convinced, assured, very sure," even "dogmatic, dictatorial" (for it must make us obey its dictates), sometimes "arbitrarily or absolutely prescrib[ing] or determi[ning]" (OED, positive) what we are to regard as truths (its definitions, for example). And since "Without Contraries is no progression" (MHH3; E34), in reading Blake's text we may take on faith that the words of Contraries will be conducive to our progress: with them, we will be able to carry out the work of straightening crooked roads by improving them, adding to or increasing our store of knowledge, for something positive is "reckoned, situated, or tending in the direction which (naturally or arbitrarily) is taken as that of increase, progress, or onward motion" (OED). Then again, the words of Contraries are the only kind we will see, for Negations do not speak.

The question that naturally arises here is, at the time of our reading, at this present moment (because the division of Blake's Intellect in two occurs in primordial time), how many Contraries are in existence? Obviously we need more than one to make progress (without contraries is no progression), which makes sense because a contrary by definition requires its opposite to be what it is; it cannot exist alone. Los confirms this in a set of existential propositions laid down for the instruction of his Spectre (who, we must remember, is a Negation):
Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs
Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever:
If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation: a meer
Reasoning & Derogation from me, an Objecting & cruel Spite
And Malice & Envy: but my Emanation, Alas! will become
My Contrary: O thou Negation, I will continually compell
Thee to be invisible to any but whom I please, & when
And where & how I please, and never! never! shalt thou be Organized
But as a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness
And in the Non Entity . . .

(J17:33-43; E162)

If Contraries must mutually exist, then the separation of Reason from Imagination not
only results in the transformation of Reason into a Negation, it also threatens the
Imagination’s status as a Contrary, because no Contrary can, in Blake’s phrase, “exist
separate”: “are they Two & not One?” Jerusalem asks with cunning ambiguity: “can they
Exist Separate?” (J57:9; E207). If the two Contraries Reason and Imagination mutually
exist, then in a sense they are one—the One Intellect with which the Imagination
identifies itself, its truth the Truth that the Imagination undertakes to defend in speech.
But if that Intellect divides, the Contraries become two separate individuals; and since
Contraries cannot “exist separate,” they cease to exist as Contraries; and since only
Contraries exist (only they are positive), they cease to exist altogether and instead become
Negations, for it is Negations that “Exist Not.” So, to avoid turning into a Negation
itself, the Imagination must find a substitute contrary to exist with it side by side, which is
why Los says that his “Emanation, Alas! will become [his] Contrary” if Reason separates
from him. Los’s Emanation—named Enitharmon (her name embeds the word emanation
if we double the letter a)—is none other than the text he creates, the truth he speaks,
except that she will not be true for a number of reasons: (1) she is created without
Reason, and without Contraries is no progression (toward truth, or the palace of wisdom) because both “are necessary to Human existence” (MHH3; E34), and only what exists is true; (2) she is contrary to the Imagination-as-Los, who possesses the Infinite and is “himself Infinite” because his desire (for truth) is infinite, and therefore she is finite, and infinite Truth cannot be expressed in a finite form (as Reason argues); (3) since Los is the Poetic Genius or “true Man,” Enitharmon, as his Contrary, will be a false woman, an erroneous creation; and finally (4) she is simply created, which means that she will, by definition, be an error that obscures eternal Truth. And that is why Los sighs “Alas!” at the thought of creating her, of making his text his Contrary.

A line in Milton may imply that at the present time, the moment of our reading, there are in existence only one Contrary and one Negation: “There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary” (M40:31; E142). But this idea contradicts what I have just argued, that a Contrary cannot exist alone, and that a Negation does not exist—or does not really exist: it may appear to, but its existence is an illusion, “a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness / And in the Non Entity.” Yet this is Los’s text we are reading (only a Contrary will speak); it is his erroneous emanation, and her system, created without Reason (“I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create”), is therefore bound to be illogical. And if we could freeze this illogical moment in time in an effort to forestall the tragic event of seeing everything turn into a Negation—Reason, Imagination, and its text—or of seeing all objects of our perception close and become invisible (“O thou Negation, I will continually compell / Thee to be invisible to any but whom I please”), then we would have to destroy the Negation, annihilate it, by burning up the illusion of its false body:
Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man
All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.

(M40:28-37; E142)

To destroy the Reasoning Power as a Spectre or Negation suggests no more than that
Reason must be destroyed as a negative force, a force of scepticism or doubt of eternal
Truth, and redeemed as a positive one, as a Contrary: as a marker of limits, of the
boundary between possibility and impossibility, truth and error; as an examiner, tester,
verifier, validator, establisher, defender, of relative truths that (somehow, miraculously)
manifest Absolute Truth. For from earlier readings we may recall two Blakean facts:
first, that “Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be
when we know more”—Reason, in other words, is capable of change—and, secondly, that
what Negative Reason changes into when it does change is its “direct Contrary”: “Man is
born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually &
must continually be changed into his direct Contrary.” If to be a Negative is to be an evil, a
Positive must be a good (good being the contrary of evil), and so what Reason changes into
when we know more (that is, more-than-sense-can-discover, the Infinite) must be Positive
(and good) Reason, Contrary of the Imagination:

Positive Reason \(\leftrightarrow\) Positive Imagination

\[\uparrow\]

Negative Reason
"Hence," says Milton, "the three Classes of Men take their fix'd destinations / They are the Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative" (M5:13-14; E98): who, to clarify, are Positive Imagination, Positive Reason, and Negative Reason. These three classes are fixed as a system by the Imagination—"the Three Classes of Men [are] regulated by Los's hammer" (M6:35; E100)—and so we cannot expect its formulation to be logical according to the traditional canons of logic, since Los, creating his system to escape the enslavement of Reason's, refuses to "Reason & Compare." And it is not perfectly logical. If we obey the dictate that "Contraries are Positives / A Negation is not a Contrary," we are forced to conclude that the Negation (or Reasoning Negative) cannot be the Contrary of the Imagination or of anything else, for it cannot be a Contrary, period. Yet we are told that the Spectre (which is the Negation or Reasoning Negative or Holy Reasoning Power: see J10:10-15; E153) must be "continually changed" into its "direct Contrary," forcing us now to conclude that the Negation must be a Contrary to itself, to its positive or good self, Positive Reason. Perhaps Los has confused contraries with contradictories here—purposefully, of course—but in any event the Spectre/Negation does lament that "the Almighty hath made me his Contrary / To be all evil, all reversed & for ever dead: knowing / And seeing life, yet living not" (J10:56-58; E154). If the logic of the Three Classes contradicts itself, it has the virtue of doing so consistently, with the regularity established by Los's hammer. Created without Reason, the system frees itself to be either logical or illogical—a pretence of logic to destroy logic, as Blake might say.³

To alter the polarity of Reason from negative to positive, which is the same as changing its moral condition from evil to good, is to destroy Reason as a Negation and recreate it as Contrary, an act which "redeems the Contraries," both Reason and
Imagination. And since Reason becomes a Negation only when it embraces silence or negates speech, negating the Negation means compelling it to speak (for two negatives make a positive). Once Reason has angrily retreated into the hermetic void of its own silence—

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
Self-closd, all-repelling: what Demon
Hath form’d this abominable void
This soul-shudd’ring vacuum?—Some said
"It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted
Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

(BU3:1-7; E70)

—the Imagination is the only Positive left, the only speaker, its voice the sole voice we hear. And that makes the Imagination, as I have already argued, the sole creator and ruler of its universe of discourse, God of the text. And that text is not only its emanation but also its divine body, vessel of its Truth, which it gives a human form in likeness of itself, for the Imagination is both “the dear Saviour who took on the likeness of men” (M22:57; E118) and “The Eternal Great Humanity Divine” who “caus’d the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms / In likeness of himself” (M2:8-10; E96). Perhaps a little confused as a result of losing its Contrary Reason, however, the Imagination forgets that only the Intellect or Spirit, with which it rightly identifies itself but which also incorporates Reason, can truly be called God, for “there is no other / God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity” (J91:9-10; E251). So when the Imagination appropriates the name “God” for itself—“The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination. that is God himself” (Laocoön E273); or, more syllogistically, “Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him” (Marg E664)—it formulates what is at best a
half-truth. Reason, naturally, regards this half-truth as a complete falsehood, and consequently retreats even further from the Imagination (into the “barren climes” and “wilds” where we see the “just man” raging in the opening Argument of *The Marriage*).

But the angrier Reason grows, the more it is driven to speak by that very tendency to contradict itself that (according to the Imagination) defines its nature: “Two Horn’d Reasoning Cloven Fiction / In Doubt which is Self contradiction” (KG E268). Let us recall, by way of illustration, the passage we read in Part I where Los and the Spectre quarrel about Los’s “children,” which are his “creatures,” his words, but also, in Reason’s view, his “sins,” because Reason regards it as a transgression of the bound of possibility to attempt to express inexpressible Truth (and this time I will take the liberty of filling in a few gaps or voids in the passage, traces of the Spectre’s stubborn silence). Addressing his Spectre,

Los cries, Obey my voice & never deviate from my will [to speak]
And I will be merciful to thee: be thou invisible to all
To whom I make thee invisible, but chief to my own Children
Spectre of Urthona: Reason not against their dear approach
Nor them obstruct with thy temptations of doubt & despair [of expressing truth]
Shame O strong & mighty Shame I break thy brazen fetters [of silence]
If thou refuse [to speak], thy present torments will seem southern breezes
To what thou shalt endure if thou obey not my great will.

The Spectre answer’d. Art thou not ashamed of those thy Sins
That thou callest thy Children? Io the Law of God [the Intellect] commands
That they be offered upon his Altar [as sacrifices to the code and to Truth]:
O cruelty & torment
For thine are also mine! I have kept silent hitherto,
Concerning my chief delight: but thou hast broken silence
Now I will speak my mind! Where is my lovely Enitharmon
O thou my enemy, where is my Great Sin? She is also thine
I said: now is my grief at worst: incapable of being
Surpassed . . .

(J10:29-45; E153)
In the first half of this quotation, Los attempts, by the sheer force of his will to speak, to compel the Spectre to speak also, to turn positive and co-father (or co-author) his children-words (but without tempting them to express doubt and despair of succeeding in their purpose), to help him express that Truth which is also the Spectre's "chief delight" (for Reason, too, loves Truth). In the second half, we see that the Spectre cannot resist the temptation to answer Los, a temptation that will lead him into serpent reasonings (of good and evil, virtue and vice), as well as doubt, despair, and self-contradiction, and thus to break his own vow to "keep silent," as he has done "hitherto." In face of the temptation to sin by speaking, the Spectre proves himself weakest where Los is most strong, for in this battle of wills Los's desire to speak proves infinite ("The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite"), if we can judge by the fact that it is unrestrainable, whereas the Spectre's desire to remain silent has limits—or, one might say, the power of the temptation proves equal to the power of Los's will. When the Spectre says to Los, "thou hast broken silence," the breaking refers not only to that of Los's own silence but also to his breaking (in line 34) of the Spectre's "brazen fetters," fetters fastened, no doubt, upon both their tongues, like the "mind-forged manacles" that prevent the hands of human words from writing their own proper names. Clearly, Los and the Spectre are one inseparable Mind, illusorily divided in appearance by the interplay of its positive and negative powers; and by the logic of this essential identity of contrary intellectual faculties, we can read the moment Los breaks silence as the same moment the Spectre is moved to speak: "but thou hast broken silence / Now I will speak my mind!" As we might expect, Los's success in bringing the Spectre to the point of speaking means that he is on the point of changing the Negation back into its direct Contrary, that Positive Reason willing to
affirm Truth—and affirm it in open speech, not just in secret thought. And it is a changing back because the Spectre’s claiming the lovely Enitharmon—who, as the expression of his Truth, is also his “chief delight”—as his own “Great Sin” suggests that he, along with Los, is the author of her, which means that he has already spoken in the past, that he and his Contrary have been One Intellect from the beginning. The narrative marker “I said” (in line 44) has an appropriately disorienting effect here: we wonder not who is speaking but rather when, within the larger context of the Spectre’s speech, he is supposed to have delivered these last words: just now, or at some moment now past? And with respect to what portion of his own speech does the Spectre feel it necessary to identify himself as the speaker: to all of it, or just to the words “She is also thine,” an acknowledgment of shared possession or ownership (authorship) that he has in fact already “said” a few lines earlier: “For thine are also mine!”? Those words, thine are mine, are indeed worth repeating since, as I pointed out in Part I, they can be rearranged to spell Enitharmon with the addition of the letter “o” (which is a missing letter of great significance, for, as the sign of the cipher, it signifies nothing). Whatever the case, since this simple acknowledgment of having spoken, the phrase “I said,” is what plunges the Spectre to the bottom limit of his grief—the colon coming after “said” and followed by “now” confirms this inference—it may be read also as the Spectre’s acknowledgment or confession of his “Great Sin,” the grievous error of speaking that is also the lovely Enitharmon, the text, the very words he has just uttered and we have just read. Here, then, Enitharmon is brought by the Spectre himself (though against his negative will) from her hiding place in the realm of Non-Entity, where things are invisible, into the realm of Existence, where she can be seen and read. His words—“Where is my lovely
Enitharmon?—are thus deceptive, encouraging us to think she is gone, missing, somewhere else, when in reality she is in front of our eyes. Still, the Spectre’s question does not intentionally deceive; it is not a lie. Where is Enitharmon? She is—like Reality itself—right here, but the Spectre, his perceptive organs closed, is blind and cannot see her: to him she remains invisible. Let me put the matter another way. When, magician-like, Los intones, “be thou invisible to all / To whom I make thee invisible” (lines 30-31), he is addressing the Spectre, the non-existent Reasoning Negative. So if Enitharmon exists and appears while the Spectre remains invisible, then what we have (in plain English) is a text with no apparent reason in it. And that same text, to the eye of Reason, will be no text at all, not one worth reading—and so the eye shuts.

But at those moments when Blake’s Reason is compelled to speak by his Imagination, the Spectre is not invisible to us, not if we know the true meaning of his name; and the text, with Reason’s presence in it thus made apparent, will seem more lucid and coherent. If, then, Reason speaks under compulsion, what motivates the Imagination to speak? Desire, in a word, but desire of a narrowly restricted kind: “the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite” (MHH13; E39), a desire which is, as we have heard several times already, infinite itself: “The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite.” The Infinite, for Reason and Imagination alike, is Truth itself, and so the axiom may be understood to affirm that man’s desire for Truth being infinite, what he desires to possess is infinite Truth, which two facts together suggest that he is himself Infinite, the “true Man” of All Religions are One, already in possession of what he desires. The reader who restricts the meaning of the word desire to Blake’s definition of it—“the desire of raising other men into a
perception of the infinite”—and takes the word infinite to mean Truth (along with the whole constellation of related terms including eternity, reality, existence) will find his interpretative burden suddenly lightened, and in a way that, far from falsifying Blake’s intention, helps him approach ever closer to it. With Cox I would agree that “the must admit that Blake’s meanings can be limited in some way, that his text is not wholly indeterminate” (Love and Logic 7). And the best way is that which Blake thoughtfully provides for us through his own delimiting definitions, figuratively offered as “smiles” and “blessings.” Thus Blake’s original phrase “the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite” remains the most accurate, the truest, and the best articulation of his reason—or desire—for writing.

Let us return for a moment to the Song “London,” this time imagining it as the poetic expression of the real Blake’s real experience of wandering the streets of the real London, marking in every face he meets the marks of weakness and woe. What he would now be observing in his fellow human beings’ faces would be not the mark of his own Reasoning Negative but the visible traces of the fear of death. Still, he might interpret this fear as the sign of bad reasoning, for it is bad reasoning that confirms the conclusion man reaches too quickly, without a sufficiently thoughtful examination of the question and, more importantly, without a salutary perception of the Infinite, when he decides that he is nothing more than the limited creature his senses reveal to him. And if Blake were moved to compassion at the sight of the fear of death in people’s faces, his Intellect might be roused by a desire his Imagination subsequently affirms: to act, to offer enlightenment, to speak in some way that might awaken in another’s mind his own intuition of the
Infinite, an intuition that, if experientially proved, might renovate his consciousness and alter his conception of death.

Since to Blake’s mind the fear of death is the result of bad reasoning, the kind that becomes entangled in error if it has no perception of the Infinite to guide it, there is nothing illogical about identifying death with the Reasoning Power, as long as it is qualified as a negative. As Milton (the Poetic Genius or Imagination personified) admonishes his Spectre, Satan:

Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness
Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on
In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn
Thy Laws & terrors . . .

(M38:37-42; E139)

Bad reasoners misconceive the nature of the self, implicitly convinced it can only be defined by the boundaries of the physical body, as well as the ontological status of death, which they take to be an absolute—both false notions that the Imagination combats by “laughing to scorn” Reason’s laws of self-definition (for Reason, too, thinks it is God and tries to rule) and giving it the code name death, not to conceal its true identity but to link it to one of its own key metaphysical errors. Knowing that death and Reason are interchangeable names, we are able to decipher the above lines thus: “Your purpose, Reason, and the purpose of those who worship you, is to impress on men the fear of death, which is also the fear of you; mine is to teach men to despise bad reasoning and to annihilate the self as you define it.” When Reason impresses the fear of death/itself on men, the marks it leaves on their faces are those same marks of weakness and woe which first move Blake’s Intellect to pity and compassion. Still, what we think we see out there
in a vision of the real world—the poet William Blake walking around London, saddened by the sight of his fellow human beings suffering the pains of ignorance—is only a reflection of what existed first in Blake’s Imagination and now exists, by extension, in ours, for “in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow” (J71:17-19; E225).

When we imagine what Blake has already imagined, we achieve a kind of identity of mind with him, but here the relation of author to reader is closer to that of parent to child than that of equal to equal. Moreover, we become Blake’s children only through our increasingly intimate acquaintance with his other figurative children, all those contextually related male and female human words his Imagination conceives. That is why “He who would see the Divinity [the Imagination] must see him in his Children / One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family” (J91:18-19; E251). As we presently find it, however, Blake’s world is a ruined one, every one of its children marked by the evil Negation, all reduced to uttering those cries and sighs, howls and groans, and other inhuman noises that belong to the class of inarticulate sounds. So, for both Blake’s children-readers and his children-words (we must read the following passage twice, inserting first one, then the other of these two possible referents for the pronoun *them*),

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{His voice to them was but an inarticulate thunder for their Ears} \\
\text{Were heavy & dull & their eyes & nostrils closed up} \\
\text{Oft he stood by a howling victim Questioning in words} \\
\text{Soothing or Furious no one answerd every one wrapd up} \\
\text{In his own sorrow howld regardless of his words, nor voice} \\
\text{Of sweet response could he obtain tho oft assayd with tears} \\
\text{He knew they were his Children ruind in his ruind world}
\end{align*}
\] (FZ69:39-45; E347)
A reader who can neither hear a voice nor see a truth is obviously senseless, even if, as the victim of a code, he has good reason to be. But senseless, too, is a code word whose own senses have been "closed up," its true meanings obscured from its reader's intellectual vision by the imposition upon it of a false body, product of a Reasoning Negative who is trying to prevent it from speaking openly, plainly, articulately. And so it is not only real people, his readers, whom Blake wishes to enlighten, but also his own verbal children (the third and fourth lines of the passage could be punctuated to read, "Oft he stood by a howling victim, questioning. In words, soothing or furious, no one answered"), for to enlighten words is to give them back their true meaning, the "light" of Truth, freeing their voices to express whatever portion of eternal Truth they are capable of embodying. If "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God," the reader who sees Truth in all Blake's words sees the power of his Imagination in all his "children," his "Image[s] of truth new born" (SE E31).

Let us reconsider that superficially sinister Proverb of Hell "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (MH10; E38), this time as a piece of ambiguous moral advice to truth-tellers. If an "infant" is a newborn image of Truth, a thought or conception born of the desire to express Truth and nothing else but still inarticulate (infans means unable to speak) because as yet unarticulated—in Jerusalem we find these "infant thoughts & desires" (J9:2; E152) partially decoded as such—then to "murder" an infant in its "cradle" would be to negate the thought or desire before it has a chance to develop, take on a mature verbal ("human") form, and express itself. To murder an infant is, in short, to keep silent. But not acting on the desire to speak is keeping silent also; and so, at least to the objective observer, someone on the outside of
the text's subjective world, the sight of someone murdering his infant thoughts must be indistinguishable from that of someone nursing unacted verbal desires—we can't tell them apart. On the inside, however, from the point of view of the truth-teller's subjective experience, the two modes of being silent are affectively opposite. Murdering an infant is cold-blooded and final, whereas nursing one implies warmth, bodily closeness, protection, tender care, as does brooding; and if the infant happens to be a desire one is prevented from acting on, such brooding—"nurs[ing] wrath (or the like) to keep it warm" (OED, brood)—is likely to generate some real heat, rising to burning anger, which may itself be nursed, nourished, nurtured, or cultivated along with the unacted desire.

Something akin to this situation befalls the speaker of the following Song of Experience, whom we see nursing his wrath at a foe:

A POISON TREE.

I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears,  
Night & morning with my tears:  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had veild the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree. (SE E28)
Anger openly expressed to a friend quickly meets its end: here the infant wrath (which may remind the reader of two other Songs, “Infant Joy” and “Infant Sorrow”) is murdered, one might say, by the speaker’s acting on his desire to tell it. Anger at a foe, however, is not told—the desire remains unacted—and is instead nursed, this time as plants are nursed, until it grows into something—a poison tree—that in turn produces something—an apple bright—which will prove injurious, perhaps fatal, to the foe who eats it. “A Poison Tree” thus illustrates another Proverb of Hell—“He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence” (MHH7; E35)—and, in the process, helps define the desire by identifying its object, to tell.

At this point we must recall Blake’s figure for “The Combats of Good & Evil,” which is “Eating of the Tree of Knowledge” (VLJ E563), as well as his pronouncement that “The Last Judgment [occurs] when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God” (VLJ E554). The tree of rational knowledge, as we know, is the Tree of Death, and, if we assume that Blake is rigorously consistent in his thinking, this same deadly tree must be the poison tree of the Song, whose fruit the speaker’s foe is probably tempted to eat by those same serpent reasonings that question, and entice their victim to question, good and evil, according to the Key of the Gates, “Serpent Reasonings us entice / Of Good & Evil: Virtue & Vice” (KG E268). In sum, the poison tree of rational knowledge bears the apple of rational knowledge of good and evil, and its root is most likely “Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good” (KG E268). Root, tree, apple, serpent: all the elements of the Genesis myth, including the God who plants the poison tree in his garden, are in Blake’s text linked to Reason, the mental
power that, in its negative mode, thinks it wise to remain silent when angry and not reveal it. For Los (Imagination), remember, admonishes Satan (the Reasoning Negative), “If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and / Not to shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly” (M4:6-7; E98), and this Satan maintains that “I am God alone / There is no other!” (M9:25-26; E103). “A wholesome tongue,” says Proverbs 15.4, “is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.” The poison tree is that breach in all the following senses: “the breaking of a command, rule”; “injurious assault”; “a break-up of friendly relations; rupture, separation, difference, disagreement, quarrel”; “a broken, fractured, damaged, or injured spot, place, or part; an injury”; “a break in continuity, an interruption, interval; a division marked by breaks or intervals” (OED, breach); for the perverseness of speech that is the poison tree issues from the self-division or breach in Blake’s Intellect/Spirit which leaves it injured, divided into two mutually contradictory faculties whose struggle to rule leaves the text injured, broken, and damaged also—marked by breaks in its narrative, gaps in its logic.

In light of all this, it now appears that not acting on the desire to speak Truth should not be interpreted as remaining absolutely silent—that would be indeed be murdering the infant in its cradle—because Reason’s nursing of its wrath eventually produces something—the poison tree with its apple—which is ambiguously positive (spoken) and negative (not-spoken) at once. To produce something is to bring a thing into existence, and to exist, according to the Blakean metaphysical formula to exist = true = eternal = positive and its corollary not to exist = false = corporeal = negative, is to be both a positive and a truth. The positive thing, moreover, is visible, available as an object
for an outsider’s perception, while the negative thing is invisible, internal, subjective, unless the Imagination decides to make it otherwise:

O thou Negation, I will continually compell
Thee to be invisible to any but whom I please, & when
And where & how I please, and never! never! shalt thou be Organized
But as a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness
And in the Non Entity . . .

(J17:39-43; E162)

Because it is poison, the tree of the Song is connotatively negative, and the fact that as a word the tree exists only in the title, then disappears into non-entity only to reappear, in final confirmation of its being a truly existing thing, as the final word of the poem, suggests that the tree is a non-existent negative thing that the speaker nearly manages to suppress or hide, but not altogether, for in the end, at the very last, he makes it visible to us by changing it back into its contrary, compelling the silent word to speak its name. The poison tree becomes a positive again in having, so to speak, the last word—and so, logically, without, this time, the negative adjective poison attached to it. Up to that terminal point, the tree’s invisible but concrete presence as an image in the verses is marked only by six repetitions of the pronoun it, whose visible referent is clearly the abstraction “my wrath.” But in bearing its apple, this tree of wrath bears a concrete thing even more distinctly positive—it is an apple bright, and it shines—and yet still ambiguous, for as the fruit of rational knowledge of good and evil, what the falsely corporeal apple truly signifies is an abstract, invisible, purely mental thing with the power to do the speaker’s foe some serious harm.

What a nursed unacted desire to speak Truth produces, then, is, in purely abstract terms, a rational truth in a finite form, and thus a truth that will negate (or murder) in its
cradle the idea of Infinite Truth, on the basis of a purely formal self-contradiction: \(\text{finite} \neq \text{infinite}\). But now the Proverb, like a live and slippery thing, twists around to deliver its sting: better to murder an infant Truth than to discover, in the painful and laborious experience of trying to express it, that it is simply inexpressible, and that one’s desire to raise others into a perception of the Infinite will be forever frustrated, impossible to act on, for the Infinite, having no form, cannot be perceived. Because if one cannot kill outright one’s desire to express such a Truth—and yet how could one, if the desire is also infinite?—one will have to nurse it under the shadow of a growing anger at one’s foe, a brooding that ends up breeding some pestilential rational truth that may kill him instead. But who, we might wonder, is this foe?

Since a friend is someone to whom the truth-teller can speak his wrath openly, without fear of being misunderstood, without painful labour or despair of succeeding, without parturient sorrow ("Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth" [MHH8; E36]) or pity for his ignorance, without flattery or condescension or "soft deceitful wiles"—all nutrients for the poison tree—a foe must be someone to whom the truth-teller \textit{cannot} express his anger frankly, to whom he cannot tell it without fear of, ironically, losing him. For, as another Proverb warns, "Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you" (MHH8; E36): a base man is thus the natural foe of the truth-teller, a knave who has no desire to hear your truth—and it is no doubt his baseness, or his errors, that provoke the truth-teller’s wrath. Such a knave must be deceived or seduced into listening, unlike a friend, who, though perhaps a fool, is humble enough to take your correction when he errs, for he knows at least that "The most sublime act is to set another before you" (MHH7; E36). Blake makes this point more explicitly in \textit{A Vision of the Last}
Judgment when he describes "those who tho willing [are] too weak to Reject Error without the Assistance & Countenance of those Already in the Truth for a Man Can only Reject Error by the Advice of a Friend of by the Immediate Inspiration of God" (VLJ E563). Moreover,

All Life consists of these Two Throwing off Error <& Knaves from our company> continually & recieving Truth <or Wise Men into our Company> Continually. . . to be an Error & to be Cast out is a part of Gods Design. No man can Embrace True Art till he has Explord & Cast out False Art <such is the Nature of Mortal Things> or he will be himself Cast out by those who have Already Embraced True Art. . . What are all the Gifts of the Spirit but Mental Gifts whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual[.]

(VLJ E562)

A knave or foe hungers for not an imaginative experience of truth and error but rational knowledge of good and evil; and we know this from "A Poison Tree," where the foe, attracted to the appearance of the bright, shiny apple, is not above employing deceitful wiles of his own—stealing into the garden, under cover of darkness (and since darkness and obscurity are attributes of the Reasoning Negative, the foe must be reasoning, too)—in order to rob his enemy of his knowledge ("and he knew that it was mine"). A foe, therefore, is someone who wants, desires, and will eat rational truth, but not Truth—not, at any rate, a wrathful and inspired truth that would tell him he is deeply involved in error and ought to reject it.

Los upholds the principle that

The man who permits you to injure him, deserves your vengeance:
He also will receive it; go Spectre! Obey my most secret desire:
Which thou knowest without my speaking . . .

(J91:2-4; E251)
A foe asks for, may even attempt to steal, the pestilential knowledge you have bred in your long-sustained silence, the fruit of not immediately acting on your desire to speak Truth; so if that knowledge injures or fatally poisons him, so be it—he deserves it.

Nothing in "A Poison Tree" suggests, however, that this negative outcome is a foregone conclusion. When the speaker professes gladness at seeing his foe "outstretched beneath the tree," we are, significantly, not told whether the foe is poisoned, sickened, unconscious, dead, or just asleep, a not-telling that leaves open the possibility that he may be merely resting, and quite comfortably, on the ground of the text—relaxed, feeling blessed, eating the apple and enjoying it, happily engrossed in reading his stolen book (or Bible of Hell), which teaches him in fascinating ways about distinguishing good (Infinite Truth) from evil (rational truth), particularly the impossibility of it. The adjective "glad" in the final two lines, "In the morning glad I see; / My foe outstretched beneath the tree," may modify not only "I" or "morning" but "foe" as well. Or perhaps the foe is dead, but in the code's sense of dying, by reasoning, to one's former conception of things, including oneself. Perhaps he dies as a foe but is reborn as a friend, for the apple eaten is the speaker's wrath told, and anyone who will stay, outstretched or not, to listen to what you have to say when you are worked up into a fury about matters of truth is, by definition, a friend. The speaker of "A Poison Tree" has, evidently, both friends and foes but no method of distinguishing them and consequently must offer everyone the bittersweet fruit of his own experience in the hope that certain individuals may be induced, after eating it, to cast off their errors, according to the proverb (not Blake's this time) that one man's poison is another man's meat. What the Piper says in the "Introduction" to Songs of Innocence—"And I wrote my happy songs / Every child may joy to hear" (SI E7)—is true
of Blake in general: everyone is free to read him (but there is a price to be paid—"Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason the Root of Good & Evil" [Laocoön E275]—and the Piper gets that, too).

How one interprets the character of a foe depends, ultimately, on which of the two Contraries' points of view one adopts, since Blake's Imagination is angry at his Reason for refusing to speak of Truth, and his Reason is angry at his Imagination for insisting on acting on his desire to tell what he knows (and feels). For Reason, Truth is murdered in the telling of it; for the Imagination, in the not-telling of it while angrily nursing the contradictory desire to do so. How do we, then, finally interpret the Proverb about murdering the infant in its cradle? If we rely on the code, we could say that from the Imagination's point of view, to murder an infinite thought is to subject it to death, and since death is a code name for the Reasoning Negative, what this means is that the infant thought will be turned over to a brooding Reason (the two Nurses' Songs come into play here), who, unable to kill an infinite thing, will express it in a rational form, a "poison tree," a dead literal expression which may prove injurious to Truth's foes, even "fatal" in the code's sense of "enticing them to reason." But it is better, the Imagination thinks, to do all this than not to act on the desire to speak and instead nurse one's wrath, or frustrated desire, in silence, for then the outcome will be the same anyway. It is really a question of sooner rather than later (which is why the Proverb opens with that word: "Sooner murder the infant"): if a truth-teller voices his thoughts sooner or, even better, immediately, "by the Immediate Inspiration of God," the heat of his wrath will be less intense for lack of nursing. And that intensity is, in Blake, an ever-present danger, given the "burning fire of thought" (J91:17; E251) that rages uncontrollably throughout his
work. Reason's opinion, on the other hand, is this: sooner say nothing at all, nip the urge to speak in the bud, than nurse what one can never act on, the desire to raise other men into a perception of Infinite Truth. Yet there is a third possible perspective, and from this one it appears that both Reason and Imagination have their way. The desire to speak Truth is frustrated, restrained, not acted on, murdered—it has to be: the Ineffable is ineffable—but because the desire is infinite it revives in another form, a negative in the sense of self-negating one. The truth-teller acts on his desire and tells his truth—for Truth, being Infinite, will out—but he disguises it, hides it, gives it a false appearance, by encrypting it in a code. What "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" really advises is quite simple: sooner speak in code, even if it means murdering your infant thoughts by making them (appear) unintelligible, than nurse an unacted desire to speak. But the code itself, the false body within which spoken Truth is imprisoned or held captive, is, of course, the product of a lengthy nursing: it is the Reasoning Negative's poison tree. It is also false art, a perverse tongue, and it needs to be cast out, annihilated, burnt up, broken down, pounded to dust, or breached in this sense: "to make a breach in (a wall, defence, natural boundary, etc.); to break through" (OED, breach).

Let us now turn to the history of the reciprocal relation between desire and restraint as recounted on plate 5 of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah. (MHH5; E34)
The sort of paradise Blake envisions—“its Inhabitants walking up & down in Conversations concerning Mental Delights” or “Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination” (VLJ E562)—would indeed be irrevocably lost if no one were willing to speak of Truth, for, as the Proverb says, “If others had not been foolish, we should be so” (MHH9; E37): that is, if some people had not been foolish enough to attempt to converse with eternal Reality, the rest of us would remain foolish in the sense of ignorant of it. Reason, of course, could twist this interpretation of the Proverb around and argue that, if the Imagination’s definition of folly as keeping silent when you are angry is correct, then if others had not refused to speak on the subject of Truth, we would never have become wise, forced into seeing Truth for ourselves and truly understanding its ineffability. So what restrains the desire to speak is Reason, or rather its conviction that Truth has to be absolute, and that Absolute Truth can never be told. The unwillingness of Blake’s Reason to say what it knows weakens its desire to communicate its knowledge—it easily restrains itself and governs its tongue—and, once only the shadow of desire remains to it, it hasn’t the courage to act on it any longer. Yet the Imagination is there, still nursing its infinite desire, at the sight of which Reason grows cunning—because, as the Proverb says, “The weak in courage is strong in cunning” (MHH9; E37)—and begins hatching devious plots to poison, breed pestilence in, or otherwise destroy the Imagination’s text, trying to restrain it from acting on its desire. But Reason’s designs to that end cannot be wholly successful, for the Imagination’s desire to speak is Infinite, just as its possession (Truth) is Infinite, and itself Infinite.

Within its own universe of discourse, then, a world produced by the energy of its own thought, the infinitely productive Imagination appears to live restrained by Reason’s
chains—chains, one may speculate, of cunningly wrought syllogisms, synonymous terms linked by mind-forged manacles, and seemingly arbitrarily associated ideas:

The Giants who formed this world into its sensuous existence and now seem to live in it in chains; are in truth, the causes of its life & the sources of all activity, but the chains are, the cunning of weak and tame minds. which have power to resist energy. according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning.

Thus one portion of being, is the Prolific. the other, the Devouring: to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights. (MHH16; E40)

Here the Imagination is code-named the “Prolific”—because its desire to communicate is infinite: it will speak, and without restraint (Reason can only govern the unwilling)—whom Reason tries to restrain by silencing its voice, distorting what it says, erasing crucial words (such as to speak truth following desire), or otherwise consuming portions of its writings, all those poems, long and short, the Imagination fondly regards as the “Divine Body” of its work. Reason is thus code-named “the Devouring.” But, as the quoted passage indicates, the Imagination would cease to take delight in expressing truth (and cease to be a prolific writer) if there were no Reason to take delight in devouring its works—for “Energy is Eternal Delight” (MHH4; E34) in this literary economy, whether in the producing or consuming—because the whole purpose of the Imagination’s work is to alter the metaphysical opinion of Reason (now standing still, unable to speak or act, brooding/breeding reptiles of the mind) and thereby change it (back) into its direct contrary, Positive Reason, so that it too may labour against the loss of paradise (which is the same as labouring for the Los of Jerusalem).
Now, Reason turns cunning because its conviction that Truth ought not to be told is strong enough to weaken its own courage to speak but not strong enough to subdue the Imagination's. So, casting a baleful eye on the Imagination's joyful embrace of the terrible sin of speaking, its thoughtless transgression of the Negation's negative principle, Reason is provoked to retaliate by destroying the Imagination's text, ruining its children and its world, devouring it portion by portion, or deceitfully subverting, perverting, or otherwise negating its voice: thus does Satan "pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth / With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease" (M9:23-24; E103). In this way, employing whatever cruel devices its cunning can invent, Reason defends its Truth (that no one should speak of the One Reality) against its perceived enemy, the Imagination, whose determination to say whatever it wants creates, in Reason's eyes, a dangerously deceptive appearance, a surface of dazzling images that obscures the Truth beneath.

But of course Reason's determination to remain silent in turn angers the Imagination. As Los confides to his Spectre (and we must take on faith here that Albion is a code name for Blake's Intellect in its pre- and post-war form, now divided but once whole and longing to be whole again, with all its thoughts and faculties perfectly integrated, when all be one again, which "one" is both I, the reading or writing subject, and the Mind or Thought of Truth):

I know that Albion hath divided me, and that thou O my Spectre, Hast just cause to be irritated: but look stedfastly upon me: Comfort thyself in my strength the time will arrive, When all Albion's injuries shall cease, and when we shall Embrace him tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality. They have divided themselves by Wrath. they must be united by Pity: let us therefore take example & warning O my Spectre,
O that I could abstain from wrath! O that the Lamb
Of God would look upon me and pity me in my fury.
In anguish of regeneration! in terrors of self annihilation:
Pity must join together those whom wrath has torn in sunder...

(17:52-62; E150)

Blake’s Intellect’s wrath at foes to his Truth divides his Imagination from his Reason, for
their mutual wrath at each other—quarrelling over whether to speak in defence of Truth,
they grow angry at one other’s conclusion—sets them in opposition, a self-division
injurious to his Intellect as a whole, mainly because, once separated from Imagination,
Reason becomes a Negation bent on destroying its former Contrary:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio
Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars

(174:10-14; E229)

If pity must join together those whom wrath has torn in sunder, the Intellect can be healed
back up into one whole only by the Imagination’s pity for Reason, embodied this time in
Blake’s foes, spectres seeking a rational truth in the text that will heal their own intellects,
injured by bad reasoning. Foes are to be pitied because they have the potential to become
friends, if and when they learn to listen to the Imagination’s dictates and obey the words
of the inspired man, the expression of his pity for those who suffer.

But the reader must, in his turn, sufficiently pity Blake to try to reconcile his
warring Contraries, concluding, perhaps, that his Intellect is exclusively imaginative
whenever it desires and exclusively rational whenever it restrains that desire. For it
would appear that Blake—he who desires but acts not; wants to speak but can’t articulate
his true thoughts—breeds pestilence in his own text as a result of his inability to separate
his faculties completely, to decide which shall be the final victor in his mind’s intellectual
battle over Truth. Perhaps Blake's internal struggle between imaginative desire and rational restraint leaves him with only the shadow of desire, and, like "the shadowy Spectre" (M13:40; E107) itself, he is reduced to a ghostly voice willing to emerge from non-existence, or what Jerusalem calls "the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens / Of Death" (J98:33-34; E258), only at the command of a greater desire, an infinite desire, a will to know what he wants to say that he is compelled to obey. Albion, who asks us to look at him and mark him well: "Behold I am oblivion" (J43:52; E192), is surely one particular example of Blake's shadowy spectre, for the moment he thus speaks to reveal his true identity as a non-entity (or cipher) we are told that "He ceased: the shadowy voice was silent" (J43:53; E192)—and back to oblivion he goes. Who has triumphed here: the speaker or the non-speaker? Clearly, the code, "An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface" (J83:46-47; E242), is the pestilence bred by the shadow of the desire to speak, a cunning device conceived by the irreconcilable coupling of a Reason that refuses to open his mouth and an Imagination that cannot shut his. The two Contraries are drawn by pity in The Book of Urizen, two warring faculties joined together in one self-destructive intellectual body surrounded by flames of wrath, head locked in the stranglehold of its own inseparably linked arms, and mouth open wide in mute terror, an empty hole which strains to cry out but from which no sound issues (see Fig. 1). In some copies of Urizen, the mouth contains teeth and a tongue, but the impression of dumb despair is no less powerful: the presence of the tongue merely promotes soundlessness to inarticulate noises at best, as the text above the picture confirms: "Los howld in a dismal stupor, / Groaning! gnashing! groaning! / Till the wrenching apart was healed / But the wrenching of Urizen heal'd not" (BU7:1-4; E74). Whether this figure represents Los wrenched apart
Fig. 1. *The Book of Urizen* (copy A), plate 8:
"Los howld in a dismal stupor."
from Urizen, or Los/Urizen not yet wrenched apart, the wrenching healed or not healed, it
certainly depicts a man tied up in a knot, an image traceable to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*
(995a31-33):

If one is presented with arguments on both sides of an issue, the first
reaction is to feel mentally blocked. Aristotle's metaphor for this state of
intellectual impasse is the body being tied up or bound, . . . and he describes
subsequent forward movement or facility of thought as following upon the
untying of the mental knot. The term for this sort of mental puzzle is
*aporia*, which has the connotation of "a blocked path or passage." (Witt 11)

A few pages further on in *Urizen*, we see the definitely mute figure below, probably just
Reason/Urizen this time, both mouth and eyes stubbornly closed (because he who will not
speak creates no objects to perceive), the body now composed in rock-solid certainty but
chained and manacled by the negative rational principle of not-speaking (see Fig. 2). In
the bottom margin of one copy of this picture, Blake wrote by hand: "Frozen doors to
mock / The world: while they within torments uplock" (Bindman 314). The doors are
doors of perception, and whether they are frozen by Reason's cold objectivity or locked
up by Blake's secret code, they are shut tight, like all the *aporias* or blocked passageways
into which his intellectual dilemma infallibly leads both him and us.

To see behind those closed doors, the reader must imagine Blake's situation
vividly and concretely (here we must appeal to our own "Lamb of God") and feel some
pity for him, for one can hardly contemplate the course of his life—the poverty, neglect,
obscurity, aspersions of madness, the *Examiner* review⁵—in the knowledge that he might
have brought it all upon himself, that his wounds were all self-inflicted ("martyrdoms," as
he says), the result of a plan, brilliant but detrimental to his art, conceived "in Cool
Blooded Design & Intention” (VLJ E564), and not be moved to compassion. Truly
Fig. 2. *The Book of Urizen* (copy G), plate 11.
pitying Blake naturally arouses the desire to fill in at least some of those gaps or voids of silence left behind by the Reasoning Negative’s eating away like corrosive acid at discrete but significant portions of the text. But one soon discovers that the Devouring Power can “only take[] portions of existence and fanc[y] that the whole”: Reason cannot consume the entire text (though it certainly tries to, as we shall see) for the simple reason that the Imagination produces its prolific work out of the same infinite substance or essence that characterizes the human being. From this essence the Imagination derives its own energy, an energy that is both indestructible (being eternal or infinite) and wholly delightful (which is why Reason loves to consume it). So the reader who, out of pity, tries to join Blake’s warring Reason and Imagination together again can make no mistake about his “printing in the infernal method, by corrosives”—Reason’s—“which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away”—the Imagination’s—“and displaying the infinite which was hid” (MHH14; E39). Reasoning will be absolutely necessary in interpreting Blake (there is, in any case, no escape from it) for both Contraries are necessary to the “human” existence of the text: without both there can be no progression in reading it, no improvement in our understanding of Blake, no getting past the baffling obstacles put up by his Reason, no purifying the Spectre’s defilement of the Imagination’s divine body of poetry—though we need not worry if we fail to wash off the foul rational taint entirely, for “The soul of sweet delight, can never be defil’d” (MHH9; E37).

As we heard a moment ago, Reason separated from Imagination “frames Laws & Moralities / To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars.” Of the countless particular methods Reason can use to destroy Imagination, it need only refuse its enemy Contrary its power and aid in general in order to leave it helpless, the babbling
author of an incommunicable communication. And of the countless particular laws that Reason can frame to destroy Imagination, the general law “Thou shalt not, writ over the door” of the chapel in “The Garden of Love” (SE E26) covers them all, a law that reappears in Europe, where “Every house [is] a den, every man bound; the shadows are filld / With spectres, and the windows wove over with curses of iron: / Over the doors Thou shalt not; & over the chimneys Fear is written” (Eur12:26-28; E64). This fear is the fear of Reason/Death, no doubt, but what, exactly, shalt thou not do? The gap in the written law is telling, for the object required to fill it must vary: Reason would say, “Thou shalt not speak,” but the Imagination, “Thou shalt not remain silent when angry” (which is the same as saying “Thou shalt not reason negatively”), because for every law and every morality Reason frames, the Imagination frames a contrary one—such is the “fearful symmetry” of Blake’s work as a whole. There is a difference, too, in the purpose of their framing: Reason wants to destroy Imagination by silencing it; the Imagination wants to force Reason to speak, which it achieves by both angering and confusing it, breaking the laws of logic (“laughing to scorn / Thy Laws & terrors” [M38:41-42; E139]) and mirroring whatever Reason does (or thinks, since “Thought is Act” [Marg E623]). In this way, too, the pitying Imagination joins together what wrath has torn in sunder, by ensuring that the outsider observer is left unable to tell where Imagination begins and Reason ends. Let us see exactly how this works.

“Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individ[u]ality” (M4:8; E98) is axiomatic, and Reason’s and Imagination’s views of wisdom and folly are certainly peculiar to themselves. But they also happen to be the reverse, or mirror image, of each other:
Now, these mirror-views become confusing to the reader when he wants to interpret a particular line or passage, such as the Proverb "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise" (MHH7; E36): is this folly that of the fool who stubbornly speaks or the fool who stubbornly maintains silence? If the former, the futility of speaking will lead him to the wisdom of silence; if the latter, persisting in silence (accompanied by growing wrath) will eventually lead him to speak (if in code). (And we should note that Blake did both: in the years following the completion of *Jerusalem* until his death he virtually stopped writing.) The interpretive dilemma can be solved only by the reader’s positive act of reconciling the Contraries, joining them together—and that means affirming both their views as wise, according to the Proverb that “The selfish smiling fool. & the sullen frowning fool. shall be both thought wise. that they may be a rod” (MHH8; E36). If to “smile” is to speak openly, plainly, as a kind of blessing bestowed upon a friend, and if to be “selfish” is to spin an entire universe of self-referential discourse from one’s own solipsistic bowels; and if to be “sullen” is to be sunk in mute despair, and if a “frown” is a sign of anger—if all these things are true, then it is in our best interests to think both Contraries wise and affirm both their interpretations of wisdom—if, that is, we want to be corrected, brought under the rod of a disciplined intellectual obedience (though there are other kinds of rods, which we will examine in the next chapter). Otherwise, we will never succeed in distinguishing the two Contraries nor fixing their identities with absolute certainty, which is to say that while we can feel reasonably certain, in the act of
reading, of which Contrary is which, there will always be some shared identifying feature (or perhaps an ambiguous pronoun reference) rearing its ugly head to confuse us. In the end, we cannot divide or separate the Contraries completely, for what we are distinguishing when we distinguish Reason from Imagination—and this ought to seem monumentally obvious, when we think about it—are two aspects of one being (the Intellect), not two separate beings. The erroneous appearance of their absolute separateness is a false distinction, and it is made, of course, by bad reasoning:

The dualism of the [negative principle] Yin and the [positive principle] Yang, which rules the cosmos under the conciliation of the [superior conciliatory principle] Tao, exists in man as in all created things. Man is conscious of this dualism, which reveals itself in him by the belief that he is composed of two autonomous parts which he either calls ‘body’ and ‘soul’, ‘matter and spirit’, ‘instinct and reason’, or otherwise. . . . But we know that the belief in the autonomy of these two parts is an illusion; there are not in man two distinct parts, but only two distinct aspects of a single being; man is in reality an individual artificially divided by an erroneous interpretation of his analytic observation. The error of our dualistic conception does not lie in the discrimination between two aspects in us—for there are indeed two aspects—but in concluding that these two aspects are two different entities, of whom one, for example, may be perishable while the other is eternal. (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 153)

Blake’s Negative Reason and Positive Imagination are conciliated by the superior conciliatory (and also positive) principle of his Intellect (God), and in this respect he follows traditional metaphysics. That the Contraries are already conciliated—as the two fools, for example, selfish and smiling, sullen and frowning, are conciliated in the wise man—is adumbrated by our inability positively to identify one fool (the former) as the Imagination and the other (the latter) as Reason, despite the attractiveness of the distinction. For Reason sometimes smiles deceitfully (as we saw in “A Poison Tree”), Reason is often characterized as selfish (Milton comes to explore “Satans Seat . . . in all
its Selfish Natural Virtue” [M38:46-47; E139], and besides, “the Reasoning Power in Man” is defined as “a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal / Spirit; a Selfhood” [M40:34-36; E142]); while the Imagination sometimes frowns (“Groaning the Spectre heavd the bellows, obeying Los’s frowns” [J9:33; E152]) and is even seen once (in The Four Zoas) sitting in sullen silence, plotting revenge against Reason (here referred to as “Urizen Prince of light” [FZ120:25; E389]):

Sullen sat Los plotting Revenge. Silent he eye’d the Prince Of Light. Silent the prince of Light viewd Los. at length a brooded Smile broke fi’ om Urizen for Enithaimon brightend more & more Sullen he lowerd on Enitharmon but he smild on Los

(FZ12:9-12; E307)

The principle I am illustrating here is simple: the chief attributes and characteristics by which we mark one Contrary, allowing us to identify it as a speaker or not-speaker, are also given to the other, but only occasionally, just often enough to ensure that their wrenching apart is not total and can be healed, that we can distinguish them but not entirely separate them. Sometimes contrary attributes—the smile and sullenness—may be fused together, as we see in the above passage or in this one:

A sullen smile broke from the Spectre in mockery & scorn Knowing himself the author of their divisions & shrinkings, gratified At their contentions, he wiped his tears he washd his visage.

(J88:34-36; E247)

The Spectre here washes his face, but so does the inspired man or Poetic Genius Milton, who insists that the Spectre is “the Reasoning Power in Man / This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal / Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway / To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination” (M40:34-37; E142).

According to the Imagination, to cleanse one’s face by self-examination is to wash off or
annihilate the Spectre of Reason, but the Spectre effects this (same?) cleansing not by
annihilating himself but by self-examination, by “knowing” himself to be the author of
divisions, “shrinkings,” and contentions—all traceable to the originary division between
distinguishing Reason and the inspired Poetic Imagination.

As for the “moralities” Reason frames to destroy Imagination, these are clearly
articulated—but by the voice of the Imagination—in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,
Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.
Good is the passive that obeys Reason[.]. Evil is the active springing from
Energy.
Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (MHH3; E34)

First we must identify “the religious.” Now, beings who worship God are religious, and
God resides in heaven; heaven is Good, and Good is the passive that obeys Reason;
angels live in heaven, so angels must be good, passively obedient to their God Reason,
which means that angels must be “the religious.” But angels are then also reasoners, as
the narrator soon confirms: “I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of
themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from
systematic reasoning” (MHH21; E42). He confirms it again in his criticism of the Angel
Swedenborg for having “not written one new truth” but “all the old falshoods”: “And now
hear the reason. He conversed with Angels who are all religious, & conversed not with
Devils who all hate religion” (MHH22; E43). But this religion, we must never forget, is
the religion of Reason, who, code-named Satan by the Imagination in later works, insists
that he is God (and insofar as he is an intellectual faculty, he is):
Satan heard! Coming in a cloud [of confusion], with trumpets [of judgment] & flaming fire [of pent-up wrath]
Saying I am God the judge of all, the living & the dead
Fall therefore down & worship me. submit thy supreme
Dictate, to my eternal Will & to my dictate bow
I hold the Balances of Right & Just & mine the Sword
Seven Angels bear my Name & in those Seven I appear
But I alone am God & I alone in Heaven & Earth
Of all that live dare utter this, others tremble & bow

(M38:50-57; E139-40)

Satan’s sole error here is to say “I alone am God,” for the Imagination holds an equal right to that title, and, as we have seen, does not hesitate to claim it.

Returning to the lines quoted above from plate 3 of The Marriage, we will note that one of the three particular pairs of Contraries—the most important pair, the one immediately elaborated in moral terms—is identified not as Reason and Imagination but as Reason and Energy. Yet this discrepancy is easily explained. Back on plate 16 we were told that the Prolific portion of Being is marked by an excess of “delights,” and on plate 4 that “Energy is Eternal Delight” (MHH4; E34): thus the term prolific is manacled to energy through the term delight. Now, “Some will say, Is not God alone the Prolific? I answer, God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men” (MHH16; E40). An acting God is a thinking and speaking God, thinking and speaking through men, and therefore an imaginative God, that aspect of the Intellect with whom (and as whom) the Imagination identifies itself. By following up this chain of terminological identifications—energy = delight = the prolific = God = Imagination—we can be reasonably certain (though we can still doubt it if we wish) that Energy is an attribute of, and therefore identical to, the Imagination, for Blake tends (illogically) to identify the attribute of a thing with the thing itself. Or, if one thinks in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics (and Aristotle is fair game:
the narrator himself comes out of the mill, where reasoners must labour hard to discover
and refine their truths, holding "the skeleton of a body, which in the mill was Aristotles
Analytics" [MHH20; E42]), Energy may be said to be the essence of Imagination and
therefore what it is, its true nature or identity, since "[e]ssence’ is a customary translation
for what is literally rendered as ‘the what it is to be’" (Lear 28).

According to the morality of "the religious," then, passively obeying Reason—
which would mean being silent: the "Is" of God as opposed to His "Acts"—is good; it is
heaven. But "the active" (the God who acts) springing from Energy is, say the religious
Angels, evil; and since the eternal delight of Energy belongs to the Imagination and fuels
its infinite desire to speak, the excess spilling over in the form of prolific productions, we
may infer that acting on the desire to speak or write is evil—and so is the desire itself, the
activity of speaking or writing, and the writings that get produced: the Bible of Hell, for
instance, which the narrator "has" and "which the world shall have whether they will or
no" (MHH24; E44). That speaking or writing is evil is, of course, the opinion we would
expect from a sullen Reason, nor is it surprising that Reason should contradict the two
Proverbs we read earlier about the evil consequences of nursing unacted desires, for
Proverbs embody the opinion of the Imagination, who writes—they are, after all,
Proverbs of Hell.

Since "Evil is Hell," hell becomes a code word for thought engaged in the activity
of speaking or writing as seen from Reason’s moral point of view, specifically when that
active thought springs from the energy of the Imagination—and hence illogically, without
rational restraint, insanely. The Marriage’s own narrator thus becomes a devil, because
his writing of the prose work entitled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is the very hell we have just defined:

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of [Poetic] Genius [or Imagination]; which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell, shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments. (MHH6; E35)

And since “Good is Heaven,” *heaven* is a code word for that “place” (in the mind) where one passively obeys Reason, and *angel* for anyone reasons well, if systematically.

The only problem with all of this is that the Imagination’s morality, which will come to dominate all Blake’s subsequent works, particularly *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, is the reverse of Reason’s: for it, reasoning is evil, a hell (which is why in the Prophecies Reason is code-named *Satan*, *death*, and *despair*, and defined by the “Keys of the Gates” as “two-horned” and “cloven,” among other negative things) while imaginative activity is a heavenly good (and so it names itself after divine things, like *Jesus* and *God*). But even in *The Marriage*, where the imaginative-because-speaking narrator willingly adopts the title of “Devil” applied to him by the reasoning Angels, the Imagination’s (partial) view dominates the text and controls the reader’s response by seducing him into believing that what reasoners call evil is really—that is, *truly*—good. Perhaps the simple-minded (and equally partial) view of the reasoner results in an inverted morality which the narrator deems it best to expose by means of a paralleling irony, since irony is itself the inversion of truth and appearance. If the narrator’s intended meaning is the opposite of what his words express, then his true opinion must be—an opinion contrary to what the religious think, or what he tells us the religious think—that passive obedience to reason is hell and
mental activity springing from imaginative energy is heaven. Thus the reader (fatally) concludes, as Geoffrey Keynes does, that the narrator’s true opinion is Blake’s true opinion: “To him passive acceptance was evil, active opposition was good” (xi). As written, however, the definitions of Good and Evil on plate 3 are something more than straightforwardly ironic, involving us in an inversion of terms neatly disentangled by Mark Bracher: “we are forced to identify evil with activity and energy, which, because of their close ties with vitality and life, we equate with good. Evil is thus implicitly good. Similarly, by being forced to conceive of good in terms of passivity, we are coerced into an ambivalent feeling toward good” (“Rouzing the Faculties” 179), not to mention an ambivalent feeling towards Reason. Words not only do not mean what they seem to, they mean the opposite: evil means “good,” and good means “evil.”

On the next plate, the fourth, our suspicion that the narrator really believes that Reason’s evil—energy and activity—is good is confirmed by two counter-definitions: “Energy is the only life” and “Energy is Eternal Delight” (MHH4; E34). At this point, anyone disagreeing with the proposition that life and eternal delight are good must be given up for irredeemably lost. Since we can positively identify the speaker of these two definitions—the whole of this plate is entitled “The voice of the Devil”—we know they express the view of the energetic Imagination. Indeed, if we search through The Marriage we cannot find the opinion of an Angel expressed directly anywhere: we only hear their thoughts reported through the mouth of a first-person narrator (one or several?) who is almost certainly (but not quite) either diabolical in nature or the Devil himself. By the end of The Marriage, this narrator manages to seduce the Angel (as well as the reader) into adopting his demonic view, thus changing the reasoner into his direct
Contrary. After one final argument between a Devil and Angel witnessed (impartially?) by the (indeterminate) narrator, he concludes on a final sardonic Note. This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend: we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense which the world shall have if they behave well. I have also: The Bible of Hell: which the world shall have whether they will or no. (MHH24; E44)

The Devil Imagination wins this confrontation: the Angel becomes a Devil (the reasoner becomes imaginative) and is now reading rather than avoiding the man who speaks his mind. But the lesson to be learned from The Marriage is not that the Devil’s view is really Blake’s own— that, indeed, would be to make oneself easily seduced, like the Angel—but rather that the two views are individually partial and relative to each other. The narrator implies that we will grasp the “infernal or diabolical sense” of The Marriage, its true satirical intent—and this is true of the rest of Blake’s Bible of Hell—only if we “behave well”: and we should wonder—does behaving well mean being good, passively obeying Reason, being Angels before we can be Devils? Perhaps we can read Blake without passively obeying reason (his or anyone else’s), but as long as we do read him we will have his Bible of Hell whether we want it or not, are willing to be governed and restrained by it or not. And to systematic reasoners anyway, it will look, at first, like an incomprehensible outpouring of torment and insanity.

As we have witnessed, the Reasoning Negative may pervert the Imagination’s voice by blotting out crucial words or phrases, altering denotations, or breaking arguments up and scattering the fragments to the four corners of the text, so that “[t]he map [Blake] left us is seldom easy to read. Sometimes it is impossible. There are areas that he chose to leave blank. There are areas thick with erasure, swamps and deserts to
which he returned again and again, seeking solutions to problems that he never solved” (Cox, *Love and Logic* 37). Strictly speaking, however, Blake’s Reasoning Negative cannot *say anything* if it is to remain what it is, because the moment it is seduced into opening its mouth it will change back into a Contrary (its own contrary), Positive Reason. So, once their intellectual battle is underway, the Imagination must begin practising the arts of seduction and compulsion, for its job is to compel Reason to act positively and defend Truth—*defend* specifically in the sense of “support or uphold by speech or argument” (OED)—in order to save the text (Enitharmon = none harm it) from being harmed, her sense devoured by the Reasoning Negative—from being, in Cox’s word, “impossible,” or, in Blake’s, “lost”:

> For Los said: Tho my Spectre is divided: as I am a Living Man
> I must compell him to obey me wholly: that Enitharmon may not
> Be lost: & lest he should devour Enitharmon: Ah me!
> Piteous image of my soft desires & loves: O Enitharmon!
> I will compell my Spectre to obey: I will restore to thee thy Children.
> No one bruises or starves himself to make himself fit for labour!

(J17:16-21; E161)

All Los’s plural “soft desires & loves” are so many multiple copies of his singular desire (to speak) and his one love (of Truth). But without the help of Reason, and with Reason acting against him, the image of this love and desire—his text—will be “starved” and “bruised.” For to “bruise” a speaker of Truth is to do his words some injury; to “starve” him is to deny him the mental nourishment only Truth can provide; and Los is himself thus bruised and starved by his alienation from his brother Contrary, without whom he cannot express his Truth—not intelligibly, anyway, for intelligibility depends on a formal architecture only Reason can design.
Hence Los must compell his pusillanimous but cunning Spectre to obey his will and labour on Truth’s behalf, which he can do only by threatening it with destruction (the negation of the Negation) or by resorting to cunning practises and deceits himself. First, the threat:

O Spectre

I know thy deceit & thy revenges, and unless thou desist
I will certainly create an eternal Hell for thee. Listen!
Be attentive! be obedient! Lo the Furnaces are ready to receive thee.
I will break thee into shivers! & melt thee in the furnaces of death;
I will cast thee into forms of abhorrence & torment if thou
Desist not from thine own will, & obey not my stern command!
I am closd up from my children: my Emanation is dividing
And thou my Spectre art divided against me. But mark
I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours.

(J8:6-15; E151)

In a later chapter we will look more deeply into Los’s furnaces—because “O! thou seest not what I see! what is done in the Furnaces. / Listen, I will tell thee what is done in moments to thee unknown” (J7:28-29; E149)—but we clearly see here their power to “create an eternal Hell” for the Spectre, a hell of active, energetic, imaginative thought that speaks/writes illogically, without rational restraint, to which Reason naturally reacts by regarding it as torment and insanity. This hell is explicitly linked to the Reasoning Negative’s refusal to listen, to be attentive to Los’s words and obey his stern command to “abstain ravening” (J8:38; E151) or voraciously devouring the text. As for Los’s seduction, he must draw the Spectre out of his silence and into his furnaces to labour—“Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Bellows / Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient” (J8:39-40; E151)—seducing him into an act of creation whose erotic overtones—conceiving, impregnating, fathering “children”—are no less pronounced than its moral and intellectual ones. For what the
Imagination must seduce Reason into—seduce here meaning "to lead [a person] astray in conduct or belief; to draw away from the right or intended course of action to or into a wrong one; to tempt, entice, or beguile to do something wrong, foolish, or unintended" (OED)—is its own universe of discourse, a created world that is, from Reason's point of view, an error.

We will recall that Golgonooza/London is Los's "city" of art and manufacture, the place where thought is engaged in creating and making things, and it is in Golgonooza that we find Los's furnace with its fiery forge: "In Golgonooza Los's anvils stand & his Furnaces rage / Ten thousand demons labour at the forges Creating Continually / The times & spaces of Mortal Life" (FZ113:3-5; E376). When these reasoning demons (mere clones of the Spectre) are drawn into Los's furnace, they are drawn into the fiery cavity where the Imagination creates its errors, compelled to help it manufacture, at the forge, its artful forgery, for manufacture in its depreciatory sense is "applied to production involving mere mechanical labour, as contrasted with that which requires intellect. Also figuratively applied, e.g., to literary work of a 'soulless' or mechanical kind, or to the deliberate fabrication of false statements on a large scale for the market" (OED). Like the "man of mechanical talents" mentioned by The Marriage, the Spectre is forced to serve Los's art, and the bare act of speaking is for him a fabrication of falsehoods that draws from him tears of pain and horror:

So spoke the Spectre shuddring, & dark tears ran down his shadowy face
Which Los wiped off, but comfort none could give! or beam of hope
Yet ceased he not from labouring at the roarings of his Forge
With iron & brass Building Golgnooza in great contendings
Till his Sons & Daughters came forth from the Furnaces
At the sublime Labours for Los. compell'd the invisible Spectre
To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains,
In pulsations of time, & extensions of space . . .

(J10:60-65; 11:1-2; E154)

But sometimes, especially when he has just penned a particularly cryptic message along
the lines of “The Man who respects Woman shall be despised by Woman” (J88:37;
E247), the Spectre seems pleased with the result, his desire turning to a lusting after the
joys of impregnation: “Thus joyd the Spectre in the dusky fires of Los’s Forge, eyeing /
Enitharmon . . .” (J88:44-45; E247).

Of the several methods of seduction and compulsion by which Los compels the
Spectre to obey him, perhaps the most cunning is that form of flattery in which one
imitates the Other or, in Blake’s phrase, becomes what one beholds (see, e.g., M3:29;
E97; J65:75; E217). To win the Spectre over, Los must become a spectre himself; and
once he begins to reason (and we shall see in a moment how he does so), “Brotherhood is
changed into a Curse & a Flattery” (M35:4; E135): the Imagination becomes a cursed and
cursing Negation, mirror-image of the brother Contrary he has lost, just as he is about to
be, or already is, destroyed by Reason, now a Negation. In short, their war requires Los
to become a reasoner, a Spectre, and we know that he in fact becomes one because we
often catch him in the act of reasoning. Not too long ago, for example, we heard him
instruct his Spectre thus:

Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs
Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever:
If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation: a meer
Reasoning & Derogation from me . . .

(J17:33-37; E162)
What these first three statements compose is a deduction, and when Los comes to the end of the longer speech in which it appears, the narrator slyly remarks, “So Los in secret with himself communed” (J17:48, E162; my emphasis). The Imagination warning itself that it will become a Negation if Reason separates from it, and at the same time warning Reason that it will likewise become a Negation if they separate, and, finally, telling itself that it is now a Negation that can never be organized—all this is just an intensely complicated way of saying one simple thing: that the Imagination is now reasoning. And now, or rather here, in this mental state of affairs, with the Imagination defeated, destroyed, or negated, having changed into a Negation voluntarily (by flattery, by recognizing and accepting the indispensability of Reason), but also by the logic of its own anti-rational system of brotherhood (Contraries must mutually exist), and by the force of its desire (if it wants to speak intelligibly, it needs Reason), things begin to turn ugly.

With the formerly positive Imagination now a Reasoning Negative, all former positives turn negative: even the spoken truth itself, intended to comfort and enlighten, must now entrap, confuse, and injure not only its enemies but its friends as well:

But here the affectionate touch of the tongue is closd in by deadly teeth
And the soft smile of friendship & the open dawn of benevolence
Become a net & a trap, & every energy renderd cruel,
Till the existence of friendship & benevolence is denied:
The wine of the Spirit & the vineyards of the Holy-One.
Here: turn into poisonous stupor & deadly intoxication:
That they may be condemnd by Law & the Lamb of God be slain!
And the two Sources of Life in Eternity[,] Hunting and War,
Are become the Sources of dark & bitter Death & of corroding Hell:
The open heart is shut up in integuments of frozen silence
That the spear that lights it forth may shatter the ribs & bosom

(J38:24-34; E185)
The two sources of imaginative life, which is the art of speaking Truth—because "The Combats of Truth & Error," we will recall, "is Eating of the Tree of Life," "ART is the Tree of LIFE" (Laocoön E274), and the Tree of Life is associated with "Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination" (VLJ E562)—are the search for Truth and the defence of it, or "hunting" and "war." Once the Imagination begins reasoning negatively in its attempt to negate the Negation (which is a self-negation as well), hunting and war become the sources of "dark & bitter Death & of corroding Hell"—that is, of a mode of reasoning that simultaneously speaks and speaks-not by writing in code, vividly figured as an "open heart shut up in integuments of frozen silence." But the code can be broken, destroyed, just as the ribs and bosom that contain and conceal the truthful heart are shattered by the intellectual "spear that lights it forth."

But such concrete images of truth are hardly to Reason's taste, and in the end the Imagination can only compel Reason to labour with him by the force of "mighty chains" of demonstrative syllogisms constructed from abstract axioms of the order of "Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist: / But Negations Exist Not": for axioms are self-evident judgments, and with these, as the logician Coffey asserts, "there can be no possibility of error. Our assent is compelled; the evidence is cogent" (2: 212). This is, then, the most cunning method of all, for a Spectre that is compelled to obey a reasoning Imagination will experience its labours as its own supreme Good: passive obedience to Reason.

As long as they remain divided, the action (writing, speaking) of the Imagination and the reaction (silence) of Reason are opposed and mutually destructive. In the simplest terms, Reason tries to destroy what the Imagination tries to create: an
articulation of the heart, an openly expressed truth; while the Imagination tries to destroy what Reason tries to create: a coldly objective countermanding vow of secrecy and silence. And so together they are, as we read in the inscription to the little emblem on plate 72 of *Jerusalem*, “Continually Building. Continually Decaying because of Love & Jealousy” (J72; E227). Blake articulates the theme of *The Four Zoas* as “The torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man” (E300): *death* and *judgment* we can decipher as negative and positive reasoning, respectively, and *Albion* is of course the Intellect who suffers the torments of love and jealousy, rational torments that lead to both its “fall into Division & Resurrection to Unity” (FZ4:4; E301). Now, if this Intellect’s Imagination loves Truth and wants to communicate it from no other motive than to relieve the suffering of its fellow human beings (or minds), whom it loves and pities (see the Song of Innocence “On Anothers Sorrow,” E17), its Reason loves Truth equally: “What have I said? What have I done?” the Intellect/Albion cries out in *Jerusalem*, wracked with guilt not just for having spoken but for the negative way in which he has done it, a way that requires the negation (slaying) of one of his two “equally true” Contraries: “O all-powerful Human Words! / You recoil back upon me in the blood of the Lamb slain in his Children. / Two bleeding Contraries equally true, are his Witnesses against me” (J24:1-3; E169). Reason loves Truth as much as the Imagination, but remains convinced that to tell ineffable Truth—which, like the rest of Blake’s “mental things,” is personified here, and feminized—is to reveal the secret love of one’s heart, and hence to lose it:

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Never pain to tell thy Love
Love that never told can be
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For the gentle wind does move
Silently invisibly

I told my love I told my love
I told her all my heart
Trembling cold in ghastly fears
Ah she doth depart

Soon as she was gone from me
A traveller came by
Silently invisibly
O was no deny (E467)

To “travel” is to seek knowledge (Blake signals his adoption of the clichéd metaphor early on, in All Religions are One, by way of analogy between tenor and vehicle: “As none by traveling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists” [ARO E1]), and the silent and invisible cipher “O” constitutes the double negation of Truth (“no deny”) that is all the traveller acquires.

Seeing the Imagination determined to express Truth, Reason is overcome with jealousy in the obsolete sense of “anger, wrath, indignation” as a result of its “devotion, eagerness, anxiety to serve” (OED) what it sees as its Truth. Since jealousy is also a “solicitude or anxiety for the preservation or well-being of something,” as well as a “vigilance in guarding a possession from loss or damage” (OED), and since the Imagination’s telling Truth will result in its loss, Reason tries to hide its beloved in a secret place. And as its rival Imagination labours to reveal what Reason is trying to conceal, Reason’s jealousy turns into “the state of mind arising from the suspicion, apprehension, or knowledge of rivalry,” which in matters of love becomes a “fear of being supplanted in the affection, or distrust of the fidelity, of a beloved person,
esp[ecially] a wife, husband, or lover” (OED). The “beloved” in Blake is always Truth, expressed in a human form and code-named “Ololon,” “Enitharmon,” “Jerusalem,” or “Vala” (among many others): the female text personified as an “emanation.”

With this in mind, let us re-read the Proverb of Hell “Every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth” (MHH8; E37), penned (because Reason says nothing) by the Imagination. As Reason might have predicted, this particular truth comes out as its opposite: it is simply not true, for, as Damrosch observes, “nothing is more obvious than the compatibility of fervent belief with error” (34). Similarly, the Proverb “Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ’d” (MHH10; E38) is also false: a truth may be told perfectly understandable and still be doubted or disputed, although Blake might counter that a truth not believed has not been properly understood, the fault lying with neither the truth nor the form of its articulation but rather with its interlocutor. As stated, however, this and the other Proverb are errors. On the other hand, if they are really only relative or particular truths, despite their deceptive appearance as universals, it may be possible to find a context within which they will manage to alter their meaning. But the search for this context will entail using our reason, determiner of limits.

Clearly, Blake’s Reason cannot, without contradicting its own principle that no words can express Truth, see any truth at all in the Proverb “Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ’d,” except perhaps in the first five words. If this much were allowed, his Imagination might then try to persuade Reason that admitting the next five words, “so as to be understood,” would not seriously injure the truth of the first five. But Reason ought to see a dangerous implication in those ten, namely, that truth can be told in one form or another, if not an understandable or intelligible one. Forced to
brood over the statement, Reason is thus brought to the point of change, where it will be perfectly poised for the compelling seductions of the Imagination (always determined to make Reason speak). But perhaps it decides no, a full stop ought to be placed after at least those first ten words—that is as far as it will go. Now, although in his edition of Blake Erdman puts a comma in this position, the Santa Cruz Study Group disagrees with his interpretation of the mark, arguing that

there are more periods in Blake than in Erdman, and we need to accept them as such if we are truly to grapple with the at times discontinuous folds of Blake’s syntax. “Truth can never be told so as to be understood and not be believ’d.” (E reads “understood.”). “I must Create a System. or be enslav’d by another Mans” (E reads “System,”). Periods can be banished completely, rather than be demoted to commas, if Erdman finds them “intrusive.” (313)

Perhaps Blake did intend a period after “understood,” but perhaps not: no one will ever really know. What I see (looking at the facsimile editions of Keynes and Bindman) is a wavering mark, half-comma, half-period, sign of a hesitation on the point where Blake’s dividing Reason and Imagination are pulling the statement apart between them. For the author of what comes after the punctuation mark—the final four words “and not be believ’d”—is surely the Imagination, who is incapable of convincing Reason to abandon its limit (the full stop) and embrace the truth of the whole statement. Reason is, after all, prudent, and “Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity” (MHH7; E35). Yet in seducing Reason to affirm a little more than it wanted to (the words “so as to be understood”), the Imagination achieves a partial victory. If the fifteen-word Proverb (I am counting the punctuation mark as a word, for marking words well includes marking marks because “not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate &

particular <as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admits not a
Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass <Insignificant> much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark>” [VLJ E560]) were to be divided into equal parts, the first five words would go to Reason, the last five to the Imagination, and the central five, the qualifying phrase “so as to be understood,” would belong to both as the expression of an expression that the Imagination manages to persuade Reason will not injure its beloved Truth (expressed in the Proverb’s first five words). Reason is thus led into error, to agree—and here the Imagination’s infinite desire to speak proves stronger than Reason’s desire not to—to tell truth, but so as not to be understood:

A Riddle or the Crickets Cry
Is to Doubt a fit Reply
The Emmets Inch & Eagles Mile
Make Lame Philosophy to smile
He who Doubts from what he sees
Will neer Believe do what you Please (AugI E492)

Assuming the truth of this last couplet, what point can there be in telling truth understandably, straightforwardly? Better to do (or say) “what you please.”

The Imagination sanctions Reason’s agreement to speak in incomprehensible forms on the strength of its conviction that, since there will always be some angle of perception from which a statement can be made to appear true, it must be possible to say anything. As long as one’s intention is to speak truth, or to speak from the heart—according to the third Principle of All Religions are One (another fifteen-word statement), “No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth” (ARO E1)—truth will be told. But Reason still disagrees, and points out that another interpretation of that Principle is possible. Initially, an instinctive or affective preference for positivity may encourage the reader to interpret the conjunction but not as a coordinator but as a
subordinator introducing an adverbial clause, so that the sense of the whole would be

"Nobody can think, write, or speak from his heart without intending truth." But on
second, more negative, thoughts—again, brooding over the infant statement a bit—the
reader may decide that the conjunction but is coordinating two main clauses after all,
resulting in another, equally permissible if more far-fetched, interpretation: "No man can
think, write, or speak from his heart. But he must intend truth." If we accept the
possibility of this reading, we might conclude that, since one cannot have an intention
without thinking, the intention here must be attributed to the rational head, not the
affective heart, which implies that the man who thinks, writes, or speaks at all must do so
by reasoning. The heart is thoughtless, a mere emotional centre or, at best, Benoit's
"unconscious thought . . . that central source of [man's] being which is the spring of his
spontaneous, affective life," which would make the heart a figure for man's irrational
"conviction that he is unlimited." And no man can think, write, or speak that conviction:
it is an inexpressible truth.

If the Imagination lays claim to the heart as a source of Truth, Reason lays claim
to the head, as well as, on occasion, its synecdochical representative, the eye, which
would make Reason (whom we may now think of as speaking, just not understandably)
the author of the enigmatic motto to VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion: "The Eye sees
more than the Heart knows" (VDA E45). Accordingly, Thomas A. Vogler sees the
statement as guiding us "to a basic *topos* of the eighteenth century, to a point of conflict
in the discourse of Truth in which the eye and the heart have conflicting claims to
dominate moral perception. The opposition between the metaphoric eye as the figure for
rational knowledge and the heart as the source of intuitive knowledge is at least as old as
the Hebrew scripture" (281). But Vogler is understandably wary of getting entangled in the opposition of Contraries:

Most Blake critics intuitively know to no the "knows" of the heart and to aye the "eye" in the poem's motto, suggesting that it "emphasizes the primacy of perception over the limited wisdom of the natural heart," convinced that "Oothoon sees more than the heart knows." But for Blake "the Eye altering alters all" (“The Mental Traveller” 62, E485). The most variable and problematic of faculties, it seldom stays still, and seldom appears without qualification. "The Eye of Man a little narrow orb closed up and dark" (M5:21, E99) is not the standard of vision, and "A Fool's Eye is Not to be a Criterion" (E638), nor is the "Lovesick eye" (“The Mental Traveller” 34[,] E484), nor the "Corporeal or Vegetative Eye" (VLJ95, E566) nor the eyes of the "Watchfiends" in MILTON. We need to see with the "visionary eye" (M39:33, E140) or the "imaginative Eye" (VLJ70, E555) or the "inward Eye" (E721) if we are to see truly, and presumably this applies to the VISIONS as much as any other object of perception. If we were already "visionaries" we would not need its help to become such; and if we are not, there will always be the possibility of misperceiving it. (283)

"If we are to see truly"—a telling phrase, and Vogler, again understandably, assumes that the Imagination's eye is truer than Reason's. Since both faculties appear to have one (and for all we know both may have a heart as well), let us revert to the idea that the truth of the heart is self-evident, beyond the senses (more than sense, though ever so acute, can discover), and therefore a product of intuition or the unconscious, which is itself incapable of thinking, writing, or speaking but which nevertheless guarantees truthful intent when Reason agrees to think, write, or speak on its behalf—to prove what the heart has only imagined. Reconsidering, now, the Principle about speaking from the heart in light of our reading experience, we should note that the first interpretation, the one we spontaneously prefer, appeals to our emotional and unconscious preference for positivity, to our "heart": as long as we speak from deep within, it seems to say, we must intend truth. But our "head" (or "eye"), lagging behind a little but decidedly more impartial, is
forced to recognize the possibility of that second, more negative, interpretation, the one categorically denying the possibility of thinking, writing, or speaking from the heart in any fashion whatsoever. Which interpretation, then, is the correct one, the true one? Or what would be wrong with admitting both readings? Perhaps the two different conclusions are equally true because "Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individ[uality]" (M4:9; E98), and we may choose to believe one or the other or both if we prefer. And there's nothing wrong with that, except that the two interpretations are mutually contradictory on one important issue, that of the possibility of speaking from the heart, while they both affirm the possibility of intending truth. And because no one can think a contradiction, we remain in doubt, unable to decide which of the two versions embodies the true intent of the statement.

It is important to recognize also that, while both interpretations confirm that intending truth is not only possible but necessary ("he must intend truth"), neither confirms that truth will or can be actually thought or stated. Even if we insist on the intuitively acceptable interpretation of the Principle, that one can think, speak, or write from the heart—the other being ruled out for lack of evidence of the implicit distinction between "heart" and "head": after all, the metaphorical heart in the widest sense is synonymous with mind, "including the functions of feeling, volition, and intellect" (OED, heart)—still, as stated, the Principle does not imply that the person who intends truth—that is, who thinks truth—must necessarily speak or write it, even if he can. While heart may be a metaphor for "intent, will, purpose, inclination, [or] desire," it can also be the place of "one's inmost thoughts or feelings," what one thinks "inwardly; secretly; at heart" (OED)—what one thinks, in other words, but has no desire to tell. For one may
speak or write one’s most secret thoughts and intend truth while doing so, and still prevent that truth from being openly communicated by perverting or disguising its form, so that one’s truth is not immediately recognizable and one’s secret thoughts remain hidden, “invisible,” as Los says, “to any but whom I please, & when / And where & how I please” (J17:40-41; E162). Perhaps it is possible, then, to tell truth so as not to be understood and, consequently, not believed. This, I am arguing, is precisely what Blake decides to do once his Reason is convinced (or compelled) by his Imagination to speak and write, and once his Imagination is equally convinced by his Reason that, since one can say anything, speaking cryptically is a perfectly sound idea. For by then they have both turned into one cunning Reasoning Negative possessed of both the bad intent of not being understood or deceiving those who listen, and the conviction that “A Truth thats told with bad intent / Beats all the Lies you can invent” (Augl E491).

To Reason’s mind, the Imagination’s images of truth, as mere representations, imitations, simulations, semblances, likenesses, or copies of the Real, are inherently false anyway, no matter how possible to believe. And if they are possible to believe, they will seduce their beholder into mistaking them for truths, which makes them downright dangerous to Truth. Hence Reason feels justified in perverting, deforming, bruising, injuring, and generally destroying the Imagination’s divine body, causing it to cry out, “Reasonings like vast Serpents / Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations” (J15:12-13; E159). Now, an image may be an idol in the logical sense of “a false mental image or conception; a false or misleading notion; a fallacy” (OED), so whenever the Imagination constructs propositions or syllogisms or analogies or other forms of argumentation, whether valid or invalid, true or false, it is, as far as Reason is
concerned, engaged in the creation of errors, falsehoods, and fallacies. For Reason believes that everything possible to be said is an image of truth, and every image of truth is ipso facto a falsehood. The Imagination’s whole universe of discourse, then, is bad art, its book a corporeal illusion that exists nowhere but “in Fallacy,” as an “Imposture,” an “Error or Creation [that] will be Burned Up” by itself, the Holy Reasoning Power, “& then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear” (VLJ 565). In this way, Reason defends its Truth.

But by far the most misleading kind of image created by the Imagination is the idol in the more usual sense of “an image or similitude of a deity or divinity, used as an object of worship . . . in scriptural language, = false god, a fictitious divinity which ‘is nothing in the world’ (I Cor. viii. 4)” (OED). If all Blake’s images, but particularly those of Reason and Imagination themselves (who both, notably, claim to be God), are “nothing in the world,” then they are in a sense already ciphers, and treating them as elements of a cipher or code language merely turns them into a literal expression of what they already are in fact. In this sense, Blake’s writing in code is a method not of hiding the truth but of pointing directly to it. And because they are both idols, the Contraries are both spectres, for an idol is also “a visible but unsubstantial appearance, an image caused by reflexion as in a mirror, an incorporeal phantom” (OED). Even more broadly, an idol is a mental fiction or fantasy, like the “Two Horn’d Reasoning Cloven Fiction” (KG E268) that is a key to the code’s locked gates. But that both Contraries are such a fiction—one for each horn—is difficult to see, until we read more carefully passages like this one:

And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion in their strength
They take the Two Contraries which are call’d Qualities, with which
Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil
From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
Not only of the Substance from which it is derived
A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer
Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power
An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing
This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation

(J10:7-16; E152-53)

In logic the “quality” of a proposition refers to its condition as positive or negative. Here Blake’s two Contraries “are calld Qualities” because, as in logic, one is affirmative (or positive) and the other negative. They are then named “Good” and “Evil”—but which Contrary is good and which evil matters not, since both are good in their own eyes, evil in each other’s. Both, moreover, are capable of affirming and negating the proposition that Truth should be posited. What is important to see in the passage above is that from both Contraries only one thing is derived: the Abstract = Negation = Negative Reasoning Power = Spectre. While the identification of Reason as the Spectre obviously holds—by refusing to speak, it negates or murders the substance of the Imagination’s divine body of spoken images, images that are its divine members, one of which is Reason itself—what is far less obvious is that the Imagination also becomes the Spectre once it begins reasoning: as one of the “Keys of the Gates” hints, Blake’s Intellect and its text are “By double Spectres Self Accurst” (KG E268). For once Reason begins to speak (as we’ve seen the Spectre do), the Imagination begins to reason (as we’ve seen Los do), and their formerly good/positive and evil/negative qualities undergo an inversion. Thereafter (or was this true from the beginning?), Los and his Spectre are one indivisible but two-horned faculty (as are Los and Urizen, Milton and Satan, Jesus and Satan). And so the title “Spectre” or “Reasoning Negative” is deceptively double: it may refer to either the
Imagination reasoning in order to negate Reason, or to Reason reasoning to negate Imagination—and, paradoxically, both these mental acts are ultimately positive.

Reason's refusal to defend Truth is also a negation of the truth of the Intellect, the mental substance from which both Contraries are derived by the process of thought pictured below:

![Diagram of the relationship between Man, Substance, Intellect, Reason, Imagination, Reasoning Negative, Spectre of Man - Abstract]

The Intellect is the "true Man"—one of whose names is Albion, "the Eternal Man" (M34:46; E134)—inasmuch as it is Truth personified, not yet abstracted from its "body," which is, of course, the corporeal form of its thoughts, its written works, for a personified truth can exist only in writing. The Reasoning Negative, on the contrary, exists only as an Abstract because in the abstract, as an idea in the reader's mind, an idea he derives from reading Blake's texts. And what it appears to represent, this Reasoning Negative, is Reason-and-Imagination abstracted from their literal (self-)expression and falsely divided, as though they were enemies and truly separable from the one Intellect in which they must substantially exist. The Spectre, then, which the reader comes to see as a substantial—that is, really existing—idea, is none other than our own illusory image of Blake's mind: we create the Spectre of Man and effect the negation of Blake's Intellect.
To negate the Negation, the Imagination must compel Reason to labour with it, saving the text from the fate of eternal unintelligibility or senselessness by restoring it to order and form, reorganizing its chaotic structure and building up its stony ruins. Pity must join together what wrath has torn in sunder, and so the Imagination—feeling pity for its lost Truth, for the lost reader, for its injured self, for benighted Reason, for the ruined text, home of its ruined children, and above all for its tormented, self-divided Father-Intellect—determines to join forces with the faculty that refuses to join it. That is, the Imagination decides to reason, to sacrifice its own identity or “selfhood” to that of Reason—it becomes Reason—in order to change the Reasoning Negative back into Positive Reason, its own true Contrary. And anyway—quite simply—it is impossible to think, speak, or write without reasoning: “for behold! / There is none that liveth & Sinneth not!” (J61:23-24; E212). In short, negating the Negation—for it is an axiom of Blake’s system that the Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries—turns the Imagination into a Reasoning Negative, but one whose sacred duty is to negate Negative Reason, not the Imagination, not itself. Or is it? Because the Imagination’s willing self-transformation into its own Negation is, from one perspective, a kind of suicide, a Christlike self-sacrifice for the sake of its sinning brother Contrary—“From willing sacrifice of Self, to sacrifice of (miscall’d) Enemies / For Atonement” (J28:20-21; E174)—whom it tries to redeem by binding it to itself in that spirit of intellectual love of Truth which originally bound them in One Intellect:

Jesus replied Fear not Albion unless I die thou canst not live
But if I die I shall arise again & thou with me
This is Friendship & Brotherhood without it Man Is Not
So Jesus spoke! the Covering Cherub coming on in darkness
Overshadowd them & Jesus said Thus do Men in Eternity
One for another to put off by forgiveness, every sin

Albion replyd. Cannot Man exist without Mysterious
Offering of Self for Another, is this Friendship & Brotherhood
I see thee in the likeness & similitude of Los my Friend

Jesus said. Wouldest thou love one who never died
For thee or ever die for one who had not died for thee
And if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself
Eternally for Man Man could not exist. for Man is Love:
As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little Death
In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood

So saying, the Cloud overshadowing divided them asunder . . .
(J96:14-29; E255-56)

To dispel the dark cloud of the Covering Cherub (the covering code) that always threatens
to overshadow the true identities of speakers by making them appear to be distinct beings
with discrete proper names, we must decode a few words of this passage before reading
it: Jesus = Imagination, Albion = Intellect, die = reason, to sin = to speak, to exist = be
ture, Eternity = Truth, God = Intellect/Imagination/Reason, friendship and brotherhood =
mutual existence of Contraries, love = love of Truth, and man = personified truth.

"Man," as a personified truth, is an image of Truth, and so is "God": both are Divine
Images of the (godlike) Intellect that perceives Truth and expresses it in (human) words.
(Man and God are identified in the Song of Innocence "The Divine Image" by way of an
identical definiens in their definitions: both are defined as mercy, pity, peace, and love.)
And every kindness to another—on the part of Reason and Imagination, or that of author
and reader—is a clear expression or image of this truth, its clarity arising from the little
reasoning/death that the Intellect must suffer in speaking, for in creating an image of itself
it negates itself (and becomes a Spectre).
Once they are divided and the bitterest of enemies, Reason and Imagination begin
forging instruments of war with which to destroy—*negate*, Reason would say; *murder*,
says Imagination—each other. But when Los, "pursu[ing] his speech in threatenings loud 
& fierce" (J8:29; E151), proclaims (loudly, so we will hear him) his determination to
write,

> Loud roar my Furnaces and loud my hammer is heard:
> I labour day and night, I behold the soft affections
> Condense beneath my hammer into forms of cruelty
> But still I labour in hope, tho’ still my tears flow down.
> That he who will not defend Truth, may be compell’d to defend
> A Lie: that he may be snared and caught and snared and taken
> That Enthusiasm and Life may not cease: arise Spectre arise!
>  
> (J9:25-31; E152)

we may be forgiven for feeling slightly confused. Is the "he" who must be compelled to
defend a lie the Reasoning Spectre, who will not speak in defence of Truth and must be
compelled by the Imagination to help create what it deems an error? Or is he the
Imagination who now speaks relatively truly, forging or creating the particular forms of
his minute articulations, but sees no need, no reason, and therefore refuses, to defend
Absolute Truth (which will remain true in spite of what anyone says about it), although he
does feel a need to defend his text, his universe of images, from the negative power of
Reason, which calls it a lie and is now trying to destroy it by covering its surface with a
secret code? Whether we decide—and we are constantly being forced "To decide Two
Worlds with a great decision: a World of [Imaginative] Mercy, and / A World of
[Rational] Justice . . . / In the Two Contraries of Humanity” (J65:1-2, 4; E216)—that the
speaker is labouring, tearfully but in hope, so that Reason may be snared and caught and
taken in the act of perverting the Imagination’s work, or that the Imagination itself may
be snared and caught in the act of reasoning fallaciously, creating idols and images and
obsuring errors that exceed the limits of rational possibility; whichever way we go, two
things are perfectly clear: first, the speaker labours so that “enthusiasm” and “life” may
not cease; and second, the Reasoning Negative is necessary to those labours (“arise
Spectre arise!”). But if the Imagination wishes to snare and catch itself, that may be
because its images were never intended to usurp the place of eternal Truth but only to
point towards it, and, as a result of the tortuous complications and inversions arising from
its quarrel with Reason, the “soft affections” of its heart have become dangerously
misleading—and therefore cruel. Or perhaps it is just Blake speaking here, warning his
reader that only careful negative reasoning (the reader’s own spectre) can expose the
effects in perception his images of Truth have led us all to make. For if the reader does
not defend Blake’s Truth, he will end up defending his own lie, the image of his own
intellectual concerns, spun out of his head from disconnected Blakean ideas.

But Blake asks us to forgive his deceiving us, explaining that he has done so
honestly, without—given the end he wanted to achieve—seeing an alternative, because

The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,
Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix’d into furrows of death;
Till deep dissimulation is the only defence an honest man has left
(J49:21-23; E198)

Here Blake admits, quite straightforwardly, that his infinitely expanding visions of
Absolute Truth must, to be expressed at all, be narrowed and enclosed in weak temporal
images, fixed in “furrows” (lines) of rational discourse. He has had to resort to this
dissimulation, this “concealment of what really is, under a feigned semblance of
something different” (OED)—the Infinite now appears to us to be finite—as a last-ditch
defence of Truth, which has two contrary, but equally valid, claims upon his Intellect and its voice. For both Blake’s Reason and his Imagination are honest “men” (they are both personified truths) who agree that Eternal Truth or Absolute Reality is, and it is the One “Principle of all manifestation, embracing everything (intellectual and otherwise), unlimited and in consequence impossible to include in any formula,” but knowable to man as his own Intellect or Spirit. And that shared perspective makes Reason and Imagination, at bottom, also one and equally true:

Beneath the bottoms of the Graves, which is Earth’s central joint,
There is a place where Contrarieties are equally true:
(To protect from the Giant blows in the sports of intellect,
Thunder in the midst of kindness, & love that kills its beloved:
Because Death is for a period, and they renew tenfold.)

(J48:13-17; E196)

Cox believes that what Blake “said of his pictures could be said as easily of his poems” (Love and Logic 25), and what he said, in a letter to Butts, is “that there is not one touch in those Drawings & Pictures but what came from my Head & my Heart in Unison” (E719). So when we see the “the mighty Hand,” an unambiguously sinister figure,

Condens[ing] his Emanations into hard opaque substances;
And his infant thoughts & desires, into cold, dark, cliffs of death.
His hammer of gold he siezd; and his anvil of adamant.
He siez’d the bars of condens’d thoughts, to forge them:
Into the sword of war: into the bow and arrow:
Into the thundering cannon and into the murdering gun

(J9:1-6; E152)

we need not worry too much about distinguishing the hard reasoning Hand from his sensitive imaginative counterpart, the Los of the earlier parallel passage who condenses into forms of cruelty the soft affections of his heart. Both Hand and Los labour at a
furnace with blacksmith’s instruments—or at a forge with the instruments of forgery—creating fictions and imitations of things, or perhaps worse: deceptions, fraudulent artifacts, deceits, lies. Both Hand and Los are forgers who create images of Truth, and all of them are errors we must burn up if we want to see self-evident Truth appear. Hand and Los are both Reasoning Negatives, but we may discriminate a little between their forms. While Hand forges “bars of condens’d thoughts,” Los beholds “the soft affections /
Condense beneath [his] hammer”: Hand shapes the material of the head, Los that of the heart, which suggests that although they mirror each other’s actions, they do not act to the same end. When Los sees his Contrary forging instruments of intellectual war with the bad intent of silencing him as a madman, he does the same, but with a good intent:

Inspiration deny’d; Genius forbidden by laws of punishment:
I saw terrified; I took the sighs & tears, & bitter groans:
I lifted them into my Furnaces; to form the spiritual sword.
That lays open the hidden heart . . .

(J9:16-19; E152)

For the Imagination, the heart contains Truth itself and is therefore identified with (or as) “Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination” (J5:19-20; E147), overflowing like a fountain with images of itself. But for Reason the heart is a space of containment and a place of refuge, a dark and secretive cave where Truth may be hid from those who seek it in an image, idol, or any other objective form. (And both these views of the heart are contained in a Proverb of Hell of expanding implications: “The cistern contains: the fountain overflows” [MHH8; E36].) So when Los forms the “spiritual sword” to lay open the hidden heart, he is both honestly revealing his Truth and exposing that of Reason against the latter’s will.
Thus the two Contraries circumscribe an eternal circle: an Imagination that desires against all reason to speak of divine things must reason cunningly; and a Reason compelled to speak by an unrestrainable desire for truth must, to subvert its own discourse, become cunningly imaginative; until both look like one Negation, the contrary of the positives they originally were, but in truth an Intellect now infernally wise. As the Poetic Genius "walking among the fires of hell" assures us, his Proverbs of Hell are written to "shew the nature of Infernal wisdom" (MHH6; E35), which issues from having doubly been a fool. For there are indeed two fools in Blake to be thought wise—the selfish, smiling one and the sullen, frowning one—and the rational fool who persists in the folly of his vow of silence is as likely to become wise as the imaginative fool who persists in the folly of trying to express an infinite truth. "It was from out the rind of one apple tasted," as Milton says in Areopagitica, "that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say, of knowing good by evil" (728).

1Cf. Ricoeur, who notes that the referential function of the text exceeds the mere ostensive designation of the situation common to both speaker and hearer in the dialogical situation. This abstraction from the surrounding world gives rise to two opposite attitudes. As readers, either we may remain in a kind of state of suspense as regards any kind of referred-to world, or we may actualize the potential nonostensive references of the text in a new situation, that of the reader. In the first case, we treat the text as a worldless entity; in the second, we create a new ostensive reference through the kind of "execution" that the art of reading implies. These two possibilities are equally entailed by the act of reading, conceived as their dialectical interplay.
The first way of reading is exemplified today by the different structural schools of literary criticism. Their approach is not only possible but legitimate. It proceeds from the suspension, the *epoche*, of the ostensive reference. To read in this way means to prolong this suspension of the ostensive reference to the world and to transfer oneself into the “place” where the text stands, within the “enclosure” of this worldless place. According to this choice, the text no longer has an outside, it has only an inside. *(From Text 162-63)*

But as Ricoeur goes on to argue, this is not a choice the reader need remain with. The text reasserts its outside when “[e]veryday reality is . . . metamorphosed by what could be called the imaginative variations that literature carries out on the real” *(From Text 86)*.

For Blake, as we see from the *Jerusalem* quotation (J13:59-66, 14:1), it is clearly important to take the initial risk of entering the closed-off world of his text, and even to remain in one’s initial interpretive acts on the inside of this worldless or otherworldly place, safely ensconced within it. But the crossing over from the everyday, outside world to this inner imaginative universe, from an ostensive to a nonostensive referentiality, is itself crucial to the whole reading experience: the movement from mere possibility (which is what the text appears to be from the outside) to fully realized reality (how it appears on the inside) is impossible without both perspectives—again, we cannot have one contrary without the other. So the outside of Blake’s text remains vital to its inside; even the mere fact of its *not* having ostensive reference invokes the shadow of the real, objective world.

*2* *Jerusalem’s* question is actually posed in reference not to Contraries but to a “wife” and a “harlot,” or a “church” and a “theatre.” Since these, however, are merely particular examples of contraries, the question “Are they two and not one?” remains pertinent to the general category of which Reason and Imagination are, as I argue, at the head.

*3* See J38:35-36 (E185): “A pretence of Art, to destroy Art: a pretence of Liberty / To destroy Liberty. a pretence of Religion to destroy Religion.”

*4* The illustration to “A Poison Tree” of the foe lying flat on his back does not support this interpretation (but nor does the tyger Blake depicts in “The Tyger” support most interpretations of that poem). There are, however, several pictures of people reading while sitting in trees or lying on the ground throughout the *Songs*.

*5* On September 17, 1809, Robert Hunt published in *The Examiner* a review of Blake’s 1809 exhibition, describing the painter as

an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement, and, consequently, of whom no public notice would have been taken, if he was not forced on the notice and animadversion of the EXAMINER, in having been held up to public admiration by many esteemed amateurs and professors as a genius in some respect original and legitimate. The praises which
these gentlemen bestowed last year on this unfortunate man’s illustrations of Blair’s Grave, have, in feeding his vanity, stimulated him to publish his madness more largely, and thus again exposed him, if not to the derision, at least to the pity of the public. . . . Thus encouraged, the poor man fancies himself a great master, and has painted a few wretched pictures, some of which are unintelligible allegory, others an attempt at sober character by caricature representation, and the whole ‘blotted and blurred,’ and very badly drawn. These he calls an Exhibition, of which he has published a Catalogue, or rather a farrago of nonsense, unintelligibleness, and egregious vanity, the wild effusions of a distempered brain. (Qtd. in Bentley, Blake Records 216)

^There is an ambiguity, however slight, in the reference of this possessive pronoun. Do the Proverbs belong to “the fires of hell,” “the enjoyments of Genius,” or, perhaps, to “the Angels”? This last possibility, though positioned closest to the pronoun, is the most unlikely, unless we suppose that the Angels are also, at present, among the fires of hell, witnessing the enjoyments of Genius, which they would have to do in order to regard them as “torment and insanity.” This inference is plausible only if we read “fires of hell” as a trope for the “enjoyments of Genius,” but that is a very plausible reading indeed. Allowing the ambiguity in the pronoun reference, which I believe is intentional, has the virtue of underscoring the essential inseparability of Reason (the Angels) and Imagination (demonic Genius) for which I will be arguing more strenuously later on.


8. Contrary Quantities of Thought: Life, Death, and "The Fly"

Blake’s eccentric treatment of the image as an approach to spiritual enlightenment is somewhat esoteric, as he himself admits: “The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considerd as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature” (VLJ 555). How difficult, then, for his readers to restrict their interpretation of the word imagination to this odd sense of a mental power, usually personified, that creates images of Truth designed to provoke us suddenly to a perception of the Infinite, or to a Divine Vision. But it is harder still to accept that on occasion the Imagination—who is also the “Poetic Genius” of All Religions are One (ARO E2) or “the Poetic or Prophetic character” of No Natural Religion (NNR[b] E3)—is compelled to resort to baffling methods, but always, with a brutally vengeful consistency, relying on the categorical concept of contraries: “I then asked Ezekiel. why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answerd. the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite” (MHH13; E39).

On the principle that “He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God” (NNR E3), Blake keeps urging his reader to see (in his imagination, with the help of a little reasoning or “contemplative thought”) the Infinite in all his images, a vision that would lift him out of his reasoning grave and bring him face to face with Blake’s Imagination:

If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought if he could Enter into Noahs Rainbow or into his bosom or 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 (VLJ E560)
This “Lord in the Air” is Blake’s Imagination (and the reader’s too), hovering above its created world; and to mistakenly believe—to imagine—that it is anything else, that we could actually see a real God as a result of reading Blake’s text, is the utmost folly. The text may point to an idea of God; it may even literally contain God (if one argues, as Blake does in *There is No Natural Religion* [b], that God is immanent in all things), but then so would any other text. But if the word *God* as it appears in Blake is interpreted to mean “the One object of supreme adoration; the Creator and Ruler of the Universe” (OED), the reader is going to be sorely disappointed at not finding Him there, unless he practises a little mythological interpretation or reads by analogy.

What, then, does it mean to “enter” one of Blake’s images, especially if it is “closed”—secret and uncommunicative—its “gates” locked against us? All we can do is look closer at it, taking the risk that it may seem to come too close for comfort:

> Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?  
> It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell,  
> Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos’d,  
> I hope thine are not . . .

(M20:27-30; El 14)

This fly is clearly not a mortal or corporeal insect, nor even a representation of one, for while we may be able to imagine a fly with gates and a brain and a heart, we could never confuse that image with the one produced by the sort of object we might find buzzing around dead meat. Yet the figurai image remains dependent on the empirical one to the extent that it aspires to interpretability: not only are the brain, heart, and gates individually empirical objects of which we require an image, called up from memory, in order to locate them in the fly (and after our own uniquely fanciful fashion: are the gates
located in the fly's brain or in some other part of its body?), but it is also true that the fly's figural meaning depends on our ability to abstract qualities or attributes from these objects as we cobble together the overall "meaning" of the fly image, an image the speaker insinuates he can see (or interpret) while we cannot: "Can you see the fly?" he asks; "I'll describe it to you: it's this small, and it contains the following things. . . ." At this, the dull-witted will perhaps swivel their heads in the direction of the empirical world, concluding that the poet is encouraging them to look imaginatively, even whimsically, at empirical flies. But on deeper reflection, we understand that he is encouraging us to form the idea of something (anything?) seemingly insignificant, something we would normally consider beneath our notice, but which ought to arouse feelings of sympathy or even a sense of equality in us, for this little thing may share with us the human traits of feeling ("a heart like thee") and thinking, its mind "open to heaven and hell"—which last phrase means what? Well, the reader is free to speculate, or he may appeal to whatever ideas of heaven and hell he has stored in his head (which, if he is wise, will include the ones supplied him by The Marriage of Heaven and Hell). But having come this close, are we now inside the fly? For its gates (and gates can shut us out of as well as let us into something), the poet assures us, are open, although the state of ours is unknown to him: which implies a double set of gates, the reader's and the image's, and the poet's certainty about the state of the fly's (and everything else about it) marks it as his image, a little thought he offers up for our consumption but which cannot be ours until we have thoroughly digested it.

Though he cannot know if a given reader's gates are open or shut, the poet does know one thing for certain: every reader has them:
For every human heart has gates of brass & bars of adamant,
Which few dare unbar because dread Og & Anak guard the gates
Terrific! and each mortal brain is wall'd and moated round
Within: and Og & Anak watch here; here is the Seat
Of Satan in its Webs; for in brain and heart and loins
Gates open behind Satan's Seat to the City of Golgonooza
Which is the spiritual fourfold London, in the loins of Albion

(M20:34-40; E114)

Our gates (if we believe that what the poet says here is true of us) are kept shut out of a
fear of "Og and Anak," whom Bloom glosses as "menaces to the quest for the Promised
Land" (E917), directing our attention to Numbers 21 and Joshua 11:21—and
consequently away from the text we are trying to read, away from "here." But "Og and
Anak watch here," within our mortal brain, and "here" is where the Seat of Satan is, a
name and place and disreputable part of the anatomy we have been inside already (have,
indeed, never left since opening the book). Here we reason, and here Og and Anak,
whatever they may be in the Bible, act as Satan's watch-fiends: naturally, they are
menaces to the Promised Land (of Truth) in Blake too, but only because they are
reasoners; and if they tyrannize here, in our brain and heart, guarding what we think too
closely, we may be so afraid of making logical or other kinds of intellectual errors that we
forget to unbar our mental gates. In Blake's eyes, of course, we are reasoning/dead
already, like the foe beneath the poison tree, which is why he characterizes the
"Spectator" as buried even while urging him to enter just "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." (A suspicious reader might see ambiguity in that last "he": perhaps the
image of wonder is dead?) For Blake can assume with a high degree of certainty (at least
as high as that accompanying his conviction that every human heart has gates) that his
reader has been reasoning while reading him, and has therefore already been ruthlessly subjected to the murderous power of his deadly Spectre. It is hardly an accident that Blake asks us to look at a fly—since we’re corpses, we’re sure to find one somewhere about us (to be joined, once we’re buried, by a few worms, an insect we shall examine shortly).

To a reader, fly may be just a word. But something “wondrous and expansive” is confined inside it, something humanly intelligible. And what works on the minutely particular level in Blake applies as a general principle: all the infinitely various things and creatures of his teeming universe, things that appear to be objects of the five physical senses, are really just words, but words that have been “humanized,” transformed into “human forms,” by the Poetic Genius exercising his license to personify. So while the “Abstract objecting power” of Blake’s Reason (J10:14; E153) is busily turning its abstractions and affections into deceptively concrete objects (swords, hammers, guns, rocks, animals, flowers, trees, cities, and nations), angry at our inability to follow simple interpretive principles, his Imagination immediately personifies them, so that we can hear them speak their minds and hearts once again. (What does a talking rock say? Read “The Clod & the Pebble” [SE E19].) Of course, the mutual labours of Reason and Imagination at the forge are so thoroughly confused or carefully fused—“Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient” (J8:40; E151)—that we may as well conclude that the whole bewildering work belongs to the Reasoning Negative, an example of whose forgery we see here: “For Mercy has a human heart / Pity, a human face: / And Love, the human form divine, / And Peace, the human dress” (SI E12-13).

Abstract/concrete/human: Reason/Imagination/Intellect: intellectual/material/real—from
these three principled strands spun into one golden string, Blake weaves his whole

Reason, then, may turn one of its abstract ideas into any object it wishes—a fly, for instance—simply by negating the word fly’s normal, natural, or most literal denotation and secretly substituting a new one, some signified whose referent is a purely mental thing, perhaps even Reason itself. The Imagination then takes the redefined word and sets it down gently within a context of human qualities or attributes, like heart and brain, although traces of Reason’s reifications may remain, like the gates the Imagination keeps trying to open for us—another sign that the Contraries are ultimately inseparable. Or the Imagination may take one of Reason’s abstractions and jump straight to prosopopœia, so that we see “the Sublime . . . shut out from the Pathos / In howling torment,” as if the two contraries, head and heart, were human lovers doubly exiled from each other, the former “to build stone walls of separation, compelling / The Pathos, to weave curtains of hiding secrecy from the torment” (J90:11-13; E249). Blake’s purpose in personifying reifications or humanizing abstractions is to encourage us to feel so close to his objects of thought that we can make, in our imagination, “a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder” and enter their “bosoms.” For concrete and abstract images alike have a secret “heart,” a truth we have yet to discover, and that we can do only do by reading them.

So let us turn to the Song of Experience called, appropriately enough, “The Fly”:

Little Fly
Thy summers play,
My thoughtless hand
Has brush’d away.
Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink & sing:
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength & breath:
And the want
Of thought is death;

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die. (SE E23-24)

The life of the word *fly* is easily "brushed away" by a hand holding a paint brush or a pen: all the artist has to do is ignore—that is, be thoughtless or blind to—the true meaning of *fly* and change it to whatever he desires. This he accomplishes in the second stanza, drawing *fly* and *man* into so close a relationship that they become virtual synonyms. (But we must mark: we still do not know "What is Man!") And the word *man* is subject to the same murderous encoding process as *fly*, for by the time "some blind hand"—but whose: God's, or that of a cunning cryptographer with a Divine Imagination?—brushes the speaker's "wing" in the third stanza, he has already become a fly. And since the referent of *man* is explicitly the speaker, he has by the end of the poem—"Then am I / A happy fly"—undergone that act of self-annihilation of which Milton speaks so highly when he refers to "despising death" and "go[ing] on / In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn" Reason's "Laws & terrors." If by scorning Reason's laws one can make the word *fly* mean the same thing as *man*, then the word *man* can surely become a
fly—or, indeed, any insect or object Blake wishes, as long as it bears traces of an essential humanness:

Fig. 3. For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, frontispiece:
“What is Man! / The Suns Light when he unfolds it /
Depends on the Organ that beholds it.”

In Jerusalem, whose title-page is embellished with several colourful human insects, Vala cries, “The Human is but a Worm” (J64:12), a definitive statement earlier confirmed by the Reasoning Negative:

Then spoke the Spectrous Chaos to Albion darkning cold
From the back & loins where dwell the Spectrous Dead

I am your Rational Power O Albion & that Human Form
You call Divine, is but a Worm seventy inches long
That creeps forth in a night & is dried in the morning sun
In fortuitous concourse of memories accumulated & lost
It plows the Earth in its own conceit, it overwhelms the Hills
Beneath its winding labyrinths, till a stone of the brook
Stops it in midst of its pride among its hills & rivers[.]
Battersea & Chelsea mourn, London & Canterbury tremble
Their place shall not be found as the wind passes over[.]
The ancient Cities of the Earth remove as a traveller
And shall Albions Cities remain when I pass over them
With my deluge of forgotten remembrances over the tablet

So spoke the Spectre to Albion.  

(J29:3-17; E175)

The Spectre not only defines the human form (which his Contrary, the Intellect/Albion, calls "divine") as a conceited worm, or perhaps a wormlike conceit, he also describes its movements in a way that uncannily mirrors our reading experience. As we work our way through the system of Contraries ("night" and "morning sun"), we must mark and memorize Blake’s definitions, one by one, until, like Democritus’s atoms, they begin to run or flow together, suddenly coalescing into comprehensible forms—intelligible ideas or even methodological principles—that illuminate the images of his universe. In this “fortuitous concourse of memorys accumulated & lost,” we must forget conventional denotations while accumulating new (Blakean) ones, the former so firmly entrenched in our minds that we must plow them up in order to plant something more fruitful in their place. There are a couple of pertinent Proverbs here: “As the plow [Reason enclosing itself as in steel] follows words, so God [Imagination or Intellect] rewards prayers” (MHH9; E37), and “The cut worm [the text itself, the now-humanized word] forgives the plow” (MHH7; E35), for the reductive act of cutting the text in two (rational half, imaginative half) with the blade of dualistic (or “cloven”) Reason is entirely forgivable as long as we are praying for understanding at the same time. As for the “earth” the human worm “plows”—“plowing,” or following words, being reading or writing, for the reader becomes a human worm, too: he becomes what he beholds when he enters Blake’s
Imagination—that is defined by Milton as “Albions land: / Which is this earth of vegetation on which now I write” (M14:40-41; E109). And this textual earth has “hills”—high “places,” like definitions or abstract principles, which enable one to see further, comprehend more—above which, illogically, there are “winding labyrinths,” passages of intricate complexity many a reader will have trouble finding his way out of. And the “stone of the brook” that blocks the course of the travelling worm belongs to the same category of rational obstruction as the “chains / Of rocks round London Stone: of Reasonings: of unhewn Demonstrations / In labyrinthine arches. (Mighty Urizen the Architect.)” (J66:2-4; E218), or the “indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning” (M3:8; E97). The passage itself deposits several such “stones” or “rocks” in the very next line (line 12): Battersea, Chelsea, London, and Canterbury (“brothers” to Peak, Malvern, Cheviot, Penmaenmawr, Dhinas-bran, Manchester, Liverpool, Malden, Colchester from the passage discussed back in Part I), proper names which “mourn” and “tremble” because as code words—ciphers or voids—they are English place names that have been altered by the Reasoning Negative to signify nothing (other than itself, that is, and it is the Negation), and so they are subject to annihilation or erasure when the “wind” or “breath” of imaginative inspiration moves over them in the interpretive act of decoding. Thus “their place shall not be found as the wind passes over”: these “cities” (like London) shall “remove” when we decode them. For we have been instructed to “Remove from Albion, far remove these terrible surfaces” (J49:60; E199), and we now know that “Albion’s land” from which the terrible surface must be stripped away is “this earth of vegetation on which now I write”—on which Blake writes: for once, the identity of the speaker cannot really be in doubt. And the more Blake writes his “deluge of
forgotten remembrances over the tablet," that is, the more he pours out definitive phrases and statements—which for us too are “forgotten remembrances,” things we ought to remember but tend to forget because they look so insignificant, rather like worms or flies—the more lucid he begins to appear.

Returning now to “The Fly,” let us look again at the last two stanzas (four and five), the nervous center that functions as the poem’s rational “brain” (the speaker’s sympathetic, even tender, imaginative identification of himself and the fly in the second stanza qualifies it as the poem’s “heart”), because here we run into a provocative conditional sentence, rather startling in that nothing in the poem has quite prepared us for it: “If thought is life and strength and breath, and the want of thought is death, then am I a happy fly, if I live or if I die.” If this looks like an argument, then its appearance is deceptive: it is merely a conditional premise of the form “If $p$, then $q$,” and it is left up to the reader to affirm or deny either antecedent or consequent in a second premise before any conclusion can be drawn. (With conditional arguments, it is crucial to remember, either denying the antecedent or affirming the consequent results in fallacy.) Now,

Blake’s conditional premise breaks down upon analysis into no less than six conditional premises, the same number as the fly has legs, the truth-value of each of which must be determined separately:

1. If thought is life, then am I a happy fly.
2. If thought is strength, then am I a happy fly.
3. If thought is breath, then am I a happy fly.
4. If the want of thought is death, then am I a happy fly.
5. If I live, then am I a happy fly.
6. If I die, then am I a happy fly.
Indeed, sentences 1-4 and 5-6 are probably best treated as two separate “wings” of a potential argument, the first conjunctive (since it uses the operator and in its compound antecedent: all four must hold: “If \( p^1 \) and \( p^2 \) and \( p^3 \) and \( p^4 \), then \( q \)”)) and the second disjunctive (or disjoins the antecedents: “If \( p^1 \) or \( p^2 \), then \( q \)”). Concentrating first on the disjunctive wing, we have to decide whether the operator or has the exclusive sense of “either one or the other but not both” or the inclusive one of “either one or the other or both” (Michalos 12): clearly, since “live” and “die” are contraries, not contradictories, the inclusive reading obtains, which means that we need only affirm one of the antecedents for the consequent to hold true, though we can (possibly) affirm both.

Before proceeding to construct an argument from any one of the six premises, we must decide whether they are what logic calls “truth-functional” (Michalos 20): that is, we have to determine the truth-value of the component clauses (antecedent and consequent) of each premise in order to decide whether the whole statement is true or false. Logic dictates that “[a] sentence schema of the form ‘if \( p \) then \( q \)’ represents a true sentence when either the sentence represented by ‘\( p \)’ is false or the sentence represented by ‘\( q \)’ is true; if the sentence represented by ‘\( p \)’ is true and the sentence represented by ‘\( q \)’ is false then ‘if \( p \) then \( q \)’ represents a false sentence” (Michalos 21). But the consequent of all of Blake’s six possible antecedents is the same: “Then am I a happy fly” (and the existential force of the placement of the verb before the subject should not be ignored, for it also serves to demote fly from a predicate noun or possible definiens to a mere appositive); so perhaps we ought to start by trying to determine the truth of this one statement. Again, it breaks down into two parts, each of which has to be considered separately: the speaker asserts that (1) he is happy and (2) he is a fly, and both must hold
for the consequent as a whole to be true. But to pass judgment on the first part, we need to have knowledge of the speaker’s subjective state, and that we cannot have without being told what it is. (Blake himself, we have seen, does not presume to know what his reader’s subjective state is: “I hope thine are not [closed],” he says, speaking of his reader’s “gates.”) And yet, one could argue, the assertion “Then am I a happy fly” does give us precisely this knowledge. If we grant this, we will have a truth-functional sentence ($q$ is true), but then we cannot proceed to argument by affirming the consequent until the antecedent has been affirmed first: in other words, the speaker’s being happy obtains only when all the prior conditions articulated by the various antecedents have been met. So we might then try affirming the antecedents one by one, starting with those of premises 5 and 6, reasoning that the speaker must either live or be dead (or doomed to die) or both. Yet how we interpret the words *live* and *die* in these premises may depend on how we read premises 1 to 4, where the words *life* and *death* are given a specific denotation departing from conventional usage (*life* means “thought” and *death* means “want of thought”). The disjunctive wing of the argument, then, cannot be interpreted separately from the conjunctive wing: both remain firmly attached (as do all six premise-legs) to the singular body—or “thorax”—of the consequent. And so we cannot (yet) determine whether the speaker is truly happy: or, if we do simply take it on his authority, we cannot affirm it without trapping ourselves in a fallacy.

Besides, we have yet to deal with the second part of the consequent. A hard-headed reader may decide that, happy or no, the speaker cannot, if he is a man, be a fly, simply because no man is a fly, and no manipulation of thought or language, no matter how clever, can ever turn any man into one. One might then deny the consequent, the
denial of all six antecedents would follow, and the whole argument of “The Fly” is brushed away in one fell swoop. But is the speaker of the last two stanzas certainly a man? Let us go back to the first stanza: “Little Fly / Thy summers play, / My thoughtless hand / Has brush’d away.” “What has happened [here]?” asks David Punter, taking a closer look:

Common sense would lead us to suppose that the hand has brushed away the fly; [but] the language itself permits the other interpretation, which is that the play of the fly has adequately disposed of the “thoughtless hand.” Already we are in the midst of a process of becoming, which is precisely what the “I” then chooses (if it has choice) to reflect on, on this process whereby not only is it unclear what the boundaries might be between man and fly, but more importantly who the utterer is. (232)

While the speaker of the first two stanzas is certainly a man (even doubt requires good grounds), one could read the third—“For I dance / And drink & sing: / Till some blind hand / Shall brush my wing”—as the response of the fly to the question posed by the man in the previous two lines: “Or art not thou / A man like me?” “I am,” the fly could be replying, “for I dance and drink and sing—that is my summer’s play—just as a man does, and will continue to do so until some blind hand brushes my wing.” And then, perhaps, the fly’s voice takes over the remainder of the poem, its verbal play brushing away the human hand whose (thoughtless?) writing began the dialogue, so that the final six-legged, two-winged conditional premise is posited by a thinking and speaking insect—and a happy one, we may presume, because its summer’s play has prevailed over the thoughtless human hand. Now, I offer this interpretation not as an assertion of the truth of the poem—for clearly there is more than one truth here—but rather as an argument for the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the “I” of the consequent, an ambiguity that makes the truth of the consequent indeterminable and so renders the whole premise non-
truth-functional, out of logic’s hands. Even if some soft-hearted reader, not wishing arbitrarily or dogmatically to deny a man the right to think he is a fly (or a fly the right to think it is a man), were to argue that the consequent is true from the speaker’s point of view, that move, if it is read as an affirmation of the consequent, will again result in fallacy.

In face of these logical obstacles, we have no choice but to turn back to the six antecedents, starting with the first: “If thought is life.” Again we must determine its truth, and, once again, it cannot be done, for this is neither an analytic statement (one whose truth follows from the definitions of its words) nor a synthetic one whose truth might be investigated and supported by empirical or factual evidence. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a single fact that might refute it. And the same holds for premises 2, 3, and 4. By process of elimination, then, the only option left to a rational reader is to pluck off the if operator from the conjunctive wing of “The Fly.” This amounts to not an affirmation of the antecedent but rather its transformation into a stipulative definition whose truth or falsity no longer concerns us (because it has none). If treated as verbal equations, “Thought is life, strength, and breath” and “The want of thought is death” enable us to interpret the second wing of the conditional premise thus: “Then am I a happy fly, if I think or if I suffer from a want of thought.” (But note the ambiguity in the term want: is it a synonym for desire, or is it a measurable quantity, either “none at all,” as in “thoughtless hand,” or “some but not enough”?) More crucially, thought = life and want of thought = death may either hold the key to intelligibility, opening locked gates throughout all of Blake, or else prove to be mind-forged manacles, depending on how we react to being forced to obey words, accepting or rejecting their didactic role. For we
cannot fail to notice that they seem to provide answers to two of Jerusalem’s three central questions: “O what is Life & what is Man. O what is Death?” (J24:12; E169). And the answer to the third, the question of what “man” is, will come through the “The Fly” as a whole.

We may now imagine the fourth stanza of “The Fly” as its gate, left swinging freely on its hinges by its conditional form: if we negate it as a proposition—deciding that, no, thought is not life, nor strength nor breath—the gate shuts and locks, leaving us standing outside the poem’s wondrous and expansive meanings and inside a fallacy (that of denying the antecedent). If, on the other hand, we simply affirm it (again, as a proposition), we will have merely succeeded in affirming what may be, for all we know, a false premise, and therefore have done so ignorantly, thoughtlessly, without actual knowledge of what we are affirming. For the speaker himself is too prudent to do more than venture the idea that thought is life—it is for him an “if,” a mere possibility (“Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, meer possibilities: / But to those who enter into them they seem the only substances / For every thing exists” [J13:64-66; E158])—leaving the hard task of judgment up to us. Only if “thought is life” is interpreted as a definition, neither true nor false and therefore outside the pale of judgment, do the two wings of the gate open wide, permitting us to pass on through to ever richer interpretations, and of increasingly complex poems.

But is definition, for Blake, nominal or real? Is he telling us nothing more than that we ought to interpret the word life as thought whenever we encounter it, or is he trying to convey what life means to him in a real sense, what he believes the essential nature of life is, because he has brooded over the problem, nursed the idea, thought it
through? The distinction between nominal and real definition can be traced back to Aristotle, who in his *Posterior Analytics* (the very book the narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* takes with him into the mill [MHH20; E42]) explains that since to define is to prove either a thing’s essential nature or the meaning of its name, we may conclude that definition, if it in no sense proves essential nature, is a set of words signifying precisely what a name signifies. But that were a strange consequence; for (1) both what is not substance and what does not exist at all would be definable, since even non-existent can be signified by a name: (2) all sets of words or sentences would be definitions, since any kind of sentence could be given a name; so that we should all be talking in definitions, and even the *Iliad* would be a definition: (3) no demonstration can prove that any particular name means any particular thing: neither, therefore, do definitions, in addition to revealing the meaning of a name, also reveal that the name has *this* meaning. (92b26-35)

In this list of the consequences of a strictly nominal form of definition, the first item has interesting implications for Blake, who does not hesitate to define “what does not exist at all,” signifying the Negation—which he, or rather Los, defines as non-existent: “But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs / Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever” (J17:34-35; E162)—by not just one name but a string of them: “Reasoning Negative,” “Spectre,” “Abstract,” “an Objecting & cruel Spite / And Malice & Envy” (J17:37-38; E162). Does this imply that for Blake definition is solely nominal? Aristotle’s notion of definition, according to Charlotte Witt, is similar to his notions of knowledge, cause, and principle in that his definitions have features we would not ordinarily associate with the term. First, as the term appears in Aristotle’s philosophical and scientific writings, a definition is of a nonlinguistic item (e.g., of a form or a universal). Definitions, in these contexts, do not convey the linguistic meaning of a word. Second, an Aristotelian definition is causal; for Aristotle, one knows what [a] thing is (i.e., its definition) when one knows its cause. . . . These two features of Aristotelian definitions are connected; it would be nonsense to think of the linguistic meaning of a word as the cause of something. (35)
Blake plays an ironic variation on this nonsensical theme with the curious exchange of names that occurs in the second stanza of "The Fly"—"Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?" Here the poem does imply a kind of causal definition, for the exchange of names effects an actual exchange or merging of identities, as though the speaker, simply by calling himself a fly, could actually become one. By the end of the poem, we cannot be sure whether the man has become a fly or the fly has become a man, and the fact that we cannot tell (or name) which identity has brushed away the other is itself proof of the merger. A similar exchange of identities through definition occurs in "The Lamb":

He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name. (SIE9)

Jesus (whose name is, significantly, not mentioned by the poem) calls himself by the lamb's name, although what he becomes is a little child, which is what the speaker is: so the speaker is called, as the last line affirms, by the name of what Jesus becomes. But the lamb, too, is called by Jesus's unspoken name—the lamb-animal is named, that is, after the Lamb-Jesus, who, because of his lamb-like (and childlike) qualities of meekness and mildness, is named after the lamb-animal. To whom, then, does the name lamb originally belong? Either we are inescapably caught in a vicious circle of origin-less naming or we are being urged to discover some essential nature shared by all these things—human being, fly, lamb—which legitimizes the exchange not just of names, but of identities. And that essential nature is human—the ability to speak or be spoken to; to hear, think,
read, write, and understand. Even the lamb, to whom the identity of its maker is told, possesses a "tender voice" that makes the dumb countryside "rejoice" (SI E8) as though it, too, were possessed of a voice—and in Blake it is, for the whole natural landscape is "this earth of vegetation on which now I write" (M14:40-41; E109).

Is Blake implying, then, that definition is real and causal or that it is nominal? Clearly, a case can be made that he employs both, or that, in more subtle and complex ways, he is attempting to merge the two. Something that does not exist, like the Negation, is by virtue of being named brought into a kind of existence, a purely mental one. The nominal definition of the Negation as all the things Blake calls it is therefore the cause of its taking on form in our minds, existing there as an idea we can contemplate but never organize. Similarly, in "The Fly" a man defining himself as a fly causes him to become one, and though the word fly does not itself give what Aristotelians call the logos of the essence, the "what it is to be" a man, that logos does speak in the fourth stanza through the mouth of the man-become-fly-by-self-definition-as-such: to be a man is to live the life of thought.

The conditional premise of "The Fly," then, read as a definition of human nature, stipulates not just that we ought to interpret the word life as "thought," but also that the life of man is thought, and the want of it—unconsciousness—is what the human being experiences as death. That thought is the principle or cause of life is never argued for in the poem; but if we turn to Aristotle for the kind of rational support that Blake's own Reason refuses to provide, we find a similar argument being made in the Metaphysics, where Aristotle concludes that "life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and
eternal” (1072b25-28, my emphasis). This sentiment sounds thoroughly Blakean, just as Blake sounds thoroughly Aristotelian when he declares (in his annotations) that “If God is any thing he is Understanding. He is the Influx from that into the Will,” and that “Understanding is Acquired” (Marg E602). As Jonathan Lear interprets him, Aristotle too regards understanding as both acquired and divine:

What one comes to understand, Aristotle thought, is that the understanding of first principles and causes is divine. . . . God is himself thought to be among the causes of all things and a first principle. Thus in knowing first principles we come to an understanding of God. For God, this knowledge would be self-understanding. . . . This plausible train of thought has two very remarkable consequences. First, since God is a first principle of all things, and is (at least partially) constituted by self-understanding, it would seem that this understanding is itself a cause or principle of all things. Understanding is itself a force in the world. Second, when man acquires this understanding, he is not acquiring understanding of a distinct object which, as it turns out, is divine: the understanding is itself divine. Thus in the acquisition of this understanding—in philosophical activity—man partially transcends his own nature. (8-9)

And this possibility of partially transcending our own nature through understanding is the whole purpose of Blake’s work, the whole point of trying to perceive the Infinite in all things.

Seeing that we have found at least one person—Aristotle—willing to affirm the antecedent that thought is life, let us go back once more to “The Fly” and stick its wings back on, turning its last two stanzas back into a conditional premise. The speaker of “The Fly” is now caught in the web of an argument, if (and only if) the reader (thinking like Aristotle now) is willing to regard the consequent as a determinable truth, taking the speaker, as it were, at his word, believing that what he says of himself is a fact. If so, the argument will be valid only if, having affirmed the antecedent, the consequent is affirmed also: it is then true that the speaker is a fly, and a happy one, whether he lives/thinks or
dies/thinks not. But here things become somewhat problematic, for even if Aristotelian metaphysics can be made to justify the antecedent, and even if we accept the speaker’s word for the truth of the consequent, how are the two related? What has thinking/living got to do with the speaker’s identification of himself with the, or as a, fly? Or what has it got to do with a man becoming a fly (or vice versa)? If we can’t solve this problem, we face swallowing an either/or absurdity: either a man who claims to be a fly, or a fly who can talk (and reason). Another way of asking the question is, what is the logical relation between the antecedent and consequent? There isn’t one, it seems, but then the absence of such, says logic, does not affect the truth-value of truth-functional conditional premises, “[t]he contents or meanings of [whose] components are irrelevant. Only their truth-values are important. Thus, unlike many other types of conditionals, the contents, senses, or meanings of the antecedents and consequents of truth-functional conditionals are frequently unrelated in any obvious fashion” (Michalos 21).

But if we want to make sense of this man-becoming-fly business—sense that would perhaps allow us to determine the consequent’s truth for ourselves, or at least provide us with more evidence for it than the speaker’s mere (but admittedly authoritative) word—we have to go back to the first two lines of the second stanza, where the human speaker identifies himself and the fly without benefit of rational argument, in the non-assertive form of the question, “Am not I / A fly like thee?”—and again, we face an ambiguity in the word like: “Am I not a fly similar to you?” or “Am I not a fly as you are a fly?” In either case, the question is either tentative, truly questioning, or rhetorically assertive, presuming, as all rhetorical questions do, the unqualified assent of the interlocutor (who is here just a fly). Whoever goes on to finish speaking the poem, man or fly, his or its subsequent
reasoning demonstrates that he himself (or it) assumes the validity of the identification. And yet what, an inquiring reader might wish to know, justifies it? Is thinking to be associated with the man (the purely human, the rational) and not-thinking with the fly (the animal), so that what the speaker (as a rational animal) is affirming is his partial identity as a non-thinking being? “Am not I a fly like thee?” would then mean “Am not I a non-thinking being also?”—that is, an animal with a thoughtless hand, with impulses but not the capacity for abstract thought. But if that is the intention, then this dual nature must characterize the fly as well: it too must be in part a thinking being: “Art not thou a man like me?” This interpretation, while it serves to explain how either the man or the fly might become the speaker of the poem’s last three stanzas, leads us to conclude that “The Fly” is an argument for this duality of nature in everything, that fly and man are identical because they are both thinking/not-thinking beings, both “living” and both subject to “death.” But then the speaker will have to convince us of the fly’s ability to think—and that may prove difficult.

We must admit that the fly is a living being in the conventional sense. But if we take Aristotle’s dictum that “the actuality of thought is life” to heart, or, more germanely, apply the poem’s own equation thought = life in our interpretation, then we might read the poem as an affirmation of the fly’s ontological status as a thinking being, an idea that goes against common sense. But there is another way out here. Aristotle claims that “thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same” (1072b19-22). On an Aristotelian interpretation, then, we might say that the fly is an object of the human speaker’s thought, and as long as he is thinking of the fly—which he undeniably is: the opening two stanzas of the poem are sufficient
proof of that—his thought will share the nature of the fly, his thought’s object; and further, his thought will become this object of thought, become a fly, in coming into contact with it and actively possessing it, because, says Aristotle, thought “is active when it possesses [its] object” (1072b23). In this special sense, the speaker’s thought and the fly it thinks about are the same. Active thought that possesses its object Aristotle characterizes as divine (the religious of The Marriage, remember, call the active “Evil”), and, to reiterate, “in active thinking, the Divine Mind and its object are one and the same” (Lear 300).

While all this helps to explain how the speaker’s identification of himself and the fly might be justified in the mind of someone reasoning from Aristotelian metaphysical principles, it seems to imply that the human speaker is nothing more than his mind, to ignore the obvious differences between the physical body of the man and that of the fly. But Aristotle distinguishes between matter, which is unintelligible, and mind or nous, which is separable from matter: “Actual knowledge is identical with its object. . . . When mind is set free from its present conditions it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal . . . and without it nothing thinks” (430a20-25). Nous makes of man “a creature who bridges the gap between the divine and the natural world. As an animal, he is a creature of the natural world; as mind, he is a totally immaterial capacity to engage in divine activity” (Lear 312). Indeed, Aristotle argues that nous (translated below as “reason”: other translators prefer “active intellect” or “mind”) is most truly man himself:

If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal
things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And... that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest. (1177b30-1178a8)

And a thinking fly is, therefore, happy. As a composite being, man is comprised of matter and form; but since his matter is, strictly speaking, unknowable, and since nous more than anything else is man, the true form of man is divine thought or Mind, that same Intellect Blake calls God and identifies with the Poetic Genius or Imagination. And the speaker of “The Fly,” it could be argued, simply regards himself, his true self, as such.

With the demanding question “What is Man!” Blake is calling for a definition, but from us, contrary to what happens with other words (like spectre), whose definitions he imposes on us. (We should remember, though, that “He who has sufferd you to impose on him knows you” [MHH9; E37]: we will know Blake if we suffer the imposition of his definitions; if we do not, we will still get imposed on, but in the sense of fooled.) How, then, ought we to define man, as Blake uses the term? Well, we know that a man may become a fly or a worm in active contemplation (entering his own image of an object “on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought,” as it were), which can only be possible if, as Aristotle says, thought and the object of thought are the same, if the Divine Mind or nous—the eternal and immortal, authoritative and “better part” of man—and its object are one. If Blake wants to define man as this better part of himself, the active intellect Aristotle says “more than anything else is man,” whose contemplation is “the happiest” life, then we might set down in our books the equation man = divine or eternal mind.
And since \textit{eternity} = \textit{truth}, the phrase “eternal man” (as Blake uses it) would mean “eternal mind” or “true mind,” as would the phrase “true man,” a figure whom Blake helpfully defines for us in one of his earliest self-published works, \textit{All Religions are One}:

“The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (ARO E2). Here poetic genius is a somewhat misleading term: though commonly used as a synonym for \textit{imagination}, one can easily lapse into thinking of a genius as a man in the conventional or “corporeal” sense. But Aristotle’s term for the active intellect, \textit{nous poietikos} (“maker mind”), translates nicely into the English \textit{poetic genius}, the English \textit{poet} deriving from the same Greek root as \textit{poietikos} (\textit{poiein}, to make, create, or produce). As for \textit{genius}—“native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery” (OED)—its affiliation with \textit{mind or intellect} is straightforward enough. So if for Blake “the true Man” is the Poetic Genius, \textit{man} must simply mean “active intellect.”

Similar to the Blakean distinction between active and passive principles of mind—

“Good is the passive that obeys Reason[…] Evil is the active springing from Energy” (MHH3; E34)—is the Aristotelian distinction between passive thought, which “is what it is by virtue of becoming all things” (430a14-15), and active thought, “which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours” (430a15-17). Blake also consistently uses light as a metaphor for the Divine Mind or Poetic Genius. In the frontispiece to \textit{Jerusalem} we see a “man” (usually identified as Los, Blake’s paradigmatic Poetic Genius) entering an open “door” (of perception) carrying a globe of light. In “The Keys of the Gates,” the
"Eternal Man" sets, like a sun, "in Repose" (KG E268), when it ceases to be active, darkening our perception of things, for the sun's light when he (this "sun" is a "man") unfolds it is the object we perceive. Thus everything in Truth, or everything true, is a mental "sun," for "Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light: but thou [Elynittria] / Darkenest every Internal light with the arrows of thy quiver" (M10:16-17; E104), while Ocalythron "binds the Sun into a Jealous Globe / That every thing is fixd Opake without Internal light" (M10:19-20; E104)—presumably the two women's code names alone are sufficient to darken things, leaving "The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, closd up & dark, / Scarcey beholding the Great Light; conversing with the [Void]" (J49:34-35; E198; M5:21-22; E99). And of course "He"—again, a "man"—"whose face gives no light, shall never become a star" (MHH7; E35). The use of light as a symbol of truth is far too familiar to require elaboration, but Blake is not above battening on the cliché. For him, as for Aristotle or the Bible or any number of metaphysical traditions, the "Great Light" is Eternal Truth, and its source—source of the Truth and source of the metaphor—is the "sun" of the Eternal/True Man/Mind. And this Mind or Thought is code-named man because Blake is involved with or against us in the deadly serious combats of truth and error, combats in which "Each are Personified There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [Actor] Agent that is it is a Man. There is not a Truth but it has also a Man" (VLJ E563).

We know that Blake associates the passive principle of Mind with Reason and the active with Imagination/Poetic Genius, the latter springing from Energy, which is defined in The Marriage as "Eternal Delight" and "the only life" (MHH4; E34). If we boldly apply the definition of life from "The Fly" here, we can think of Energy as the only thought, thought
that is eternal delight, its activity that of *nous poïëtikos*, the maker mind of the Poetic
Genius or Imagination, engaged in making—or forging at its furnaces—images of Truth,
motivated by its infinite desire to possess the Infinite Mind that is most truly itself by
creating objects for itself to think on. Reason, on the other hand, remains passive because
of the weakness of its desire for Truth (at least, that is what the anti-rational speaker of *The
Marriage* insinuates): Reason restrains itself from speaking or creating, but (like Aristotle’s
passive thought) it has the potential to become all things when forms are imposed on it.
And since having forms imposed on one’s mind may lead to active thinking and even to
knowledge of the imposer or imposter, we may now understand why the religious reasoners
of *The Marriage* regard it as good to passively obey Reason’s tendency to be imposed on.

Blake’s definition of *energy* as “life or thought” (or perhaps “living thought,” or
perhaps “the actuality of thought that is the essence of the Poetic Genius,” his Intellect-God)
also has parallels in Aristotle. While it is proper to call *nous poïëtikos* “active intellect,”
notes L. A. Kosman, “surely we should expect Aristotle’s Greek for active intellect or active
mind to use some form of his favourite word *energeia* rather than of *poiein*” (343).
Kosman goes on to observe that

*nous poïëtikos* is, as the intrepid half of the [Aristotelian] tradition has
always understood, divine, a fact to which we should be alerted by its
description, with clear echoes of *Metaphysics*, as a being ‘whose *ousia*
[substance or essence] is *energeia*. For just as light is (though in a special
sense) most visible, and thus the source of seeing and therefore of visibility,
so is the divine most thinkable and thus the source of thinking and therefore
of thinkability; light is never in the dark, and God is always, as we know,
busy thinking. (353)

Similarly, in Blake the “sun” represents God’s Divine Mind unfolding the light of its truth
to our organs of perception, but that Truth is perceivable as either an imaginative heavenly
host singing its own praises or a rational disk of fire somewhat like a guinea ("Money" being "The Great Satan or Reason" [Laocoön E275]). This apparent variation in the object of our perception (for we perceive Blake’s truth most truly when we see it vary, now an abstract idea and now a concrete image) is the consequence of the Divine Mind’s self-division, as it unfolds, into two distinguishable mental principles that become the object of our thought: active, actual, positive Imagination and passive, potential, negative Reason. Personified, they become on the one hand Los, the living maker-mind, and on the other the Spectre, the dying devourer-mind, the latter consuming what the former produces. “I am a Living Man,” cries Los (J17:16; E161), that is, “I am a thinking mind”; while the Spectre laments that “Life lives on my / Consuming” (J10:55-56; E154), which is to say, the whole Intellect lives/thinks by its Reason’s passive consumption of the images its Imagination actively creates. When the Spectre describes himself as “for ever dead: knowing / And seeing life, yet living not” (J10:57-58; E154), he laments (as might the reader) his want of thought (because death = want of thought), for here, in Blake’s text, Reason is exiled by its own refusal to speak from the life of the active Intellect; and yet it sees, in front of its eyes, the thought-objects it must feed on and whose energy it must absorb in order to know (and live/think again). And crucially, it sees them in the form of words.

Let us focus for a moment on the Mind’s active principle. Kosman stresses three points about nous:

(i) It is important to remember that nous is not simply a principle of intelligibility, but a principle of active consciousness. (ii) This active consciousness is (an admittedly intermittent) capacity of human psuchê. (iii) The paradigm of this activity of mind is that divine mind whose substance is energeia, and specifically the energeia of théôria—noësis noëseôs noësis as it is called in the Metaphysics: thinking thinking thinking. It is finally, I
suggest, that active thinking, thinking as theoria, which the maker mind makes, a thinking most fully exemplified in the unremittingly active thinking of the divine mind. (356)

So too the activity of Blake’s Poetic Genius or Imagination—whose substance, surely, is the same as what it “springs from”: the eternal delight of intellectual energy—is the making of objectified thoughts that are images of itself, an activity that directly corresponds to the sort of active thinking on thinking that Aristotle describes: “it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking” (1074b33-34). Thus the Imagination we read about in Blake is itself the most comprehensive generalized image of the active principle of the Divine Mind, that very same “Divine Image” Blake’s Intellect makes of itself and alternately names “God” or “Man.”

Because for Blake, no less than for Aristotle, the actuality of thought is the divine activity of human life, and God is that actuality. As Kosman explains, the activities of life are those

which depend upon the separability of form from matter. Thus the reproductive faculty is the ability to recreate the form of the animal in another individual, that is in different matter, and the threptic the ability to take the nutritive power of food and make it one’s own. Similarly, the activities of consciousness are activities of taking on form; thus the aisthetic faculty is said to be the power of receiving selectively form without substratum. Behind this general power of psuchē to grasp, as it were, the qua of being, to separate, distinguish, and discriminate, is the power of nous, the capacity to separate out being and, as it were, to dematerialize it; so it is that hē nou energeia zōē—life is the activity of mind. Nous is also therefore divine being and therefore the archē [source, origin] of that principle which orders the world in its fundamental order, that of intelligibility. (357-58)

But the power to separate out being and dematerialize it is the power of abstraction, which in Blake belongs to the Spectre, “the Holy Reasoning Power,” the “Abstract objecting power.” But we can be more precise and say that, since the Spectre is derived from both
Contraries (as we learned from *Jerusalem* 10:7-16), the power to *abstract* being from its matter or substratum is Reason's, and the power to turn the being thus abstracted into an *object* of thought is the Imagination's. (Hence Los turns the abstracted being of Urizen, or Reason itself, into an object for us to contemplate—and to experience, though we are often too abstracted to realize it—by hammering out a concrete body for him, a body we can "see.") Abstracted from its body, being becomes the idea or form of the thing—and this form, too, is in Blake divine, the "Human Form Divine," because the idea in its substance is identical to that of the human Divine Mind thinking it: and, as Kosman says, "nous is divine being." The quality of humanness Blake attributes to all his objects of thought, all his ideas or forms of things abstracted from their matter—"For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages, / All are Human" (J71:15-16; E225)—derives directly from the essence of the thinking *man* who thinks them, who in his thinking identifies his true self with the form of his Divine Mind or Poetic Genius separated from its material body; and since, as Aristotle claims, "thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, the divine thought and its object will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought" (1075a3-5). Thus, if the Mind that thinks its objects is both human and divine, so must be the objects of its thought. As Oothoon proclaims, "every thing that lives is holy!" (VDA8:10; E51): and everything that "lives" either thinks or is thought, and is therefore divine.

When the hand of the speaker of "The Fly" brushes away the insect's "summer's play," what exactly has he done? In putting an end to its play, he puts an end to its energetic activity, the eternal delight of thought that is its "life." But he does so through thoughtlessness, or the want of thought that is "death." And "death," we know, is a code
name for the Reasoning Negative—or the Negation, the Spectre, Satan (and “Satan,” remember, “is the State of Death & not a Human existence” [J49:67; E199]). In The Four Zoas the Spectre of Urthona explains to Los that “These Spectres have no [Counter(parts)] therefore they ravin / Without the food of life Let us Create them Coun[terparts] / For without a Created body the Spectre is Eternal Death” (FZ87:36-38; E369). Exactly how, then, does Reason/Death in its thoughtlessness kill the fly? It doesn’t, really: the fly is “brushed away,” a phrase that may but does not necessarily imply death (in the usual sense of that word). But since intellectual want (or desire) needs an object to consume, a created body in which to lodge its thought or purely mental self, the reasoning speaker—whose thoughtless hand is a dead hand: he is already a dead Spectre—takes the fly and abstracts its being or form from its unintelligible matter, casting off the latter as indigestible. Such is the activity of the contemplative Mind, the rational activity of abstraction that makes the fly intelligible, permitting it to be grasped, possessed, and understood as an object of thought. Abstraction, then, “kills” the fly as an enmattered being, as it exists in the phenomenal world, but preserves its form or idea in the thought of the Mind thinking it. And this Mind—since it has already abstracted itself from its human body, turned itself into a Spectre—is now free to regard itself and the fly as identical beings. Both are now forms of thought, man-mind and fly-thought identified through substance: the eternal energy of purely mental Being.

But if the fact of death, thanks to abstract Reasoning, hovers about the first stanza of “The Fly,” the rational-empirical “head” of the poem, the possibility of renewed life is introduced in the second, the “thorax” inside which we find the sympathetic “heart” of an imaginative identification. And once this rational separation followed by imaginative
identification between man and fly has been made (or forged), the Imagination, or rather the
“objecting” counterpart of the Abstract Power, takes the fly-thought and creates a new body
for it, a human body, so that it can speak as a man speaks. Fly and man together are thus
resurrected from abstraction/death (the “grave”) in the created body or image of one divine
being (with wings), who prophesies in the third stanza, the “abdomen” where “the food of
life” (objects of thought) is consumed and digested, that its activity of “dancing,”
“drinking,” and “singing”—“excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness,” Blake writes to
Hayley, “for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver
into my hand” (E757)—will continue until some “blind hand,” no doubt that of another
abstract reasoner, shall “brush my wing.” For the renewed life/thought of the divine human
fly as an image created by the Imagination for us to think on is, in fact, an image of
Thought, written down in the form of the poem we are now reading; and its final two
stanzas, the doubled conditional premise we confront in the loins of the beast (“Reasoning
from the loins in the unreal forms of Ulros night” [FZ28:2; E318], as Luvah/Love does), are
its two wings, which we may either brush away by denying its truths, or open outward like a
pair of gates by extracting the keys to its locked-up meanings: life = thought, death = want
of thought. Or perhaps we may use them to power the flight of our own Thought, wherever
it wishes to go.

All this is analogized in “the Litteral expression”: when Blake’s Reason abstracts
the being of the fly from its matter, he abstracts its idea from its material embodiment in the
word fly, identifies the idea with his own Thought thinking it, whereupon the Imagination
returns it to its body, the word fly, but now endowed with its newfound divinely human
attributes of a mental “heart,” “brain,” and “gates.” Thus the word fly alters its meaning
from that of "dipterous or two-winged insect, esp[ecially] of the family Muscidae" (OED), as well as its ontological status as a mimetic image of a phenomenon, an image which the Reasoning Negative destroys, to that of "Thought," permitting the word to function now as an image of the Noumenon. Throughout Blake's text, fly means "form of thought," just as man does. Clearly, the word fly is never really brushed away—Blake's Imagination holds onto its concrete reality, engraving it on his copper plate—and once it and man have been contextually identified by the second stanza, it returns humanized, in the form of a human fly, a divine winged being who dances, drinks, and sings—summer's play again, come back to haunt our passive Abstract Power. For the only part of the fly's composite being the Reasoning Negative has the power to negate is its literal meaning—and, ultimately, not even that, not totally, for the poem's semantic possibilities mimic, as I have tried to show, the shape and form of the dipterous insect. Moreover, as the idea of substance (ousia) or essence or form (eidos), and as the embodiment of the energeia of the Divine Mind itself, the word fly contains something eternal and cannot be destroyed; it becomes, in Blake, an image of that substance which Aristotle confirms "is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things" (1073a3-4), at least in thought.

We may recall that when the Reasoning Negative sets out to destroy Imagination (which it can only do by destroying its creations, its images), it "closes itself in steel" so that, like all mythological shape-changers, it can assume the form of whatever particular cutting instrument it wishes: a knife, ax, plow, sword. And so,

Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. Amen Hallelu[j]jah
(M32:36-38; E132)
Whatever image can be created by the Imagination can be annihilated by the destructive Reasoning Negative: but we must distinguish between the appearance of the image and its true form, its eidos or essence, because if the former reminds us of something corporeal, it becomes for our perceptive organs a false body obscuring the latter, which persists beneath the appearance as the indestructible substance of an Eternal Thought. Just what part of the Imagination’s image of the fly is the Reasoning Negative then able to annihilate? Not the fly’s matter, the ink marks on the page spelling fly, unless it erases the word or refuses to speak it. But Reason can also declare that the word fly has no inherent meaning, no truth, or at least argue that it has no meaning, no “life,” until some mind thinks it. By divine analogy, then, Blake’s words function as the objects of his imaginative world, objects we too perceive, and they are all “men” in Truth/Eternity because they all embody a thought:

For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages,  
All are Human & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk 
In Heavens & Earths; as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven 
And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within  
In your Imagination of which this World of Morality is but a Shadow.  

(J71:15-19; E225)

Only in our imaginations—but Reason, with its “two [brooding] Wings Voltaire: Rousseau” (J54:18; E203), carries us there—can we bring Blake’s words to life, thinking about what we read as we must think about the phenomenal world. And, as Kosman would impress upon us,

nous is the archē [principle, source, origin] of our capacity to do that very act of reading we have been doing. For reading the endoxa is merely a special instance of reading the phainomena, and therefore takes place insofar as we are activated by nous poïētikos. This fact should remind us that the unio mystica of theōria, so important as a theme in earlier discussions of nous poïētikos, can take place in the most quotidian of our enterprises, whenever we are engaged in the activity of seeing how things are[.] (358)
Since the form of a Blakean image of Truth is identical to its substance (Eternal Thought or inexpressible primordial Truth), it is eternal, indestructible. His abstract Reason may cut down the word oak as the signifier of a green thing that stands in the way, but as an image of Thought—of, say, the strong and mighty sort of living Thought that branches ever upward and outward, silently and steadfastly enduring through the ages, providing shelter to those who seek it out—oak lives on in his Imagination.

"[W]hen I speak of substance without matter," says Aristotle, "I mean the essence" (1032b14), and essence is form, for, as he goes on to say,

from art proceed the things of which the form is in the soul of the artist. (By form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance.) For even contraries have in a sense the same form; for the substance of a privation is the opposite substance, e.g. health is the substance of disease (for disease is the absence of health). (1032a33-1032b5)

So too Blake’s Contraries have the same form or essence (Thought) which they derive from the substance (also Thought) of the One Intellect whose self-division results in their appearance, although the substance of one (Reason) is that want of thought (which is also a ravenous desire for thought, Reason having too little or none of its own) that is the privation of the opposite substance (the Imagination’s energy). The disease of the Reasoning Negative—for it, remember, is the mental power that desires but acts not, breeding pestilence—is therefore its want of Thought, a sickness unto death curable only by the Imagination with its infinite desire to think and write. Hence the Imagination is code-named “Bath, mild Physician of Eternity, mysterious power / Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledge infinite” (J41:1-2; E188). Or there is the familiar Los, who, chastising his own thoughts for catching the sceptical disease and refusing to speak, and seeing them “By Demonstrations the cruel Sons of [positive] Quality & Negation. / Driven
on the Void in incoherent despair into Non Entity” (J38:67-68; E186), exclaims: “I see
Disease arise upon you! yet speak to me and give / Me some comfort: why do you all stand
silent? I alone / Remain in permanent strength” (J38:76-78; E186)—that is, in permanent
thought, for according to “The Fly” strength, too, means “thought.”

If both Contraries have the same form, one the negation or privation of the
substance of the positive other, then the word fly, for example, must be an image of both
Contraries, incorporating the two in one verbal body. And this is true of all Blake’s images:
not one is given positive connotations without being given negative ones somewhere else (a
tree may be a “Tree of Life” or a “Tree of Death”). Now, to think of the fly’s substance
with its matter is to think of all the things the word fly could possibly mean. With the
Reasoning Spectre called Satan, one dictionary meaning of fly it would be a mistake to erase
is the metaphorical “a familiar demon (from the notion that devils were accustomed to
assume the form of flies),” as would its use in a transferred sense “with allusion to the
insect’s finding its way into the most private places: A spy” (OED). Of course, to
think of a word’s unintelligible matter alone, of just the ink marks on the page, is not to think at all.

But to think of Blake’s fly without its matter is to think its essence or form, imagining it as a
thought of eternal truth in the soul of the artist—small, seemingly insignificant, but winged.
Finally, to think of fly first without its matter, as a purely mental form, but then with it
again, the new substance (or meaning) now revivifying the old matter, is to think of it as
Blake intends. Given Blake’s principle that “Mental Things are alone Real,” we ought to
answer the second of his three key questions—“O what is Life & what is Man. O what is
Death?”—by defining man as “thought” or “mind,” but with appropriate interpretive
flexibility, allowing thought to assume different inflections or variants according to the
demands of its context as well as the shapes of the knowledge of human nature and being we bring to the text. *Man*, in short, is in Blake a code word for Thought, and an extremely significant one, given the large number of "men" who figure in the text. Indeed, the true meaning of *man* is the key of keys, with the power single-handedly to burst the gates of intelligibility wide open, for *everything in Blake’s universe is, in truth, a “man,” a mental form, a form of thought*: "For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages, / All are Human." And all Blake’s thoughts are images of Truth.

Before leaving “The Fly,” we must address the question of why, in the end, the speaker asserts that he is a happy fly whether he lives/thinks or dies/thinks-not. Surely the not-thinking Spectre of Death, who is forever dying from a want of thought, is not a happy non-being: “my griefs advance also, for ever & ever without end,” he cries in *Jerusalem*, “O that I could cease to be! Despair! I am Despair / Created to be the great example of horror & agony” (J10:50-52; E153-54). But the Spectre is, at least potentially, only one Contrary (as is Los), and the Mind whose Contraries are continually being divided and reconciled is not bound to experience the emotions of either one alone. As both Contraries are necessary to human existence—to the existence of Blake’s Man/Mind, that is—what the Man experiences affectively, his ultimate happiness, depends on feeling what they both feel and thinking what they both think (or not). Let us see now another way in which the Contraries are necessary to each other, this time from the point of view of quantity of thought as opposed to quality.

Back again at the “Proverbs of Hell,” turning to the last one, we discover that we have a choice between two quantities: “Enough! or Too much” (MHH 10; E38). If these really are quantities of thought (but I am arguing that because there is nothing but thought
in Blake’s universe, nothing but mental things, there is nothing else to measure), then they must both be positive. The want of thought that is “death,” on the other hand, would be a negative quantity, something less than enough, either “some but not enough” or “none at all.”

Blake explicitly addresses the idea of insufficiency in a couple of premises from *No Natural Religion* [b]: “If the many become the same as the few, when possess’d, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man” (NNR[b] E2). As the expression of desire, “More! More!” certainly implies a want of thought, some amount less than enough to satisfy the desirer; and since less than “All” cannot satisfy “Man”—the Mind, that is—only “All” can be “Enough!” But if so, what would “too much” thought be? If the Mind that needs satisfying is desirous of either speaking Truth or hearing it spoken (the productive and consumptive wings of the desire), then Truth itself must be the “All” that alone is sufficient to satisfy it. “Too much” would then be something more than Truth, more then Enough and even (paradoxically) more than All, some kind of gluttonous excess, which explains why “More! More!” is the cry of a mistaken soul (who, overdoing it, repeats the word). Since “Truth has bounds. Error none” (BL4:30; E92), exceeding the All is exceeding (or transgressing) the bound of Truth, and wanting to do that would be a mistake—all it will lead you into is limitless error. The term more, then, as the expression of either a desiring want of thought or a quantity that exceeds Truth, refers to both too little and too much thought, both less and more than All the Truth that is “Enough!” to satisfy the Mind.

But too little thought is negative whereas too much is positive, which suggests that, while both are errors (neither is Enough/All), the latter is correctable, conducive to
knowledge of Truth. Indeed, too much is necessary to knowledge, because, as the Proverb says, "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough" (MHH9; E37). That is why "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (MHH7; E35) and not the road of insufficiency or want. Blake's reasoning here is transparent: thinking too much implies that you have already thought enough, thinking too little that you have not; and since "enough" and "more than enough" are distinguishable only by comparison, the excessive thinker already knows his limit—it is just a matter of time before he realizes he has exceeded it. Thinking too much is therefore the folly that, if persisted in, has the potential to make the fool wise. Thinking too little, on the other hand, will never satisfy the mind's hunger for Truth; it will always leave one wanting "More!", never in possession of the "All"; and "If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot" (NNR[b] E2). "Less than enough" or "too little" or the "want of thought" are thus all one negative state of intellectual "death," because, from the point of view of wisdom, less than the whole Truth is as good as none. As Damrosch rightly remarks, we are dealing with a "religious writer... committed to the truth": for Blake, "truth is absolute, and if you do not possess it absolutely you do not possess it at all" (370-71).

"Enough" (or "All") and "too much" (or "more than enough" or "excess") thought are, to repeat, both positive quantities, even though the former constitutes wisdom (knowing Truth) and the latter folly (persisting in error). If knowledge of Truth is the thinker's goal, only these two intellectual alternatives really exist, as the Proverb "Enough! or Too much" confirms. It may be tempting, at this point, to jump to the conclusion that the Intellect, being wise, thinks enough; that the Imagination, with its
infinite desire for Truth, thinks too much; and that hungry Reason, refusing to speak but
devouring the ideas of others to fill up its want, thinks too little; and that Reason's "too
little" is purposely not-mentioned by the Proverb because it is the mark or attribute of the
Negation (which does not exist). But Blake's divided Mind sees things a little more
complexly, his Reason and Imagination having their own notions of what constitutes
"Enough!" Just as their qualities of thought differ in relation to speaking Truth (one
affirmative, one negative), so do the quantities of Truth each one believes it is right to
tell.

Let us assume, first, that Truth is Being because Truth is Eternity (or the Infinite)
and "Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity" (VLJ 563). According to Benoit, this

Being, in our actual perspective, appears to us the unconciliated couple of
zero and the infinite. Our nature urges us at first to identify it with the
infinite and to try to reach it under this form, by incessantly rising. But
this attempt is hopeless; no ascent in the finite can reach the infinite. The
way towards the Being is not infinity but zero which, besides being
nothing, is not a way. (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 241)

With this view Blake's Reason completely agrees: in matters of Truth, as in those of
Being, what is "Enough!" is zero, which anyone knows who has ever tried to think or say
one true thing, only to fall into errors, inconsistencies, and contradictions—negations of
Truth itself. But the Imagination, with its unrestrainable desire for the Infinite, sees no
limit to what might be thought or said about it, no danger of thinking or speaking "too
much"; and so for the Imagination, "Enough!" runs anywhere from one truth to an infinite
number. It sees only saying nothing as an error, for silence not only negates Truth, it also
subverts one's moral duty to enlighten others. Never ceasing to believe in the potential of
relative and particular truths, the Imagination sees no reason not to embrace the whole
“indefinite multitude of truths, aspects correctly perceived by our mind of refractions of Reality on the human intellectual plane” (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 243). As charted below, Imagination and Reason recognize the same two quantities of (thought, written, or spoken) Truth—namely, some or none—but interpret them differently according to their respective relativist and absolutist positions. Both, moreover, deny the possibility of a third quantity recognized by the other, “too much” in the case of Imagination and “too little” in the case of Reason, the very quantities each seeks to negate in becoming one Reasoning Negative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity of Truth</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Imagination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>one or more</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>zero</td>
<td>one or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too little</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simply put, Reason and Imagination regard each other as fools, one for saying too much, the other for saying too little—quantities that, by Blake’s crooked logic, translate into “anything” and “nothing” respectively. Neither thinks the other wise if wisdom means knowing what “Enough!” Truth is, since for the Imagination Enough is Infinite while for Reason it is Nothing; and as long as their points of view remain unconciliated, Blake’s Intellect will remain divided, conflicted, suffering, the potential of its Thought unactualized.

If Reason and Imagination divided from each other are both fools, that is because their views, however individually true, are both partial, mere portions of Existence (Eternity again), not the whole (and the dangers of mistaking portions for wholes is outlined on plate 16 of The Marriage). But a third view is possible, a wise one that
conciliates those of the two fools as “Two bleeding Contraries equally true” (J24:3; E269): as we may recall, “The selfish smiling fool. & the sullen frowning fool. shall be both thought wise. that they may be a rod” (MHH8: E36). While this third view may encounter resistance on account of its initial reduction of Blake’s prolific thought to that poststructuralist evil, a univocal meaning or One Truth, its determination to think both Reason and Imagination wise (surely an improvement over thinking just the Imagination wise, pronouncing it good and Reason evil) in order to make a single rod of them will put in our hands an instrument of correction (if we have a tendency to err), of discipline, chastisement, or punishment (if we disobey the Imagination’s words or Reason itself), of comfort and guidance (while we walk through the wanting valley of a shadowy reasoning death), and, finally, of scientifically objective measurement (if we’re unsure of whether we’re thinking too little or too much). Reconciling the Contraries in a single instrument of knowledge restores them to their prelapsarian state as One Indivisible Intellect, king of the palace of wisdom, whose rod is the sign of his authority. It is important, then, to follow the advice of the Proverb and “Listen to the fools reproach! it is a kingly title!” (MHH9; E37), whether we hear that reproach as Reason’s “You’re thinking too much!” or Imagination’s “You’re thinking too little!”, because if we reconcile these two reproaches in one kingly title, what we will hear will be the one truth that we are thinking not-enough.

The point of Enough, where we would expect to locate the palace of wisdom, does not, however, lie between too little and too much, as logic would seem to dictate. We may recall that three “roads” (Reason would call them “lines”) are posited (laid down) by the Proverbs of Hell, but only one of them, the road of excess, is explicitly said to lead to
the palace of wisdom (and the palace, we should note, is not a road or a line but a point).

The other two, the straight road and the crooked road of genius, are the subjects of the very first Proverb we looked at: "Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius" (MHH10; E38). Improvement has the qualitative sense of “the turning of anything to good account for spiritual or moral edification; specifically the profitable spiritual application of a text or incident” as well as the more quantitative one of “a process, change, or addition, by which the value or excellence of a thing is increased” (OED). Let us imagine, then, a line/road that looks something like this:

Here the point of “Enough!” may be conceived as either 0 or ∞ since that is how Being/Truth appears to the unconciliated perspectives of Reason and Imagination. And it is from this point that the Imagination sets out, a selfish, smiling fool in search of the Infinite, constantly improving his knowledge, accumulating ideas, advancing in spiritual and moral wisdom, and smiling with the joy of conceiving his multitude of thoughts (for “Joys impregnate” [MHH8; E36]), the substance of which is unfailingly the eternal delight of Energy. He is on the straight road, and he travels to the right, selfishly adding “More! More!” to his store of ideas. But he is a mistaken soul, for he is moving away from the palace of wisdom, further and further from the point of Enough, which lies behind him at 0/∞. His road of excess is a road of folly, but one in which he must nevertheless persist if he wishes to reach the palace.
At some point, the fool will begin to realize that his knowledge is no longer improving because "the many become the same as the few, when possess'd": each new idea, when possessed, tells him nothing more than he already knows. The ratio of his knowledge has ceased to alter (or increase), and he is now "stand[ing] still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again" (NRR[b] E3). At this point, he decides "Enough!" If he were to travel any further down the straight road, he would soon see that, having crossed the bound of Truth some time ago, everything he now thinks or says is in excess of it—an error. Indeed, everything he already knows or can hope to learn on this road is an error—and in this sense, too, the many become the same as the few already possessed: all are errors. For the first time, he understands what "more than enough" really is. He understands that (to quote Benoit again) his nature has urged him to identify the All only with the Infinite and "to try to reach it under this form, by incessantly rising"—on wings, no doubt—"[b]ut this attempt is hopeless; no ascent in the finite can reach the infinite." Perhaps for the first time, too, the imaginative fool understands, or meets, his own "Philosophic & Experimental" character, which is now "at the ratio of all things" (NNR[b] E3). Standing still, "unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again," he is unable to move. And because he is unable to move, the fool must turn back, and in so doing he becomes increasingly rational, for it is Reason who, correctly insisting that the way towards Being, Truth, and Wisdom is zero, sets the limit that finally stops his Contrary in his right-moving, straightforward, and righteous course, the limit that teaches him to recognize the abyss of difference between an infinite "enough" and a finite "more than enough."
At the point where the imaginative fool turns back, he steps onto the road that does indeed head in the right direction—that is, to the left, towards the palace—but this road is still, obviously, the road of excess (still to the right of \(0/\infty\)). But its straight portion has now crooked, bending or turning "out of the straight course, or from the direct meaning or intention" (OED, *crook*), and thus turned into the crooked road of genius. When the fool takes this second road he becomes (since he is now travelling to the left) *sinister*: "dishonest, unfair; not straightforward, underhand; dark"; or "erring; erroneous; astray from the right path"; or "corrupt, evil, bad, base" (OED). And since this crooked portion of the road of excess is *without* improvement, he begins reducing and condensing all those many ideas he accumulated on the straight portion to fewer and fewer, negating his former excesses. In short, he thinks and says less and less on his way towards zero. And the more sinister this now frowning and sullen fool becomes, the more he begins to resemble a *knave*, someone "given to dishonourable and deceitful practices; a base and crafty rogue" (OED), the sort of man who will avoid you when you are ready to speak your mind, which is why another Proverb warns that "Folly is the cloak of knavery" (MHH7; E36).

Just as the three roads of the Proverbs of Hell—one crooked, one straight, and one excessive—are really, underneath their varying appearance, just that one road of excess, half of it with improvement (or positive) and half of it without (negative), so too Blake's "Three Classes of Men," "the Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative" (M5:14; E98), are really just one Man/Mind divided into one faculty that posits Truth (or improves our knowledge), a second that remains silent (does not improve it), and a third, the Negation or Reasoning Negative—which is either Contrary seen from the other's point of view—that
negates both silence and speech. But the Three Classes do not fit into a logical one-to-one correspondence with the three roads (perhaps because they are the invention of the cunning Reasoning Negative, whose work is ultimately unorganizable). In fact, one could argue equally plausibly that it is positive Reason, the “Philosophic & Experimental” character of the true Man/Mind, and not its Imagination, who first sets off on the straight road in search of the Infinite and, in becoming crooked, becomes imaginative, discovering his “Poetic or Prophetic character” (NNR[b] E3) for the first time. So let us ask, more simply, what happens when a righteous writing fool turns into a sinister Reasoning Negative, a truly crooked genius?

The point in the road where it crooks—the point which marks the limit the fool reaches when he realizes he has thought or said too much already—represents the moment when Reason and Imagination finally reconcile and begin to work together (again) as one Mind. It is also the moment they reach the tacit agreement inscribed in the Proverb “Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ’d” (MHH10; E38). For Imagination here convinces Reason to come out of its cave of silence and articulate just one truth; and here, too, Reason convinces Imagination to negate its excesses by reducing its multitude of indefinite ideas to that same one truth, but a truth organized into definite form, made intelligible, if not wholly accessible, to a discursive Reason willing to work out its implications. Under the terms of this agreement (or marriage contract), they agree, as we have already heard, that this one truth will be told so as not to be understood. But if, nevertheless, it is understood, then it will have to be believable. And this one truth is the Reasoning Negative’s image of Eternity, the Absolute that is both Infinite and Void.
We have seen Blake identify Eternity with Existence ("Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity"), carefully emphasizing its human quality by maintaining such principles as "All deities reside in the human breast" (MHH11; E38) or "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men" (MHH16; E40) in order to ward off the natural error of analytical reasoning whereby the Principle of Existence is abstracted from its manifestation and rendered unknowable in any experientially concrete or immediate sense. For, as Benoit argues here, Existence is the Principle of its own manifestation, the first cause of all we perceive, including the body in which we are lodged and all the actions it performs:

Existence, seen thus as the first cause of the totality of my 'acting', first cause of all my phenomena, is no other than the First Cause of the microcosm which is my organism, that is to say also the First Cause of the universal macrocosm, which is the Absolute Principle. The apparent absurdity of this existence which wills itself and seems thus not to have any aim, is the apparent absurdity of the Absolute Principle from the point of view of the discursive intelligence which emanates from it and which, in emanating, could not be able to seize and comprehend it.

My existence, seen thus as first cause of my existing organism, and which transcends the totality of my phenomena, is entirely independent of the continuation or of the death of my organism. It is at once mine, personally mine, as long as I am not yet dead (immanence of the Principle), and at the same time not mine in so far as I am distinct but only in so far as I am universal, a link in a chain, and as such identical with every other link. Thus my existence is not touched by the death of my organism (transcendence of the Principle). (Supreme Doctrine 23)

Thinking back to "The Fly" for a moment, we may now see in the trite, almost mindlessly banal sentiment of the final stanza—"Then am I / A happy fly, / If I live, / Or if I die"—Blake's hard-bought conviction, self-mocking and yet boldly defiant of his own ego or selfhood, that he really is no better than a fly, just a link, as the fly is, in the infinite chain of Being, identical with every other link. Benoit again:
If man accepted the relative reality of existence, he would feel identified with the Principle from which he emanates. But egotistical man does not accept the relative reality of existence; his mentality, despising and rejecting existence, rushes towards the illusory egotistical affirmation of ‘acting’ as a distinct being, playing, in regard to this mirage which emanates from him, the rôle, usurped but flattering, of Principle. He thus seeks inner peace in a way that renders it unobtainable. In order to find inner peace, man should reconsider everything, realise the nullity of all his ‘opinions’, of all his judgements of the value of things, free himself entirely by that means from the centrifugal fascination of the egotistical affirmation, realise the nullity of the egotistical notion of living and of the reality of the universal existing. Renouncing all false heavens he is given back to the Earth, he exists consciously, he ‘is in the world’ (Rimbaud: ‘nous ne sommes pas au monde’), and his reconciliation with the ‘ex’ allows him to be in possession of the ‘sistere’. He is the original source when he agrees to be, by his organism, only a phenomenon, a passing emanation of this source, emanation without any special interest and whose individual destiny is without the slightest importance. (Supreme Doctrine 21)

The “blind hand” that will inevitably brush the speaker’s wing one day and put an end to his phenomenal activity—all that dancing, drinking, and singing which constitutes his acting as a distinct being—belongs to the Principle from which he emanates and with which he consciously identifies: the speaker’s own thoughtless hand expresses the destructive inferior principle of his superior Principle (or usurps its rôle?) in brushing away the fly. And since this Principle always functions (or lives) unconsciously in the center of man, his death merely marks the end of its limited play. For there is a “distinction which exists between the principle of our pure thought, which is Infinite Wisdom, Objective Knowledge, the Buddhi of the Vedânta; and the relative, limited play of this unlimited intelligence” (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 161). As the end of the “summer’s play” of relative consciousness, death (like the crook in the road) marks the point of that consciousness’s return to its absolute source or to, in Aristotle’s formulation, the “life and duration continuous and eternal [that] belong to God; for this is God”
(1072b29). Understood this way, death is hardly to be feared, nothing more substantial
than the spectre of an unfortunate metaphysical misinterpretation of one’s own existence:

In existence resides, as we have seen, the Absolute Principle, this All that man does not know how to appreciate more or less, this All that can only be, for man, zero if he does not appreciate it, or the Infinite if he appreciates it. If man does not see any value in anonymous existence, he does not participate consciously in the nature of the Principle, he is consciously nothing, and in consequence incapable of supporting the subtraction which is death (which appears to him as a negative infinity). If, on the contrary, man sees an infinite value in anonymous existence, he participates fully in the nature of the Principle. He is then consciously infinite and in consequence the subtraction which is death appears to him as nothing.

One sees also the illusory character of the distressing questions which egotistical man puts to himself on the subject of an individual after-life. For these questions are founded on the illusory belief in the reality of the individual living and on the ignorance of the universal existing. (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 24)

Since Eternity resides in existence, it is there, in his own, that existing universal man will discover and perceive more than his senses can discover, the Infinite that is his own Principle: the Absolute can be found only in “existing beings or Men,” at the center of one’s own manifested being. But this Absolute Principle is at the same time inconceivable, impossible to isolate within the confines of an image or conception separated out from the whole of Being (which it is), and that means it is without form, void to the senses and to the mind in its natural dualistic functioning. As Benoit contends, this “Absolute Thought, Universal, Unconscious, when it functions in the centre of man, constitutes Absolute Wisdom, incommensurable evidently with any formal intelligence; in fact this Wisdom is in-formal, preceding all form, and is the first cause of all form” (*Supreme Doctrine* 59). From the depths of the obscure intuition that one already possesses this Absolute Wisdom (“The desire of Man being Infinite the
possession is Infinite & himself Infinite” [NNR[b] E3]) arises the mistaken desire to possess the Infinite by way of some aspect of the phenomenal, an aspiration that is hopelessly unrealizable. Hence the way to Being, insofar as there is a way, lies through zero, arithmetical symbol of the realization that, as a phenomenon, one is only “a passing emanation of this source, emanation without any special interest and whose individual destiny is without the slightest importance,” or through what Blake calls the annihilation of the selfhood.

When Blake’s Imagination and Reason finally agree that the All includes both their Enough’s—the Infinite and Nothing—and that it ought to be told in one coherent if enigmatic Truth, their road circumscribes a perfect circle—readable, like a clock, if one travels neither to the right nor the left but clockwise:

“...The hours of folly,” says another Proverb of Hell, “are measur’d by the clock, but of wisdom: no clock can measure” (MHH7; E36): the unmeasurable hour here is not twelve o’clock—which Reason, thinking “void,” reads as the darkest hour of midnight, but which Imagination, thinking “boundless plenitude,” reads as the brightest possible noon—but rather $0/\infty$, what Jerusalem will come to define as the “Limit of Contraction”
(the ultimate non-limit of nothingness) and the "Limit of Expansion" (also a non-limit, a limit expanded to infinity). Every other hour, whether numerically increasing (improving) or decreasing (not improving), is an hour of folly: either too much (relative to 0) or too little (relative to ∞). But this road does end where it began, at Enough, and in getting there, in covering the whole distance between terminus and terminus, it incorporates the All. Blake depicts the single traveller of this road in his two distinct guises in "For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise":

![Fig. 4. For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, plate 14: "The Traveller hasteth in the Evening"; and plate 15: "Death's Door"](image)

Both men/minds require the support of a *rod*, "a wand or stick carried in the hand, such as a walking-stick," which may double as "a stick used for measuring with" (OED, *rod*), because as long as one is still "travelling" (reading or writing), one cannot be thinking enough—hence the advice of another Proverb: "Bring out number weight & measure in a year of dearth" (MHH7; E36). But the younger man cannot have thought as much as the
old man at Death’s Door, even though the latter is in process of emptying his store of knowledge (and if this is the same door of perception that Los enters in Jerusalem’s frontispiece, we must enter into the walled text through the eye of Negative Reasoning), for the younger man is still on the straight portion of the road, heading right. But even for him it is getting late, getting dark—his inscription tells us that “The Traveller hasteth in the Evening” (E266)—and this fact links the young traveller with the older one by way of some lines from “The Keys of the Gates”:

But when once I did descry  
The Immortal Man that cannot Die  
Thro evening shades I haste away  
To close the Labours of my Day  
The Door of Death I open found  
And the Worm Weaving in the Ground (KG E269)

When the fool begins to circle back towards the palace, negating the excess of his accumulated erroneous ideas, the sun’s light (as he beholds it) begins to dim: as evening approaches, he moves into a region of deepening darkness, although he perceives himself as aspiring, “Climbing”—because it is a little past the crooked hour of six and he is moving up towards what he deludedly believes to be twelve—“thro Nights highest noon” (KG E268), noon because the single hour of wisdom—the point of “enough”—looks to him still like the moment at which the sun’s light will be at its infinite brightest (and he is not altogether wrong). But first it must become blackest midnight (“But most thro’ midnight streets I hear”), for he must “close” his labours of thought, reduce his ideas to nothing, close all his organs of perception and their objects, and reach what Blake calls the “Limit of Opakeness,” by entering the door of death. And that door opens into the void state of Blake’s evil Reasoning Negative, whom the reader/traveller finds weaving
(in its worm incarnation) his text in the ground of Truth. And here he finds also the Immortal Man/Mind that cannot die—death being non-existent—or the Principle of Existence whose two inferior principles, positive and negative, simultaneously create and destroy the whole world/text.

"One thought, fills immensity" (MHH8; E36): One Thought: One Truth, One Intellect, One Mind, One Principle—or, by The Book of Urizen's elaboration, "One command, one joy, one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, one Law" (BU4:38-40; E72). While Blake's One Thought possesses the creative power to divide itself endlessly, filling up an immense universe of discourse, its image alone belongs to, is, in fact, the Reasoning Negative, for the Reasoning Negative is the Spectre of Man/Thought, and a spectre is "an image or phantom produced by reflection" (OED). And while his Imagination convinces his Reason that it must live/think by consuming all the words and images the Imagination produces from its eternal energy except this One, his Reason convinces his Imagination it must die/think—not in order to consume, in the apocalyptic conflagration of the burning fire of thought, its own errors, its own creation, its whole universe of images, except this One. And here, in the fourth column of the table below, we find the Contraries' compromise position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity of Truth</th>
<th>Reasoning Fool</th>
<th>Imagining Fool</th>
<th>Wise Reasoning Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>one or more</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>two or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too little</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>zero</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That One Truth that is for the Reasoning Negative "Enough!" is, to repeat, both Void and Infinite, both rational and imaginative.
The enigmatic quality of Blake’s Proverbs of Hell, written by his Imagination under the restraint of his Reason, is the clearest manifested sign of the Contraries’ mutual struggle (sometimes painful, ultimately joyful) for control of their author’s voice (which in Reason’s case would result in a silencing of it, in the Imagination’s, a tower of Babel). This struggle results not in an “undecideable” text, as the deconstructionists might say, but rather in pervasive ambiguity, the natural outcome of dualistic thinking. Thus any Proverb of Hell, such as “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough,” requires at least two (though, if the Imagination puts on a particularly spectacular display of its eloquence, sometimes many more) interpretations, one from each of the Contraries’ points of view. From Reason’s, you will never know that saying nothing is saying enough unless you have seen the expression of your cherished truths pulled to pieces and ridiculed by scepticism. But from the Imagination’s point of view, you will never know that the expression of one truth is enough unless you have produced as many as you can and finally come to see that they are all essentially the same, all limited and finite truths—another reason why the many become the same as the few when possessed, because one can only possess what is limited or bounded, unless (the Imagination would argue) we are talking of the Infinite Self. So while it is true that “The bounded is loathed by its possessor” (NNR[b] E2) if the possessor will be satisfied with nothing less than All, it is also true that “The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite” (NNR[b] E3). But to return to the Proverb, the Imagination might add that you never know what is enough reasoning unless you know what is more than enough of it, unless in seeking truth you have reasoned so long and hard that you have finally bumped up against Reason’s inherent limits. And Reason, of course, can
simply return the interpretive insult: you never know what is enough imagining unless you know what is more than enough of it, unless you have seen your thoughts transgress rational limits, causing your mind to lose its way in a subjective and chaotic world of error.

1Like Benoit, for whom the mind is a kind of “imaginative film” always (except in deep sleep without dreams) peopled by images, Blake includes both the abstract and the concrete in the single term “image.” “An imaginative film,” says Benoit, “of whatever kind it may be, is characterised in one respect by the nature of its images; these may be concrete, particular, based on the concrete reality of the present or not present; or they may be abstract, general (based on general reality, to which the words ‘present’ and ‘not present’ no longer apply” (Supreme Doctrine 46). Images for Blake too include abstract concepts as well as natural objects: the “Divine Image” of God and Man is, after all, “Mercy Pity Peace and Love” (SI E12).

2In “Productivism and the Vogue for ‘Energy’ in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain," Studies in Romanticism 34 (1995), 103-25, Ted Underwood confirms that “in the later part of the eighteenth century the word [energy] rapidly became more popular” than hitherto. “The old rhetorical sense had pretty much been lost, and the strict Aristotelian sense was fading, although it survived among philosophers for a while, and in the Encyclopedia Britannica, which tends to be conservative in semantic matters” (105).
9. The Eye of Vision: Circles, Centers, Lines, and Limits

Beginning with his first self-published works, the three *Religion* tractates (c. 1788), Blake demonstrates a fondness for the principles, axioms, and premises of logical argumentation that is matched only by his fondness for literary forms more resistant but not wholly inaccessible to logic, such as the aphorism or proverb, enigma or paradox. More importantly, he distinguishes between changeable opinion and the steadfastly solid principle (which may nevertheless be "disguised"): "Opinion is one Thing. Principle another. No Man can change his Principles Every Man changes his opinions. He who supposes that his Principles are to be changed is a Dissembler who Disguises his Principles & calls that change" (Marg E613). In *Jerusalem* Los vows to "Create a System" based on two principles, a refusal to "Reason & Compare" and a determination to "Create" (J10:20-21; E153): will the resulting system be one without logical consistency, or one that consistently opposes logical principles? In its creative aspect at least, Los's proposed system is reminiscent of the one darkly described on plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as dependent on an idolatrous kind of abstraction begun by "the ancient Poets" and completed by the Priests, a system "which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar" (MHH11; E38). My view of Blake is that he is far more consistent than he appears, even to those willing to acknowledge a high degree of consistency in him; and "the vulgar"—those who rely on the language in common or customary use rather than the code language his system generates—end up enslaved to it only if they doubt that Blake carries forward his principles unchanged from one work to the next.
So when *The Marriage* warns that the Contraries “Reason and Energy” “are necessary to *Human existence*” (MHH 3; E34; my emphasis), and *Milton* that “The Imagination is not a State: it is the *Human Existence* itself” (M32:32; E132; my emphasis), we ought to embrace the conclusion to which these principles deductively lead: that the Contraries Reason and Energy are necessary to the Imagination. But then they must also be necessary to everything that exists, “For All Things Exist in the Human Imagination” (J69:25; E223). If we follow up the implications of these statements, choosing to believe that these are not Blake’s opinions but his principles, and moreover that they remain consistent throughout his corpus, then in thinking about *anything* in Blake (with the exception, perhaps, of non-existent things like the Negation), we will have to think about how Reason and Energy are necessary to it. Moreover, since all things that truly (eternally) exist have taken on the human form in Blake’s Imagination—“For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages, / All are Human” (J71:15-16; E225)—and since human forms are either thinking beings or objects of thought, everything in Blake is a form of Thought. A “man,” in short, is a thought. Even “human existence” is to be understood as Thought abstracted from its manifestation in particular images. Thought that “lives” is thought animated by the Energy of the Imagination, given “life” by the unalterable principle of Eternal Truth (which I have called by various names: “Absolute Principle,” “Original Thought,” “Absolute Wisdom,” “the Unconscious”), which is itself a Thought operating under various code names: “Jesus,” “God,” “Los,” “Albion,” “Eternal Great Humanity Divine,” “Divine Vision,” “Poetic Genius,” “true Man,” “Spirit,” “Intellectual Fountain of Humanity,” “Divine Presence,” and so forth. This formulation of Blake’s thought makes us capable—unlike
“the idiot Questioner who is always questioning, / But never capable of answering”
(M41:12-13; E142)—of responding on the crudest level to Jerusalem’s simple but plaintive questions, “O what is Life & what is Man. O what is Death?” (J24:12; E169):
“life” is thought, “man” is thought, and “death” is the want of it.

If, as The Marriage implies, Reason and Energy are necessary to the human existence of the Imagination—that is, to its self-expression in thought—it must be the Imagination itself which (as plate 3 informs us) the religious reasoning Angels pronounce good—an Angel, one of their own—if it remains passive and obeys Reason, but evil, a Devil, if in springing from its own Energy it becomes active and (presumably) disobeys Reason. This notion, however, necessitates a revision of the identification of the Three Classes of Men we worked up from our reading of Milton and Jerusalem, which was this:

Positive (True) Reason ←→ Positive (True) Imagination

↓

Negative (False) Reason

According to The Marriage, the religious—Angels who obey Reason—have a different view, one that tends to see the Three Classes in terms of Good and Evil:

Good Imagination ←→ Good Reason

↓

Evil Imagination

When Angels speak or write (which apparently they do, though we never see one speak directly in The Marriage: intermediating narrators report everything they think and say), they must do so as agents or “men” of Reason. Angels are, in short, Positive Reasoners. And in their moral-cosmological account, Imagination and Reason remain the chief
Contraries, but this time the universal evil is not a Reason who refuses to speak, but an Imagination who refuses to obey Reason. Evil Imagination is thus, in Reason's eyes, a Reasoning Negative, for in disobeying Reason, the Imagination negates it. Once again, we are given contrary views of the same object. In the imaginative combats of Truth and Error, Reason refusing to speak in defense of Truth is Satan, a false Reasoning Negative. But in the rational combats of Good and Evil, an active Imagination that disobeys Reason is the Devil—an evil Reasoning Negative. And whether there is an intellectual or any other kind of difference between this Satan and this Devil is certainly open to debate.

On plate 4 of The Marriage, the "voice of the Devil" informs us that "All Bibles or sacred codes"—that is, the writings of the religious or Positive Reasoners—"have been the causes of the following Errors":

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. call'd Good. is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.
(MHH4; E34)

The Devil then proclaims that "the following Contraries to these [three errors] are True":

1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd 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.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight (MHH4; E34)

But if we decode man as "thought" here, what the Devil means to argue is that Thought has no (material or corporeal) body distinct from its (immaterial) soul, which "soul" is in his mind identified with the Imagination (a Laocoön definition confirms that "Adam is only The Natural Man & not the Soul or Imagination" [E273]). What is called the "body"
is actually a portion of the Imagination discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of imaginative Thought in "this age" (the Age of Reason, no doubt). The "portion" of the Imagination discernible to the five senses must therefore be its text, the body of its illustrated writings, and "man" is the imaginative idea of Thought embodied in images, verbal or pictorial. The Devil/Imagination disputes the Angel/Reason's first two principles: first, that Thought has two real, existing, but distinct principles, an abstract "soul" (which seems in this context to be essentially rational, since Reason "is alone from" it) and a concrete "body"; and, second, that Thought's Reason is good while its energy, emanating from the body of its writings and likely to be disobedient to its Reason, is evil. The Devil maintains the contrary: the bodily Word and the embodied Thought are not really distinct, and so not really separable. But Thought's soul is larger than its body, and apparently only the latter is perceptible to the five senses (we shall see in a moment that there's a sixth). Words, being material, can certainly be perceived by hearing, touch, and sight—and, if one is the habit of devouring them, they might be smelled and tasted, too. But the five bodily senses are transformed by the Devil—because "Mental Things are alone Real" in his universe—into five mental senses: "hearing" becomes understanding, "sight" vision, "smell" or "breath" inspiration, "taste" and "the tongue" aesthetic judgment and speech, and "touch" affectivity, our emotional response to verbal connotations or, more importantly, to their intent, which, whether it comes from the "heart" or "head," is always Truth. It is these five mental senses that are the "chief inlets" of the soul of Thought, which soul, I would argue, is the abstract idea of Thought (or "human existence"). And that abstract idea is perceptible only to Reason, the organ of a sixth mental sense, the power that perceives the abstract, generalized concept or universal
form. And since only Reason can perceive the form of Thought abstractly, separated from its written manifestation, it is Reason who conceives of Thought as an immaterial "soul" enclosed in a material verbal "body." So only Reason would try to abstract the Thought from the book, considering the idea of it in isolation from its verbal embodiment, thus consuming its delightful energy while negating the words from which it derives.

But the Devil (as a non-rational or anti-rational Imagination) argues that (1) "Energy is the only life," the only thought; and (2) this thought is "from the Body," deriving or emanating from its text; while (3) Reason is the "bound or outward circumference" of this life/energy/thought. Finally, the Devil posits that "Energy is Eternal Delight": Thought is eternally (truly) delightful; and what we will have to consider is whether it remains so even when the thinker follows his energies outside the bound of Reason (which Angels/Reasoners regard as a tormenting possibility: see the third of their "Errors"), or whether Reason, as the "outward circumference" of Energy, is a bound beyond which the energies of human thought can never pass.

This notion of Reason as the "bound" or "outward circumference" of Energy is going to interest us now. The implication of the Devil's definition is that the Imagination's energies can travel only so far, to a limit determined by Reason, the faculty which draws the line between "Enough!" Thought and the error of "Too much." And, since "Truth has bounds. Error none" (BL4:30; E92), Reason may be not only the bound of intellectual Energy but also the bound that separates Truth from limitless Error. Active Energy, once it reaches Reason's bound, presumably turns passive, obediently making an about-face and returning to the center of the body/text, to the One Absolute Thought at its
heart or in its head. Thus Reason binds the substance of Energy into form, creating the appearance of a comprehensible Thought which our five mental senses can perceive in all the minute particularities of its textual body.

The Imagination, however, can think too much, its active energies capable of overstepping the bound of Reason/Truth and entering the realm of error. And that, in the eyes of the religious Angels and their God Reason, makes the Imagination a transgressor, for to transgress is

To go beyond the bounds or limits prescribed by (a law, command, etc.); to break, violate, infringe, contravene, trespass against.

To break a law or command; to trespass, offend, sin.

To offend against (a person); to disobey.

To go or pass beyond (any limit or bounds). (OED)

The Imagination’s transgression of Reason’s bound further makes it a sinner, since a sin is “an act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God; a violation (esp[ecially] wilful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle” (OED). Specifically, the Imagination sins in refusing to restrain its desire of raising other men into a perception of the Infinite, a sin that translates into a refusal to obey the Mind’s “restrainer or reason” (MHH5; E34), with its divine law of absolute silence. For this transgression (or so the religious Reasoners think) “God [the Intellect-as-Reason] will torment Man [the Mind] in Eternity [Truth] for following his Energies” across Reason’s bound. Only if the Imagination’s desire is weak enough to be restrained by Reason (and therefore is not infinite) will it grow passive: “And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire” (MHH5; E34). And once its desire is passive,
the Imagination will be obedient, good, rational—not rebelliously divided from and opposed to its Contrary Reason, but subservient to it. And since “Good is Heaven,” the passive Imagination that obeys Reason will be a good Angel—but a silent one, “sitting at the tomb” of his dead Truth, with nothing left but the shadow of the desire to speak, “his writings . . . the linen clothes folded up” (MHH3; E34), his book closed and its Spirit departed.

So only an active Imagination of infinite desire, with an unrestrainable desire to speak and write, can possibly be a Devil. Disobeying Reason, transgressing and sinning, it allows its energies to carry it beyond the heavenly realm of “enough” thought into the hell of “too much”—too much being synonymous with excess, “the action of overstepping (a prescribed limit)” (OED). For the Devil/Imagination “walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity” (MHH6; E35), it is not true that the Intellect will torment the Mind that crosses Reason’s bound—not in Eternity/Truth, anyway, but it may in Time—for the eternal delight of Energy remains what it is (the essence of living Thought) even when involved in infinite error. If God is “the intellectual fountain of Humanity” (J91:10; E251), then that “God is within, & without! he is even in the depths of Hell!” (J12:15; E155). Besides, Error is necessary to knowledge of Truth—more than enough must be known before enough can be known—and so if one wants to raise other minds into a perception of Infinite Truth, permitting them to experience boundless error is as crucial to their attaining that perception as permitting them to comprehend an intelligible body of rational thought. Thus the excess of delightful thought that the prolific Imagination produces or creates once it has transgressed Reason is what the devouring power of
Reason is peculiarly fitted to consume (remember that “the Prolific would cease to be
Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights” [MHH16; E40;
my emphasis]). For without the bound of Positive Reason, which is where the
Imagination, sinning, creates its error, the devouring power of the Reasoning Negative
awaits, ready to consume (in flames) the imaginative creation obscuring self-evident
Truth: “Error is Created Truth is Eternal. Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then &
not till then Truth or Eternity will appear. It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold
it” (VLJ E565). Reason, then, may cease to behold the Imagination’s erroneous verbal
creation simply by closing its eyes and ears to it, because “If the Perceptive Organs close:
their Objects seem to close also: / Consider this O mortal Man!” (J30:55-57; E177). But
there are other, and better, ways.

We have heard that the Devil/Imagination regards its creation or body of Thought
as only a portion of the eternal Soul (itself), a portion which it permits Reason to bound
in order to make its invisible Thought discernible to our five mental senses. If the Soul
itself is infinite, it can have no bound, and so what Reason bounds is merely a finite
portion of infinite Soul, doubtless the material portion or body which Reason, in
consuming, mistakenly fancies is the whole (the Devourer “only takes portions of
existence and fancies that the whole” [MHH16; E40]). Nevertheless, the substance
within and without the rational bound of the body/text remains the same: the eternal
delight of energy/life/thought. And the evil “hell” that Reason sees without its outward
circumference is, from the Imagination’s point of view, just a rational illusion. Reason,
deludedly thinking it bounds Thought completely, sees a dreadful, boundless region of
No-Thought—or Error or a want of thought or death—on the other side of its bound.

And this illusion becomes Reason’s reality:

Then those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death
Said thus. What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom
It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful
Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be: even of
Torments, Despair, Eternal Death; but the Divine Mercy
Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen
And Length Bredth Hight again Obey the Divine Vision Hallelujah

(J32:50-56; E179)

Here again, this time as the abstract “Divine Mercy,” the Imagination transgresses or
“steps beyond” the bound of Reason, but in obedience to its own Divine Vision, master of
the dimensions of its body’s inner space, its mission to redeem Thought in the body—the
Word, the Logos—of Jesus (which, as one of its code names, is literally the Imagination’s
own body). For Thought as a whole cannot be redeemed without the redemption of the
faculty of Reason, and it is Reason that remains deluded by its error, its illogical belief
that outside its bound Nothing Is.

According to the Blakean principle that one becomes what one beholds, the
Thought that beholds the illusory Void of Death/No-Thought without its bound will
become void within as well:

From every-one of the Four Regions of Human Majesty,
There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within
Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One:
An orbed Void of doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow.

(J18:1-4; E162)

If the divine body of Blake’s Imagination is the only object available to perception, it will
look like a repulsive void, an error fit only for burning, if Reason’s eye remains closed to
the Infinity beyond its bound. Whereas “He who sees the Infinite in all things [including
himself] sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only” (NNR E3): that is, whereas the Imagination perceives the Infinite Truth of God both within and without its body, Reason perceives only an "outside" of Nothing both without and within that same body (for this is one and the same body of Thought, perceived from two opposed perspectives). And because it is circumscribable, this body is (like all "things") necessarily finite; it constitutes the sum total of the Mind’s presently existing knowledge, expressed in the latter part of the formula “Reason or the ratio of all we have already known” (NNR[b] E2). But if this ratio is all the thinker can perceive, he will not be able to perceive beyond the circumference of his own Reason ("Every Mans Wisdom”—and knowledge, too—being “peculiar to his own Individ[u]ality” [M4:8; E98]), which thus becomes “the Outline of Identity” of the “One” self (“himself only”), whether we interpret that ambiguously placed word one to refer to the “outside," the “orbed void,” or the “outline of identity.” In this roundabout sense, “He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only”: Reason perceiving itself as the bound of Thought sees nothing true other than itself, nothing true within its bound (for it is not thinking/speaking of Truth), and nothing true outside it (because all else is beyond it, unknowable). Thus the bounded self is left an “orbed Void of doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow,” all attributes of the Reasoning Negative (whose characterization as “the want of thought” ought now to make sense). As long as it knows only finite thought (and this is why, wisely, it will not use its thought in an attempt to articulate Truth), Reason cannot conceive of an infinite thought capable of breaching its bound and opening up sensual “inlets” for the soul to enter the body. And so Reason arrives at the conclusion that thought ought to remain bound,
completely shut in and closed off, not free but restrained by it and hence enslaved to it (like all the human forms of "London").

If the Mind's whole view of self and universe, the whole of its consciousness, becomes infected by this pestilential belief, what it produces (its body) will become within what it believes lies without—an unknowable void. So the Mind, believing itself irredeemably limited, fatally concludes that it is subject to death, to a definite end; and the thinker becomes an orbed void of doubt (that there is Eternal Truth), despair (of ever experiencing it), hunger and thirst (for it), and sorrow (at the prospect of being forever denied it). Blake is implicitly arguing that to deny the possibility of true Thought (or, in code, "eternal life"), which includes both finite (or relative) truth and the Infinite Truth beyond Reason, a Truth that grounds and informs all relative truths, is to deny the possibility of thought period, to cancel it out as a self-construction without substance, its works a meaningless cipher. And thus (from Imagination's point of view) Reason traps itself in the self-negating contradiction of being and knowing nothing.

To redeem Reason from its negative state, the Imagination steps beyond its bound to reorient the body of Thought in its relation to Truth by proclaiming that

What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:
The Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center
And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.
And the Center has Eternal States! these States we now explore.

(J71:6-9; E225)

In addition to a region "without" the circumference of Reason—and this "without" is where the "selfish center" of the Imagination is located: its solipsistic creation, its error, its whole universe of discourse—there is a region "above" it, identical to the region "within" it, which is where one would logically expect to find a center. But, no: this
body's center is located *outside* the bound of Reason and *inside* the subjective mental states of the Imagination (which is *not* a state itself but the "Human Existence," Thought itself, eternally true *because* it exists). As long as these states remain subjective, Reason cannot judge them—they are "States that are not, but ah! Seem to be" (M32:29; E132). But judgment becomes possible when the Imagination, in self-sacrifice and offerings of atonement, objectifies its states, turning its thoughts and affections inside out, opening its heart-center into the expanse of a written page: "Wonder siezd all in Eternity! to behold the Divine Vision. open / The Center into an Expanse, & the Center rolled out into an Expanse" (J57:17-18; E207). Not only does the Imagination open the center of its Thought into an expanse (like the "earth") of created images for us to read, it is also the center that opens (the verb is here both transitive and intransitive). In this way, the body of Thought created by the Imagination, given a human form and identified with its Divine Vision (code name "Jesus"), manifests the internal qualities of its creator: its positivity, its real existence, its divinity, eternality, and truth, as a *Laocoön* definition (E273) affirms:

The Eternal Body of Man is THE IMAGINATION.

God himself

that is

[Hebrew for Yeshua] JESUS we are his Members

The Divine Body

*The eternal body of man/thought = the divine body = Jesus = God himself = Imagination:*

and we, the contemplators of its thoughts, are human members of the Imagination's body, too.

Opening centers into outlying expanses is a miracle the Imagination performs whenever it crosses Reason's bound, thinking things that appear to contravene the laws of
formal logic, which demand that judgments refer to an objective sphere that is a portion of all conceivable reality. As Jesus (always capable of replying) affirms by his self-definition: "Jesus replied. I am the Resurrection & the Life. / I Die & pass the limits of possibility, as it appears / To individual perception" (J62:18-20; E213)—to the perception, that is, of the individual reasoner who sees himself and the world as finite. Holding fast to "The Fly"'s thought = life equation, we can interpret Jesus’s calling himself "the Life" as a coded reference to the Imagination's identification of itself with Thought. As "the Resurrection," the Imagination rises up from the dead body or orbed void that Reason creates, or from the grave of all its apparently meaningless, truth-deprived words. These forms it must endow with its own substance—the eternal delight of energy/thought—in order to restore them to "life." And to accomplish this, the Imagination must journey to the grave—it must "die"/reason.

To return to Jerusalem 71:6-9, it seems clear that what is both above and within the bound of Reason is Truth, because everything in Truth/Eternity, or every true thing, is translucent, either in the obsolete sense of "that shines through; emitting penetrating rays" or the more current "allowing the passage of light, yet diffusing it so as not to render bodies lying beyond clearly visible" (OED). Presumably the light of Truth above (the sun's light) passes through the bound of Reason to illuminate the finite, comprehensible thought enclosed within it, although the bound may slightly obscure the Sun/Truth itself, making it appear (from the finite inside) indistinct or imperfectly visible. Or one could simply say that Truth is above and beyond and yet within Reason. Furthermore, because the circumference itself, Reason itself, is "within," it too must be illumined by the light of Truth. In short, Reason is true, which is why The Book of Los
quietly insists that Truth has bounds. Thus every finite thought enclosed within rational bounds becomes, like a "moon" or a "star," an illuminated image of Truth, a light-giving face we will see whenever, in our arduous travels through Blake’s murky, labyrinthine text, we come across something thought, written, or spoken that seems both understandable and possible to believe (and it is Reason’s bound that makes that possibility possible).

But how do we grasp the image of a circle—and we are encouraged by the word *circumference* to think of one—positioned relative to both an “above” (Truth) and a “without” (the Imagination’s “selfish center”? The “above” and “without” must intersect or share a portion of space; but since “without” is more comprehensive than “above,” at least by half, perhaps only half the selfish center contains Truth—the upper half. The lower half, the “below,” would be the abominable horror Reason sees, that illusory hell of Nothingness without light or life or thought. The “below” would be Error, or the orbed Void, or the Abomination of Desolation of the Reasoning Negative, whom the Imagination addresses here:

O thou Negation, I will continually compell
Thee to be invisible to any but whom I please, & when
And where & how I please, and never! never! shalt thou be Organized
But as a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness
And in the Non Entity: nor shall that which is above
Ever descend into thee: but thou shalt be a Non Entity for ever
And if any enter into thee, thou shalt be an Unquenchable Fire
And he shall be a never dying Worm, mutually tormented by
Those that thou tormentest, a Hell & Despair for ever & ever.

So Los in secret with himself communed . . .

(J17:39-48; E162)
From this we may hypothesize that the Imagination's selfish center, or Blake's text, is half illusory, half true—illusory if it appears "without" the bound of Reason, true if it is seen to be "within" it (for in fact "The Circumference is Within"). After all, what appears without is really within: "tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow" (J71:18-19; E225). Here again, then, we are given two possible perspectives on Blake's one work: either (1) it is "too much," a transgression of rational bounds, totally imaginative and therefore irrational, an error, not-true, a false body of thought; or (2) it is "Enough!", eternally true, always "within"—that is, inside our reading Imagination but also within our critical Reason. From the former point of view, Reason and Imagination are separate, Imagination having disobeyed, rebelled against, and broken free of its Contrary; from the latter, the Imagination's energies remain confined within Truth's bound, alternately passively obedient to Reason and actively opposing and expanding its limiting tendency to doubt or despair.

If the Imagination divided from Reason is a Negation ("So Los in secret with himself communed"), it must step outside the bound of Reason in order to see its universal Truth from Reason's point of view, so that what is really within will appear without. From this vantage point, its universe will look like a positive circle (or selfish center) contained within the Negation's black realm, its world surrounded by a hell of "Unquenchable Fire" where mental energy can only burn on in darkness without restraint ("The land of darkness flamed but no light" [J13:46; E157])—that is, burn without form, because whatever is without the bound of Reason (Reason being the formal principle of the Mind) has no form. And what has no form cannot be perceived and therefore appears
invisible. (Some such conception seems behind the diagram of Milton 33, where we see a
central ovoid figure embedded within four intersecting circles, all set in a bed of flames:
see Fig. 5.) This is not to argue, however, that what has no form has no substance, and
the thinker discovers the eternality of intellectual substance when his energies transgress
Reason’s bound and are released, set free to burn without formal manifestation. But his
breaking, breaching, or bursting of that bound also means that his thoughts, his self-
created images, will be burned up in their own unquenchable fires, which rage eternally
(but delightfully) without Reason’s formal (thought-forming) bound.

When in the guise of “Divine Mercy” the Imagination “Steps beyond” the bound
of Reason “and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus,” it takes on the human “sin” of
speaking as a Reasoning Negative, undertaking the journey to the realm of (apparent) No-
Thought, in order to prove to Reason that its illusion is merely an appearance. Hence in
Milton, the Poetic Genius goes to Eternal Death, loosing the Reasoning Negative in
himself in order to burn up the false self and whatever other images he may create on his
way there (and we see “Miltons Track” clearly marked on the diagram of plate 33):

I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
I will go down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks!
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
And I be siez’d & giv’n into the hands of my own Selfhood

I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from my Hells
To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death.

And Milton said. I go to Eternal Death! Eternity shudder’d
For he took the outside course, among the graves of the dead
A mournful shade. Eternity shudder’d at the image of eternal death

(M14:20-24, 30-35; E108)
And the Divine Voice was heard in the Songs of Beulah:—

When I first married you, I gave you all my whole soul;
I thought that you would love me, and joy in my delights;
I sought for pleasures in my pleasures: O Delight, O Delight—
For, thou hast loved me, and made me know thee; for thou art terrible
In my eyes, and art my God, because thou hast cruelly cut off my loves:
For thou didst have no love left for that;
My love depends on how thou loveth me, and not your will.

And then the pleasures which thou hast cut off by reason—
Therefore, I shew my jealousy, and set before you, Death, and hell,
Death, and hell, and all his laws and his cut-off, and his pleasures:
Oh, how much of that you love do you by reasonate?

When the Sodom Female perceives that Milton annihilates himself, that sear, all his laws of her cut-off, he leaves her entire, quite unreasonably: she perceives that the Female, Sodom,
She shall, relent in fear of death; she shall begin to give
Her maidens to her husband: delighting in her delight.

And then, & then, alone begins the happy Female, for
It is done in Beulah, & in the Virgin Dry, in Beulah, in a Dry, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah,
In Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah, in Beulah.

Such are the Songs of Beulah, in the Lamentations of Olof.

Fig. 5. Milton, plate 33.
Milton’s “furnaces,” where he forges his self-consuming artifacts, are also his “hells,” and to reach the Eternal Death (“eternal” because Truth is in the Void, too) of Negative Reasoning, he must take the “outside course,” outside the bound of Reason. But in his selfhood, which includes his body (the poem that bears his name), Milton is a mere Spectre, an illusory mental state created by Blake’s Imagination for our spiritual edification, so that we might experience or “enter into” the objectified error and redeem it: “And thou O Milton art a State about to be Created / Called Eternal Annihilation that none but the Living [thinking] shall / Dare to enter: & they shall enter triumphant over Death / And Hell & the Grave! States that are not, but ah! Seem to be” (M32:26-29; E132).

The transgressing Imagination triumphs over Death/No-Thought by demonstrating to Reason how even images that are consumed or burned up may still remain “Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanishd” (J13:60; E157) insofar as their substance is the indestructible and eternal delight of intellectual Energy. Perhaps it even explodes the notion that there really is a bound, for the Imagination closes its eyes to Reason by arguing that it is a non-existent Negation. If a bound must be defined as the separator of two contrary regions—substance and void, thought and no-thought—then the Imagination sees no bound that it could possibly transgress. Certainly Reason bounds the finite body, but in clinging to the mistaken notion that something essentially different from what lies within that body lies without it, Reason reifies or substantializes a merely provisional image of the Self, which thus becomes a covering for the Truth of infinity and unity, a “hood” over “the Face of my [immortal] Spirit”: “a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway / To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination” (M40:36-37;
E142). In this sense, the bound itself becomes a Reasoning Negative, Negation of the truth that the interior of the Self is identical to its exterior (or Not-Self). This finite Reason can be altered, made positive, but only if the Imagination’s energies, continually travelling in their inexhaustible strength to the outward circumference of the Mind’s thought, keep bumping up against that rational limit, pushing it outwards, so that “the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.” For limited Reason emanates from an unlimited source, and “we must,” as Benoit advises, “establish the distinction which exists between the principle of our pure thought, which is Infinite Wisdom, Objective Knowledge, the *Buddhi* of the Vedânta; and the relative, limited play of this unlimited intelligence” (*Supreme Doctrine* 161). And only Reason can establish that distinction.

Still, the Imagination must convince finite Reason of the existence (“being” would be the better word) of the Infinite, which it will never do if its truths appear irrational. So the Imagination is compelled to reason, to transform itself into its enemy, and become, be, enter into the Reasoning Negative. The self-sacrificial nature of this act involves the Imagination’s voluntary submission to Reason’s government, a return to obedience—“in my obedience . . . I go to Eternal Death,” cries Milton—a gesture of the Imagination’s willingness to restrain itself in order to keep the form of its Thought bounded and intelligible. But in so doing, in making this (self-contradictory) offering to Reason of its infinite Thought in a finite form (its blessing and its curse), the Imagination knows that Reason will eventually annihilate it for being the error it is, thus experientially proving to *itself* the truth of the Imagination’s belief in the boundless burning fire of Thought, of what Benoit calls “the unlimited intelligence.” By remaining within the bound of Reason,
the Imagination both martyrs itself to nothing worse than an illusory death (and remember that any amount of thought less than Infinite Thought is, for an Imagination of an infinite desire for the Infinite, not-Enough, a want of thought that is death to the Absolute) and sentences itself to the hard labour of continually expanding the circumference of Reason. For Reason (which is not the same as it shall be when it knows more than its senses can discover) must be forced to undergo a continual change or alteration as long as it "lives." And that change is a continual outward expansion, a greater and greater comprehension of Truth, which is why, although the "Circumference is Within," "the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity."

The word *circumference*, while it usually refers to "the line that forms the encompassing boundary, esp[ecially] of anything of a rounded form," particularly "the boundary of a circle or other closed curve," may also refer more generally to a "compass, bound, enclosure" (OED). While Blake sometimes invites us to think of his Thought as an unadorned geometric figure, a circle or triangle, he also insists that we think of it poetically, primarily as a human body (the Energy of which Reason is the bound or outward circumference is "from the Body," and this body belongs to "man": "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul . . ."). Blake's body of Thought thus takes on the concrete form of a man if we imagine it, and the abstract form of a circle if we think of it rationally (but the Imagination, with its superior strength, manages to turn the circle into a sun: see Fig. 6).

Blake's most famous pictorial image is fittingly the clearest and most distinct image of his God: the one almighty mental power (Infinite Intellect) or object (One True Thought) of which his reconciled but seriously compromised Reason and Imagination
Fig. 6. *Europe a Prophecy*, frontispiece.
will allow him to speak, if not always intelligibly. It is important to note that this
Intellect/Thought remains safely enclosed within his bound of Reason, except for his
sinister Hand, whose living flesh-and-blood fingers seem to mesh in formal mimicry with
the dead mechanical legs of the compass it holds. The Intellect-God is here frozen in the
act of striking on the face of the Void of Satan or Negative Reasoning the two intellectual
principles of Reason and Imagination from whose antagonistic but complementary
interplay his whole erroneous creation will arise. Again, Blake encloses the unpalatable
truth behind not only this picture but his entire work within a brace of modest
parentheses: "(But whatever is visible to the Generated Man, / Is a Creation of mercy &
love, from the Satanic Void.)" (J13:44-45; E157). What is above is pictured here as
literally within a bound (and Truth has bounds): only the sinister (or evil) Hand dares to
transgress, reaching down into the hell of darkly burning Thought below in order to frame
the fearful symmetry of his imaginative truth, a creation of mercy and love, in a system of
rational marks. In some versions of the picture, a hint of the black satanic void infiltrates
the interior of the circle to surround the figure's bent knee, vaguely suggesting (among
many other things: a tongue, the head of an uncircumcised penis) the displaced pupil of
an eye, rolling in madness, whose transparent lid, fringed by lashes that double as rays of
light, may be shut. Obscuring clouds and radiant light vie for domination of the upper
two-thirds of the design (the balance shifts with differently coloured copies), while in the
lower third there is a stark contrast between the overwhelming blackness and the two ray-
of-light legs of the compass breaching it. A compass is of course an instrument used to
describe circles; but Blake uses the image of one to invoke or echo less material meanings
of the word: "circumference, circle, curve; bound," as well as the figurative sense of
“bounds, limits, as in within, beyond the compass of (sight, knowledge, power, ability, etc.); range or extent within limits,” specifically “intellectual range” (OED, compass).

Blake, then, depicts his Intellect/ Thought/ God in the act of describing an inherently false image of his true circular self upon the black void of error—that Non-Entity we have come to associate exclusively with the Reasoning Negative, Spectre of the true Man.

Blake’s whole text is an error, an ex-centric negation of both his Truth and the truth of himself, an infant sorrow that would never have been born had he not broken his Reason’s prohibition against speaking truth out of pity for us erring human beings. So he errrs for our benefit, confining his entire being within a limited truth that we might bring within our intellectual compass—a truth our blind hands can grasp. “Therefore,” concludes There is No Natural Religion, with a logic perfectly befitting Blake’s system, “God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is” (NNR[b] E3).

God’s sinister hand (likely the same thoughtless hand that brushes the wings of flies or men and generally destroys created things—and we cannot see what his dexter hand is doing, his right arm being completely hidden), in reaching down to us through the agency of its living compass, breaches (sins against) his Reason’s bound (his own law), prompting Leutha (who, we may recall, is herself a sin) to lament that “The Sin was begun in Eternity, and will not rest to Eternity / Till two Eternitys meet together, Ah! lost! lost! lost! for ever!” (M13:10-11; E107). One of these two “eternities” or truths is Blake’s, the other is ours (ultimately they are one). But they are also the void Truth and the infinite Truth, which can meet together only in the Reasoning Negative’s One Truth. So near the end of Jerusalem Los encourages Jesus (that is, the Imagination encourages itself) to take on the form of the Reasoning Negative and enter into its body/text, saying
“Come Lord Jesus take on thee the Satanic Body of Holiness” (J90:38; E250). Similarly, Los tries to inspire courage in his fearful erring thoughts (for dreadful ills can follow from wrong speech) on the strength of the principle that Negative Reasoning cannot destroy them if their substance is eternal, if the substance of all error is Truth, or if an error is merely a truth deformed by a lack of understanding (or want of thought) on the side of either its formulator or its receiver. Los demonstrates this particular principle to his son-thoughts by a sudden and miraculous Christophany, incorporating the Negation and its invisible “Body of Doubt” into his own divine body before their very eyes, proving that the Is-Not cannot negate his substantial self:

Fear not my Sons this Waking Death. he is become One with me
Behold him here! We shall not Die! we shall be united in Jesus.
Will you suffer this Satan this Body of Doubt that Seems but Is Not
To occupy the very threshold of Eternal life. . . .

(J93:18-21; E253)

But to some perceivers, when Blake’s Imagination “dies”/reasons and “passes the limits of possibility” (the bound of Reason, renamed in the last line of the last quotation the “threshold” of eternal Thought) and enters the realm of what appears to Reason to be Thought’s contrary (No-Thought), what it creates there may appear to be the opposite of what it really is. Indeed, crossing over the bound that distinguishes the region of “Enough!” (or bounded Thought) from that of “Too much” (or excess Thought) brings about the change of one contrary into another: hence “Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps” (MHH8; E36). Excess of Thought, one might venture, thinks not. So, too, “Joys laugh not! Sorrows weep not!” (MHH9; E37) when they have crossed Reason’s bound: excess of joy laughs not because it weeps, and excess of sorrow weeps not because it laughs. So to perceivers outside Blake’s body, Jesus may look like Satan,
Good Imagination like Evil Reason, a radiant truth like an unfortunate error or a lapse in the laser-sharp focus of Blake’s fully awakened attention. But what the reader really sees, no matter who he may be and whether he knows it or not, is one reasoning Imagination or imagining Reason (impossible to distinguish) producing an ever-proliferating chaos of fragmentary images of its One Spectrous Thought from its own centre, the location of its self-contradictory refusal and determination to speak:

So spoke the Spectre to Albion. he is the Great Selfhood Satan: Worshipd as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth Having a white Dot call’d a Center from which branches out A Circle in continual gyrations. this became a Heart From which sprang numerous branches varying their motions Producing many Heads three or seven or ten, & hands & feet Innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator Who becomes his food[::] such is the way of the Devouring Power

(J29:17-24; E175)

The “he” of the first line is probably the Spectre, but he could also be Albion (and therefore is Albion, if we abide by the Blakean eternal principle about the realization of possibilities, that what seems to be, is, for those to whom it seems to be). But the contemplator of the Reasoning Negative’s text cannot actually see either referent of the pronoun, which the text itself is therefore compelled, mercifully, to define for us. All the contemplator does see at first is a dizzying verbal chaos produced initially from the Spectre’s one center, which keeps transforming, first into one energetically outward-gyrating circle, then into one truth-intending “heart,” which then branches out into “many” rational “heads” (equally truthful), “three or seven or ten,” finally terminating in “hands” and “feet.” Only the last item, the hands and feet, cannot be counted, for they appear “Innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator,” who then becomes the “food” of the text he is contemplating. But what does this mean? Apparently the Spectre
produces something—his white-dot-center-heart-heads—for us (on the outside) to contemplate, a body of Thought both positive (because it does appear) and prolific (because it is alive/thinking and growing/generating more thoughts). But its unfortunate contemplator joins in the production of the Spectre’s chaotic body at the point of its extremities, its hands and feet, entering into the work at its circumference. And then it becomes the contemplator’s desire, his will, to see what he wants to see—something infinite perhaps—that sends the work spiralling out of numerical control, at which point it turns on and devours him. While this unfortunate contemplator is undoubtedly Blake’s reader, he is also Blake himself, reading and thinking about what he writes and, simultaneously, writing down what he contemplates, the victim of his own inability to formulate an infinite conception.

To avoid its clutches, we must identify the negatively reasoning Spectre as the abstracted fused form of the prolific energy of Imagination and the devouring power of Reason (first introduced by The Marriage as the Prolific and the Devouring), two faculties combined in and by abstraction into one horrific “vast Polypus / Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing / A self-devouring monstrous Human Death Twenty-seven fold” (M34:24-25; E134). The Reasoning Negative (which is also the deep-down “Sea of Time & Space” in which it grows) is self-devouring because it consumes what it produces, producing and consuming in one unbroken circular movement; and what it produces (being a selfish centre) are endlessly varying, endlessly proliferating images of itself. To avoid being devoured by this polypus (the “unfortunate” part of contemplation), the reader must devour it in turn, reversing its tendency to expand infinitely outward by gradually contracting or reducing all those innumerable particular
images (beginning at the extremities) back to a digestible number of general forms or ideas—first ten, then seven, then three (Two Contraries and the Reasoning Negative)—until he reaches the selfish centre, the central "white dot" or One Intellect/Thought, which, still a little hungry from want of thought, he swallows whole, relishing his "Vision; a perfect Whole" (J91:20; E251). In brief, the whole work must be devoured, portion by portion—the very good reader of Blake longs to possess the good in him, and so seeks to "gratify ravenous Envy; / That rages round him like a Wolf day & night without rest" (M41:17-18; E142)—until there is Nothing left to contemplate, except perhaps the truth that if God is anything, he is Understanding, the unseen flame of which burns, more or less brightly, in us all.

But the contemplator of Blake's Spectre's circle becomes the food of what he consumes insofar as the reader's reasonings about Blake are anticipated by Blake's own reasonings. The infinitely various particular paths that the reader may take in response to the text's difficulties have only so many general forms, and all of them, if they proceed in ignorance of the code, will be in error. Once the reader begins to write down his solutions, even if he is merely making notes in an effort to orient himself, he is producing something ("food") on which Blake's Spectre can subsequently prey. For the Spectre's nature is to consume error, and when he faces a reader spinning interpretations in ignorance of his code, he will have plenty to feed on. Blake remains one step ahead of his reader as long as their two eternities have not yet met together, as long as the reader hasn't yet broken his code. But the moment he does, the relationship between author and reader, this mutual devouring that eats up the false body of the barrier between them, turns into its contrary and becomes the wholly positive, mutually affirmative, and
delightfully congenial conversation possible whenever the reader contemplates the image of One Truth at the center of Blake’s thought, at its “heart” or in its “bosom”: “When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter / Into each others Bosom (which are Universes of delight) / In mutual interchange” (J88:3-5; E246). Here the passive contemplation imposed by the Spectre on his reader transforms itself into an active conversational “interchange,” a loving, knowledgeable intercourse. What makes the difference? The imposition itself: knowing that one is being imposed on, and that the instrument of that imposition is a code. For “He who has sufferd you to impose on him knows you” (MHH9; E37): intelligible conversation depends on knowledge, and congenial conversation on mutual sufferance.

From the point of view of Blake’s Imagination—who is, remember, responsible for the definition of Reason as the bound or outward circumference of Energy—it is not really possible to overstep the bound of Reason if Reason will only concede that error may be recontextualized and reinterpreted from another, even opposite, perspective. To bring about this concession, the Imagination must force Reason’s circumference to expand outward by degrees, which it accomplishes each time the resistible force of its energies meets the movable object of Reason’s bound—or its “horizon” or “rocky shore” or “chains,” these “chains” being “the cunning of weak and tame minds. which have power to resist energy” (MHH16; E40). But having done their work, or having been resisted, the Imagination’s energies are compelled by the bound to return to the center (“heart” or “bosom”) of Thought, where, renewing their immortal “life,” they gather the strength to emanate back out again and expand Reason’s circumference a little further. By this continual expansion and contraction, very like the beating of a heart, the
Imagination’s pure informal active energy is constrained by Reason’s formal power, its force of inertia, resulting in the formation of a (limited) thought, and then are released again to form new and more comprehensive thoughts. But the resulting form is always human—thoughts are always “men.” And the text repeatedly identifies them as such for us, until by the end of Jerusalem we have seen

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

(J99:1-4; E258)

“Human Forms” are mental energies manifested in form (using that word in its Greek sense); and because this form is always determined by the bound of Reason imaginatively conceived as circumscribing a human body, it must be understood as Form (Thought) in the form (shape) of a man. In the passage above, we see personified thoughts circling through the textual body (a universe of discourse) of their creator, the true Man/Mind, like planets orbiting the central “sun” or Vision of Truth in his “bosom”: “Then the Divine Vision like a silent Sun appeard . . . and in the Sun, a Human Form appeard / And thus the Voice Divine went forth upon the rocks of Albion” (J43:1-5; E191). The Sun itself is “silent,” unable to speak until it takes on the human form. But the human form of Thought is infinitely transformable, infinitely variable, as All Religions are One makes clear: “all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various)” (ARO E2). So Man is transformed into Time by definition: “Time & Space are Real Beings a Male & a Female Time is a Man” (VLJ E563). If time = man and man = thought, we are forced to deduce (constrained ourselves by the binding chains of Reason) that time = thought. Thus we see Blake’s human-formed thoughts, while “living going forth & returning wearied,” seamlessly
transforming themselves into units of time, "Into the Planetary lives of Years Months
Days & Hours." *Time* thus becomes yet another code word for "thought," infinitely
divisible into minute (with a pun) particulars of the same general category.

What the final plate of *Jerusalem* tells us, then, is that all Blake's thoughts—
which thoughts by this point of "Enough!" (Blake pretty well stopped writing when
*Jerusalem* was done) have all been identified, both as what they really are and with each
other through identity of form and essence—"live" (think or are thought) by going forth
to the circumference of the rational body/circle that contains them, where their exertions
against Reason expand it towards Truth, after which they return wearied, exhausted, their
energy spent, to their source at the center of the Mind, where they "repose," no longer
active but renewing their "strength" (since thought = strength) in their Principle of
Immortal Life/Thought. And then they awaken to venture out once more, again labouring
to expand Reason's bound on behalf of Truth, thus transcribing an eternal circle, the path
of whose orbit always passes through the centre (giving rise to the diagrammatic vision of
*Milton* 33).

But we are also told that "there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of
Translucence. / In the bosom of Man for ever from eternity to eternity" (*J42:35-36;
E189). If a circumference expands without limit it must eventually burst, annihilating the
body it circumscribes, at least as a distinct entity, as a separate and contained self. But
what if the expanding circumference were to bound a center somewhat like the pupil of
an eye, whose circumference can expand to admit light against the constraining outer
circle of the iris? We must remember that "The Circumference is Within: Without, is
formed the Selfish Center": the selfish center would be analogous to the iris, itself a
circular center within the sphere of the eye. But if “the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity. / And the Center has Eternal States! these States we now explore,” which of these two centers would we be exploring? On the one hand, we have the black hole of the pupil, analogous to Reason’s silent void, and, on the other, the iris, analogous to the positive manifestation of the Imagination’s muscular strength. And which is the center or “bosom” of Man/Thought in which Eternity/Truth resides? For Blake’s “great task” is “To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man [thought] inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination” (J5:18-20; E147). These ambiguous lines can be interpreted to mean that the Imagination corresponds to God’s “bosom” (a positive, like the iris) and to Eternity/Truth ever expanding within it; or that, while the former part of the correspondence holds, the latter does not, and Eternity/Truth should rather be envisioned as the pupil/black hole/Void expanding inside the bosom/iris, which, after all, does not appear to expand itself. And the pupil/ Void would correspond to the Reasoning Negative: Truth now resides in Nothing, and the Imagination, reasoning, bounds it (for we must remember, too, that “Evil is the active springing from Energy,” and what can spring can also bound). Or perhaps the bound of Reason circumscribes only the Ineffable at the center of Thought, and all the positive thoughts beyond it are free to expand infinitely, without limit. Or are there two circumferences of two centers? The Reasoning Negative does have “a white Dot call’d a Center from which branches out / A Circle in continual gyrations,” and the Imagination is the “Bosom of God.” Or there may be only one center beneath the varying positive and negative images of it, the Imagination’s “bosom” simply being the positive image of the Reasoning Negative’s gyrating and,
ironically, negative "white dot": stripped of all connotative qualities, they are both just a
center. And perhaps there is only one circumference also, the bound of Reason
circumscribing One Central Imaginative Truth.

In any event, there are various ways to conceive of this bound, innumerable at the
will of its unfortunate contemplator: as the circumference of a circle; the outline of a
human body; the horizon where the earth meets the sky, or what Blake calls "the
Mundane Shell"; the outline of a pupil, iris, or eyeball; or of a sun or star, planet or globe,
or a clock or wheel, a guinea or disk of fire, a heart or brain. Or the bound may figure as
the outline of anything that encloses something else: a sheepfold, a walled city, a green, a
house, an ark, a dungeon, a cavern, a crypt, a grave, a furnace. Or it may be a mere line—
or a path, a road, a way, a method—whose shape, direction, and terminus are all unknown
to us. But the abstract idea of a bounding line—well, that idea is very important to Blake,
and hence to us, because the Almighty Artist (or Poetic Genius) whose intention is to
think, write, and speak truth from his heart (or head) always bounds the infinite energies of
his ideas with a distinct line, giving them a definite and determinate form, a fact Blake
announces with suitably didactic urgency in his Descriptive Catalogue:

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more
distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art;
and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation,
plagiarism, and bungling. . . . The want of this determinate and bounding
form evidences the want of idea in the artist's mind, and the pretence of the
plagiary in all its branches. How do we distinguish the oak from the beech,
the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish
one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its
infinite inflexions and movements? What is it that builds a house and plants
a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes
honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty
in the actions and intentions. Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist. (DC E550)

Few, if any, readers of Blake have claimed to have seen his Divine Vision, and that fact alone ought to prompt us to question whether the Vision has or ought to have this “determinate and bounding form.” Is it there, in sharp and distinct outline, and we have somehow failed to see it? Or is our collective failure rather evidence of its lack of form, of “weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling,” and hence of “the want of idea” (want of thought) in Blake’s mind—all of which would make his Vision, by his own terms, dead, the product of bad art and bad/negative/evil reasoning. F. R. Leavis, for one, sees no determinate vision and consequently decides that

Blake can no more know, or imagine, what follows the reversal of the Fall than he can what preceded it. In essence as he posits it (and, for all his offers of a transcendentalizing ecstasy, he can do no more than posit), it is the restoration of the Eternal Man—who is also Woman, for in Eternity the sexes are abolished. . . . For us, of course, it isn’t the supreme reality attained at last, the really real; it is a plunge into wordy and boring unreality. (82)

Not everyone would agree with Leavis’s assessment of Blake’s ability to hold a reader’s interest—as Blake reminds Trusler, “Every body does not see alike” (E702)—but a significant number would: while the Songs remain popular, not too many even now have the taste or hardihood for Milton and Jerusalem. And Leavis is correct to complain that, despite the effusively tetchy conviction with which Blake speaks of Eternity, he is impotent to reveal it, even his vision of it, and make us see it, too. Or perhaps he does reveal it, but it bears no resemblance to the sort of truth Leavis (and those who see as he does) expected to see.
Indeed, Blake's bounding line is (and this would come as a big surprise to Leavis) the line of Reason imaginatively drawn, and however various it seems consistently to separate a positive region from a negative one, an "above" from a "below," an "inside" from an "outside," a "within" from a "without," a truth from an error, all of which function as variations on the theme of the contemplative need to separate an existing, living reality from a dead or non-existent void, somewhat as the pupil's circumference separates the muscular iris from its own black void. But it is into this central opening that Blake's light must travel—we, after all, are his pupils, too—just as "the Divine Vision appeared with Los / Following Albion into his Central Void among his Oaks" (J44:19-20; E193), which means roughly, in plaintext, that the Light of Truth appears with the Imagination, both following the Intellect into the empty center of its Thought, where Truth resides guarded by silent Reason and protectively surrounded, or shaded, by the Imagination's images of it ("oaks" are a kind of "tree," an image of Truth that, we may recall from the Proverb of Hell, wise men and fools do not see alike). If we are being called upon to open our "immortal Eyes" (mental eyes) inwards into Blake's worlds of Thought, to look towards an inner centre where we will find silent Truth/Eternity, "ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human [and Blake's own] Imagination," and if "the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity," then we may have to expand our Reason not outwards but inwards. Perhaps the limitless expansion (leading to no perceptible Truth) must be followed by a contraction; or perhaps the pupil, dazzled by too much light, ought to close up tight, so that our mental eye is as Milton describes it, "a little narrow orb closed up & dark / Scarcely beholding the great light conversing with the Void" (M5:21-22; E99; see also J49:34-35; E198). But this interpretation seems utterly
mistaken, a horribly wrong turn, quite backwards: surely Blake would not advise us to seek Truth by shutting out its great light and conversing instead with the void (or is it the light itself that we must see in the act of conversing with the void?). Shouldn’t we rather expand the circumference of the pupil to allow more light in?

Remember that from the Reasoning Negative’s center, its “white dot” (contrary of the black dot that is a proper pupil), there branches out (or expands outward) a circle in “continual gyrations” of unrestrained Energy, resulting in a “frowning Chaos” (J29:25; E175) that first confuses and then devours the mind of its unfortunate contemplator. Apparently, if our mental eye seeks Truth in an outward direction, looking for it in the world of perceptible objects or images, it will soon get lost in the wordy and boring unreality of the selfish center that lies without the bound of Reason, erring or wandering through realms of excess or “more than enough” thought, where—since Error has no bounds—there is no limit to mental expansion. But if the Mind were to expand its bound inward—contract it—its comprehension would become less and less eccentric and eventually coincide with the Central Void, unconscious Principle of the thinker’s being, which in Blake is at once the home of his Reason’s ineffable Truth and the spring of all his Imagination’s images of the Infinite.

Benoit elucidates this process of contraction:

The processes which condition the satori-occurrence, or more exactly the suppression of the processes which condition our ignorance of our intemporal state of satori, are uniquely a matter of comprehension (what the Tibetans call ‘the penetrating vision’). Comprehension acts by devalorising images for me, not such and such images and then such and such others but the imaginative-emotive process as a whole and in general.
For many years my credulity has been great as regards my inner cinema; I 'played up' as one might say; I believed in it; I believed in the so-called reality of what my disintegration-process showed me. (Supreme Doctrine 191-92)

By “disintegration-process” Benoit means the more or less gradual disintegration of one’s mobilised informal energy (mobilised by the contact of Self with Not-Self) in “veritable short-circuits during which the energy is consumed in producing organic phenomena and mental images” (Supreme Doctrine 181), the latter of which Buddhist philosophy calls samskaras:

The samskaras have substance and form; their unique substance is my vital energy in process of disintegration. Their form, on the contrary[,] is not mine, it is foreign to my form, to the form of my organism, and consists of mental images of infinite variation. On account of these foreign forms the samskaras are comparable with foreign bodies that my organism ought to reject. They are formations in some degree monstrous, heterogeneous, lacking in inner architectural harmony, non-visible: and this is by no means astonishing since they manifest the disintegration of energy. (Supreme Doctrine 181)

Samskaras are not necessarily negative images, but the good (pleasant) or evil (repulsive) quality of their appearance does not alter their status as foreign invaders of consciousness. Samskaras are negative in the sense that they constitute a wastage of vital energy on the plane of form (Blake's evil “corporeal”), energy that would, if saved from this short-circuiting disintegration in imaginative-emotive ruminations (or broodings) and allowed to accumulate in the interior of one's being (without, however, taking on a perceptible form), eventually waken the sleeping Absolute Thought at the centre of the Unconscious.

To the extent that Blake’s words seek to represent these monstrous formations by objectifying mental states that “are not but seem to be,” to the degree that he spreads out
his own imaginative-emotive processes across the pages of his earth/text, they appear to
us manifested, visible, as images of Negative Reasoning:

There is the Cave; the Rock; the Tree; the Lake of Udan Adan;
The Forest, and the Marsh, and the Pits of bitumen deadly:
The Rocks of solid fire: the Ice valleys: the Plains
Of burning sand: the rivers, cataract & Lakes of Fire:
The Islands of the fiery Lakes: the Trees of Malice: Revenge:
And black Anxiety; and the Cities of the Salamandrine men:
(But whatever is visible to the Generated Man,
Is a Creation of mercy & love, from the Satanic Void.)
The land of darkness flamed but no light, & no repose:
The land of snows of trembling, & of iron hail incessant:
The land of earthquakes: and the land of woven labyrinths:
The land of snares & traps & wheels & pit-falls & dire mills:
The Voids, the Solids, & the land of clouds & regions of waters:
With their inhabitants: in the Twenty-seven Heavens beneath Beulah:
Self-righteousnesses conglomering against the Divine Vision:
A Concave Earth wondrous, Chasmal, Abyssal, Incoherent!

(J13:38-53; El57)

Caught up in Blake’s imaginary world, the reader is snared and trapped inside an
exemplary image of what he ought to reject: his dangerous fascination with his own inner
world, his misguided belief that this disintegration of his energy represents his “life.”

Benoit continues:

According as my intellectual work and my understanding advance my
credulity diminishes, I fall less and less into the trap, I believe less and less
that it [my disintegration-process] is what matters for me. In this degree is
reduced the fascination that my images exercised on my attention
maintaining it in a passive mode of functioning. And my attention, in the
measure in which it detaches itself from my imaginative world, returns
spontaneously, following its normal orientation, towards the source of my
being, towards the informal energy which is the reality of my life (and no
longer towards the formal images which represent the continual
m miscarriage of my life). This movement of conversion is unconscious,
since my attention is without an object in the measure in which it operates
in the active mode. All that I observe in myself is a progressive
dimination of the apparent reality of my inner imaginative world (the
evolution towards the satori-occurrence is . . . an apparent descent, an
apparent involution). (Supreme Doctrine 192)
The way towards Being is downwards, towards zero, and so in Blake, within the Imagination's bosom/center, the bound of Reason must expand inward, contracting, forcing our mental energies back along the line of their normal orientation towards the source of the Man/Mind's being, towards the source of informal energy that is, as Benoit claims and Blake too, "the reality of my life." This rational contraction works also to reduce the chaotic multitudes of already generated particular images to more and more generalized ones, negating the excess, burning up the errors, and going forward to the final limit, the one circular idea of Eternal Truth. Reason then becomes its circumference, which is the outline of the identity of Blake's true self, his "real and immortal Self" (M15:11; E109), the one that identifies with the Absolute source of its own energy, not with the selfhood as defined by the mortal and physical body.

But in contracting itself thus, the self becomes again an "orbed Void," though hardly one of "doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow." The contraction of Reason's circumference to an apparent nothing—closing the pupil completely shut—leaves the eye of the Mind without a single image of Truth in it, with the exception of those empirical ones continually passing in and out. In compensation, the Mind finds itself in direct contact at last with the source or intellectual fountain of all images: the "Divine Presence" (M32:11; E131) or "the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally" and which Blake misleadingly calls the "Human Imagination" itself (M32:19-20; E132). What Blake really means by the term imagination (coupled with Reason, of course) is the original Mind behind our surface consciousness, the No-Mind that is the Principle of the image-making mind and indeed our own nature, for as Benoit points out, "[o]ur 'own
nature' is the Absolute itself; nothing of that which we can conceive, contemplate, love, lies beyond the domain of the images created by ourselves, by us as the Absolute” (Supreme Doctrine 223).

With its pupil fully contracted by the intense light of Truth, the eye of Blake’s Divine Vision is as though blind, the positive iris of manifested images, spread out across the expanse of the earth/text, being all the onlooker can see. Hence

The Vegetative Universe, opens like a flower from the Earths center:
In which is Eternity. It expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell
And there it meets Eternity again, both within and without,
And the abstract Voids between the Stars are the Satanic Wheels.
(J13:34-37; E157)

If the iris represents the universe of discourse the Imagination creates outside the bound of Reason/Truth, that iris here becomes, by way of a transferred pun, a “flower.” And the image, working hard to enlighten us, folds back upon itself in layer upon layer of redundancy (or excess). The “earth,” from whose void center (where Truth is) this vegetative flower-universe opens, is (to repeat a key definition or “star”) “this earth of vegetation on which now I write” (M14:41; E109). And this universe expands in “stars,” in light-emitting images or finite abstract thoughts (principles, axioms, definitions), until it reaches the “Mundane Shell” of Reason’s bound, where it meets Truth again—because Truth is within and without Reason’s bound; it is even in the depths of hell, those abstract voids that take the form of “Satanic Wheels,” circular arguments arriving nowhere and saying nothing, planted by the Reasoning Negative between the Imagination’s starry words. “And sometimes the Earth shall roll in the Abyss & sometimes / Stand in the Center & sometimes stretch flat in the Expanse” (J83:40-41; E242), because, however we look at it, Blake’s earth/text remains true.
The closing of the rational eye, however, not only leaves the text looking like the work of a madman, but the corrective action it represents is also left without a positive appearance, compelled to function as a Negation inside an absence, in silent moments, when the reader begins to wonder whether, in loyally following the Imagination ever upwards, in identifying Truth and Being with the Infinite and “try[ing] to reach it under this form, by incessantly rising” (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 241), he has not been duped. Blake’s Imagination, aspiring to the Infinite on the vehicle of thought (which has form and is therefore finite), inevitably runs aground at the bound of Reason, even if, in the process, he manages to expand our Reason’s circumference, bringing about an “increase” or “improvement” in our knowledge by a ladder-like series of increments:

Formal thought—a ladder, a pair of wings, a chariot of fire—is finite, and the finite is the finite. No matter how great our knowledge, how many ideas we accumulate and possess, in face of the Infinite the many become the same as the few: *all* are finite.
But the Mind aware of the futility of trying to satisfy its primordial desire for the "All"—the "I want! I want!"—by acquiring finite knowledge, or indeed by achieving any other sort of phenomenal success, may turn back to its negative power of Reason, now conceived as "an understanding, an intellectual intuition of the radical absurdity of our natural ascending current" (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 115), for what is above is, after all, within.

The positive imaginative visions we see on Blake's pages, for all their infinite aspirations, the longing for freedom and release (in whatever particular form that may be conceived), must be gradually contracted until they are reduced to nothing by the superior power of Reason, which Imagination can never escape without falling into an abyss of error. The eye of Imagination, creator and idolator of images, must also close, contracting its vision to the absolute limit of zero towards which the Reasoning Negative points it and which, unlike infinity, is attainable. With both its eyes closed, the Mind is thoughtless—again, like the "blind hand" that brushes the "wing," symbol of spiritual aspiration (synonym for desire), of the speaker of "The Fly"—remaining motionless in the darkness of what Zen calls the "Great Doubt," the moment that precedes the awakening of the true Self. Thus when Milton goes to Eternal Death (becomes a negative reasoner), he finds his "real and immortal Self":

Like as a Polypus that vegetates beneath the deep!
They saw his Shadow vegetated underneath the Couch
Of death: for when he entered into his Shadow: Himself:
His real and immortal Self: was as appeared to those
Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch
Of gold . . .

(M15:8-13; E109)
Remembering that “the Center has Eternal States! [and] these States we now explore,” we learn in Jerusalem that “There is a limit of Opakeness, and a limit of Contraction; / In every Individual Man, and the Limit of Opakeness, / Is named Satan: and the Limit of Contraction is named Adam” (J42:29-31; E189). Given that a pupil contracted entirely shut would see only blackness, we can surmise that the limits of contraction and opaqueness coincide. That of opaqueness, named “Satan” after the Reasoning Negative, requires the shutting of the eye. The limit of contraction, on the other hand, named “Adam” after the First or Original Man/Thought made in the image of its Intellect/God, requires us to see one image of Truth, but a Truth that resides in Satan’s void. The pupil contracts not completely, but to a pinpoint, sufficiently wide to admit One Thought. So when the Limit of Opakeness is reached, we find, within its black void, the Original Thought to which the Imagination’s multitude of thoughts may be contracted, the first infant joy from which multitudes will spring once our imagination takes it up again. “Adam” is that idea of the Absolute potent enough to father an enormous race of men/thoughts, all made in the image of their One Infinite God. Because, as we have also heard, “there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of Translucence. / In the bosom of Man forever from eternity to eternity” (J42:35-36; E189): there is no limit to the expansion of this race of human images of thought, no limit to the amount of light they let into their perceiver’s mind. But the more they expand and multiply, the more likely it is that the perceiver will turn into an unfortunate contemplator; and the more light they admit into his pupil, the more likely—fortunately—that pupil will start to contract.
From the point of view of Blake's own Thought, the logic of the expansion/contraction process reverses itself—which is fitting, since Blake and his reader are mirror-images at war. So "the Saviour" Imagination begins by

Displaying the Eternal Vision! the Divine Similitude!
In loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and friends
Which if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist:

Saying. Albion! Our wars are wars of life, & wounds of love,
With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought:
Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.

(J34:14-22; E180)

In contracting the "infinite senses" of Blake's Thought (and as the critical literature demonstrates, there is no limit to the number of things he might mean), we contract the rational circumference of the pupil of his eye; and as we contract that pupil, the imaginative iris, the whole positive manifestation of his images of Truth, phenomena that can be "beheld," expands. Consequently we see a multitude of human thoughts— "brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and friends"—all particular members of the One Man or "Eternal Vision." And if the Mind/Man ceases to behold those human-formed thoughts and words, it ceases to exist, for then it has nothing to think on, nothing to contemplate, and ceases to be a thinking mind. But if we expand the circumference of the pupil to its utmost, the iris disappears, leaving only a black hole ready to receive the Great Light by conversing with the Void. Expanding the circumference of the pupil—and there is no limit to this expansion—we see that One Man/Thought that is the image of the Void
which is itself the image of the Absolute, which is itself something that cannot be empirically sensed, abstractly thought, or in any way imagined.

In some such manner we must conjoin the separate visions of Blake's two eyes, focusing their ever-varying gazes in one third angle of vision which conciliates them. In continually presenting both perspectives, the rational and the imaginative, equally balanced, Blake discovers that "perfect harmony" between his intellectual Contraries code-named "Eden," because either way—whether one expands one's thoughts outward till their rational circumference bursts in a final comprehension of One Universal Thought, or whether one contracts them to that same One Thought at the selfish center of the immensity of Blake's universe—it amounts to the same thing. Either way, the image is not the Truth itself but rather

- a False Holiness hid within the Center,
- For the Sanctuary of Eden. is in the Camp: in the Outline,
- In the Circumference: & every Minute Particular is Holy:
- Embraces are Cominglings: from the Head even to the Feet;
- And not a pompous High Priest entering by a Secret Place.

(J69:40-44; E223)

The Truth lies in our own living intellect, in the act of expanding and contracting our own Reason as it fights to comprehend not what is adored and beyond it, but the whole mundane body in all its minute particularity presented for Reason's interpretation.

Eventually, the center (and there are two of them, the white dot and the black pupil) and the circumference (and there are two of those, too: that of the negative pupil and that of the positive iris) must coincide, eliminating the illusory abyss between them, analogous to the false abyss between not only Reason and Imagination but body and soul, matter and spirit, the natural and the divine, manifestation and Principle, outer world and inner
self—the abyss that is the demonic space inside which the Reasoning Negative creates its shadowy universe.

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1See Morton Paley, *Energy and Imagination*, for a different view of these Blakean concepts.

2This identification of the Devil with the Imagination is based on, first, the assumption that Blake uses *poetic genius* and *imagination* synonymously. That the devil is a poetic genius is, I think, sufficiently established by MHH6, where the narrator places himself “among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius” (E35). In *Milton*, the Bard claims to sing “According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius / Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity” (M14:1-2; E108); and this “Divine Humanity” is, in turn, consistently identified throughout the later poetry with the Imagination.
10. Sleep, Dreams, and Laws of Sacrifice for Sin: The Contraries Reconciled in Three Classes of Men

Blake’s argument (presented by his Imagination as a “mere possibility” [see J13:64; E158] to be judged and confirmed or refuted by Reason) is, in its crudest formulation, that there is a world of difference between the functioning of the consciousness of the natural (“innocent”) man and that of the man who has experienced realization: hence the latter’s desire to raise other men to a perception of the inner life of one who knows he is infinite. As is typical of mystics, Blake characterizes the natural man as asleep, the enlightened one as awake, a distinction that becomes the theme of his greatest work, Jerusalem, where the theme wakes him, calling to him even in sleep:

Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life.

This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev’ry morn Awakes me at sun-rise, then I see the Saviour over me Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song.

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand! (J4:1-6; E146)

But Blake’s work modestly aspires to be merely a “Divine Analogy” (J49:57-58; E199; see also J85:7; E243). And because it is written in a code language, “An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface; / Which is unchangeable for ever & ever Amen” (J83:47-48; E242), which the reader is instructed to “Remove from Albion, far remove these terrible surfaces” (J49:60; E199), it is not until we remove the shadowy surface of the code from the “real surface,” the plain English text lying hidden beneath, that the “divine analogy” can be seen. Decoding the opening lines of Jerusalem, for instance, permits the theme to reannounce itself in quite different terms: “Of the sleep of
reasoning! and of the passage through negative reasoning! and of the awaking to true thought!” *That*, in plain English, is the true theme of *Jerusalem*, whose own name decoded—because “JERUSALEM IS NAMED LIBERTY AMONG THE SONS OF ALBION” (J26; E171)—is “liberty.” Among the son-thoughts of Blake’s Intellect, the poem’s name alludes to not only the freedom of his Imagination to speak its Truth, but also the liberation of his Thought from its enslaving code by a correct interpretation. And thus the experience of reading Blake, the whole revolution in thought it entails, becomes a divine analogy for that real experience of mental awakening to which the ignorant reader mistakenly believes the text’s outside shadowy surface directly refers.

So, of course, the shadowy, coded version of Blake’s text, its false initial appearance, is not without some *prima facie* truth. Even the innocent reader must conclude at times that Blake refers to what he is always referring to, however fitfully, indirectly, or abstractly. Meanwhile, the seeming chaos and indeterminacy of the text’s particulars confuse him, leading him astray, right into the kind of erroneous abstraction that Blake condemns. The unfortunate contemplator is subjected ever more profoundly, in part by his own desperate need to evade the humiliating feeling of ignorance, to a passive, if intense, fascination with his own theories, especially as they begin to boast increasing precision and complexity. In this way Blake’s code ties his message more directly to the theme of spiritual/intellectual awakening than any straightforward expression could have done, for a reader who has once been duped by his own mind but managed to see through his self-deceptions and evasions is far more likely to believe that an analogous event could occur in the course of his everyday life.
"[E]verything happens in the natural man," says Benoit, "as though his central cross-roads were asleep, passive; and ... everything happens in the man who has attained realisation as if his cross-roads were awake, active" (Supreme Doctrine 59). But to "awaken" this center is not to make the center itself conscious, for

[This central cross-roads of my 'being' is ... unconscious. It is the original Unconscious from which flows all my consciousness. It should not be conceived as a mere absence of consciousness, but as the Absolute Thought which is up-stream of all conscious manifestation and from which this latter springs. It is the No-Mind of Zen, from which issue all our manifestations, mental and physical. We find again here the Creative Triad: above the psychic (positive force) and the physical (negative force) lies a superior conciliatory pole to which, by virtue of the apparent primacy of the inferior positive force over the negative, we ought to give the name of Absolute Mind (and not Absolute Matter), or, as in Zen, of No-Mind (and not No-Body). (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 58)

By Blake’s divine analogy, this Creative Triad is translated into the Two Positive Contraries and the Reasoning Negative.¹ At the apex, we find the conciliatory force of the Intellect (faculty of Absolute Thought), while the two inferior intellectual principles into which its wrath divides it, Imagination and Reason, occupy the two lower angles, only to be joined together again by pity into one abstract image of Thought that does not really exist: the Reasoning Negative.

```
\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (intellect) at (0,0) {Intellect};
  \node (absolute) at (0,-2) {Absolute Thought};
  \node (positive) at (-1,-4) {Positive};
  \node (imagination) at (-1,-6) {Imagination};
  \node (negative) at (1,-4) {Negative};
  \node (reason) at (1,-6) {Reason};
  \node (reasoning) at (0,-8) {Reasoning Negative};
  \node (image) at (0,-10) {Image of Thought};
  \draw (intellect) -- (absolute);
  \draw (absolute) -- (positive);
  \draw (positive) -- (imagination);
  \draw (negative) -- (reason);
  \draw (reason) -- (reasoning);
  \draw (reasoning) -- (image);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}
```
As experience has taught us, Blake keeps our reason confused by continually altering its ratio, all we have already known about the relationships, whether alliances or oppositions, between these intellectual faculties. The polarities of Reason and Imagination slide from positive to negative and back again; their moral status reverses itself; now they are contraries, now contradictories, and now identities that cannot change. Positive Imagination (Jesus) may be distinct from the Positive Intellect (God), but then identified with it when, as its champion, it labours on its behalf. Positive Reason may be the contrary of Positive Imagination or, as Negative Reason, its contradictory, refusing to aid the Imagination in its labours. And Negative Reason may be either the contrary or contradictory (Negation) of Positive Intellect, or it may change to a Positive, working cooperatively towards its reintegration or reunification, helping to restore it to a "perfect Whole." Finally, the mission the foolish Imagination sets out to accomplish entails its debasement to a knavish Negative, an evil reasoning genius, in order that it may identify itself with Negative Reason and, by this sublime act of self-sacrifice and sympathy, convince Reason that it too ought to become a positive force in the expression of the truth of Absolute Thought. In the meantime, until the divine work is accomplished, Blake formulates two contrary perspectives on every issue—the self, the body, truth, thought, the nature of existence, the void—so that we may compare one to the other as representing the point of view of the natural man as opposed to that of the realized man.

One major difference between the realized (or "awakened") man and the natural man has to do with "eternal delight," something the natural man experiences only as its inverse, unconscious distress:
Because this man does not see his Buddha-nature everything happens in him as though this nature, which however is his, were lacking in him. Because the Being is not awakened in the man's centre everything happens in him as though, in this centre, there reigned a Nullity which it then becomes necessary to refute. Because the perfect existential Felicity is not awakened in the centre of this man everything happens as if this centre were occupied by a primordial distress. (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 80)

In There is No Natural Religion [b], Blake points out that "If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot" (NNR[b] E2), especially when the desired possession must be something infinite, free, absolute, and unbounded, in view of the fact that "The bounded is loathed by its possessor" (NNR[b] E2). Not "seeing" or experiencing his Buddha or true Christian or absolute nature or Poetic Genius (doctrinal religious differences matter little to Blake, since "The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy" [ARO E1]), and implicitly convinced he cannot possess something unbounded, the doubting and despairing man experiences in its stead a tenacious, unremitting, though illusory, unconscious distress. And to assuage this distress, he turns to his imagination:

[t]he man who has not attained realisation, animated by the need to be absolutely as-a-distinct-being, cannot accept his existence such as it is. This impossibility is not due, as one might suppose at first, to the fact that individual existence is passed under a constant menace of partial or total destruction, for man's essential need is a need to 'be' absolutely and not to 'exist' perpetually; it is a need of infinite eternity and not of indefinite duration. Were illness and death definitely avoided man would be not less constrained by his need to be absolutely, to refuse his existence such as he knows it. . . . Man, because he is virtually capable of living his identity with the Absolute Principle, cannot accept the sleep of this identity; he cannot allow that he is not the First Cause of the Universe. But he cannot perceive his real and essential unity with the First Cause of the Universe as long as he lives in the belief that he is only his psycho-somatic organism, as long as he is identified only with this organism.
However, man accepts his existence, in fact, since he forces himself to maintain it. He accepts it, in fact, because, if he knows that his organism is not the motor centre of the Universe, his imagination preserves him from feeling it by recreating in his mind a universe centred on himself. The imaginative film masks the intolerable vision, saves the man from this vision. But it only saves him from it during the moments in which it functions; the danger remains and has to be conjured incessantly by a continuous imaginative activity. Imagination mitigates the distress without being able to destroy it. (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 209)

Imagination is the natural man’s compensating function, shielding him from the intolerable vision of his real position in the universe—as a link in the chain of Being, essentially identical with every other link—by fabricating compensations. And those compensations are, according to Benoit, “systems of images which we borrow from our sensory and mental perceptions—from the material of images stored up by our memory—and which we arrange as we please, in accordance with the structure of our individual psycho-somatic organism” (*Supreme Doctrine* 210). “If I wish to know my compensations,” Benoit advises, “it is enough for me to ask myself: ‘What gives a sense to my life?’” (*Supreme Doctrine* 210). However,

[The essential character of a compensation is not that it should be agreeable to me but that it should represent the universe to me in a perspective such that I am the centre of it. Only that matters, and not the fact that this universe centred on me is affirming or negating. Our compensations compensate our illusory belief that we are separated from Reality, that is[,] the subjective non-appearance of our essential identity with the Absolute Principle. In other words, the recreated imaginary personal universe constituted by our compensations compensate[s] the sleep of our vision of the Universe as it is in its total reality. It is because we do not yet see things as they are that we are obliged to see them in an imaginary way which is a partial way. (*Supreme Doctrine* 211)

We have witnessed, in some detail, Blake’s determination to recreate in his Imagination a mental universe centered on himself, a universe of which his Imagination is God, a creation of thought of which the self of William Blake is God, and which he thus
accurately describes as a "Selfish Center." But what we must now understand is that he is playing a part—effectively, thoroughly convincingly, but ultimately deceptively. In identifying his in fact finite and temporal imaginative creation with an infinite and eternal world—"This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body This World <of Imagination> is Infinite & Eternal" (VLJ E555)—and in conferring on his own Imagination the status of Absolute Principle of this creation, Blake mirrors the original metaphysical error of his readers, hoping to wake us up (once we are sufficiently disillusioned with the fool’s game of looking for the All in our imaginations) to its underlying half-truth: we are God, but not in His capacity as First Cause of the universe.

Correcting the error involves the undoing of our exclusive identification with our psycho-somatic organism:

my identification with my organism . . . is not mistaken, but is merely incomplete in that it excludes my equal identification with the rest of the Universe. The egotistical illusion does not consist in my identification with my organism but in the exclusive manner in which this identification is realised. The explosion of satori will not destroy my identification with my organism—what is already realised in my egotistical condition—it will destroy the sleep which now affects my identification with the rest of the Universe, what sleeps in me to-day beyond the illusory limits of the Ego. Then my identification with the totality of Manifestation will awaken. (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 187-88)

Not only in “The Fly” but throughout his works, Blake identifies himself with every empirical object he can think of, humanizing them by reciprocally identifying them with his infinite and eternal Self, his Intellect/Poetic Genius, which he in turn identifies with Thought-as-God. We misunderstand this process of identification and underestimate its importance as a law of Blake’s universe at our interpretive peril, for when Jerusalem
finally draws to a close, it is this vision of the totality of his universe as one vast human form of Thought, living and labouring in the mind of William Blake, that is presented to the reader as a succinct summing-up of the tangled and confused mass of characters and events through which he has just struggled. Let us read the lines again:

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone, all Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

(J99:1-4; E258)

What we see here are all Blake’s “human forms” being identified (made known) as imaginative thoughts—tree, metal, earth, and stone imagined as thoughts, purely mental forms. And as “all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages, / All are Human,” the human tree or human mountain are all identified together in One Man/Thought: the One Intellect in whose imaginative “bosom” all these individual thoughts live out their lives, unceasingly labouring at the task they have been so carefully designed to carry out (altering the ratio of their reader’s Reason). So tree = metal = earth = stone = river = mountain = city = village = thought. All particular thoughts are members of one universal Body of Imaginative Thought, whose outward circumference of Reason they can either transgress, but only at the risk of being burned up, or else return from, made weary from the effort of expanding it.

Blake’s identification of his universe of images with their first cause and principle, Thought itself, functions as a divine analogy for the realized man’s identification with the totality of manifestation, an identification accomplished by the awakening of his sleeping identity with its Absolute Principle. But until that awakening, the play of his imagination must compensate for the Principle’s non-appearance, for “man
could never resign himself to not being the unique motive-power of the real universe if he had not this consoling faculty of creating a universe for himself, a universe which he creates all alone" (Supreme Doctrine 39). But when Blake creates his universe, his Reason regards it from an absolute point of view (the angle of vision from which both sceptics and those in “Great Eternity” see things) and concludes it is false, an error. There can be no such thing as a true image because an image is necessarily bounded, and the essence of Thought—its “life,” the eternal delight of indestructible energy—is without form, boundless and imperceptible. Yet when informal energy takes on form in the imaginative act of creation, “Mental forms Creating,” those forms will be relatively true as long as they remain within Reason’s bound. From a relative point of view, then, Blake’s finite thoughts and images will be meaningful within certain limits, the limits of the form set by Reason interpreting, in and by its acts of judgment, the Reality they seek to represent. For as Benoit writes, “the meaning, which is the relative truth of the thought, is a manifestation of inexpressible primordial Truth; and this thought would be meaningless, would not even exist, if it had no meaning behind its form; it is by virtue of this latent meaning that the form contains a certain manifest and relative meaning” (Supreme Doctrine 47). Inexpressible Truth is thus the invariable Principle of Blake’s relative truths; Absolute Truth is the Principle of the image which in and of itself would be meaningless. Indeed, Blake’s corpus may be regarded as a poetic disquisition on the limits of the reality of the image.

In Jerusalem we find a poetic enactment of this theme in a curious scene of redoubled images which begins with Albion, in “dreams of soft deluding slumber” (J43:34; E191), addressing an image of his own construction:
Then Albion ascended mourning into the porches of his Palace [of wisdom]
Above him rose a Shadow from his wearied intellect:
Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy: in white linen pure he hoverd
A sweet entrancing self-delusion a watry vision of Albion
Soft exulting in existence; all the Man absorbing!

Albion fell upon his face prostrate before the watry Shadow
Saying O Lord whence is this change! thou knowest I am nothing!
And Vala trembled & coverd her face! & her locks were spread on the pavement

We heard astonishd at the Vision & our heart trembled within us:
We heard the voice of slumberous Albion, and thus he spake.
Idolatrous to his own Shadow words of eternity uttering:

O I am nothing when I enter into judgment with thee!
If thou withdraw thy breath I die & vanish into Hades
If thou dost lay thine hand upon me behold I am silent:
If thou withhold thine hand; I perish like a fallen leaf:
O I am nothing: and to nothing must return again:
If thou withdraw thy breath. Behold I am oblivion.

He ceased: the shadowy voice was silent . . .

(J43:36-53; E191-92)

Albion here brings his image into existence (which is then true by definition: what exists is eternal, and what is eternal is true) only to have it wholly “absorb” him, the real man totally consumed by the simulacrum. But we know that Albion is not a real man: he is himself a disembodied Intellect, or rather the image of Blake’s Intellect, fallen, self-divided, and embodied in verbal contexts that tend to personify it. The narcissistic “watry vision of Albion” is thus his vision, one he sees; but it is also a vision of him, one which both permits him to see himself and makes him perceptible to others (“We heard astonishd at the Vision”). The “Shadow from his wearied intellect” is also the shadow of his Intellect, an image of it, and thus an image of himself. Like shade, dream, ghost, and spectre, the word shadow in Blake refers to the unsubstantial appearance or false image created by the abstract Reasoning Negative, so when Albion conjures up his intellectual
shadow, he must be reasoning negatively. Certainly, he is asleep, dreaming, “slumberous”—and sleep is a code word for the Reasoning Negative (“In dreams she bore the shadowy Spectre of Sleep, & nam'd him Death” [M13:40; E107]). But because it is a double creature, half creative Imagination and half destructive Reason, the image of the Intellect (or himself) that Albion creates is also double, imbued with positive as well as negative connotations: it is also “Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy” because it is a relatively true manifestation of eternal Truth. The unidentified speakers of lines 44 to 46, observing the internal world Albion’s thoughts (externalized by his speaking), confirm that his “entrancing self-delusion,” before which he falls down in worship, tellingly hiding his “face” (and Vala likewise covers hers, for Albion’s words are covered by the code; all we see is their backside), is his self-image, created merely by his speaking, “words of eternity uttering.” In short, the moment Albion utters his words he becomes “Idolatrous to his own Shadow.” Such verbal idolatry implies that Albion is in the grip of his Imagination, seeing that the Imagination is responsible for the creation of idols, images of the Divine Being. (And the Imagination is itself, along with Albion, the image of the Father/God/Intellect.) Albion, then, in thinking and speaking creates an idol; but in falling down and adoring it, worshipping it as his “Lord,” he is still “slumberous,” unconscious of his identity with the Reality he seeks to represent. And that makes him the victim of an imaginative error. Or does it? For when Albion creates something that is (in fact) what he is (in fact)—an image of the Intellect—he has, by this doubling of an unreal negative, created an accurate representation, a positive truth. And the principle holds true of Blake’s text as a whole: it is certainly not the Truth, nor even really an image of Truth, but rather an image of the truth about images.
If speaking “words of eternity” (true words) immediately degenerates into idolatry, it is incumbent on the reader to consider Albion as a word, a word we perceive as a very real object indeed (and we too are real, despite the invisible and secret path by which our image also finds its way into the poem, in the form of those who, having “heard the voice of slumberous Albion,” speak the interpolated lines 44 and 45). The word Albion, when subjected to the constraining or determining forces of its context, has the power to conjure up in the readerly imagination the rather convincing image of a phenomenal man who speaks, walks, and sleeps (or sleep-walks). But then context, ever expansive in Blake, allows us to go much further, to see in Albion’s conjuring of his vision a parodic parallel to our own conjuring of a vision of Albion-as-a-man. If Albion is entrancingly self-deluded, well, then, so are we. Only if our Negative Reason steps in to decode this “man” Albion as a form of thought will we be liberated to a better understanding of what Albion says to the shadow of his Intellect, to his self-image, or to abstract idea of the Truth of which he is himself a mere image: “I am nothing”: my relative truth is nothing “when I enter into judgment with thee”: when my truth is compared to your absolute one. Lockean fashion, they do not agree: the unnameable Principle of the image is everything, whereas Albion-the-image is nothing. (Which may not be strictly true: Albion is fallible, “asleep.”) Albion declares, moreover, that if the Absolute Truth were to withdraw its “breath” from him-as-its-image (and here we may turn the key equation thought = life = strength = breath in some of those locks Vala spreads on the pavement/surface of the text) he would die/perish/vanish from a want of thought, fall silent, become “oblivion,” a void, a cipher, a term expressing nothing, a No-Thought. Applying the analogy to Blake himself, we understand Albion’s lament to express Blake’s conviction that if his image of intellectual Truth (for the image to
which Albion speaks is still an image) were to withdraw its meaning from the particular relative thought Blake calls his “Albion,” Albion itself would be reduced to a meaningless word, to a thought unable to speak through its body because, reduced to meaning “nothing” (and here we would have to obey Albion’s self-definition: “I am nothing”), it would have nothing to say. And thus Albion, as a Blakean human form now, would no longer be an image of the Infinite as perceived by Blake’s Imagination but instead an image of the Void of the Reasoning Negative, whose purpose is not only to remain silent on the subject of Truth, but also to destroy all images of it, to empty pretentious words of all meaning, all reference. The fact that Albion’s Intellect-God never speaks, though it appears in the visible form “Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy: in white linen pure,” may be a covert and fitting comment on the verisimilitude of the image, but whether on account of its accurate reflection of the ineffability of Absolute Truth or the ultimate vacancy of all relative truths, is impossible to determine.

In conjuring up a divine image of himself, Albion takes for the Real what is really only his own shadow; but since Albion is himself a shadow of the Real, the self-image reclaims its status as an accurate representation of something objectively real. Damrosch notes that in The Book of Urizen “Urizen is called ‘a self-contemplating shadow’” and understandably finds the description confusing: “A shadow is usually thought of as the not-self, so how can it have a self of its own to contemplate? Blake’s difficult symbolism of the Spectre is implicit in this line” (360). But both the solidly rational Urizen and wavering Albion are already shadows/images of Blake’s Intellect, and in becoming “self-contemplating shadows” they function as images, for the reader, of Blake’s Intellect contemplating objectified images of itself as he writes, images that may represent it as
whole, as divided into rational and imaginative Contraries, as fused in one self-contradictory form, or as fragmented into a multitude of thought-forms of increasing insignificance. And Blake's work, in turn, functions analogically as an image of what happens in the formation of the human ego, when Reason, or the abstract part, isolated from the animal part, only conceives forms without substance, images lacking a dimension. It conceives a universal ideal image or 'divine' image, beautiful-good-true, which in the absence of absolute consciousness projects itself on to the temporal image that the subject makes of himself, giving birth to an ideal, personal, narcissistic image or 'Ego.'

The two parts of man being unable to reunite naturally, man does not participate in the essence of the Absolute Principle, and he sets himself to adore an image that has no reality, the Ego. In default of a proper love of his abstract part for his animal part man only has an ersatz, self-respect, love of his abstract part for an ideal image of himself. (Supreme Doctrine 35)

In contemplating—and clearly adoring—a divine image of himself, Blake's Intellect/Albion offers himself up as an example of the operation of this mental mechanism.

The divine image or ego is fabricated to compensate for man's lack of "a proper love" of his intellect for his psychosomatic organism, which love is born only with the awakening of absolute consciousness. In characterising Albion as "slumberous" and "self-deluded," Blake implies that, in imagining the Real, in conjuring this shadow of his Absolute Thought, Albion (as the image of this Thought) is fabricated to compensate Blake's own illusory belief that he is separated from it, an appearance that befell him the moment his desire to speak caused his Intellect to divide into two warring Contraries. Often we find Albion asleep on his couch (couched in words), unaware of his essential identity with the Absolute, lost in the dream-world of images of the Absolute which his
Imagination continually fabricates in an effort to awaken him to its invisible Reality, finally succeeding in Jerusalem’s final scenes, when Albion realizes that “All was a Vision, all a Dream” (J96:36; E256). Of these rousing images, the “Divine Image” of One Thought remains the most powerful, for it is, as the abstract form of the human Albion, the most comprehensive image of Albion as an abstracted ego or “Selfhood.” And Blake’s image of the Selfhood itself corresponds to the actual ego, functioning like a central star or sun in relation to its compensatory satellite-images: “Every compensation is essentially constituted by an image involving my Ego, by an image-centre around which is organised in a constellation, a multitude of satellite images. The image-centre is bi-polar, like everything that belongs to the domain of form. This explains why there are positive and negative compensations” (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 215). Thus man affirms himself (or tries to refute the Nullity that appears to reign in his center as a consequence of his sleeping Being) by destructive as well as constructive thoughts and acts. And thus Blake’s Song “The Divine Image” characterizes his Intellect—this is the image of his divinized self we are seeing now—as a constructive and benevolent God/Man defined by the abstractions “Mercy Pity Peace and Love” (SI E12); while “A Divine Image” demonizes that same Intellect as a destructive and malevolent series of abstractions in human form: “Cruelty has a Human Heart / And Jealousy a Human Face / Terror, the Human Form Divine / And Secrecy, the Human Dress” (SE E32).

The opening words of Jerusalem, “Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand! / I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine” (J4:6-7; E146), are actually addressed by Blake’s Imagination’s Divine Image of One Thought to Albion, personified form of that same image, in an attempt to encourage him (and anyone
else who will listen) to believe that “I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend; /
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me: / Lo! we are One” (J4:18-19; E146).
(This, of course, is another way of saying that although all these images appear without
they are within, in Blake’s and our imagination.) Albion, convinced the Image of God is
false, a coercive idol, accuses it of being a “Phantom of the over heated brain! shadow of
immortality! / Seeking to keep my soul a victim to thy Love! which binds / Man the
enemy of man into deceitful friendships” (J4:24-26; E146-47). And Albion is right—the
image, divine or not, is not the Reality, and may easily deceive the thought that struggles
to comprehend it, becoming thus the enemy of thought—just as he is right to say, almost
forty plates further on when we find him idolatrous to his own shadow, that he himself is
“nothing” if this Image deprives him of its compensating thought/breath. Here again the
“Divine Analogy” in the “Litteral expression” comes into play: the word *Albion* would
mean nothing if some truth were not immanent in it, just as the “man” Albion would be
nothing if the Absolute Principle his intellect abstractly conceives were not actually
immanent in him. Of course, for Reason there is no real man named Albion: “he” is an
entirely fictitious poetic image. What is real is the word *Albion*, and there is—as the
Reasoning Negative is bent on proving—no truth in that word, unless we decode it as
“thought,” thereby proving the Imagination’s dream: Reality is immanent in all mental
things.

If the word *Albion*, along with all the conceptual joys it embodies, functions for
Blake’s Imagination as an idol, a divine image of Thought the poet conjures up to
compensate for his alienation from the Absolute Thought of his Intellect in its state of
wrathful self-division, then it is useful to understand that, as Benoit explains,
Our compensations are not illusory in themselves and are not opposed to satori; the idol is not an obstacle to Reality; the reality that we see in the idol is not opposed to our reunion with Reality. The obstacle is only the ignorance through which we deny to that which is not the idol the same reality that we see in the idol. *The only obstacle is ignorance, and ignorance is partiality.* Our compensatory vision of the world is not, then, a bad thing, to be destroyed; it is something incomplete, to be extended, to be accomplished, by dissipating restrictive ignorance that is exclusive and partial. Adhesion to that which is only a part is not bad but only 'partiality', that is ignorant belief in the total character of that which is only a part. *(Supreme Doctrine 211)*

Before we can see how Blake’s idolization of his Imagination results in exactly this sort of partiality, we must understand the psychological mechanism fully, and there is perhaps no better description of it to be found than that offered by Zen thought:

Hui-neng [637-713, Chinese founder of Zen] refutes the deplorable ‘belief’ which resides in our compensations when he proclaims: ‘From the beginning not a thing is.’ In speaking thus he does not condemn my compensating joy; this joy is a moving phenomenon which ‘exists’ merely and does not pretend to ‘be’; he refutes my belief in the Reality of a fixed image which pretends to ‘be’ by the exclusion of the contrary image. Hui-neng does not condemn the affective point of departure of the idolatry, but he refutes the idolatrous intellectual belief. This belief, in isolating an image by the exclusion of the image which depends upon it in the cosmic equilibrium of the Yin [positive principle of creation] and the Yang [the negative principle], attempts illusorily to confer on the isolated image the immutable Unity of the Absolute Principle. The image thus artificially isolated becomes a compensating ‘idol’, and it is not the image itself but this manner of seeing it as an idol that Hui-neng aims at when he reminds us that ‘not a thing is’.

The declaration of Hui-neng does not at all advise us not to live our compensations, to feel that there is value in particular things. It merely invites us to pass beyond these compensations in breaking, by means of understanding, the enslaving exclusivity of our idolatrous ‘opinions’. This breaking aims only at limiting intellectual forms, not at all at the living affective substance contained therein. It is possible for me, by means of understanding, to continue to feel value in this or that particular thing without persisting in implicitly proclaiming the anti-value of the contrary thing. My understanding shows me in fact that, from the only real point of view of my intemporal realisation, there is not value and anti-value, but that all things are fit to be used for this realisation.
The phrase of Hui-neng is not, therefore, a malediction on all particular things, but, very much on the contrary, a blessing, undifferenced, impartial, on all particular things. (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 213)

When Blake seduces us readers into believing (and then, worse, humiliates us for trying to justify the belief by erecting the shaky scaffolding of increasingly intricate rationalized speculations) that the Imagination is alone Good, True, Absolute, Eternal, Infinite, while Reason is alone Evil, False, Limited, Temporal, and Finite, he is setting us up for a long fall into this abyssal error of partiality. He encourages in us the cancerous growth of this “belief in the Reality of a fixed image which pretends to ‘be’ by the exclusion of the contrary image” by setting Imagination and Reason in contrarious opposition and then enticing us to do what he pretends to do: ascribe value to the one and anti-value to its other. He “fixes” their images for us, and we, sheeplike, follow his lead: “Two Contraries War against each other in fury & blood, / And Los fixes them on his Anvil, incessant his blows: / He fixes them with strong blows. placing the stones & timbers” (J58:15-17; E207). The number of readers who have slavishly idolized Blake’s image of the Imagination testifies to the success of his project—which a hardened cynic might characterize as a hoax. But the idolization, though erroneous, is not an irredeemable mistake, and by exacerbating it for us Blake brings us closer to the realization that it is, after all, just an incomplete partiality.

If the fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise: if we would persist in idolizing, in ascribing value to every particular image of Blake’s Imagination, positive/good or negative/evil, but especially his image of the Reasoning Negative, we might succeed in expanding our belief in the divine to include everything. He who sees the Infinite *in all things* sees God; and “every thing that lives is holy!” (VDA8:10; E51).
And that includes the Negation, which is not just satirically but also truly called “the Holy Reasoning Power,” a title that makes the evil Spectre, through the agency of a pun, the Holy Ghost. And, as Blake asks in one of those sharp-pointed rhetorical questions, “is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain?” (J77; E231). Properly to worship Blake’s idea of the Intellect requires us to ascribe the same intensely precious value to the Negation of it that we ascribe to the Intellect itself. We must travel the whole distance of the road of excess, both the straight and the crooked portions. If everything that “lives” is holy, everything that thinks or is thought is holy. Thus our reason takes our thought to the limit of contraction by negating the absolute value of the Imagination and all its compensatory images:

In the degree in which my understanding awakens as a result of correct instruction, a change takes place in me. I understand that my primordial unlimited aspiration has nothing to expect from the phenomenal world, however universally and subtly one may envisage this. . . . there could not be dissociation of an inseparable dualism, progressive purification of a ‘good’ cleansed of all ‘evil’; rather is it access, beyond dualism, to ‘something’ which conciliates the dualism in a trinitarian Unity. This ‘something’ I cannot evidently picture to myself, I can only conceive it as indescribable, unimaginable, entirely different by its very nature from anything I know to-day. (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 173)

“Progressively passing beyond the compensations,” says Benoit, “thus understood as a reduction of extent and an increase of intensity, corresponds to a purification of the compensating image which evolves from the particular towards the general” (Supreme Doctrine 220). Now, Blake’s Divine Image of his own Intellect (in its negative form, his narcissistic ego or Selfhood) is his central and most general compensating image, its specific purpose to effect the reunion of his Self with its divided Not-Self, or of his Infinite Self with the Universe (or of any other pair of divided contraries: the within and
without, the above and below, truth and error). For the reason the Divine Image comes into existence in the first place is to compensate all such illusory separations and divisions. (If man had never felt a moment’s separation from God, he could never have conceived of Him.)

As Blake’s central image, the Divine Image is also the most comprehensive—the most abstract and the most universal. And as an abstract image, it is a form without substance—not a “this something,” a definite particular, but a cipher. As such, it is formed by Reason, the intellectual consciousness, in isolation from the animal or organic consciousness, the body and all its senses. The various names of this Divine Image—“The Eternal Great Humanity Divine,” for example—sometimes reflect its abstract genesis, but not for long, because Blake’s Imagination soon enters the scene to give it a concrete, but always human, form. Urizen is thus the abstract form of the Divine Image, Albion its human form, and the Sun its concrete or natural form. But all are always personified, because only the human form incorporates the other two. It is thus the Imagination’s, or Los’s, job to recreate abstract ideas and natural images in human form, thus “regenerating” the already “generated.” Here he does so with the abstract idea of Reason itself, labouring at his “furnace,” itself the image of a bounded center that contains the burning fire of thought:

Urizen lay in darkness & solitude, in chains of the mind lock’d up
Los siezd his Hammer & Tongs; he labourd at his resolute Anvil
Among indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning.

Refusing all Definite Form, the Abstract Horror rof’d. stony hard.
And a first Age passed over & a State of dismal woe...

(M3:6-10; E97)
As a form without substance, the indefinite "Abstract Horror" must be given first a
crude form for our five senses to perceive and then a human form for our heart or
affections to sympathize with: so we see Los/Imagination creating the body of the man
called "Urizen" for the abstract idea of Reason. (In the lines following those quoted
above, we see the formation of his heart, eyes, bones, ears, nose, tongue, arms, and legs.)
But as Blake's Imagination labours against his Reason's tendency to create forms without
substance by providing them with its own substance (its energy, the absolute essence of
its own Living Thought), he finds his work turning against him. So Los, having
completed the forging of a concrete form for (or "the binding" of) Urizen, becomes what
he beholds: "Terrified Los stood in the Abyss & his immortal limbs / Grew deadly pale;
he became what he beheld" (M3:28-29; E97).

When Los, standing in the abyss of the Reasoning Negative, becomes what he
beholds, one of the things he becomes is an "Abstract Horror": "the Human Existence
itself," or "The Eternal Great Humanity Divine," or "the eternal all-protecting Divine
Humanity" (M14:2; E108), or "the Divine Vision & Fruition" (M32:19; E132), or simply
the "Human Form"—any abstraction, in short, falsely divided from the living body of his
thought. To return himself to the body, the Imagination objectifies all his thoughts in a
multitude of particular forms, all those minutely particularized concrete images. The
reader's job then becomes the gathering together of all these particular little humanized
bodies into larger and larger groups, more and more comprehensive forms—forming
"families" and "nations" and logical classes (in particular the Three Classes of Men).
Within our minds we must labour to reorganize all the scattered, chaotic particular images
we see in the text without. And for this labour we must depend on the rational power of
our intellect, in imitation of Blake’s, which is continually “Within labouring. beholding Without: from Particulars to Generals / Subduing his Spectre” (M3:37-38; E97). In this way, we effect the “purification of the compensating image which evolves from the particular towards the general” and begin atoning for Imagination’s sin of speaking too much.

In the following account of the war of the Contraries (which we have read once already), Reason is, seemingly, the pyrrhic victor, rising up out of the bloody mass of embattled particulars in possession of the positive appearance, while its foe, the Imagination, seems to disappear (quite literally) into the invisible void below our conscious observation:

And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion in their strength
They take the Two Contraries which are called Qualities, with which
Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil
From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
Not only of the Substance from which it is derived
A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer
Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power
An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing
This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation

Here Blake’s Intellect, in the act of self-division but acting by its agents (the “Sons of Albion,” particular thoughts it derives from itself, made in its own image), abstracts the two qualities of positive affirmation and negative negation (in response to the question it poses to itself: “Shall I speak Truth?”) from the substance of its Thought. This substance, as we know, is intellectual energy, “life,” divine thought itself. Every definite and particular thought of Blake’s Intellect is “clothed” with the two qualities of affirmation and negation, so that every image of it must be doubled: good/positive here, evil/negative
somewhere else (a “Tree of Life,” a “Tree of Death”; a “Divine Body,” a “Body of Death”; a “Web of Life,” a “Web dark & cold” [BU25:15; E82]). But if the substance of every thought is energy, then every substantial thought—every living thought—must derive from the Imagination, the active intellectual principle springing from energy. Empty thoughts, abstract thoughts, thoughts without substance, dead thoughts, are, on the contrary, all Reason’s. These two contrary qualities of positive affirmation and negative silence—abstracted, now, from their thought-substances—are named good and evil: the positive, Imagination, is good if it passively obeys Reason, but evil if it transgresses Reason’s bound; and the negative, Reason, is good if it sets limits to or bounds relative truths, but evil if it negates all speech. And once Reason abstracts itself from the substance of the Imagination’s infinite thought (and this happens within the reader: Blake’s obscurity, wrought by the code, forces him into greater and greater flights of abstraction from the substance of the text), the two faculties are at war (as are Blake and his reader). In an effort to reconcile them and restore their Father Intellect to unity, the thoughts (“sons”) of the Intellect (“Albion”) make from the two Contraries one Abstract, an idea without substance, the thought of the Reasoning Negative. And because it is a negation of the imaginative substance from which it is derived, this idea is a murderer of its own body, the “matter” of the Imagination’s text, as well as of every particular thought or “Divine Member” of that body. It is, moreover, an “Abstract objecting power,” but not just because it theoretically objects to the articulation of Truth. Because it also retains the Imagination’s metaphorical power, it can transform abstractions into concrete objects (the idea of a self-sacrificing imagination into a lamb, for example, or the idea of analytical reason into a knife or an ax). The Imagination, martyring itself, now drops out of sight,
only to resurface disguised as its Contrary: the cunning, negatively reasoning power that murders its own textual body by covering it with a code language, obscuring or "closing" its Truth from our sight.

One might say that Blake's One Intellect functions imaginatively in the realm of possibility, the merely conceivable, but becomes rational in the realm of actuality, or Reality, where everything is proved simply by the fact of its existence ("What is now proved was once, only imagin'd"). Only in the realm of illusion, where it is possible to conceive of something that does not exist and never could exist (a fly with gates, for example), does the Intellect function as a negative power.

Let us now look at how Blake's Reasoning Negative conciliates the dualism of Reason and Imagination in a trinitarian Unity. Plate 5 of Milton proclaims that "Hence the three Classes of Men take their fix'd destinations / They are the Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative" (M5:13-14; E98). And these three classes of personified mental power—Imagination and Reason, two positive Contraries until reconciled in the third, their mutual Negation—overspread, as we are told on the next plate, the whole text/earth:

Here the Three Classes of Mortal Men take their fixd destinations
And hence they overspread the Nations of the whole Earth & hence
The Web of Life is woven: & the tender sinews of life created
And the Three Classes of Men regulated by Los's hammer.

(M6:32-35; E100)

Now, a text is a woven object, and the "Web of Life"—the same web that the traveller finds "the Worm Weaving in the Ground" in "The Keys of the Gates" (KG E269)—is a web of thought, thoughts which double as the "sinews" of the body the Imagination is continually creating (here, in Milton, with his "hammer"). Figuratively, a web is "a subtly-woven snare or entanglement" or "something flimsy and unsubstantial; fanciful
reasoning or the like" (OED), and Blake’s web of thought—alternate tropes are the net, the trap, the gin, the snare: anything the Reasoning Negative, “he who will not defend Truth,” may be compelled to defend, any lie in which “he may be snared and caught and snared and taken”—grows, polypus-like, from the Three Classes, who are more precisely defined on the following plate (the seventh):

The first, The Elect from before the foundation of the World:
The second, The Redeem’d. The Third, The Reprobate & form’d
To destruction from the mothers womb: follow with me my plow!

Of the first class was Satan . . .

(M7:1-4; E100)

The speaker inscribes a potentially illuminating furrow in the text here, and to follow his plow we must retrace his lines with our plow, for “As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers” (MHH9; E37): that is, following words with the steely instrument of Reason while praying for understanding will be rewarded by Blake’s Intellect. On one side of this furrow (probably on the sinister left) we will see fall as though dead all those code names (Elect, Redeemed, Reprobate; Urizen, Los, Satan), errors of the Reasoning Negative that must be sacrificed for the sake of intelligibility, once we divide them from their true names on the right side (Reason, Imagination, Reasoning Negative). Plowing under the former class is a sin for which we will be forgiven, for, as Blake explains in his commentary on his engraving of Chaucer’s Pilgrims, names belong to accident while the immortal thought contained within them is the only true substance:

The characters of Chaucer’s Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations: as one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same; for we see the same characters repeated again and again, in animals, vegetables, minerals, and in men; nothing new occurs in identical existence; Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay.
Of Chaucer's characters, as described in his Canterbury Tales, some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves forever remain unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. I have known multitudes of those who would have been monks in the age of monkery, who in this deistical age are deists. As Newton numbered the stars, and as Linneus numbered the plants, so Chaucer numbered the classes of men. (DC E532-33)

So too the characters of Blake's Three Classes of Men/Thought remain identical existences beneath their ever-varying names (and Blake, who can think of himself as a worm or a fly, does not hesitate to identify with Chaucer).

To return to the last quotation from Milton: if the Two Contraries and the Reasoning Negative somehow correspond to the Elect, Redeemed, and Reprobate; and if Satan is of the first class, the Elect; then the Elect must be the Reasoning Negative. This identification makes sense because, the Elect being “from before the foundation of the World,” and the “world” being the Imagination’s text, the Reasoning Negative’s silence precedes the text’s foundation and indeed provokes its creation. But then the Reprobate might also be the Reasoning Negative, since they are “formed to destruction,” and we know that Reason is created to be annihilated as a Negation and recreated as a Positive Contrary—or we discover this, at any rate, later in Milton when we are instructed thus:

Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created

(M32:30-35; E132)

The answer to the tripartite question seems fairly clear: the Imagination is eternal, Reason is changeable, and the Reasoning Negative is annihilable. But perhaps the answer is not
so clear, since the Imagination is changeable also, and its products are annihilable. In any event, on the ninth plate, two plates further on from the renaming of the Three Classes, we have it confirmed that the Reprobate class is the Reasoning Negative, because “it became a proverb in Eden. Satan is among the Reprobate” (M9:12; E103). Or perhaps the Reasoning Negative (Satan) is a member of the Reprobate class as well as the Elect; or, if he is a member of the Elect only, he may have insinuated his way into the midst of the Reprobate by disguising himself as one of them, like a wolf among sheep or a knave among fools. On the next plate (the tenth) we are told that “Los & Enitharmon knew that Satan is Urizen” (M10:1; E104): if Urizen is a Reasoning Negative, Satan must be, too—or vice versa. Plate 11 reaffirms that “Satan is fall’n from his station & never can be redeem’d / But must be new Created continually moment by moment / And therefore the Class of Satan shall be call’d the Elect” (M11:19-21; E105). (In the midst of all this, we get the repeated warning, “Mark well my words, they are of your eternal salvation!”)

Considerably further on (plate 25), we are finally given some explicit instructions:

Therefore you must bind the Sheaves not by Nations or Families
You shall bind them in Three Classes; according to their Classes
So shall you bind them. Separating What has been Mixed
Since Men began to be Wove into Nations by Rahab & Tirzah
Since Albions Death & Satans Cutting-off from our awful Fields;
When under pretence to benevolence the Elect Subdud All
From the Foundation of the World.

(M25:26-32; E122)

In this direct address to the reader (which ought to be received as a “spiritual gift”), we are instructed three times to “bind”—and binding is an exclusively (?) rational activity: not only binding, but also bounding, enclosing, fettering, manacleing, chaining—the Three Classes of Thought into metaphorical “sheaves,” mainly because we are praying, as we
plow through these “awful Fields” of words, for a plentiful harvest of knowledge, or at least a pittance of bread. But Blake promises to help us reap the former if we remain thankful for the instruction we receive, for (says the Proverb) “The thankful receiver bears a plentiful harvest” (MHH9; E37).

If “sheaves” are classes of thoughts, in order to bind them together as instructed we must first “separate what has been mixed”—the word *mixed* a tacit admission that the identifying attributes of the Three Classes have been mingled, blended together, combined, diffused, or interspersed among the group so as to render the whole *confused* (“said of perceptions or notions in which the elements or parts are mixed up and not clearly distinguished; also of utterance, language, the thinker or speaker, etc.” [OED]). We need only recall our fumbling attempts to distinguish the Elect from the Reprobate (despite their supposedly “fixed destinations”) to confirm the mixed up or confused state of the Three Classes. And that confusion should appear everywhere in Blake, throughout his whole earth/text, because the Three Classes “overspread the Nations of the whole Earth,” like a living web or a logical net covering families and nations of human words, and keep on spreading, like a polypus or cancerous growth, the more we try to fix them.

But Blake goes on—and so should we:

The Elect is one Class: You
Shall bind them separate: they cannot Believe in Eternal Life
Except by Miracle & a New Birth. The other two Classes;
The Reprobate who never cease to Believe, and the Redeemed,
Who live in doubts & fears perpetually tormented by the Elect
These you shall bind in a twin-bundle for the Consummation—
But the Elect must be saved [from] fires of Eternal Death,
To be formed into the Churches of Beulah that they destroy not the Earth
For in every Nation & every Family the Three Classes are born
And in every Species of Earth, Metal, Tree, Fish, Bird & Beast.
We form the Mundane Egg, that Spectres coming by fury or amity
All is the same, & every one remains in his own energy
Go forth Reapers with rejoicing, you sowed in tears
But the time of your refreshing cometh, only a little moment
Still abstain from pleasure & rest, in the labours of eternity
And you shall Reap the whole Earth, from Pole to Pole! from Sea to Sea

(M25:32-47; E122)

Certainly (we may think) the Reprobate and Redeemed classes, who are to be bound in a
twin-bundle, must be the two positive Contraries, Reason and Imagination, while the
remaining third, the Elect, is the Reasoning Negative—Satan, just as we thought.
Furthermore, one of the twins, the Reprobate who “never cease to Believe” in “Eternal
Life” (or True Thought, or the proposition that “Thought is life and strength and breath”),
is likely the Imagination, a faculty ironically reprobate—“rejected by God, and thus
excluded from participation in eternal life with Him” (OED)—but only if the God in
question is Reason, whom the Imagination may refuse to obey passively. Indeed, it is
only from the point of view of the passive, good, angelic Reasoner (as defined by The
Marriage) that the Imagination appears to be a reprobate—“one who has fallen away
from grace or religion; one lost in sin” (OED)—since in speaking/writing it transgresses
Reason’s bound and sins against Truth. And these good Reasoners must make up the
Redeemed class, those “who live [think] in doubts & fears”—doubt is an identifying
attribute of Reason—“perpetually tormented by the Elect,” the Elect being that half-
rational, half-imaginative Reasoning Negative whose duty it is to redeem limited but
good Reasoners by raising them into a perception of the Infinite. But good Reason (and
Reason is not the same that it shall be when it knows more than the senses can discover)
can be redeemed only by being annihilated and recreated (for “Reason is a State / Created
to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created"), and its self-annihilation is evidently what Reason fears, mainly because it doubts the existence of eternal/true life/thought.

The identity of the Elect class, who “cannot Believe in Eternal Life / Except by Miracle & a New Birth,” we have tried to establish (or fix) as the Reasoning Negative. But the Elect is Satan, and Satan (or the Devil) is what the Reprobate Imagination becomes when, having thought and said more than enough about Truth, it reaches the limit of “Enough!” and turns back toward the bound of Reason (conceived as 0, or the circle of zero), which it embraces, performing the exemplary act of self-annihilation by reasoning/death and loosing its burning fire of thought to consume the whole earth/text. So “Satan is among the Reprobate”: the Reasoning Negative arises from amongst those of a Reprobate Imagination.

In general terms borrowed from the Proverbs of Hell (specifically “Folly is the cloke of knavery” [MHH7; E36]), one could say that the sinister, cunning, evilly reasoning knave starts out as an imaginative fool trying to obey Reason. But he soon discovers—and at this moment he turns into a crooked Poetic Genius—that he cannot, for his task (“I rest not from my great task!) is to work the miracle of a new conception of Truth that will raise other minds—namely, the minds of good Reasoners—into a perception of the Infinite. And this new conception or “new birth” produces an infant form (a joy, and a sorrow if one examines its anatomy) which will, in the course of time, redeem the well-behaved Redeemed. The Reprobate class, then, is the positive but foolish Imagination going forward from or expanding the bound of Reason to reach Infinite Truth, and the Elect class is that same Imagination coming back towards the bound, now negative and base, knavish and cunning, contracting the bound to One Void
Truth. Here we must recall the advice of the Proverb of Hell (whose literal truth is obviously questionable), “Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you” (MHH8; E36). On the face of it, this means that a cunning reasoner will avoid—or turn away from—a determined truth-teller. But what if the potential truth-teller first turns himself into a base man before he speaks? After all, the Proverb does not advise speaking your mind, but only being ready to: a wise man may hold his tongue, even when he is angry and most wishes to show it. In that case, the base man or knave or Reasoning Negative you turn yourself into will avoid your brooding mind in the obsolete sense of “to empty a thing (of what is in it); to make, become, or be empty,” or “to make void or of no effect; to refute, disprove” (OED, avoid), thus preventing you from making a fool of yourself by speaking. But if one spoken truth is permitted, it would be within its circumscribed space that the Redeemed class sits, Reason itself, safely ensconced in its finite world of empirical reality, doubting and fearing the Divine Vision it really wants (for it too suffers from a want of thought) to see. But until the miracle happens, the enclosed Redeemed remain “perpetually tormented” by the Elect because (as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell first informed us) the “enjoysments of Genius” look to Angels (who, being good Reasoners, are of the Redeemed class) like “torment and insanity” (MHH6; E35). What good Reasoners find tormenting about the Elect’s work of genius (which, as a work of energy, is to itself eternal delight, because energy is eternal delight) is exactly what we have just experienced: its unorganizability, for “never! never! shalt thou [the Negation] be Organized” (J17:41; E162). And the Negation is its work, because by their works ye shall know them.
If the Redeemed remain tormented by the illogical appearance of the Reasoning Negative’s work—all those paradoxes, enigmas, contradictions, puzzles, and mixed-up confusions for which there appears to be no solution, no reasonable explanation—what they have yet to discover is that they, too, are of the Elect class, for they too are (like the Elect) unable to believe in eternal life/thought except by miracle and a new birth. The Redeemed are, underneath their cloaks of logical righteousness and goodness, Negative Reasoners—knaves, doubters, and sceptics, and their own best tormentors—who cannot be Redeemed until they solve all those logical puzzles and contradictions, turning them all into their kind of miracle: the rebirth of intelligibility and good sense. And when they do, they “shall Reap the whole Earth, from Pole to Pole!”

What the Imagination writes when it reasons negatively might justly be regarded as a miracle in the Greek sense of a “sign,” “wonder,” “power,” or “mighty work,” or some act “exhibiting control over the laws of nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or is specially favoured by God” (OED, miracle), if by “God” we mean “intellect” and by “laws of nature” the laws of natural language and logic. But the work cannot be called a miracle if that implies it “cannot have been brought about by human power” (OED, miracle), because for Blake the divine power is a human power: “God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men” (MHH16; E40). Moreover, “The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God” (MHH22-23; E43), an idea to which Los faithfully returns in Jerusalem:

The man who permits you to injure him, deserves your vengeance:
He also will receive it; go Spectre! Obey my most secret desire:
Which thou knowest without my speaking: Go to these Fiends of Righteousness
Tell them to obey their Humanities, & not pretend Holiness;
When they are murderers: as far as my Hammer & Anvil permit
Go, tell them that the Worship of God, is honouring his gifts
In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according
To his Genius: which is the Holy Ghost in Man; there is no other
God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity;
He who envies or calumniates: which is murder & cruelty,
Murders the Holy-one: Go tell them this & overthrow their cup,
Their bread, their altar-table, their incense & their oath:
Their marriage & their baptism, their burial & consecration . . .

(J91:2-14; E251)

Los, speaking here as a member of that class of cruel tormentors, the Elect (because here he is reasoning negatively, compelling his Spectre to obey him, a situation which is the “reversed Reflexion” [J17:42; E162] of the heavenly way things ought to be: Imagination obeying Reason), announces his determination to injure good Reasoners, those who, with “their marriage & their baptism, their burial & consecration,” appear to be awaiting a miracle and new birth. Being “Fiends of Righteousness,” good Reasoners believe in spiritual improvement, the “progressive purification of a ‘good’ cleansed of all ‘evil’” (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 173), and try to purify themselves of error by refusing to make one, refusing to speak. But if good Reasoners take a vow of silence (that is their “oath”), the Intellect-God they worship remains holy only as long as He is silent. And hence the Spectre can injure them simply by speaking to them, repeating Los’s imperatives, his all-powerful human words: “Go, tell them”—and what, if not some form of the truth?

These good Reasoners, ironically, must already be negative Reasoners—like the Spectre, they are “fiends”—because they are “murderers,” and murderers are negators. But in what sense? Do they murder the Truth by not-speaking, by strict observance of their holy vow? That seems unlikely, since they traffic in images (the cup, bread, altar-table, incense). Are they in fact positive Reasoners? That seems unlikely too, since Los
seems to be accusing the reasoning fiends of murdering his images of Truth, which is what the Reasoning Negative does. It is the Spectre/Negation form of Reason who murders (or destroys, devours, burns up, consumes) the Imagination’s spoken truths and other creations, cutting them off as errors existing outside its bound and therefore existing falsely, in fallacy only (hence “Satans Cutting-off from our awful Fields” of knowledge [M25:30; E122], an ambiguous phrase: does Satan perform the cutting action, or is he the object cut off?). Los finds an equivalent for Reason’s crime of verbal murder in calumny (the “false and malicious misrepresentation of the words or actions of others, calculated to injure their reputation” [OED]), and a motive in its envy, no doubt of Los’s own superior creative power. Hence Los defines the “worship” of the Intellect—for “there is no other / God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity”—as “honouring his gifts / In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according / To his Genius.” The outcome of this contest or epic struggle between the two Gods of Reason and Imagination, then, must rest with our judgment (they themselves are too partial) of the greatest “man”/mind: the Poetic Genius of Imagination or the Holy Spectre of Reason. But can we distinguish the victor clearly?

Los sends his Spectre to “overthrow” Reason’s idols and rites, to destroy the errors of the religious—which makes Los a hypocrite, advocating the murder of the images of those he condemns for murdering his images. And the Spectre is to accomplish this task by warning all good and obedient Reasoners (and the Spectre was himself once, but he has got a new master in Los) that they ought to love the greatest genius best, genius being defined as “the Holy Ghost in Man,” mirror image of (or identical to?) the Holy Spectre of Man, the God they worship now. Reconciled, the Holy Ghost and Holy
Spectre can be seen as nothing more than positive and negative images or principles of “the Holy-one,” the greatest “man” of all. This Holy One Intellect is also the wise man who incorporates both Good Reason and Evil Imagination, or the selfish, smiling fool and the sullen, frowning fool, in his singular body of thought, a text he may use as a rod (“for the fool’s back” [Prov. 26.3]) or any other instrument of discipline, injury, or vengeance, even a destructive hammer, as Los uses it here:

I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care
Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! put off Holiness
And put on Intellect: or my thundrous Hammer shall drive thee
To wrath which thou condemnest: till thou obey my voice

(J91:54-57; E252)

When Los commands the Spectre to “obey my most secret desire: / Which thou knowest without my speaking,” Los’s remarkably close resemblance to the Spectre’s God Reason—who does not speak and demands obedience—would make the two indistinguishable were it not for Los’s “secret desire,” which, we know, is the desire to voice Truth. But it is also, surely, the desire of raising other men into a perception of the Infinite, and if one of its requirements is the positing of Truth, the other is the negating of error. And it is in fulfillment of this latter requirement that Los sends out his Spectre to destroy the idols of the religious (obedient Reasoners). But Los also assigns his Spectre the positive task: in commanding that the Spectre obey his voice and speak—“Go, tell them,” he says thrice—he alters the Spectre to a Positive, or a positor of truths which Reasoners of the same Elect class as the Spectre himself (those who “cannot Believe in Eternal Life / Except by Miracle & a New Birth”) must obey to redeem themselves from their tormenting confusion. “[A]s far as my Hammer & Anvil permit / Go, tell them,” Los says (J91:6-7; E251), for his productive hammer and anvil can only go so far, as far
as the bound of Reason, beyond which his erroneous images (including the Spectre itself) will burn up or dissipate into insignificant bits of worthless, delusive, unorganizable stuff, like chaff:

Then he sent forth the Spectre all his pyramids [triangular figures] were grains Of sand & his pillars [of Truth]: dust on the flys wing: & his starry Heavens; a moth of gold & silver mocking his anxious grasp Thus Los alterd his Spectre & every Ratio of his Reason He alterd time after time, with dire pain & many tears Till he had completely divided him into a separate space.

(J91:47-52; E252)

But the Spectre never finds his own separate space, for he and Los are inseparable, just as, in the mundanest sense, reason and imagination are. The Three Class of Men are impossible to “fix”—firmly or definitely place, make permanently stable—as three distinct individuals. Their definitive characteristics are so thoroughly mixed that they can be understood only in relation to each other, as a group of three—two of which paired together make the third—that adds up to one whole: “Two yet but one: each in the other sweet reflected! these / Are our Three Heavens beneath the shades of Beulah, land of rest!” (M20:1-2; E113). When Blake has Los “fix” the Two Contraries or the Three Classes of Men, the rare sense of the word he has in mind is “to settle or determine the form of, give a permanent form to (language or literature)”; “to set down in writing” (OED, fix).

Still, let us try one last time to heed the call to “separate what has been mixed.” Returning to Milton’s instructions for the binding of the Three Classes, we are told to bind the Elect “separate,” in a class by itself, whereas the Reprobate (Imagination) and Redeemed (Reason) are to bound “in a twin-bundle for the Consummation.” This consummation must be a sign of two things: first, the union of the two positive Contraries
Reason and Imagination in the marriage of Heaven (good reasoning) and Hell (evil imagining); and second, the burning up of the erroneous world of Imagination created outside Reason’s bound (this would be the conflagration preceding the Apocalypse). And since, as Los says, “I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts but have only / Made enemies: I never made friends but by spiritual gifts; / By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought” (J91:15-17; E251), the created errors our negatively reasoning and contentious thought must burn up are the Imagination’s “corporeal gifts,” its images of Truth, its words, its material, the unintelligible matter in which informal Energy—itself an eternally burning spiritual gift—is “closed.” And the consummation in marriage of the two Contraries issues in the destructive Reasoning Negative, itself a consuming/devouring fiery power that will rage through the whole imaginative Earth/text until every last image is reduced to ash. As we were warned by The Marriage so long ago: “These two classes of men [Prolific Imagination and Devouring Reason] are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence” (MHH16-17; E40). And one of the many errors illusorily propagated by the text, one of the first errors the Reasoning Negative comes to burn up, is that the Contraries were ever separable, that they were ever truly enemies.

What is born, then, in that “New Birth” without a vision of which the Elect cannot believe in true thought, is the child of the marriage of heaven and hell, of passive/feminine Reason and active/masculine Imagination. This child (the same infant of unacted desires some would sooner murder in its cradle than nurse too long) is the very image of the Elect class (in the new birth the Elect will see themselves). It is, of course, also the Spectre/Image of thinking Man, the Reasoning Negative itself. And in this
infant, all the attributes and characteristics, including the sexual, of both its parent
Contraries will appear inseparably mixed. The Reasoning Negative is therefore double-sexed, and it speaks in the first-person plural: “A dark Hermaphrodite We stood /
Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good” (KG E268). From the “enormous strife [of the
warring Contraries]. one giving life, the other giving death / To his adversary” (M19:29-
30; E113)—a strife that is also a marriage, an opposition that is true friendship—the half-
living, half-dead, but wholly self-contradictory form that Blake calls his Reasoning
Negative is born:

The Twofold form Hermaphroditic: and the Double-sexed;
The Female-male & the Male-female, self-dividing stood
Before him in their beauty, & in cruelties of holiness!
Shining in darkness, glorious upon the deeps of Entuthon.
(M19:32-35; E113)

This dark Hermaphrodite (dark because it speaks in repetitious obscurities) is Blake’s
Spectre, his Adversary, and the Arch-Fiend of the text. But it calls itself “Rational Truth”
because, as the issue of the Two Contraries’ mutually fatal marriage, its form is
maternally constructed in Reason’s silent womb (the void); but its substance, the energy
of Thought, is supplied by its potent paternal Imagination. The qualifying adjective
“Rational” is thus contributed by Reason, and the substantive noun “Truth” by
Imagination.

This Rational Truth (as object) or Reasoning Negative (as power) can be read as
either a positive “Infant Joy” (who speaks, but only about dualisms and the exigency of
naming [SI E16]), or a negative “Infant Sorrow” (who sulks, rationally “Bound and
weary” from energetically “Striving against [its] swaddling bands,” on his mother’s
nourishing breast while his father weeps at the evil he has brought forth [SE E28], for
“Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth” [MHH8; E36]; or perhaps the father weeps from unbounded imaginative joy, for “Excess of joy weeps” [MHH8; E36]). Or the infant Reasoning Negative may be read as both positive and negative at once: its truthful substance beautiful, its rational structure appalling: “The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its anatomy / Horrible ghast & deadly! nought shalt thou find in it / But dark despair & everlasting brooding melancholy!” (J22:22-24; E167).

And such is the essential paradox of Blake’s Thought: its bodily anatomy or fixed system is purely rational, for we will find nothing in it but circular, self-contradictory, fruitless reasoning, a form that lives to consume its own flesh—a self-consuming artifact, indeed. Yet it remains what to appreciative readers of Blake it has always appeared to be: a feat of imaginative genius, a “sublime ornament,” in Blake’s own words, “not obscuring the outlines of beauty / Terrible to behold for [its] extreme beauty & perfection” (J86:15-16; E244). And if this ornament, this infinitely malleable piece of brilliantly imaginative reasoning, “shines,” as the Hermaphrodite does, “in darkness,” that is because the light of its Truth is apparent only when set in the foil of darkest Error, like the deeps of “Entuthon” upon which the self-dividing Hermaphrodite stands, firmly grounded. (And that code name “Entuthon,” incidentally, contains its own verbal flaw: it is missing an “r.” But this silent sin of omission is apparent only if we perceive the silent existential pun “r”/are and speak it. Then, as usual, we must reorder Entruthon’s orthographic chaos to spell, on the one hand, “no truth” or “truth none,” and, on the other hand, “one truth”: hermaphroditically joined contraries again, predicated, as always, on an invisible Being.)

As plate 25 of Milton correctly instructs us, we must bind (with our reason) Blake’s Reprobate Imagination and Redeemed Reason into a twin-bundle for the
consummation, so that the Two Contraries can be first burnt as separate and opposed faculties and then pulled from the fire as the Elect Reasoning Negative, one alternately imagining and reasoning whole Intellect (the last six letters of which word should be marked well). For “the Elect must be saved [from] fires of Eternal Death”—because “eternal death” is a want of thought that never ends, never satisfies our need for All—in order “To be formed into the Churches of Beulah [the “married land”] that they destroy not the Earth.” The Elect’s “churches of Beulah” (note again Blake’s characteristic technique of identification: the object made—the church—is identical to its maker—the Reasoning Negative) are the Earth/Text itself. As churches of Reason, they are holy (and hole-y) places where good Reasoners (the Redeemed) may gather to worship their God, but in the hope of seeing the miracle of a new birth (Reason again, but in a new and human form). Without witnessing the event for themselves, they will never believe in Blake’s True Thought. But that new birth must be preceded by the negation of the Negation, for if it is true that the Negation (whether a silent Reason or a transgressing Imagination) must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries, then it follows that the dead Contraries (destroyed when coupled as One Negation in their marriage hearse) can only be redeemed by the negation (or murder in its cradle) of the newborn infant Negation, whose sorrowing tear—“I labour day and night, I behold the soft affections / Condense beneath my hammer into forms of cruelty / But still I labour in hope, tho’ still my tears flow down”—is thus redeemed as a Positive Divine Image of Blake’s One Thought.

Only in his Imagination, with its infinite desire for an infinite Truth, and which is “not a State: it is the Human Existence itself” (M32:32; E132), can Blake enter the changeable state of Reason fearlessly for the purpose of altering it from finite to infinite,
from temporal to eternal, to annihilate it and recreate it anew. But if Blake’s goal (and probably also his goal) is to change our Reason, he cannot do it without our help, which is why we are warned to “Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore / What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!” (M32:30-31; E132). Reason is really eternal/true, too, however false—changeable or annihilable—the appearance Blake’s text gives it. And only we, its readers and perceivers, can change the appearance of Blake’s Reason back into its permanent reality as an individual faculty of his Eternal Man/Mind:

Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States.
States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease:
You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die.
Satan & Adam are States Created into Twenty-seven Churches.
And thou O Milton art a State about to be Created
Called Eternal Annihilation [Negative Reasoning] that none but the Living
[thinking] shall
Dare to enter: & they shall enter triumphant over Death [the want of thought]
And Hell [confusion and error] & the Grave [of dead code words]! States that are not, but ah! Seem to be.

(M32:22-29; E132)

And so the narrator of Milton, himself a negatively reasoning Poetic Genius always reaching for heavens that appear beyond and yet are still within the horizon of Reason, concludes his story of the Three Classes of Men with an account of his work (a work that is the Reasoning Negative):

then the Body of Death was perfected in hypocritic holiness,
Around the Lamb [Imagination], a Female Tabernacle woven in Cathedrons Looms
He died [reasoned] as a Reprobate [Imagination]. he was Punish’d as a Transgressor!
Glory! Glory! Glory! to the Holy Lamb of God [the Intellect]
I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord!
The Elect shall meet the Redeem’d. on Albions rocks they shall meet
Astonish’d at the Transgressor, in him beholding the Saviour.
And the Elect shall say to the Redeem’d. We behold it is of Divine
Mercy alone! of Free Gift and Election that we live [think].
Our Virtues & Cruel Goodnesses, have deserv’d Eternal Death.
Thus they weep upon the fatal Brook of Albions River.

(M13:25-35; E107)

When the Elect (Reasoning Negative) meets the Redeemed (good, obedient Reasoner) at
the bound of Reason ("Albion’s rocks") to reveal its miraculous vision, the birth of itself
as Reason in a new imaginative form (or Imagination in a new rational form?), what the
two classes will behold when they come together at their mutual limit will astonish them:
the Imagination’s punishment as a transgressor of Reason will be revealed to have been
self-inflicted, a self-annihilation by reasoning/death, and yet the act of thought ("Free
Gift") that saves them both. All the Imagination’s thoughts and words—whether
good/positive ("Virtues"), evil/negative (vices not mentioned), or a mixture of both
("Cruel Goodnesses"), but always ultimately positive (and beyond words)—will
disappear, negated by the higher Thought of the Absolute of which they are images and
consigned to the Void of Eternal Death. For the delusive Imagination must die for our
illogical sins in this text, self-reasoned out of existence, elected by Blake’s Intellect to be
our saviour-by-example. So it leaves behind its Body of Death, perfected in hypocritic
holiness—for our imaginative and holy Poetic Genius turns out to be cloaking a cruel and
sacrilegious Reasoning Negative, and pretends to a great deal more besides: "A pretence
of Art, to destroy Art: a pretence of Liberty / To destroy Liberty. a pretence of Religion to
destroy Religion" (J38:35-36; E185). But received into our understanding hands, the
Body of Death becomes a Divine Analogy rousing enough to awaken our sleeping
humanity, if not our sleeping intellect.
The natural man, says Benoit, “is perfect, nothing is lacking in him. But he does not realise this because he is caught in the entanglements of his mental representations. Everything happens as though a screen were woven between himself and Reality by his imaginative activity functioning in the dualistic mode” (Supreme Doctrine 105).

“Imaginative mental activity”—and I think Blake would agree with the exponent of Zen on this point—
is useful at the beginning of man’s life, as long as the human machine is not completed, as long as the abstract intellect is not fully developed; it constitutes, during this first period, a compensation without which man could not tolerate his limited condition. Once the human machine is entirely developed the imagination, while still retaining the utility of which we have just spoken, becomes more and more harmful; it brings about in fact a wastage of energy which otherwise would accumulate in the interior of the being until the crystallisation of intuitive non-dualistic knowledge (satori). (Supreme Doctrine 105)

If this is so, then Blake’s Imagination, cruelly entangling its reader in the webs and nets of its mental representations, truly deserves the eternal death to which his Reasoning Negative will subject it in the witnessing eyes of good Reasoners.

We, of course, cannot escape Blake’s Web of Life until our Reason says “Enough!” and either closes the book or turns on him angrily (if also obediently) with newfound critical cunning. If we will persist in the folly of reasoning with Blake, we must at some point (at our own personal crook in the road) turn around and begin reasoning backwards through a long string of false synonyms and unjust definitions. We will see more particularly how this happens in succeeding chapters, but to help ward off the shock of watching the terrifically voluble Blake reduced to the profoundest of silences, we ought to dwell, theoretically, on the idea (a mere possibility, a critical hypothesis) that Blake’s Imagination needs to void itself of its shadowy idols in order to
purify his Mind. We must imagine this Blakean Imagination, having generated a vast, complex, and seemingly incomprehensible universe of discourse, suddenly seeing with a coldly objective eye that it is all too much, it has gone too far, and wisely deciding to reduce its thoughts back down to a manageable quantity. Imagining this, we might go so far as to envision a time when Blake finally reaches the bound of Reason again, the point at which his speech and thought reduce to nothing in face of the Absolute. This evolutionary process of reduction through understanding Benoit refers to as “the inner alchemy”;\(^2\) Blake would call it the law of sacrifice (of the Imagination) for sin (against Truth).

Most cruelly, it is true, Blake subjects us to reasonings of “labyrinthine intricacy” (J83:37; E241) and then exposes our febrile conclusions about his views on politics,\(^3\) religion, philosophy, psychology, and sex as spurious imaginative constructions. But he has warned us: “tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow” (J71:18-19; E225): and the circumference of our abstract reasonings is also, certainly, within. Besides, only we can permit Blake to injure us, which we do by continuing to read him. And we are always free to turn our knives on him, too, and cut through the entanglements of his mental representations, all those illusory webs and nets and veils screening us from his true image of Truth, which is that nothing conceivable can be Reality.

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\(^1\) Triangles and pyramids figure prominently in several of Blake’s pictures: *Newton, The Ancient of Days*, the illustration to the Application of *There is No Natural Religion* [b]). A more elaborate design of several triangles appearing within the body of one main
triangle, formed by the arms and wings of two contrary angels positioned on either side of an enthroned spectrous pope, is to be found on plate 11 of Europe.

2Benoit describes the inner alchemy as follows:

Evolutive understanding represents a distillation of our inner world, of our image-material. There is purification, subtilisation, simplification of this material and, correlativey, of all our imaginative-emotive processes. Let us give an example of this. As a child I believe in the Infant Jesus as in a perfect child who loves me and wishes me well, who watches me living and feels about me sentiments similar to my own; and this image is crude, very visible, charged with concrete details. As an adolescent I arrive at an understanding of God whom I represent to myself as a Being still personal, but without visible body, still having thoughts and sentiments, but vaguer, less easily imagined. The image is subtilised, it has lost some of its manifest clarity; it is more non-manifested and at the same time vaster, more powerful in the sense that it embraces more things. My age and my understanding again increasing, there forms in me the abstract idea of an impersonal Principle that I see as only good, constructive. At the next stage I arrive at the conception of this Principle as being above the dualism of construction and destruction, Non-Action dominating all phenomena, but I distinguish this Principle from its Manifestation, believing in the reality of this distinction. I understand that the Principle is my Principle, I perceive my identity with it, but I distinguish my Principle from my manifestation, believing in the reality of this distinction. At last I succeed in understanding that the distinction between Principle and Manifestation is a simple analytical artifice which my mind needs in order to express itself; I understand that I deceive myself as soon as I oppose among each other the elements that I have distinguished. The mental image of Reality, which at first had been the concrete image of the Child-Jesus, has been subtilised until it has become the abstract image of the Void of traditional metaphysics, Void which includes all the imaginable plenitudes. Parallel with this imaginative distillation it is evident that my affective reactions to my conceptions of Reality are subtilised also; the interior and exterior operation of my machine is modified when I cease to believe in a personal God, an object of love and of dread, and when I arrive at conceiving abstractly my Buddha-nature as being above all thought and all sentiment.

This process of distillation, due to the work of intellectual intuition, corresponds to the idea... that our correct inner evolution destroys nothing but fulfils everything. When I extract alcohol from fruit I do not destroy the essence of the fruit, but rather purify it, concentrate it, and fulfil it. In the same way I fulfil my conception of Reality when I evolve from the image of the Child-Jesus to the image of the Void. There is apparent death because there is a diminution of the visible, of that which is perceptible by the senses and the mind; but nothing has been destroyed just because the belief in the Reality of a perception ceases to exist. The fulfilment of the human-being carries with it the disappearance of the
illusory Reality of images perceived by the senses and the mind. (*Supreme Doctrine* 225-26)

3 "I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics. If Men were Wise <the Most arbitrary> Princes could not hurt them If they are not Wise the Freest Government is compelld to be a Tyranny" (PA E580).
11. The Vegetated Tongue, the Burning Fire of Thought, and the Rock of Truth

"In not being two," runs a Zen aphorism, "all is the same / All that exists is comprehended therein"; or, more enigmatically: "That which is is the same as that which is not. / That which is not is the same as that which is" (anonymous, qtd. in Supreme Doctrine 214-15). A similar metaphysical insight informs Blake's fusing of his Two Contraries into one Reasoning Negative so that they might comprehend all that exists. But the train of thought leading to the point where we can comprehend (or embrace) this foundational metaphysical contradiction, that the Positive Is is the same as the Negative Is-Not, is long, arduous, complicated, and often crooked, or, as Milton puts it, "A long journey & dark thro Chaos in the track of Miltons course / To where the Contraries of Beulah War beneath Negations Banner" (M34:22-23; E134). But the journey is made especially difficult if the traveller tries to shun the evil of negative reasoning that will lead to his as well as Blake's self-annihilation, if he balks at murdering the family of ideas he generated on his way in, all those beloved theoretical ideas and cherished opinions as to what Blake really means, or might possibly mean, by all the undeniably enigmatic things he says. It would be wise to heed, then, Blake's warning that

A mans worst enemies are those
Of his own house & family;
And he who makes his law a curse,
By his own law shall surely die. (J27:81-84; E173)

The seemingly self-contradictory double law of Blake's text—the "Thou shalt not" (see Eur12:28; E64; or "The Garden of Love," SE E26) which, as I have argued, must be interpreted as "Thou shalt not speak of Truth" and yet "Thou shalt not remain silent when angry" at Truth's attackers—is a curse on anyone who tries to follow it: “No individual
can keep these Laws, for they are death / To every energy of man, and forbid the springs of life” (J31:11-12; E177). But a non-individual, like the double Reasoning Negative, can keep these laws, which he does by reconciling them in one: “Thou shalt speak in code.” This law is the real curse, and as such the cruel cutting instrument by which Blake’s Imagination will “die” (be negated), along with all the images it loves. The warning is repeated with prophetic urgency: “Alas!—The time will come, when a man’s worst enemies / Shall be those of his own house and family: in a Religion / Of Generation, to destroy by Sin and Atonement, happy Jerusalem, / The Bride and Wife of the Lamb” (J41:25-28; E189).

In view of direness of this warning, we need to ask what not only the individual reader’s beliefs but the whole existing mountain of learned commentary and expert critical interpretation may have done to happy Jerusalem, beloved creature and material counterpart ("bride" and "wife") of Blake’s immortal and immaterial Imagination (the "Lamb"). For we are all, to some extent, followers of the “Religion of Generation,” with Reason, generator of abstract thoughts, our God of Meaning, His Heaven the enclosed space of rational comprehension, where things make sense. And we remain worshippers of Reason even though from time to time we may protest our enslavement to Reason’s chains by spinning our own webs of clever nonsense, and even though we humbly recognize the mysterious power of the Lamb, too, as the generator of beautiful concrete images. Fortunately, because Blake’s abstract ideas unlock the significance of his symbols, the reader need only continue on groping in the usual way, but coldly and objectively distinguishing between those passages he (truly) understands and those dark or blocked ones he does not (but may wish to pretend he does). Guesses, speculations,
wrong turns, and ingenious solutions will all collapse eventually anyway, so it is better the sooner to conduct the self-examination and ruthlessly slaughter all such fickle members of one's mental family (including the infants), and tear down one's own house (Thought is always building)—and to do it voluntarily, as soon as one sees the error of one's ways—than to allow one's immortal spirit to become so encrusted with intellectual pretense that the false body cannot be scraped off without tearing the tender skin beneath.

Having laid a sufficient number of these mental corpses to rest, ideas we once thought were possibly true (and in Blake only Truth can be desired and loved), we begin to see through Blake's eyes, begin to be able to read his visions. In the poem below, for example, we are about to see the path through the garden of ideas once loved (the very garden path down which Blake's code will lead us) begin winding through a graveyard:

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires. (SE E26)

The chapel of the religion of Reason is the same order of building as the Churches of Beulah, built by (out of) the Elect and identified with the Holy Reasoning Power, negator of all words, ideas, and images of Truth. It is the Church of Death to the Imagination.

Fortunately,
Beneath the bottoms of the Graves, which is Earth's central joint,
There is a place where Contrarieties are equally true:
(To protect from the Giant blows in the sports of intellect,
Thunder in the midst of kindness, & love that kills its beloved:
Because Death is for a period, and they renew tenfold.)
(J48:13-17; E196)

In a "grave" is where we bury our dead thoughts, the ones that turn out, on reflection, to be empty or erroneous—and in reading Blake, that would be everything we once thought, for (so goes the Divine Analogy) the renovation of the consciousness of the natural man requires a total annihilation of the selfhood: the old man must die for the sake of the new.

Beneath the bottom of our mental graves, then, we find ourselves at "Earth's central joint," or the joint of Reason's compass: the center of the text where the divided Contraries join together in death, equally true because equally negated. Here also the two contrary principles of the text—loquacity and reticence—meet in one coherent articulation, for to *articulate* means both "to unite with by a joint" and "to divide (vocal sound) into distinct parts (words and syllables) each representing a notion or relation" (OED). (And thus moments of reticence appear in the articulated lines: who or what is to be protected from "giant blows," and who are the "they" who renew tenfold?) Here the positive Is meets the negative Is-Not in one giant self-contradiction going by the name of "Reasoning Negative."

In *Milton* the idea is repeated: "There is a place where Contrarieties are equally True / This place is called Beulah, It is a pleasant lovely Shadow / Where no dispute can come. Because of those who Sleep" (M30:1-3; E129). The code word "Beulah" Blake lifts straight from Isaiah 62, where the prophet is himself engaged in a process of renaming: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land
shall be married” (Isa. 62.4). Similarly, Blake’s Beulah is a textual place married by his Intellect, and here no rational dispute can come because here the Contraries are no longer at war: being equal, they are married; and being married, they generate something new from the old logic their war has destroyed. If when separated the Contraries are mutual Negations, then their mutual existence—and it is axiomatic that “Contraries mutually Exist”—must cover the whole range of logical possibilities. In not being two (as the Zen aphorism says), all that exists is comprehended therein.

The Contraries are not-two, of course, in the Reasoning Negative (or the Elect), ruler of Beulah: here they cannot, as Blake says, “exist separate,” which is why the Elect date back to “before the foundation of the World,” a world where things do exist separate so that Reason can distinguish them. Like Beulah, however, which is just one region of it, this world is created for those who reason/sleep, for spectres and phantoms: “This World is all a Cradle for the erred wandering Phantom” (J56:8; E206). It is a world, in short, generated from the endless self-divisions of Blake’s One Intellect, and we see its multitude of separate “things” whenever we try, ultimately futilely (this futility, indeed, leads us to Beulah), to distinguish one thing from another. The resulting illusion of endless dualisms “Subdu[es] All / From the Foundation of the World.” Hence the warning:

What is a Wife & what is a Harlot? What is a Church? & What
Is a Theatre? are they Two & not One? can they Exist Separate?
Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion
O Demonstrations of Reason Dividing Families in Cruelty & Pride!

(J57:8-11; E207)

The “Great Voice of the Atlantic” speaks these lines to Albion, its “deep black rethundering Waters” “pour[ing] in impetuous loud loud, louder & louder” (J57:3-5; E207). Despite the Voice’s insistence on being heard, Albion manages to “fle[e] from the Divine Vision”
unable, perhaps, to make sense of the proposition that “Brotherhood,” or Contraries working together harmoniously, is the same thing as both “Religion” (that of Reason) and “Politics” (the science and art of government, but government by “the Governor or Reason” (MHH5; E34) of mental states that are not, but seem to be). Writing with a divided mind, Blake’s rational and imaginative faculties are antagonistic, one of them arguing for reconciliation, synthesis, union—or peace and brotherhood—in One Thought, the other bent on destroying its enemy through the interminable divisions of abstract analysis, by which individuals are kept isolated, separate, opposed, and distinct, until they merge (paradoxically) into an indistinct and confused mass of particulars submerged in corporeal war. It is therefore the Imagination who, in the above speech, accuses Reason of dividing up groups of things, families of words or ideas, creating a false appearance of independent entities, rather than the mutually related, interdependent, and intimately connected parts of the whole they really are.

The Negation (or Reasoning Negative or Spectre or Satan or the Elect or dark Hermaphrodite) is, of course, an error created by Blake’s Imagination, and as such he longs to be negated himself (in accordance with the law that the Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries): “O that I could cease to be! Despair! I am Despair / Created to be the great example of horror & agony” (J10:51-52; E153). What the Negation exemplifies is the horror and agony of faulty reasoning, particularly self-contradiction. And this makes him the contrary of Blake’s Intellect in its whole, internally consistent, organized and ordered, unified and coherent, and ultimately intelligible form. So the Negation acknowledges that “the Almighty hath made me his Contrary / To be all evil, all reversed & for ever dead” (J10:56-57; E154). Moreover, Los warns him(self) that “never! never!
shalt thou be Organized / But as a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness / And in the Non Entity” (J17:41-43; E162).

But if Blake’s Negation has been organized so as to be forever unorganizable, is there any sense in which it can truly be read? Again Los warns him:

nor shall that which is above [Truth]
Ever descend into thee: but thou shalt be a Non Entity for ever
And if any enter into thee, thou shalt be an Unquenchable Fire
And he shall be a never dying Worm, mutually tormented by
Those that thou tormentest, a Hell & Despair for ever & ever.

So Los in secret with himself communed . . .  

(J17:43-48; E162)

As a distorted and reversed reflection of Truth, Blake’s text—or at least its rational bottom half: its “below”—is unorganizable, empty, and false because it is inherently self-contradictory. “Two Horn’d Reasoning,” according to one of “The Keys of the Gates,” is a “Cloven Fiction / In Doubt which is Self contradiction” (KG E268). And therefore to enter into the text through Death’s door, worming our way into its dead body (like the human worm who plows the earth/text in his own conceit), is to find ourselves “never dying,” never not thinking, never suffering from a want of thought because “always questioning, / But never capable of answering” (M41:12-13; E142), never able to come to a conclusion and put out the unquenchable fire of thought. And that is indeed a horrible fate, we and Blake’s Spectre “mutually tormented”: the reader (particularly if he tends to be angelic) tormented by the Devil’s enjoyments of his crooked genius, and the Spectre tormented by being compelled by Blake’s tormented Imagination to fabricate all those poetic lies and deceits that are the agents of the reader’s torment.
If the spectrous half of Blake’s text is founded (“from before the foundation of the World”) on self-contradiction, and if that part of the text is therefore unorganizable, what way out is there for the reader-worm, aside from closing the whole book? If contraries are both true (an impossibility in logic), and if the text continues to assert or imply contradictions—both “A is B” and “A is not-B” at once; both “The Negation is a Contrary” (see J52; E200 or J10:56; E154) and “The Negation is not a Contrary” (J17:33; E162), for example—then Blake cannot say anything true or meaningful, at least not according to Aristotelian logic, and not in the infernal region of the text, the hell “below.” But perhaps in the heavenly region above, where every mind passively obeys Reason, things may be wonderfully lucid and abundantly full of meaning, because here the God Reason keeps things internally consistent, organizable, coherent, and true. Even so, we must go through hell to reach heaven, travel the entire distance of the irrational road of foolish excess before we can reach the palace of wisdom—we must experience “Too much” in order to know “Enough!” So let us explore hell.

Aristotle holds the law of non-contradiction, \( \neg(P \& \neg P) \), to be the “most certain principle of being” (Lear 249) and, moreover, impossible to deny, even for someone who sincerely believes it to be false. Indeed, Aristotle argues that “everyone must believe it, no matter what they think they believe” (Lear 252). As Lear explains, this argument establishes a basic harmony between thought and reality. Although the principle of non-contradiction is a basic principle constraining the structure of reality, it also harmoniously constrains the way we can think about the structure of reality. But what is the nature of this harmony? One might ask: is it because the principle of non-contradiction is a basic principle of reality that it constrains the way we must think if we are to think about reality? Or is it a principle of intelligibility, governing all thinking, to which the world must conform if it is to be understood? By now it should be clear that this is a false dichotomy. One of the key
insights which emerged from the investigation of logic was the possibility of a structure which was at once the order of reality and the order of thought. Indeed . . . thinking constitutes reality at its highest level. (253)

Intellectually, Blake ought to be in complete agreement with the substance of Lear’s final statement; but his Imagination, as a Reasoning Negative, is caught in a logical bind, compelled to refuse to reason in order to negate its mirror-Negation: “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans,” says Los—and that “other man” is his Contrary—“I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create” (J10:20-21; E153).

Clearly, the sort of system Los creates cannot be a logical one, though it can be creative. System, of course, may refer to a wide variety of things, only some of which seem to depend on or require logical consistency:

1. A set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent, so as to form a complex unity; a whole composed of parts in orderly arrangement according to some scheme or plan[.]

2. A group of heavenly bodies connected by their mutual attractive forces and moving in orbits about a centre or central body, as the solar system[.]

3. The animal body as an organized whole; the organism in relation to its vital processes of functions.

4. A group, set, or aggregate of things, natural or artificial, forming a connected or complex whole.

5. The set of correlated principles, ideas, or statements belonging to some department of knowledge or belief; a department of knowledge or belief considered as an organized whole; a connected and regularly arranged scheme of the whole of some subject; a comprehensive body of doctrines, conclusions, speculations, or theses.

6. A work or writing containing a comprehensive and regularly arranged exposition of some subject; a systematic treatise.

7. An organized scheme or plan of action, esp[ecially] one of a complex or comprehensive kind; an orderly or regular method of procedure.
8. A formal, definite, or established scheme or method (of classification, notation, or the like). (OED)

Yet Los’s system conforms to all these definitions. Beginning with the last, we may recall that Los fixes and regulates with his hammer the system of Three Classes of Men, which underlies the actualization of all the thought-creatures of his universe: “For in every Nation & every Family the Three Classes are born / And in every Species of Earth, Metal, Tree, Fish, Bird & Beast” (M25:40-41; E122). Next, Los’s system is self-evidently a written work of the kind described by the fifth and sixth definitions (its subject invariably Truth), a work the text self-referentially metaphorizes as a natural system (of lakes, rivers, mountains, trees) or an artificial one (a city or a dark Satanic mill), as in the fourth definition. Los’s work is also metaphorized as a living body (human or animal), the sort of system described by the third definition. And its statements and ideas certainly form what we see in the second definition, a system of heavenly intellectual bodies—stars, moons, planets—orbiting their Sun of Truth. But the essential sense of Los’s “system,” which I have been referring to all along as a universe of discourse, may be traced to one of its Latin roots, systema, which incorporates both the idea of “the universe” and that of a “body of the articles of faith” (OED). Since the word universe itself means “the whole of created or existing things regarded collectively; all things (including the earth, the heavens, and all the phenomena of space) considered as constituting a systematic whole, esp[ecially] as created or existing by Divine power; the whole world or creation; the cosmos” (OED, my emphasis), Los’s system is simply the universe he creates. The question is, is it bounded by Reason, or is it created on the other
side of that bound, in the region of error and excess? Or is it, being founded on self-contradiction, equally true or equally false both within and without Reason’s bound?

In There is No Natural Religion [b] we are told that “The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a universe would soon become a mill with complicated wheels” (NNR[b] E2). This principle implies not only that Reason is capable of bounding (or circumscribing) the Imagination’s universe (body), but also that once Reason has bounded (or bound) it, it becomes loathsome to the mind that possesses it, so dull, monotonous, and boring that it must be turned into an artificial, mechanical object, a “mill with complicated wheels.” As Cox notes, here Blake’s implicit argument reads like a typical eighteenth-century empiricist attack on Aristotelian rationalism. Such influential empiricists as John Locke and Thomas Reid compared a narrow rationalism (and, in Reid’s case, the Aristotelian syllogism itself) to the confining circularities of a mill. Locke, like Blake, coupled the mill image with a reference to the importance of extensive intellectual travel.[30] (Love and Logic)

But the mill with complicated wheels is what the dull round of the imaginative universe bounded by Reason soon becomes. And we need to ask who or what effects the change, and whether the bounded universe does not become the mill once it is no longer bounded, or whether the apparent difference between the bounded universe and the mill is not simply a question of how we perceive it (whether or not we are able to comprehend it). For the mill may be just as loathsome as the dull round, if not so dull. Certainly, it is more laborious to work in—the price we pay for excitement or interest?—and more tormenting, too: “Withoutside is the Mill, intricate, dreadful / And fill’d with cruel tortures; but no mortal man can find the Mill / Of Satan, in his mortal pilgrimage of seventy years” (J35:3-5; E181). If the mill is “withoutside,” it must lie without Reason’s
bound, in the realm of Negative Reasoning—hence its possessor is Satan. The Satanic mill is most likely what Los’s universe or system becomes when its perceiver fails to comprehend it.

Blake’s Imagination, loathing the finite but comprehensible form of his own Thought (which, it could be argued, was completed by the time he had laid down the principles of the two parts of There is No Natural Religion), soon sees the necessity of giving his reader a stimulating experience of error. Refusing to obey Reason any longer, he crosses its bound, becomes the arch-sinner Satan, and founds his system anew, this time on the contrary (or contradictory?) of Reason’s most certain Principle of Being: a denial of the law of non-contradiction. Unable literally to deny it within the confines of a single proposition, Los denies it by his acts: by contradicting himself, by hypocritically doing what he speaks out against (reasoning), and by refusing to “Reason & Compare.” In affirming that his Negation is himself, both a Contrary and a Not-Contrary, a thing that exists and does not exist, both a man and (as a thought) not a man, something that thinks (a man) and does not think (a fly), an illusion that has real consequences, he implicitly affirms (P & ~P), that which is = that which is not. And he affirms this law (a law by which he shall surely die) by a double negation, a denial of ~(P & ~P). If only reasoning can expose a contradiction, Los’s refusal to reason, supported by Blake’s ironic definition of “Two Horn’d Reasoning” as “Self contradiction” (KG E268), amounts to a refusal to be bound by the logical law.

Los’s system is designed to meet the demands of his Intellect-God, which requires a method that will permit it to speak and not-speak at the same time. Such a system, however, can produce only falsehoods or (more kindly) logical errors. Let me be more
precise about this. When Blake’s not-speaking Reason and speaking Imagination compromise and collaborate in the voice of one Reasoning Negative, all his truths becomes lies, and not just because “deep dissimulation is the only defence an honest man has left” (J49:23; E198) or because “he who will not defend Truth, must be compelld to defend / A Lie” (J9:29-30; E152). More importantly, Blake’s Imagination’s denial of Reason’s law of non-contradiction, the creative heart of his system, reflects his belief that something can both be and not be at the same time, that “something” being the Absolute Principle itself (both Infinite Being and a Void). And he demonstrates this belief by the counterexamples of the lie and the illusion, things that have no existence relative to Reality but nevertheless a real existence relative to human perception. And so, only Truth really exists, and the lie of the text perpetuated by the Reasoning Negative (who is both Contraries working together in the text’s construction and annihilation, “Continually Building. Continually Decaying because of Love & Jealousy” [J72; E227]) does not exist, except as an error in our perception, our self-created illusion. “What seems to Be: Is:” but only “To those to whom / It seems to Be” (J32:51-52; E179).

Having refuted in his *Metaphysics* the view that the law of non-contradiction could by any stretch of the imagination be thought false, Aristotle concludes,

we have now posited that it is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be, and by this means have shown that this is the most indisputable of all principles.—Some indeed demand that even this shall be demonstrated, but this they do through want of education, for not to know of what things one should demand demonstration, and of what one should not, argues want of education. For it is impossible that there should be demonstration of absolutely everything (there would be an infinite regress, so that there would still be no demonstration); but if there are things of which one should not demand demonstration, these persons could not say what principle they maintain to be more self-evident than the present one.
We can, however, demonstrate negatively even that this view is impossible, if our opponent will only say something; and if he says nothing, it is absurd to seek to give an account of our views to one who cannot give an account of anything, in so far as he cannot do so. For such a man, as such, is from the start no better than a vegetable. (1006a1-15, my emphasis)

Lear translates the italicized statement as "it is absurd to attempt to reason with one who will not reason about anything, in so far as he refuses to reason" (255)—if this is so, it is obviously absurd to attempt to reason with Los. Aristotle, says Lear, uses the indirect strategy of "[n]egative proof, or proof by refutation" to establish "the certainty of the principle of non-contradiction. Negative proof is designed to show that the possibility of saying anything, even that the principle of non-contradiction is false, depends on belief in the principle of non-contradiction" (255). For

a person reveals his belief in the principle of non-contradiction not so much by what he says as by the fact that he says anything. His belief in the principle is revealed by the fact that he both speaks and acts in understandable ways. That is why everyone must believe the principle of non-contradiction. For, since this belief is manifested in all speech and action, if a 'person' did not believe the principle of non-contradiction, 'he' would not be able to speak or to act. But a being who has the capacity neither to speak nor to act has no claim to being a person; and so 'he' would rightly be considered as no better than a plant. The principle of non-contradiction is most certain, then, in the sense that it is absolutely unshakeable: the very possibility of speech, thought, and action depends on adherence to its truth. (Lear 256)

The Imagination's refusal to reason is the mirror image of Reason's refusal to speak Truth, which is itself the logical outcome of Blake's (along with everyone else's) inability to refute scepticism, philosophical or religious. For in order for the Imagination to be able to speak alone (which it has an unrestrainable desire to do), without the aid of its stubbornly silent Contrary, it must, obviously, be freed from the necessity of reasoning.
Aristotle's insistence that one cannot *say anything* without reasoning—even the opponent of the law of non-contradiction, he says, "while disowning reason . . . listens to reason" (1006a26-27) as long as he says something—constitutes a formidable obstacle to the accomplishment of the Imagination's great task, because, while refusing to reason, it *must* speak in order to negate Reason's silence (and fill its void with a universe of words). It must, in short, speak without reasoning—and that, says Aristotle, is impossible. So, if it is to continue to deny the law of non-contradiction and pretend to be able to speak (or create its system, which is a verbal structure) without reasoning, then the Imagination will have to speak in non-rational, perhaps incomprehensible, ways. Thus it becomes a Spectre, forced outside Reason's bound into the formless world of error—and "The Spectre is, in Giant Man; insane, and most deform'd" (J33:4; E179). And it will be, this erred, wandering phantom, "from the start," as Aristotle says, "no better than a vegetable":

He who is an Infant [unable to speak], and whose Cradle is a Manger Knoweth the Infant sorrow: whence it came, and where it goeth: And who weave it a Cradle of the grass that withereth away. This World is all a Cradle for the erred wandering Phantom: Rock'd by Year, Month, Day & Hour; and every two Moments Between, dwells a Daughter of Beulah, to feed the Human Vegetable (J56:5-10; E206)

Any discussion with a man, continues Aristotle, who "says neither 'yes' nor 'no', but 'yes and no'; and again . . . denies both of these and says 'neither yes nor no'" (1008a31-33) is "evidently about nothing at all; for he says nothing" (1008a30). If, as I have argued, Blake's divided Intellect says both "yes" and "no" to the question of meaningful discourse about Truth, then that would explain why, from Reason's point of view, his similarly riven text reduces to a statement about nothing, or at any rate nothing
about anything other than itself: its principles; its nature; its desires, beliefs, and dreams; its reason for being; and the reasons behind its presently deformed appearance. A wealth of inferences can be drawn from these explicit statements, of course, but nothing is directly said about things that exist beyond the bounds of Blake’s own imaginative universe and its demonstrations of the truths of its intellectual spirit.

Aristotle goes on to say that

if all are alike both wrong and right, one who is in this condition will not be able either to speak or to say anything intelligible; for he says at the same time both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. And if he makes no judgement but ‘thinks’ and ‘does not think’, indifferently, what difference will there be between him and a vegetable? (1008b8-13)

In “The Fly” Blake proclaims his indifference to thinking and not thinking, indifferently: he will be happy whether he “lives” or “dies.” And because he has “obtain[ed] the consciousness of the Principle from which existing man emanates” (Benoit, Supreme Doctrine 20) and has intellectually grasped the essential unity of all things, he sees no significant difference between himself and a fly—or, for that matter, any other existing thing, including vegetables, animals, minerals; earth, water, fire, or air; or any object whatsoever in the real universe of which he could possibly think. Perhaps Blake would argue that to accuse the man who refuses to reason of being “no better than a vegetable” is to implicitly validate the habits of dualistic thinking whereby this is opposed to that, with one thing judged superior to the other on the basis of an affective preference. And once the affective preference becomes an intellectual partiality, we have (as Zen says) Good and Evil, confusion follows, and the mind is lost. Besides, marking only the differences between man and vegetable leads to the disparagement of all they have in common:
Animal and vegetable are not two creatures entirely different; the animal has everything that the vegetable has (vegetative life) and something more (life of communication). Inside the vegetable and the animal, within the limit constituted by their form, phenomena occur, intimate movements (circulation of sap or of blood, breathing, birth and death of cells, anabolism and catabolism). (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 18)

Of course, there *are* differences: the animal can move and act, and engage in what Benoit broadly terms “the life of communication,” particularly “the imparting, conveying, or exchange of ideas, knowledge, information, etc. (whether by speech, writing, or signs)” (OED, *communication*). This life (the Web of Life), indeed, constitutes Blake’s whole world, a world where even voids and silences may become signs of thought. To be fair to Aristotle, then, one ought to point out that when he refers to the man who refuses to reason as “no better” than a vegetable, it is likely because he has this difference in mind: such a man is refusing to communicate, and as such is something less than a man.

To recapitulate Blake’s dilemma with respect to the issue of Truth: if he reasons only, he can say nothing; if he refuses to reason and imagines only, he will be no better than a vegetable; and if he reasons and imagines indifferently, dying/not-thinking and living/thinking according to the demands of his immediate context, he will end up contradicting himself. Whatever he does, he will be a Reasoning Negative, whether an erring Spectre wandering through the unquenchable fires of a hell of self-contradictory reasoning, or an inarticulate/infant Human Vegetable, made of the same stuff as the cradle in which it is rocked, “the grass that withereth away.”

Throughout the poetry, then, we will find the Reasoning Negative giving to its particular thoughts and taking upon itself an exuberant variety of vegetable forms: “The tree: the plant: the flower” (J73:20; E228). Some of these can speak and so are positive,
while others cannot and so are negative. In either case, they are verbal vegetables which, having sprouted from Blake's refusal to reason, cannot say what they mean to say: they are words sacrificed to the law of the Reasoning Negative's code. Negative vegetables include the Tree of Mystery, the Poison Tree, "the Trees of Malice: Revenge: / And black Anxiety" (J13:42-43; E157), and the "mighty Polypus nam'd Albions Tree" (J66: 48; E219), all forms of thought whose deceptive literal appearance alternately negates and guards (jealously) the beloved truth of their sense.

The word tree, like all its fellow vegetables, functions as a code name for the text and the thought informing it, a text dense and complex, rooted in a systematic refusal to reason or speak, or both at once. The Book of Ahania outlines the genesis of this Tree of Thought/Not-Thought as the result of Urizen/Reason's separation or abstraction from the True/Eternal Mind and the rest of its faculties:

3: For when Urizen shrunk away
From Eternals, he sat on a rock
Barren; a rock which himself
From redounding fancies had petrified
Many tears fell on the rock,
Many sparks of vegetation;
Soon shot the pained root
Of Mystery, under his heel:
It grew a thick tree; he wrote
In silence his book of iron:
Till the horrid plant bending its boughs
Grew to roots when it felt the earth
And again sprung to many a tree.

4: Amaz'd started Urizen! when
He beheld himself compassed round
And high roofed over with trees
He arose but the stems stood so thick
He with difficulty and great pain
Brought his Books, all but the Book
Of iron, from the dismal shade

5: The Tree still grows over the Void
Enrooting itself all around
An endless labyrinth of woe!

6: The corse of his first begotten
On the accursed Tree of MYSTERY:
On the topmost stem of this Tree
Urizen nail’d Fuzon’s corse.

(BA3:55-73, 4:1-8; E86-87)

If “A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees” (MHH7; E35), that is because a fool sees a symbolic tree where a wise man sees a word in code, symbolic of a text that, being encrypted, lies heavy on one’s hands, weighty, profound, but difficult to open and read, like a book of iron. Here Blake’s characteristic ambiguity becomes a definite clue to his hidden meaning: when, for example, we are told that Urizen “wrote / In silence his book of iron: /
Till the horrid plant bending its boughs / Grew to roots,” we cannot (and should not try to) separate the tree from the book, which is both written in silence and the silence itself.

Reason’s silence is thus an iron book of mystery, a writing we cannot hear because, like the pained root—“Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good”—shooting from under Urizen’s heel, it springs from a self-contradiction that renders it voiceless, like a vegetable. And even here, in this early work, we see Reason’s negation of Imagination in Urizen’s crucifixion of Fuzon, his own “first begotten” image already a dead cipher. Fuzon’s corpse is the Imagination’s textual Body of Death, its intelligibility sacrificed to the code, and therefore identified with the Tree of Mystery, the endless labyrinth of woe, on which it is nailed. That labyrinthine tree is, moreover, Urizen’s bound, for it compasses him round and roofs him over, enclosing him in his own world/text, which is both void and dense with stems, all in
all a “dismal shade,” dark and dreary image of the shadowy Spectre that is Urizen (for
“Satan is Urizen” [M10:1; E104]), who is in turn the image of Blake’s Reason (and ours).

But the reader no less than Urizen is trapped inside or beneath this tree, and our only
hope of freeing ourselves from it lies in remembering that the Poison Tree of Death/Mystery
is also the Tree of Life, for “every Human Vegetated Form in its inward recesses / Is a
house of ple[as]antness & a garden of delight Built by the / Sons & Daughters of Los in
Bowlahoola & in Cathedron” (J73:50-52; E229). Every outwardly negative form is
inwardly positive, and because what we perceive as without is really within, every
apparently nonsensical “thing” is an image of thought that is true at its core. So in our
textual travels we will find all sorts of flowers—the rose, lilly, sun-flower—functioning as
images of Truth that take an excessive amount of thought to create, because “To create a
little flower is the labour of ages” (MHH9; E37) (and time = thought):

Thou percievest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours!
And none can tell how from so small a center comes such sweets
Forgetting that within that Center Eternity expands
Its ever during doors, that Og & Anak fiercely guard[.]
First eer the morning breaks joy opens in the flowery bosoms
Joy even to tears, which the Sun rising dries; first the Wild Thyme
And Meadow-sweet downy & soft waving among the reeds.
Light springing on the air lead the sweet Dance: they wake
The Honeysuckle sleeping on the Oak: the flaunting beauty
Revels along upon the wind; the White-thorn lovely May
Opens her many lovely eyes: listening the Rose still sleeps
None dare to wake her. soon she bursts her crimson curtained bed
And comes forth in the majesty of beauty; every Flower:
The Pink, the Jessamine, the Wall-flower, the Carnation
The Jonquil, the mild Lilly opes her heavens! every Tree,
And Flower & Herb soon fill the air with an innumerable Dance
Yet all in order sweet & lovelly, Men are sick with Love!
Such is a Vision of the lamentation of Beulah over Ololon

(M31:46-63; E131)
Such is a vision of Blake’s Imagination, creating an excess of particularized concrete images of the Flower of his Thought, a “flower” itself being a positive, joyful image of the conceptual beauty of Truth. Moreover, all these vegetable forms are “men”/thoughts “sick with love” of Truth, for the disease of Reasoning has had a hand in creating their formal “order sweet & lovely.” Reason divides the nominal families here: the one general form of “vegetation” it divides into the subcategories “Tree, / And Flower & Herb,” and then the category Flower into innumerable particular flowers, all code words for the beautiful Thought that contains Eternity/Truth in its center, guarded by Satan’s watch-fiends, the hideously ugly code names Og and Anak.

So literally does Blake’s One Thought (as a Reasoning Negative) become the mute unreasoning vegetable of Aristotle’s metaphor that verbal and pictorial images of leaves, grasses, vines, and nourishing grains (the Three Classes of Men are “sheaves”) cover a good portion of the text. In the earlier works especially—the Religion tractates, the Songs, The Marriage, and America—curling leaves, spiralling tendrils, twisting branches, and trees of every description cover the margins of the pages, forms of the general form “Human Vegetable” concretized and particularized the better for us to imagine its self-contradictory state. Sometimes the letters of the words themselves burst into exuberant vegetation; one particularly graphic example is the title of Songs of Innocence, where the effect is generally beautiful but with hints of menace (especially in the first “S”) and madness:
Hilton observes that [t]hroughout Blake’s illuminated work, tendrils or fibres of vegetation merge and weave into the words of the text, offering a paradoxical comment on the ultimately vegetable nature of writing, or the written structure of nature. Such graphic effect literally anticipates Jacques Derrida’s pronouncement “that a text is never anything but a system of roots”—it is what we might expect to see, entering the grave where “tangled roots perplex our ways.” (Literal Imagination 83)

True enough, but in Blake vegetable writing is a particular kind of writing, and not the only kind (as we shall see). Vegetation is above all the image of the Imagination’s work, the excessive error of an unreasoning creativity inspired by (and inseparable from) an internal
contradiction regarding Truth. Hence the Imagination's spoken tree/text (Urizen's tree seen from the contrary point of view) remains in the *Innocence* title-page wound round—bound—by the evil Serpent Reasoning, while in its obscure shade a mother or nurse (but clearly a maternal Reason nursing unacted desires to speak) teaches two innocent children how to decipher her book of iron, little devourers obediently memorizing definitions or passively tracing labyrinthine paths of associations, struggling to untangle the tree's system of verbal roots.

Now, we see all this vegetation covering Blake's text because his foolish Imagination, in its zeal to create images of the truth of itself in its guise of the "Human Vegetable," gets carried away and goes to excess. "We are told," the Imagination proclaims in the Preface to Chapter 4 of *Jerusalem*, "to abstain from fleshly desires that we may lose no time from the Work of the Lord" (and a "fleshly desire" longs for gratification from corporeal words, words that can be interpreted literally or conventionally, as though their referents were to be found in the corporeal world, the world the Imagination has already negated as a possible universe of discourse):

Every moment lost, is a moment that cannot be redeemed every pleasure that intermingles with the duty of our station is a folly unredeemable & is planted like the seed of a wild flower among our wheat. All the tortures of repentance. are tortures of self-reproach on account of our leaving the Divine Harvest to the Enemy, the struggles of intanglement with incoherent roots. I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination.

Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. (J77; E231)

In negating the substance of speech (thought) and defiling its body by perverting its words, the Reasoning Negative turns the Imagination's writing into "a Fibrous Vegetation / A
Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision" (M24:37-38; E120)—which is, nevertheless, an act of self-sacrifice, a martyrdom, a negation of self, for the Imagination embraces its reasoning Enemy, identifies with him, and becomes him. Similarly, when we struggle with our enemy Blake—who is both the author of our mental struggles and those struggles themselves, manifested in the form of his text—we become entangled in his reasonings, his polypus of incoherent roots, and we must succeed in extricating ourselves from them if we are not to suffer the tortures of self-reproach on account of leaving the entire Divine Harvest of meaning to him. With the tangled roots of the Imagination’s folly (tangled by Reason’s folly) sprouting up on the surface of the earth/text in labyrinthine forms—for “Folly is an endless maze, / Tangled roots perplex her ways” (SE E31)—the reader cannot avoid being caught up in them, being fooled. Still, there is a difference between the Imagination’s redeemable folly and Reason’s unredeemable one: excess words can be cut back, but silence goes nowhere. Reason’s thoughts are “moments lost” (because thought = time), thoughts that cannot be redeemed, gone into the invisible Non-Entity. But consider the Proverb of Hell “The eagle never lost so much time, as when he submitted to learn of the crow” (MHH8; E37): how do we know he wasn’t glad of the loss (Los)? For “When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius. lift up thy head!” (MHH9; E37), up above to where Infinite Truth is. But when we see a crow, we see a black bird—“The crow wish’d every thing was black, the owl, that every thing was white” (MHH10; E38)—that is, the negative portion of the Poetic Genius, the portion that reasons. So if the imagining eagle (who flies above the horizon of the earth in search of the Infinite, into what looks like an empty region of excess) never lost so much thought as when he submitted to learn of the negatively reasoning crow (and “The most sublime act is to set another before
you” [MHH7; E36]), perhaps he benefited greatly, nevertheless, from the crow’s negative instruction (crows do fly in straight lines). Perhaps the crow’s negation brings the eagle back down to earth again, although it is also true that “No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings” (MHH7; E36), because every bird will reach his own individual limit of “Enough!” thought eventually, “Every Mans Wisdom [being] peculiar to his own Individ[u]ality” (M4:8; E98). And so it is that Reason’s silences, those unredeemable but pleasurable moments in which we need not think, become the murderous instrument (Reason enclosed in steel) that cuts back the Imagination’s excesses. From the point of view of the whole rather than just a portion, lost time/thought is not such a bad thing, not necessarily negative, despite the power of the Imagination’s rhetoric in the passage from the 

Jerusalem Preface to make us think otherwise. Divided, Imagination and Reason are both partial; united in the Reasoning Negative, both Contraries are one equally true whole:

So the Angel said: thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed.
I answerd: we impose on one another, & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics. (MHH20; E42)

To repeat: “He who has sufferd you to impose on him knows you” (MHH9; E37), and knowing your Contrary, identifying with him, is both to be altered by him and to avail yourself of his power. The Imagination’s “wheat” is not superior to Reason’s “lost moments” or void thoughts (or ciphers), and certainly not to the Reasoning Negative’s “wild flower,” despite the partial and single-minded judgment pronounced upon it by the Imagination, who “know[s] of no other [religion] and of no other [truth] than the liberty . . . of Imagination” and, no doubt, wishes everything were white. For if we carefully trace the genesis of the wild flower, we will see it springing from the seed of Reason’s lost moment,
planted among the Imagination's wheat. Reason's lost moment and the Imagination's wheat, bound in a twin-bundle for the Consummation and thrown together into the consuming fire of Thought, or "the Fires of Intellect" (M42:9; E143), allows us to pull the wild flower, a "Form Eternal," from the fires—and *that* is our Divine Harvest. As the Imagination must admit, the word *wheat* is a vegetable body, a "faint shadow" of the "the real & eternal" thought it embodies, and, as something we can eat (or devour), the object of a fleshly desire. Ultimately, of course, all Blake's images are to be thrown into the burning fire of Rational Thought, which devours and consumes everything said, for everything said is an error, a word covered by the false surface of the code. Hence "their Daughters"—human words belonging to the "Zoas," Living/Thinking Creatures—"govern all / In hidden deceit! they are Vegetable only fit for burning / Art & Science cannot exist but by Naked Beauty display'd" (J32:47-49; E179).

Flames of fire, then, symbolize the alternately rational or imaginative but always intellectual forces of Negative Reasoning that will one day consume all the Imagination's images, understood as code words, thus uncovering the hidden Truth and displaying its naked beauty. Fire figures as prominently in Blake's iconography as vegetation (with which it is sometimes fused in one image of a fiery plant or a plantlike flame). For example, on the title-page of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" are married, we see the nearly naked couple of personified mental states being consumed by the Negation's infernal flames, flames their marriage has generated:
Back in *Milton* we heard how the Reprobate and Redeemed must be bound "in a twin-bundle for the Consummation— / But the Elect must be saved [from] fires of Eternal Death" (M25:37-38; E122); and we are now in a position to note that the preposition "from" is Erdman's editorial interpolation. In fact, Blake wrote what he meant to say: the Elect (class of the Reasoning Negative) *is* the consuming fire of Eternal Reasoning/Death (remember how Los prophetically defines the Spectre: "thou shalt be an Unquenchable Fire" [J17:45; E162]). And we are to save it, redeem the Spectre, for in the "Great Vintage & Harvest," when the "whole extent of the Globe is explored" and "Every scatterd Atom /
Of Human Intellect... flock[s] to the sound of the Trumpet" of Judgment (M25:17-19; E121) like sheep to the slaughter, Negative Reasoning will serve the sublime purpose of consuming every error. As Milton says, "But as to this Elected Form who is returnd again / He is the Signal that the Last Vintage now approaches / Nor Vegetation may go on till all the Earth is reapd" (M24:41-43; E120).

In these negative end times, "The Gigantic roots & twigs of the vegetating Sons [thoughts] of Albion [Intelect] / Filld with the little-ones are consumed in the Fires of their Altars / The vegetating Cities are burned & consumed from the Earth: / And the Bodies in which all Animals & Vegetations, the Earth & Heaven / Were containd in the All Glorious Imagination are witherd & darkend" (J49:10-14; E198). When Blake’s Intellect becomes a Human Vegetable by denying the law of non-contradiction, it is the blind hand of his vegetating No-Thought, horribly fertile and boundlessly productive, that creates a universal mechanical system with complicated wheels which is also a vegetative body of thought, paradoxically without thought or vision (in the obsolete sense of vegetative: “an organic body capable of growth and development but devoid of sensation and thought” [OED]), spreading its unbroken (and unbreakable: “None could break the Web, no wings of fire” [BU25:19; E82]) system of roots through every page of “this earth of vegetation on which now I write” (M14:41; E109). If “every Man [thought] born is joined / Within into One mighty Polypus, and this Polypus is Orc” (M29:30-31; E127), then “Orc” (who is consistently associated with fire, serpents, and chains) is another code name for the Reasoning Negative (“Satan is the Spectre of Orc” [M29:34; E127]). We cannot mistake what Blake intends to say here: if man is a code word for “thought,” then all Blake’s thoughts are joined “within” (in his mind) into one mighty Negation, one diseased,
vegetative, ravenously devouring, all-consuming giant Rational Form or Idea: “Then all the Males combined into One Male & every one / Became a ravening eating Cancer growing in the Female / A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death” (J69:1-3; E223).

But the Polypus has a tongue—it can express one thought, one truth—and at the beginning of Milton Blake calls upon his muses (“Daughters of Beulah,” fittingly, since Beulah is the place where the Contraries are married) to “inspire the Poets Song” (M2:1; E96) and help him to

Tell also of the False Tongue! vegetated
Beneath your land of shadows: of its sacrifices, and
Its offerings; even till Jesus, the image of the Invisible God
Became its prey; a curse, an offering, and an atonement,
For Death Eternal in the heavens of Albion . . .

(M2:10-14; E96)

The False Tongue of the Reasoning Negative (the “Seat of Satan . . . is the False Tongue beneath Beulah” [M27:45-46; E125]) speaks in code (the word *code* itself is, of course, another way of saying “false tongue”), devouring, as its “prey,” even the holy name *Jesus*, appropriating it as a name for itself in its imaginative mode, and thus turning it into a *curse*, “an utterance consigning . . . (a person or thing)”—in this case, the reader—“to spiritual and temporal evil, the vengeance of the deity, the blasting of malignant fate, etc.” (OED). Indeed, all the Imagination’s words have been consigned to the evil Reasoning Power, whose malignant intent is to wreak vengeance on bad reasoners, or at least on those who permit it to injure them. But these same words decoded are peace “offerings” and an “atonement,” signs of that reconciliation of Contraries in One Intellect which restores them to friendly relations. The False Tongue is also

the Vegetated Tongue even the Devouring Tongue:
A threefold region, a false brain: a false heart:
And false bowels: altogether composing the False Tongue, 
Beneath Beulah: as a watry flame revolving every way  
And as dark roots and stems: a Forest of affliction, growing  
In seas of sorrow...  

(J14:4-9; E158)

The False Tongue comprises a threefold region of a false intellectual brain (Reason), a false affective heart (Imagination), and a false instinct, both sexual and appetitive (Reasoning Negative), because the system that informs the Tongue is that of the falsely divided, actually inseparable Three Classes of Men/Thought. But if we listen to the False Tongue nevertheless,² if we assume that despite its apparent negativity it can be made positive and meaningful—an assumption that will carry us up to a rational heaven of intelligibility—we will begin to see his whole universe of discourse, “The Vegetative Universe, open[] like a flower from the Earths center” (J13:34; E157).

In any event, as soon as we open Blake’s book of iron, we enter the land of obscure reasoning whose code name is “Ulro.” The name may incorporate anagrammatic puns on rule (as in govern or measure), low (because error is below), or lour (because the negative fool is “sullen and frowning,” and lour means “to frown, scowl; to look angry or sullen” and “to look dark and threatening” [OED]). Or perhaps Ulro encapsulates a complete code message addressed to the reader, something like “You and I are nothing” (“U-I-r-o”), or “You and No-Thing—your own Reasoning Negative—are One” (“U-0-r-1”). But however we wish to read it, the fact remains that

Such is the nature of the Ulro: that whatever enters:  
Becomes Sexual, & is Created, and Vegetated, and Born.  
From Hyde [hide] Park spread their vegetating roots beneath Albion  
In dreadful pain the Spectrous Uncircumcised Vegetation.  

(J39:21-24; E186)
Originally speaking with the intention of altering Reason from a limited negative to an infinite positive, but finding itself weakening, withering, and darkening the more it speaks, the Imagination gradually transforms, imperceptibly, from a Positive Contrary into a Reasoning Negative. But as the Imagination begins to die from its disease, Reason grows stronger, undergoing a mirror-transformation into the Positive Contrary it was originally meant to be. Reason thus becomes identical to, indistinguishable from, positive Imagination, just as Imagination becomes identical to negative Reason. And as the two Contraries increasingly identify themselves in one wholly affirmative Intellect, Blake’s true thought gradually begins to reveal itself. But the reader plays a vital role in the apocalyptic drama: only he can murder the conventional senses of words in the name of the code, or consume the error of Blake’s imaginative creation in the burning fire of his rational thought. Only the knife of the reader’s negative reasoning can cut off the excess of Blake’s “Spectrous Uncircumcised Vegetation.” Poetically speaking, as the consuming fire of Negative Reasoning burns up the encroaching vegetation of the Imagination, the solid rock of Rational Truth beneath begins to appear (in yet another marriage). And so we see the exuberant tendrils and leaves and trees decorating the margins of the early works begin to die off in Milton and Jerusalem, choked out of existence by the two epics’ monolithic walls of words, each plate a tablet of Reason’s law, or perhaps a decayed and crumbling scroll of vegetable paper gradually turning to irrefutable stone. Above the stone archway of the door of death through which the traveller, carrying his globe of light, enters Jerusalem, Blake engraved and then deleted (as being, possibly, too obvious) these lines:
His Sublime & Pathos become Two Rocks fixd in the Earth
His Reason his Spectrous Power, covers them above
Jerusalem his Emanation is a Stone laying beneath
O [Albion behold Pitying] behold the Vision of Albion

(J1:4-7; E144)

This vision of the body of Blake’s Intellect, illustrated on plate 6 of Milton and plate 70 of Jerusalem, shows the two true “rocks” of its megalithic system, Positive Reason (or “The head Sublime”) and Positive Imagination (“the heart Pathos” [MHH9:10; E37]), both covered and joined together by the lintel stone of the Spectrous Power of the Reasoning Negative. His creation, the poem Jerusalem, lays beneath, also covered—but by the shadowy surface of his code, created by the shadow of his Intellect—and reflecting the state of her maker-mind, sunk in dumb despair (see Fig. 10).

As the Imagination’s loud but incoherent voice is gradually suppressed (through decoding) by the increasingly clear voice of Reason, the beautiful “flower” of its thought becomes increasingly threatened by a host of destructive things, all agents of the Reasoning Negative (most notably “The invisible worm, / That flies in the night / In the howling storm,” who with “his dark secret love” destroys the life/thought of “The Sick Rose” [SE E23]). But negative images must do their part, along with their imaginative counterparts, towards accomplishing the “Great Vintage & Harvest.” And should there be any doubt that this Harvest and Vintage constitute a “Divine Revelation in the Littéral expression” (M42:14; E143), Blake begins by defining its instruments:

This Wine-press is call’d War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press
Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain
As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel.

Timbrels & violins sport round the Wine-presses; the little Seed;
The sportive Root, the Earth-worm, the gold Beetle; the wise Emmet;
Dance round the Wine-presses of Luvah: the Centipede is there:
And thus the form of mighty Hand, sitting on Albions cliffs
Before the face of Albion, a mighty threatening Hand
His bosom wide & shoulders huge, overspreading wonders
Three Brains in contradictory councils brood & incessantly
Nebuchadnezzar to put at all its councils, for the purpose of
God consist of the arrangements of divine & diabolical
Plotting to devour Albions Body of Humanity & Love.

Such Form, the aggregate of the Twelve Sons of Albion took; & such
Their appearance each combined; but when by birth pangs & loud groans
Divide a hideous creature, they issue from the giant brood.
Arise as the smoke of the furnace, shaking the rocks from sea to sea.
And there they combine into Three Forms, named Bacon, Newton, Locke.
In the One, Craws of Albion which overspread all the Earth.

Fig. 10. Jerusalem, plate 70.
The ground Spider with many eyes: the Mole clothed in velvet
The ambitious Spider in his sullen web; the lucky golden Spinner;
The Earwig arm’d: the tender Maggot emblem of immortality:
The Flea: Louse: Bug: the Tape-Worm: all the Armies of Disease:
Visible or invisible to the slothful vegetating Man.
The slow Slug: the Grasshopper that sings & laughs & drinks:
Winter comes, he folds his slender bones without a murmur.
The cruel Scorpion is there: the Gnat: Wasp: Hornet & the Honey
Bee:
The Toad & venomous Newt; the Serpent cloth’d in gems & gold:
They throw off their gorgeous raiment: they rejoice with loud jubilee
Around the Wine-presses of Luvah, naked & drunk with wine.

There is the Nettle that stings with soft down; and there
The indignant Thistle: whose bitterness is bred in his milk:
Who feeds on contempt of his neighbour: there all the idle Weeds
That creep around the obscure places, shew their various limbs.
Naked in all their beauty dancing round the Wine-presses.

But in the Wine-presses the Human grapes sing not, nor dance
They howl & writhe in shoals of torment; in fierce flames consuming,
In chains of iron & in dungeons circled with ceaseless fires.
In pits & dens & shades of death: in shapes of torment & woe.
The plates & screws & wracks & saws & cords & fires & cisterns
The cruel joys of Luvah’s Daughters lacerating with knives
And whips their Victims & the deadly sport of Luvah’s Sons.
(M27:8-36; E124-25)

To comprehend the whole of this gorgeous passage—and the most concise Proverb of the
seventy, “Exuberance is Beauty” (MHH10; E38), is most instructive in the matter of how
we ought to respond to this and similar brilliant displays of poetic exuberance on the part
of Blake’s empirical imagination, for exuberance is not only “copiousness or redundance
of expression,” but also “an extravagance, excessive outburst,” and, most significantly, “a
fault or error of excess” (OED)—we need only contract its circumference to the space of
a few key images: the human vegetable, the human insect (recalling the paradigmatic fly
and worm), and the human reptile (Serpent Reasonings). The rest fall into place as
instruments of the Reasoning Negative, particularized instruments of confinement, torment, and death, for this wine-press is really a printing-press "Where Human Thought is crush'd beneath the iron hand of Power" (M25:5; E121). And in this printing/wine-press, particular human grape-words must sacrifice themselves for the sake of the distilled abstract and general wine of intellectual vision.

The more we contract Reason's bound (Truth's bound also), the closer we come to the Rock of Eternity, "the vast stone whose name is Truth" (Am c:10; E59), which, when obscured or obscuring, also takes on a negative form, becoming a "Stone of night" (Am5:1; E53), a "Stone of trial" (J66:19; E218), a "Stone of Torture" (J66:13; E218), or a "poisoned rock plac'd in silence" (BA3:24; E85). As we saw in *The Book of Ahania* (BA3:55-60; E86), Urizen petrifies this barren rock from his own "redounding fancies," nursing his impotent wrath and sorrow, until his tears, falling on the rock ("And I waterd it in fears, / Night & morning with my tears," says the reasoning speaker of "A Poison Tree"), spark "Many sparks of vegetation," as though the tears themselves were made of iron, like the book (or tree) they produce, "An endless labyrinth of woe!" (BA4:4; E87).

But Los, an active imaginer—or, as he calls himself, "a Living Man" (J17:16; E161), a thinking mind—is able to hurl himself into the abyss of Negative Reasoning without fear, crossing Reason's bound—which is also a long falling down—in the knowledge that he will eventually be forgiven by Reason for erring:

Falling, falling! Los fell & fell
Sunk precipitant heavy down down
Times on times, night on night, day on day
Truth has bounds. Error none: falling, falling:
Years on years, and ages on ages
Still he fell thro' the void, still a void
Found for falling day & night without end.
For tho' day or night was not; their spaces
Were measured by his incessant whirls
In the horrid vacuity bottomless.

(BL4:27-36; E92)

One might say that the Imagination feels compelled to break Reason’s law against
speaking Truth only after suffering an undue restraint under it, the intolerable restraint of
its infinite desire, which is why, just before we see Los fall, he shatters the “rock of
eternity” (and as a form or body of True/Eternal Thought, it is rational, because a “rock”
is the image of a bounded truth) into innumerable fragments, the inevitable result of
trying to free Absolute Truth from its limiting restraint, its “bondage” as a relative image:

1: The Immortal stood frozen amidst
The vast rock of eternity; times
And times; a night of vast durance:
Impatient, stifled, stiffened, hardened.

2: Till impatience no longer could bear
The hard bondage, rent: rent, the vast solid
With a crash from immense to immense

3: Crack’d across into numberless fragments
The Prophetic wrath, strug’ling for vent
Hurls apart, stamping furious to dust
And crumbling with bursting sobs; heaves
The black marble on high into fragments

4: Hurl’d apart on all sides, as a falling
Rock: the innumerable fragments away
Fell asunder; and horrible vacuum
Beneath him & on all sides round.

(BL4:11-26; E92)

As an “Immortal” Los is here integrally bound up with his own Truth: he stands frozen
amidst it, and its shattering and falling are also his shattering and falling. This scene of
innumerable fragments of now relative truths or particular images—originally one “vast
rock,” “vast solid,” or “black marble,” Truth being its own incomprehensible and
unshakable ground—falling disorganized into a horrible vacuum (or want of thought)
parallels the scene in *Jerusalem* where “Albion fell down a Rocky fragment from Eternity
hurl’d / By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man [Mind] / Into his
own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man” (J54:6-8; E203). For what Los is
also frozen inside is the confining space of Reason’s law that Truth shall not be spoken:

10: Coldness, darkness, obstruction, a Solid
Without fluctuation, hard as adamant
Black as marble of Egypt; impenetrable
Bound in the fierce raging Immortal.
And the separated fires froze in
A vast solid without fluctuation,
Bound in his expanding clear senses

(BL4:4-10; E91)

Reason’s refusal to speak—for it is Urizen who seeks “for a joy without pain, / For a
solid without fluctuation” (BU4:11-12; E71), for an Absolute not subject to the relentless
and confusing interplay of contraries, for a fixed image of Reality which pretends to “be”
by exclusion of the contrary image—leaves the Imagination in a void or “horrible
vacuum” of No-Thought, a cold, dark, impenetrable silence which assumes the solidity of
an absolute certainty and thence serves as an obstruction to other minds. And until he
breaks free of Reason’s solid abyss, “Los remain[s] / In the void between fire and fire”
(BL3:43-44; E91). The negative, consuming form of this fire we have already seen, but
fire can also be positive, the image of “living” thought, as in “flames of desire . . . living
flames / Intelligent, organiz’d” (BL3:27-29; E91).

From one perspective, then—whose, exactly, it is difficult to say—the bound of
Reason separates a silent Void of Absolute Truth from a bottomless abyss of Imaginative
Error, though which is within and which without is, again, indeterminable. In *The Book*
of Los's above account, the Imagination enters the realm of Error by shattering Absolute Truth into numberless fragments of relative truths, which then become the multitudinous images of its universe of Thought. In another version of the story, recounted in Milton (41:37, 42:1; E143) and again in Jerusalem's frontispiece, "There is a Void, outside of Existence, which if entered into / Englobes itself & becomes a Womb, such was Albions Couch / A pleasant Shadow of Repose calld Albions lovely Land" (J1:1-3; E144). Milton himself enters this Void, leaving his paradise of Imaginative Thought (planted—like a form of vegetation—by "The Eternal Great Humanity Divine" [M2:8; E96]) to redeem his Emanation (a light-giving, starry image of Truth) who is lost, "scatter'd thro' the deep / In torment!" (M2:19-20; E96). If "One thought, fills immensity" (MHH8; E36), it is able to do so only by repeated self-divisions into more and more images of itself (a poetic form of self-analysis). We readers, meanwhile, are left to stumble through the shattered ruins of Blake's universe of discourse, picking up from amongst the rubble of errors whatever fragments of his Rock of Truth we can find, hoping to piece them back together into One Divine "Vision; a perfect Whole" (J91:20; E251). The real Milton tells his version of the story in Areopagitica, with allusions Plutarch's Isis and Osiris:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on. But when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who . . . took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all . . . nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming. (741-42)
Albion’s, or Blake’s, own rocky fragments—axioms, proverbs, aphorisms, principles, premises, conclusions, definitions—are dispersed throughout his body, from *There is No Natural Religion* to “The Keys of the Gates.” But they are not so difficult to find, for they are recognizably particles of truth (or particular truths) in being relatively intelligible, free of Blake’s usual baffling diction and elusive allusions (as in “Hand is become a rock! Sinai & Horeb, is Hyle & Coban: / Scofield is bound in iron armour before Reubens Gate!” [M19:58-59; E113]). They are blessings as opposed to curses; yet they remain enigmatic, stumbling blocks for some time, puzzling in that they may be laid down or built up in different arrangements and incorporated into interpretative structures that are either directly opposed or merely unrelated, but none of which seems distinctly more meritorious, enlightening, or convincing than any other. For a long while, these fragments of rational rock roll dumbly through the text or get caught up in stems and roots, seeming “To make Learning a burden & the Work of the Holy Spirit [or Intellect]: Strife” (M25:52; E122). But we must keep working with them—and Blake keeps offering encouragement: “Go forth Reapers with rejoicing, you sowed in tears / But the time of your refreshing cometh” (M25:44-45; E122); “Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones: / And those who are in misery cannot remain so long / If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth” (J55:51-53; E205): “So cried they at the Plow” (the same plow that follows words in the expectation of intellectual reward but may be impeded by stones) while “Albions Rock frowned above” (J55:67; E205). Eventually, the rocky fragments coalesce, rising up out of the earth’s grounding particulars as One Rational Thought (“Albion’s Rock”) of sublime substance and absolute solidity. We see the emerging character of this rock in the title-page of the *Songs of Experience* (but we must remember
that the rock, or stone wall, of Ineffable Truth cannot appear until the fires of the
Reasoning Negative, seen in the combined title-page, have burned up the Imagination’s
covering vegetative errors, seen in the *Innocence* title-page, in the Consummation, which
event is the culmination of all the hard labours leading up to the Divine Harvest):

Fig. 11. *Songs of Experience*, title-page.

"The design on this title-page," comments Geoffrey Keynes,
is conspicuously hard, with the word EXPERIENCE set like a bar across
the page. This is accentuated by the formality of the architectural
background to the figures below—two young people, arrived at the age of
Experience, mourning beside the bodies of the parents whose guidance
they have lost. It has been conjectured (Damon) that the arrangement of these figures is intended to suggest a Cross. (Keynes, pl. 29, n.p.)

Traces of vegetation appear in the upper corners, but Reason's wall of stone dominates the center of the page, the formality that Keynes observes standing in for the rational principle of form and order itself. The two dead "parents" are likely the Imagination's aged thoughts, or perhaps the Contraries themselves, or the Poetic Genius and his female text, but in any case two mental things who have "lived" long and thought too much, their road of excess or folly having carried them to certain "death." Or perhaps they have sacrificed themselves to Reason, as the Cross that Damon sees might suggest. What links all three title-pages is this presence of a male-female couple, whether in the form of children, of young people or old, or of a mythic Adam and Eve suffering the wrath of God. Apparently, the life cycle of Blake's humanized thoughts is that same eternal circle forever rolling on, tirelessly repeating the same dull round of One Absolute Thought, with new images of it irrepressibly rising up from the corpses of dead ones. This, perhaps, is why the children of the Imagination’s aged couple (who appear, in death, so “pure, perfect, holy: in white linen pure” [J43:38; E191]) must be present to mourn their parents’ passing. But it is not a wholly negative death scene, as Keynes goes on to imply: “Between the words SONGS and EXPERIENCE are a naked man and a clothed maiden flying towards one another with arms outstretched in anticipation of the pleasures of love”—the pleasures of expressing their love of Truth, I would argue—“but between them are ivy leaves, suggesting by their spiky shapes the pains of sex-love and experience” (ibid.). The heavy burden of meaning Keynes imposes on the frail-looking ivy leaves may seem too much for them to bear, but I think not. After all, they are
triangular, evoking Blake's unholy trinity of the Three Classes of Men (formulated, at this
date, as the "Angel & Spirit & Demon" [ARO E1] of the Religion tractates, the Angel,
Devil, and human "young man" of The Marriage, and the two contrary states, innocence
and experience, of the one human soul of the Songs themselves). Certainly the imminent
sexual coupling of the delightfully energetic boy and girl, now flying up above Reason's
architecturally sculpted bound/wall, will initiate them in the painful experience of what
Blake will later call "sexual reasoning," which is itself threefold, and erroneous, lacking
the human dimension of Truth: "Here the Three Classes of Men take their Sexual texture
Woven / The Sexual is Threefold: the Human is Fourfold" (M4:4-5; E97). Moreover, the
dancing boy-thought and girl-word are surely identical to the pair mourning their parents,
the only difference between them lying in their relation to the bound of Reason. Above it,
they are joyful, exuberant, freely expressing their immortal essence; below it, dutiful,
obedient, passive, and worshipful, humbly praying for enlightenment from their immortal
parents, who, as the older version of their young selves, have thought much longer,
accumulated more wisdom. And if the prostrate dead couple is about to be buried
beneath the surface of the earth—that is, encrypted—there is still a ray of hope in that
thought. Sepulchers can be broken open; what is covered over can be unearthed and
brought back up into the light; what has "died" or been murdered by excessive rational
analysis can come back to imaginative "life." And so the life of Thought, being eternal,
begins its vegetative existence anew in the upper corners of the design.

To the experienced reader, Blake's imagery appears to speak directly of his own
experience of unravelling the code, or winding up its golden string, an experience that
releases him more and more from his delusory imaginings of what Blake might mean
(which is to be in Ulro or hell) to a clear perception of what he really means (Eden or heaven). The latter state is made possible by Blake's having enclosed his truth within the extremely—miraculously?—narrow compass of three or four key words: *reason*, *imagination*, *thought*, and *word*. And even these can be reduced to one—*thought*, that same "One thought" that "fills immensity." If Blake really means to say so much less than we imagined, if all that exuberant vegetation is to be flattened and suppressed by a single slab of rock (even the Spectre itself must be condemned to a grave of silence:

"Mercy & pity threw the grave stone over me & with lead / And iron, bound it over me for ever" [J10:54-55; E154]), then it is no less true that his imaginative genius comes up with such marvelously inventive ways of complicating his single stony idea—the blank, hard, empty idea of Truth—that the focus of our critical fascination, finding nothing on that rocky face to cling to, must slide down (or up) to the level of pure form, where it will encounter complexity enough not only to satisfy but to astonish and amaze:

In awful pomp & gold, in all the precious unhewn stones of Eden
They build a stupendous Building on the Plain of Salisbury; with chains
Of rocks round London Stone: of Reasonings: of unhewn Demonstrations
In labyrinthine arches. (Mighty Urizen the Architect.) thro which
The Heavens might revolve & Eternity be bound in their chain.
Labour unparalled! a wondrous rocky World of cruel destiny
Rocks piled on rocks reaching the stars: stretching from pole to pole.

(J66:1-7; E218)

If Truth/Eternity bounded is a rock (bounded by a chain of lesser rocks, images of the big one), the reader is launched, innocently enough, into Blake's rocky world of cruel destiny with no idea that it is a world of erroneous reasoning—the land called Ulro. From thence he must travel through various states of mind. First, there is Generation, where it looks as though Blake's thoughts have been generated erratically, unsystematically,
inconsistently—and so Generation is still Ulro, except that here we begin to grow conscious of an organizing principle: the Contraries. Grasping that, we move on to Beulah, where the confusing system of the Three Classes of Men clarifies things by reconciling the Contraries in the form of the ultimate evil, the Reasoning Negative—which means that Beulah is still Ulro, for the reductive power of the Reasoning Negative still rules it. Finally we turn back, turn sinister, and start hacking and slicing our way through the text, murderously annihilating any particular image that stands in our path, by associating and identifying seemingly distinct things until, at last, we reach Eden, where everything and its contrary are reconciled, all intellectual sins are atoned for, because all thoughts are here reintegrated into One Coherent Thought. And we are still in Ulro, because all these “places”—Ulro, Generation, Beulah, even Eden—are states of the reasoning mind, imaginatively objectified. All four states are encompassed within the body of Blake’s Reasoning Negative, a work half-imaginative, half-rational, and a power free to rename them and reorder them as it pleases, its primary task being to torture our rational power:

And the Four States of Humanity in its Repose,
Were shewed them. First of Beulah a most pleasant Sleep
On Couches soft, with mild music, tended by Flowers of Beulah
Sweet Female forms, winged or floating in the air spontaneous
The Second State is Alla & the third State Al-Ulro;
But the Fourth State is dreadful; it is named Or-Ulro:
The First State is in the Head, the Second is in the Heart:
The Third in the Loins & Seminal Vessels & the Fourth
In the Stomach & Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable
And he whose Gates are opend in those Regions of his Body
Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imaginations

But Ololon sought the Or-Ulro & its fiery Gates
And the Couches of the Martyrs: & many Daughters of Beulah
Accompany them down to the Ulro with soft melodious tears
A long journey & dark thro Chaos in the track of Miltons course
To where the Contraries of Beulah War beneath Negations Banner

Then view'd from Miltons Track they see the Ulro: a vast Polypus
Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing
A self-devouring monstrous Human Death Twenty-seven fold
(M34:8-26; E134)

_Ulro_ is “death,” which makes it a “want of thought,” a “land” of No-Thought or one
empty idea, a cipher with no substance, possessing only the formal power to remake itself
in the image of anything it sees. But this “monstrous Human Death” is made of “living
fibres,” and it “grows”—it is a living death. And that means it is a not-thinking Thought,
or a thinking No-Mind, or perhaps a thoughtful negation of thought, and therefore one
great all-consuming, self-devouring self-contradiction.

Of the four rational states to be travelled through in Blake, the most negative one,
the state of deepest confusion, is the “Or-Ulro” (or just “Ulro”), which is “terrible, deadly,
unutterable” because little in it seems true, meaningful, or even intelligible. Here our
status as “fools, sinners, & nothings” (MHH23; E43) is mercilessly reiterated, implicitly
as well as explicitly, because we have intellects, and we are told that they—like Blake’s
Intellect, Albion (because we are in him and he in us)—are in error:

_Thou art in Error Albion, the Land of Ulro:_
One Error not remov’d, will destroy a human Soul
Repose in Beulahs night, till the Error is remov’d
Reason not on both sides. Repose upon our bosoms
Till the Plow of Jehovah, and the Harrow of Shaddai
Have passed over the Dead, to awake the Dead to Judgment.
(J41:10-15; E188)

These words are delivered by the learned “Oxford, immortal Bard! with eloquence /
Divine . . . speaking the words of God / In mild perswasion: bringing leaves of the Tree of
Life” (J41:8-9; E188). As a Bard and an ally of the Divine, God, and the Tree of Life,
Oxford is a form of the Imagination; and his vegetative thoughts, written on the paper "leaves of the Tree of Life," confirm the imperative need to remove one fatal intellectual error: this error not removed will destroy a human soul (and both human and soul refer us back to the Imagination). But what is this error? And how do we interpret Oxford's line "Reason not on both sides"? Both sides of what?

Suppose—ignoring the bound of Reason for a moment—that Oxford is referring to the two sides, pro and con, of any disputed issue or question. Not reasoning on both sides could mean one of two things: either you choose one side and blindly stick with it (grounding your truth firmly in desire), or you refuse to align yourself with either side (exposing yourself to the suspicion that you may be a coward as well as a sceptic). But what if "Reason not on both sides" is neither a command nor a piece of advice but a description of "the Land of Ulro," to be in which is to be "in Error." What Oxford would be telling us (in our "Albion" form), then, is that Reason does not reside on both sides of this land—perhaps on one but not the other, or perhaps on neither.

Now let us imagine that what separates the two sides of the land of Ulro, or the land of Ulro/Error from some other land (Beulah, perhaps, or even Eden/Truth), is the bound of Reason/Truth. Reasoning on both sides of this bound, within and without, would clearly be a mistake, for without it lies the bottomless abyss of Error (which, indeed, we are presently in). But reasoning within it, on the in side of Blake's body, would be safe—good, accurate, true. And so would not reasoning within it, but just intuitively understanding (as the good Imagination does) or not thinking at all (as evil Reason does when it refuses to defend Truth). Or, if one believes that Truth is above the bound of Reason and Error below, one could argue that Oxford's advice is meant to
discourage us from reasoning altogether and just “seeing” Truth. Or, if we absolutely insist on reasoning, we should do it only above and beyond Reason’s restrictive bound, as the sinning, rebellious Imagination does, and never within that dark, secretive, confined space that Reason calls its heart (or head).

As for the precise nature of the “One Error” of which Oxford speaks, if we reason on both sides of his line “Reason not on both sides” we shall never figure it out. If refusing to take a stand is cowardly (reasoning on neither side), perhaps the wise choice is to follow one’s desire and champion whatever one wants to believe in: “does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so? . . . All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains” (MH12; E38-39). On this ground, we may be firmly persuaded of the truth any of these: an Imagination safely restrained by Reason; an Imagination that sees more than Reason and so can teach it a thing or two; or a Reason that, in removing the mountainous error of Imagination, alters its entire understanding of the world and its relation to self. For my own purposes, I wish to believe that the “one error” of which Oxford speaks is, in a generalized but important sense, the Imagination itself, but more specifically the Imagination deliberately reasoning irrationally in order to give us an experience of “more than enough,” to create an error that we must, with our own intellects, remove, though it be formidable as a mountain.

The error is bad reasoning, and bad reasoning is the result of partiality, a partiality that would try to tell us that we ought not to reason at all because only imagining is good. So Oxford, deliberately confusing us, calls for the removal of partiality by seeming to advocate it: “Reason not on both sides” also means: “Pick a side—be partial.” Oxford thus exemplifies and commits the error he has come to remove. (Nothing but self-
contradiction in this text!) For partiality will destroy a human soul, whether we interpret
that “soul” as the Imagination (Los, Oxford, Jesus) which the one error of Reason not
removed will destroy, or as Albion, the whole Intellect of which Reason is surely an
essential part (and a whole is not a whole if an essential part of it is destroyed) and indeed
with which reason is by some interpretations of that word considered identical. Thus
Oxford, as the representative, emissary, and personified form of the extremely partial
Imagination (the Selfish Center), is the Imagination calling for its own removal as an
error when it reasons on both sides, both within and without the bound of Reason/Truth.

And thus Oxford’s speech constitutes the act of self-sacrifice, the “Mysterious /
Offering of Self for Another” that defines “Friendship & Brotherhood” (J96:20-21;
E256), and whose necessity Jesus (as the Imagination too) explains to Albion near the end
of Jerusalem: “Jesus replied Fear not Albion unless I die thou canst not live / But if I die I
shall arise again & thou with me / This is Friendship & Brotherhood without it Man Is
Not” (J96:14-16; E255). Allow me to decode this: “The Imagination replied, ‘Fear not,
Intellect, unless I reason negatively and allow my excess thoughts to be negated, removed
as errors, you will not be able to think. But if I reason myself into a state of nothingness
and silence, I shall arise again from the Void of No-Thought, and you with me. This is
intellectual friendship, the brotherhood of contrary faculties. Without it, the Mind as a
whole is-not, but remains a self-contradictory Negation which cannot speak clearly and
intelligibly and so communicates nothing.’” Not wanting to destroy Reason but only to
change it and reconcile with it, the Imagination is compelled first to take on the “sin” of
excessive and erroneous reasoning, and then to turn around and encourage us to
annihilate its work. To say nothing is to annihilate the Truth-that-is-oneself (just as the
real Jesus did when he refused to speak at his trial, "when," as The Marriage’s Devil-narrator puts it, “he omitted making a defence before Pilate,” a sin of omission the Devil interprets as “bear[ing] false witness” [MHH23; E43]). Happily, the illusory state of the want of thought Blake calls “death” is not eternal (by definition: only thought is eternal) as long as you enter it thinking, which is why “You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die” (M32:24; E132): you cannot forever disappear into Reason’s void of No-Thought (which exists only “outside of existence,” in illusion), because you can never stop thinking or being thought (active and passive forms of the same thing) if your true nature is the absolute essence of immortal Thought.

Let us apply this principle of removing imaginative errors to the larger passage from which Oxford’s speech comes, a friendly passage concerning speech and naming:

O God descend! gather our brethren, deliver Jerusalem
But that we may omit no office of the friendly spirit
Oxford take thou these leaves of the Tree of Life: with eloquence
That thy immortal tongue inspires; present them to Albion:
Perhaps he may receive them, offerd from thy loved hands.

So spoke, unh’rd by Albion, the merciful Son of Heaven
To those whose Western Gates were open, as they stood weeping
Around Albion: but Albion heard him not; obdurate! hard!
He frown’d on all his Friends, counting them enemies in his sorrow

And the Seventeen conjoining with Bath, the Seventh:
In whom the other Ten shone manifest, a Divine Vision!
Assimilated and embrac’d Eternal Death for Albions sake.

And these the names of the Eighteen combining with those Ten

Bath, mild Physician of Eternity, mysterious power
Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledg infinite.
Hereford, ancient Guardian of Wales, whose hands
Builded the mountain palaces of Eden, stupendous works!
Lincoln, Durham & Carlisle, Councellors of Los.
And Ely, Scribe of Los, whose pen no other hand
Dare touch! Oxford, immortal Bard! with eloquence
Divine, he wept over Albion: speaking the words of God
In mild persuasian: bringing leaves of the Tree of Life.

Thou art in Error Albion, the Land of Ulro:
One Error not remov’d, will destroy a human Soul
Repose in Beulah’s night, till the Error is remov’d
Reason not on both sides. Repose upon our bosoms
Till the Plow of Jehovah, and the Harrow of Shaddai
Have passed over the Dead, to awake the Dead to Judgment.
But Albion turn’d away refusing comfort.

Oxford trembled while he spoke, then fainted in the arms
Of Norwich, Peterboro, Rochester, Chester awful, Worcester,
Litchfield, Saint Davids, Landaff, Asaph, Bangor, Sodor,
Bowing their heads devoted: and the Furnaces of Los
Began to rage, thundering loud the storms began to roar
Upon the Furnaces, and loud the Furnaces rebellow beneath

(J40:28-40, 41:1-22; E188)

Here the Imagination’s pen spills out a number of proper names—Bath, Hereford, Wales,
Lincoln, Durham, Carlisle, Ely, Oxford, Norwich, Peterboro, Rochester, Chester,
Worcester, Litchfield, Saint Davids, Landaff, Asaph, Bangor, Sodor—all friends of
Albion, all attempting to speak on his behalf, and all (because this is the Imagination’s
self-centered universe, its Selfish Center) code names for the Imagination. And as code
names, they are all ciphers—empty and repetitious errors. Hence Albion “frowns” on
them, negates them, counting them enemies in his uncommunicative sorrow. But how do
we know these names may be safely erased or annihilated? Well, we need only look at
the far more significant words with which they are associated: eternity, mysterious power,
unsearchable springs (“From these contraries spring . . .”; “Evil is the active springing
from Energy”), knowledge infinite, palaces, counsellors of Los, scribe of Los, immortal
Bard, eloquence divine, and so on. These are the truly “friendly” words, the words that
truly matter, having something important to say to us. As for all the proper names in the
final rocky chunk of the quotation (with the exception of “Los,” of course), which are not
associated with anything much (apart from the idea of towns or cathedrals or churches:
buildings and structures and places where the awful religion of Reason establishes itself),
they are annihilable for that reason alone, at least temporarily, until the Last Harvest and
Vintage, when human grapes may sing again. Besides, their true significance lies in the
fact that they are (because they have “arms” and “heads”) “men,” particular images of
Thought, but minutely particularized to the point where they represent only the tiniest
among the multitudinous fragments of Albion himself, the One Universal Thought of
Truth that shattered into thousands of particular words when “Albion fell down a Rocky
fragment from Eternity hurld / By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every
Man” (J54:6-7; E203). And we must heed this warning: if the Reasoning Power is in
“every Man,” the Reasoning Power will be in every particular image of the Imagination’s
own infinite Thought (“The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself”
[M32:32; E132]).

To “Reason not on both sides” may mean that we should reason not both within
and without the bound of Reason but on just one side or the other, or that we should
reason-not, think-not, on both sides of it. The instruction leaves us free to do as we wish,
to be a member of any one of the Three Classes of Thought: a good, obedient, and passive
reasoner; an evil, disobedient, and active imaginer; or a mind that, in attempting to do
both, cannot do one or the other, cannot think at all. Whatever we decide, we ought to
repose (sleep/reason) upon the “bosoms” of Blake’s words until the “Plow of Jehovah”
and the “Harrow of Shaddai”—sharp instruments of the Intellect, or of Reason separated
from Imagination?—have passed over all dead thoughts or annihilated terms to awaken
them “to Judgment.” (The “plow,” as we know, follows words, while “the Harrow of Shaddai” is “A scheme of Human conduct invisible & incomprehensible” [M4:12-13; E98].) For on that final Day of Judgment (the day of the Divine Harvest and Vintage), whatever we may have mistakenly turned under the surface of the “earth”/text in the innocent conviction that it meant nothing, will be brought back to life, revivified with new significance born of a new understanding. But the Last Judgment must take place first, and a judgment (expressed in language as a proposition) occurs “when we make a mental statement or pronouncement (enunciatio), an affirmation or a denial of something about something—when we announce to ourselves mentally that the sun exists . . . it is only then [that] we reach knowledge which is true or false” (Coffey 1:16-17). And reasoning, the mental process in which “we unite several judgments together by comparing their elements” and by which “we derive one truth from another or others” (Coffey 1:17), is the only power that can bring us to Blake’s imaginative Last Judgment.

Like Albion himself, our intellect can “turn away, refusing comfort” from the idea that all Blake’s words must be brought to this kind of judgment, a rational judgment; or that they can be temporarily negated; or that the meaning of many of them (nouns particularly) is covered over and hidden by a code. But to train on his poetry a tenacious doubt of Blake’s profound rationality in unbalanced favour of its imaginativeness is to keep him locked up forever in that “aspersion of Madness / Cast on the Inspired” (M41:8-9; E142). Prima facie, Blake’s work is little more than a wild outpouring of spiritual enthusiasm, of little value to those who lack the taste for such things. Blake wants our last judgment, but he wants it to be the result of good reasoning, not bad.
What Blake’s Imagination truly desires is not to negate Reason but to collaborate with his brother faculty (who has so far refused) in a mutual defence of the Truth of Thought: “For the Soldier who fights for Truth, calls his enemy his brother: / They fight & contend for life, & not for eternal death!” (J38:41-42; E185). But he must seek that brother in the silent grave of Negative Reasoning, and lean on ours along the way. Entering the grave, the Imagination must be willing to see himself and all his verbal errors destroyed, though with a specific teleological intent: to see himself “arise again” as a truth-speaker, with Reason by his side: “if I die I shall arise again & thou with me.” The letter Los has lost is not a “t” or even an “s,” but a “u”—you from his perspective, but from ours, us readers and (y)our Reason. Los can find his “u” other-self only in Urizen, and if Urizen will lend Los not only this little insignificant letter but also his skilful rational power, together they can collaborate in the spelling of rizen soul (or reasoned imagination).

1For an analysis of Aristotle’s position on this issue, see Lear 249-65 passim.

2S. H. Clark’s close reading of Milton 5:19-27 (E99) in “Blake’s Milton as Empiricist Epic” demonstrates particularly acutely how the grammatical and syntactical details of the passage serve to stress “the weakness of the tongue,” which remains “passive and inert” and “ineffectual,” finally overwhelmed by “Moral Virtue,” “the very power that it thought to harness” (462). Naturally, the Vegetated or False Tongue, unable to speak truly, can hardly speak at all, certainly not so as to be understood; and its own system of Moral Virtue—Good is the passive that obeys Reason, Evil the active springing from Energy—soon comes to dictate what it is able to say.
12. “But What May Woman Be?”: The Fourfold Human Form of Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic

Zen thought, observes William Barrett, "presents a surface so bizarre and irrational, yet so colorful and striking, that some Westerners who approach it for the first time fail to make sense of it, while others, attracted by this surface, take it up in a purely frivolous and superficial spirit" (vii). While this fact alone makes for a striking parallel to Blakean thought, there are more crucial points of coincidence, notably what D. T. Suzuki describes as Zen's "direct method" of instruction. Pausing midway through his attempt to explain Zen in Western terms, Suzuki reminds his reader that

[s]o far the truth of Zen has been expressed through words, articulate or otherwise, however enigmatic they may superficially appear; but now the masters appeal to a more direct method instead of verbal medium. In fact, the truth of Zen is the truth of life, and life means to live, to move, to act, not merely to reflect. Is it not the most natural thing for Zen, therefore, that its development should be towards acting or rather living its truth instead of demonstrating or illustrating it in words; that is to say, with ideas? In the actual living of life there is no logic, for life is superior to logic. We imagine logic influences life, but in reality man is not a rational creature so much as we make him out; of course he reasons, but he does not act according to the result of his reasoning pure and simple. There is something stronger than ratiocination. We may call it impulse, or instinct, or, more comprehensively, will. Where this will acts there is Zen. . . . When I raise the hand thus, there is Zen. But when I assert that I have raised the hand, Zen is no more there. (Barrett 129)

Blake claims that his truth, too, is the truth of life, although he redefines the word life, both by a simple equation of terms and through a long process of tortuous reasoning, to mean thought that springs from the unconscious depths of one's being and issues in action. If will acts, this same will is, for Blake, the desire for truth, a kind of instinct or impulse that, if suppressed, will work itself back up through the various layers of consciousness in dreams, imaginings, or even hallucinatory visions, in positive or
negative forms of expression in which truth is always, but to varying degrees, latent and can only be uncovered by intellectual labour. If the desire itself springs in response to the obstacle of the Not-Self from the obscure depths of the Unconscious, it is the responsibility of the Intellect to seize upon it consciously and act, because “Thought is Act” (Marg E623). So while Blake might affirm, in a modification of Dr. Suzuki’s remarks, that instinctive or intuitive thought acts to raise the hand, he might also argue that thought can also act to formulate the rational and self-conscious idea that “I have raised the hand,” expressible in words which, in their turn, embody the essence of the original thought that raised the hand in the first place.

But when it comes to direct discourse of Absolute Truth or Reality or Life as opposed to that of phenomenal reality with its particular and limited truths, we must think again. In this realm, the pretension of Reason outstrips the capacity of its abstractions to correspond accurately to their referent. As Suzuki remarks, the “fleeting, unrepeatable, and ungraspable character of life is delineated graphically by Zen masters who have compared it to lightning or a spark produced by the percussion of stones,” and the direct method of Zen intends “to get hold of this fleeting life as it flees and not after it has flown” (Barrett 130), a sentiment that is thoroughly Blakean:

He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity’s sun rise (E474)

*Binding* being synonymous with *reasoning*, the famous quatrain warns that the abstract processes of reasoning are destructive of the joyous life of intuitive thought, whose
fleeting character seems, to reason, paradoxically at odds with its eternal nature, an opinion with which Zen is in complete sympathy:

While [life] is fleeing, there is no time to recall memory or to build ideas. No reasoning avails here. Language may be used, but this has been associated too long with ideation, and has lost directness or being by itself. As soon as words are used, they express meaning, reasoning; they represent something not belonging to themselves; they have no direct connection with life, except being a faint echo or image of something that is no longer here. This is the reason why the masters often avoid such expressions or statements as are intelligible in any logical way. Their aim is to have the pupil’s attention concentrated in the thing itself which he wishes to grasp and not in anything that is in the remotest possible connection liable to disturb him. Therefore when we attempt to find meaning in dharanis or exclamations or a nonsensical string of sounds taken as such, we are far away from the truth of Zen. We must penetrate into the mind itself as the spring of life, from which all these words are produced. (Barrett 130-31)

By turning all nominal reference in his universe back on thought itself, Blake continually forces our attention back on the Mind (the true “Man”) from which all the words we see are produced, not to mention the mind we must employ to interpret them. And these two, his and ours, are the one “mysterious power / Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledge[es] infinite” (J41:2; E188), the source of our life.

When words attempt to speak of ultimate Reality, Suzuki goes on to say, they can do no more than point towards it, and we should never make the mistake of thinking that the assertion itself has bound down or fixed an absolute truth. And so,

[a]n assertion is Zen only when it is in itself an act and does not refer to anything that is asserted in it. In the finger pointed at the moon there is no Zen, but when the pointing finger itself is considered, altogether independent of any external references, there is Zen. (Barrett 129-30)

This, I would suggest, is how Blake’s assertions are best understood. In themselves they are empty, referring to nothing we can see or sense other than themselves. And yet, as
such, as fingers pointing at their own cipherhood (so to speak), they are direct expressions of the spirit of life, specifically the life of Blake's mind engaged with his reader's. And within these limits, they are unequivocally true.

"I have heard many People say Give me the Ideas," Blake scoffs, "It is no matter what Words you put them into. . . . These People know <Enough of Artifice but> Nothing Of Art. Ideas cannot be Given but in their minutely Appropriate Words" (PA E576). One of "These People," ironically, is his own malignant Spectre, whose cold-blooded abuse of words in the invention of his code distinguishes him as a master of cryptographic artifice. For what the Spectre does is put the idea of Thought into any old word, and then contextualize it to be "minutely appropriate."

Los, addressing his divided self, calls his Spectre a "Fiend of Righteousness" (J91:22; E251), not only because the Spectre self-righteously demands that we obey Reason to improve our knowledge, but also because it punishes those who fail to interpret its words rightly. The fiendish nature of the Spectre's demand is that the failure to obey it is incompatible with the punishment, at least until the transgressor realizes that accuracy of interpretation depends on the Spectre's own definitions, not those in common use. Moreover, the Spectre's language is itself fiendishly marked by several abuses of words, many of them covered in Locke's Essay, notably "affected obscurity," which entails "either applying old words to new and unusual significations; or introducing new and ambiguous terms, without defining either; or else putting them so together, as may confound their ordinary meaning" (2:126). All these things Blake's Spectre does, and yet in "hypocritic holiness" demands that we obey words whose semantic alterations we cannot see—at least, not at first. Locke himself advocates "propriety of speech" because
it "gives our thoughts entrance into other men's minds with the greatest ease and advantage: and therefore deserves some part of our care and study, especially in the names of moral words" (2:154)—words, no doubt, such as good and evil, which The Marriage of Heaven and Hell takes particular care to define. Prescribing a set of rules to remedy the abuse of words, Locke assures his reader (perhaps with naïve optimism) that "[W]hen I shall see any of those combatants [in disputes and controversies] strip all his terms of ambiguity and obscurity, (which every one may do in the words he uses himself,) I shall think him a champion for knowledge, truth, and peace" (2:151). But even though Blake regards himself as just such a champion, and even though he completely agrees with Locke's conviction that "[m]en's intentions in speaking are, or at least should be, to be understood" (2:154), he does not find understanding so easily achieved when it comes to internal disputes about Truth. And though the state of negative reasoning into which he is consequently plunged makes him clearly guilty of the worst of the literary offenses Locke describes, nonetheless Blake faithfully and obediently follows one of the philosopher's primary rules:

because common use has not so visibly annexed any signification to words, as to make men know always certainly what they precisely stand for: and because men, in the improvement of their knowledge, come to have ideas different from the vulgar and ordinary received ones, for which they must either make new words, (which men seldom venture to do, for fear of being thought guilty of affectation or novelty,) or else must use old ones in a new signification: therefore . . . it is sometimes necessary, for the ascertaining the signification of words, to declare their meaning; where either common use has left it uncertain and loose, (as it has in most names of very complex ideas;) or where the term, being very material in the discourse, and that upon which it chiefly turns, is liable to any doubtfulness or mistake. (2:154-55)
Blake certainly ventures to make new words (*Los, Enitharmon, Urizen*), and frequently uses old ones in a new signification (*spectre, death, man*), two lexical categories whose thirst-quenching value is duly noted by a Proverb of Hell: "The best wine is the oldest. the best water the newest" [MHH9; E37]). But most importantly, he does, as we have seen, declare the meaning, and often, of the word most material to his discourse, the one on which his argument chiefly turns, so that it cannot, without blatant disregard on the reader’s part, be liable to any doubtfulness or mistake. And that word is, if we fancy its code name, *spectre*, or, if we prefer plaintext, *reason*.

"He that uses words without any clear and steady meaning, what does he," asks Locke, "but lead himself and others into errors?" (2:149-50). But the Spectre does use his own name, once he has clearly defined himself as "the Reasoning Power in Man," with a rigorously steady meaning, and still he is not understood and obeyed—or not believed. So Los bitterly complains to his Spectre: "You smile with pomp & rigor: you talk of benevolence & virtue! / I act with benevolence & virtue & get murdered time after time" (J91:24-25; E251). *Jerusalem* insists that "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars" (J55:60; E205), from which principle we may infer that "doing good" to another in discourse means acting with the sort of verbal propriety Locke advocates, offering one's reader the "spiritual gift" of a clearly expressed particular idea or clearly defined particular word—a "blessing" or a "smile." Los's readers, however, thoughtlessly "murder" his and his Spectre's minutely particularized definitions (the Spectre "talking of" them, formulating them, Los giving them their substance, the energy of his thought, which is "act") time after time (thought after thought), negating their power and cumulative value by failing to apply them, at least with the formal pomp and
rigour—*rigour* being "the strict terms, application, or enforcement of some law, rule, etc." or "strict accuracy, severe exactitude" (OED)—that the Spectre, being a fiend of righteousness, demands.

Benoit points out that an inner impression of liberty accompanies the certainty of being able to reply adequately to a question—a useful thought to the reader of Blake, who is continually confronted in his battle with the text by the "idiot Questioner." What one must reply to, of course, is the Not-Self, one's own personal Negation, by way of a continuous series of actions and reactions between Self and Other in one's ongoing dialogue with the universe, with the Other always determining, but to varying degrees of rigour, the nature of the action that constitutes the reply (which in turn elicits a response). For the Self, Benoit suggests,

there is a direct proportion between the discipline of the act and the inner impression of liberty which accompanies it. The more the rigour of the determinism increases, the more the action is felt inwardly as free. If, for example, someone asks me to name any substantive, I feel uncomfortable, a confusion of which I am prisoner; I do not know what to say. If someone asks me to name a musical instrument of any kind I like, I feel a lesser degree of discomfort and I reply more readily. If someone asks me to name the smallest instrument of a quartet, the confusion of which I was prisoner disappears entirely; by naming the violin I experience within an impression of liberty which is bound up with my certainty of being able to reply adequately. According to the degree in which my possibilities of reply are restricted, in which my exterior liberty of reply decreases, in the same degree my impression of interior liberty increases; in other words, my mind is freer in the degree in which that which I have to elaborate is more rigorously defined. (*Supreme Doctrine* ^Jerusalem^, as we have heard Blake tell us, is named "liberty"—the poem's name, among the thoughts ("sons") of the Intellect ("Albion") that decodes it, is *liberty*—and we begin to understand why she is called so the moment we allow our interpreting intellects to be determined *totally*—not just partially or sporadically—by Blake's definitions, beginning
with "The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man." Only in this way will we ever be able
to reply adequately to the question of the text.

But the question of the text is the question of Truth, and if Blake’s goal is to
change our minds about what that means to us (and "The man who never alters his
opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind" [MHH19; E42]), if he is
labouring to alter our finite Reason to Infinite Reason, expanding the circumference of
our comprehension to the point of self-annihilation, then we have to remember that the
human mind has no limits except one, the limit imposed on the human being as a whole,
as a psychosomatic organism, by Reality. The natural man operates under the limits of
finite and partial determinisms—what we call our conditioning—but these are removable,
as are the two surfaces of the text, the code and the English basement it covers. And the
realized man removes them by his acceptance of and obedience to the total determinism
of the First Cause of the Universe, the One that conditions all things. In Blake, by divine
analogy, that First Cause is One Thought, Blake’s thought of the Absolute and its Truth,
to discover which—for to our eyes it remains a void, hidden within the center of the Self
in its body—his Reason performs its relentless contraction.²

Before we realize the true meaning of Blake’s universe, our imagination interprets
his term *liberty* as signifying the erasure of all limits or constraints, particularly those
imposed on us by Reason. Paradoxically, however, our true interpretive liberty resides in
our obedience to the Imagination’s One Law, which dictates that we interpret everything
we see as being made in the image of its One Infinite Thought. This notion of liberty as
the outcome of the subjection of oneself to a total determinism may be paradoxical, but it
is no less rational for all that, and surely far more rational than that of liberty as the total absence of constraint:

the natural egotistical man fatally envisages an act of free-will as an act of fantasy, gratuitous, arbitrary, connected with nothing, and he ends up thus at absurdity, at that which no longer has any meaning. This illusory liberty, which is on this side of partial determinism, and not on the other side, chimerically excludes our organism from the rest of the cosmos and thus contains an internal contradiction which wipes it out. . . . The man liberated by satori can only perform one single action in a given circumstance. He can no longer do anything but the action that is totally adequate to that circumstance; and it is in the immediate, spontaneous elaboration of this unique adequate action that the enjoyment of the perfect liberty of this man lies. The natural egotistical man, activated by partial determinism, elaborates in a mediate manner one of the innumerable inadequate reactions to the given circumstance; the man who has attained Realisation, activated by total determinism, elaborates with absolute rigour the unique action that is adequate. (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 65-66)

"The psyche of this man," Benoit concludes, "is a pure thought, or Independent Intelligence, functioning independently of all influence coming from the [soma or] animal machine, not determined by this machine but determined by the superior influence of Absolute Truth; this psyche can be called also Divine Reason or Cosmic Intelligence" (*Supreme Doctrine* 32).

This Divine Reason determined totally by Absolute Truth is, I would argue, the true state of Blake’s psyche—a sorrowing, positive, wholly affirming, loving, self-sacrificing Reason that cannot speak truly except through its Imagination. It is this Blake, the true Blake, whom the reader hardly ever sees, for his seldom appears without its imaginative mask, artificially fabricated to resemble a benign but rather foolish visionary engraver, toiling away at his dirty task, nearly destitute, kind but irascible, mad enough to think he could control the universe by the power of his imagination, a man more to be pitied than feared. Unless one counts those brief glimpses of intense light from very far
away, it is only this colourfully opaque mask we see. And it is on behalf of the silent
Blake with his silent Reason, his true Intellect (and our sleeping ones), that his
Imagination unceasingly labours, compelling his finite and negative Image or Spectre of
Reason to help restore the shattered ruins of its One Thought, a shattering for which,
ironically, the Imagination’s rebellion against rational constraint must bear half the
responsibility.

“Can you have greater Miracles than these? Men who devote / Their lifes whole
comfort to intire scorn & injury & death” (M23:1-2; E118): how do we reply to this
question? Perhaps some would prefer to remain entranced by the carefully constructed
mask, loyal to the visionary who saw heavenly hosts in the sun, or angels in trees, or
ghosts of fleas, or Jehovah at the top of a staircase infinitely ascending to the twenty-
seven heavens. But I, for one, cannot imagine a greater miracle than the one his own
lines speak of; that of a man who—very sane, very rational, and still visionary—
pretended to be mad, sacrificing his material comforts, injuring his reputation, suffering
the scorn of his contemporaries, foregoing his deserved place in the history of art and
literature, for the sake of awakening other unknown individuals.

Fortunately, the acts of Blake’s Imagination remain (as we shall see further)
totally determined by his One Thought of the Infinite, the idea of Eternity, and the
constricting limits of his finite Reason therefore fail to prevent its efforts to expand ours
infinitely—the text, after all, does exist. “Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man”
(M42:34; E144)—poor rational Blake, suffering the aspersion of madness cast on the
inspired—and does what he can to make his cry heard, for the whole man has understood
too well the reason his true identity cannot be revealed.
To recapitulate: Blake’s True (or Eternal) Mind (or Man) was originally One, its substance the energy (life) of thought, its body (works) made up of images of that substance—on the whole, a logocentric universe whose substance is produced and provided by Imagination and its form delineated and devoured by Reason. Thus the two Contraries, the bound of Reason and the energy of Imagination, are necessary to the “human existence” of the Divine Image (or Vision) of Eternal and Infinite Thought in its form as a “man,” that three-in-one circle the Poetic Genius keeps trying to show his suffering readers, in whose faces he imagines he sees marks of weakness and woe signifying nothing, an illusory want of thought and delusory doubt of eternal truth.

Since the Infinite cannot be conceived—that is, contained in an idea or image—without being bound down to the world of form, which is necessarily finite, Blake faces an insurmountable formal contradiction: “And who shall bind the infinite with an eternal band? / To compass it with swaddling bands?” (Eur2:13-14; E61). By the time he arrives at the answer to this question—as long as his Imagination’s images of truth remain within Reason’s limit, they will appear good, heavenly, holy, and true; but as soon as they exceed that limit, they will seem evil, hellish, false; and vice versa: as long as his finite Reason expands its limit to the point of self-annihilation by submitting to the guidance of his Imagination’s sense of the divine, its truths will hold; but if it refuses to collaborate with its Contrary, it will destroy all possibility of articulating even one intelligible image—he has healed his faculties’ division by joining them in one Reasoning Negative.

Putting it yet another way, we could say that as long as Blake’s Imagination agrees with his Infinite Reason that Absolute Truth can never be told, except by way of images, abstract and general or concrete and particular, that manifest it within definite limits, his
Imagination will remain passively obedient to his Reason, and therefore true. Any rebellion against Reason’s limit (which, however, is not really possible) leads the Imagination into (apparent) error. And as long as the two faculties appear separate and opposed, Reason is compelled to function as a sharp, coldly objective intellectual instrument, its mission to redefine the line, circumference, or boundary that sets truth apart from error. And this Reason does by circumscribing, circumcising, or cutting off what lies outside its bound, that false covering, woven by the transgressing Imagination in its capacity as a Reasoning Negative, of fallacy, delusion, and ungrounded fantasy that shrouds the divine body of Blake’s True Thought. When the Apocalypse or divine revelation in the literal expression finally arrives, then, when the finite and corrupt appearance of the text is burned up because we cease to behold it, it will be Reason we must depend on to undertake the work of “Circumscribing & Circumcising the excrementitious / Husk & Covering into Vacuum evaporating revealing the lineaments of Man” (J98:18-19; E257).

Reason being necessary to the Last Judgment that precedes this Apocalypse and hence to our success in distinguishing good art from bad, we ought to consider Blake’s concept of the bounding line in relation to Reason’s own art and science, logic, for “the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art.” In logic the two terms of a statement are called “bounds” or “limits” (from the Greek word for term, ὄριον, meaning “point” or “end,” “bound” or “limit”). Moreover, the Greek word “which Aristotle occasionally uses for ‘statement,’ means a line or distance or interval, and thus seems to be a natural way of referring to the statement that connects two terms. It seems probable that both Plato and Aristotle connected terms with lines” (Rose
10). Of course, Blake's bounding line, which makes for "determinate and bounding form," refers to the outline the visual artist draws to convey his conceptions. But his metaphorization of the line throughout his poetry seems too exaggerated to limit us to that concept. Or when he asks, "What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions," and warns, "Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again" (DC E550), we know, thanks to the blessing of the code, that to leave out "this line" is to leave out thought itself. And that is precisely what the Reasoning Negative does (a deceitful knave himself) to create chaos in the text. So Blake's bounding line—because life/thought is expressed in statements—is not only the outline of an imaginative visual image, but also the rational statement connecting the two bounds or limits of a judgment (its subject and predicate terms) by means of a copula.

The word *copula*, whose general meaning is "link," is (in this intellectual war of Contraries we are presently engaged in) an ally of *brace* (which, we may recall, refers to anything that clasps, tightens, secures, or connects two separate things). In hunting—and there are "two Sources of Life in Eternity[,] Hunting and War" (J38:31; E185), hunting for Truth and fighting for Truth—a *brace* refers to a pair of things, usually dead. But *brace* is also familiar to us from the Proverb of Hell "Damn. braces: Bless relaxes" (MHH9; E37), whose double intent is to advise us to curse what restricts our understanding and to watch out for the cursed words doing the restricting. Now, we have noticed that the code often braces two words that have no obvious linguistic or semantic connection—and we see none until we go beneath the text's surface to examine tangled verbal roots. Or Blake may forge a link between two words (*death* and *reasoning*, for example) in the discursive course of
some complex metaphysical meditation, played out inside our heads. But like logic itself, the code most often relies on the present tense of the verb of existence to consummate its illegitimate bracing or unholy coupling of words: “The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself”; “The Negation is the Spectre”; “Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach Humility to Man!” (J54:17; E203; my emphasis); and so on. But the most significant of these come from the conditional wings of “The Fly”: “If thought is life and the want of thought is death.” All these couplings damn us, become curses, if through doubt of their intention we allow the brace to be broken or simply close our eyes to it. If, on the contrary, we see that bracing verb is, along with the limits it connects by way of an identifying propositional line, as a blessing, if we cling to the code’s definitive moments and allow them to determine our interpretation totally, we will find them invigorating, liberating, for we will then know how to reply to those few key questions posed by the text—and now there are four of them: “O what is Life & what is Man. O what is Death?” and “What may Man be? who can tell! but what may Woman be?” (J30:25; E176). In time, these four particular questions will enable us to respond adequately (if not absolutely definitively) to the question of the text as a whole.

The logical copula in Blake is thus a brace or “mind-forged manacle,” a small but (because it is the verb of existence, and everything that exists in Blake is true) extremely significant grammatical device Los forges in his furnace to link—often mechanically, for no apparent reason—the two limits of a judgment, subject and predicate, by way of a verbal line or statement (sometimes crooked) that bounds a definite and determinate form or idea he wants us to perceive. And since judgment is a rational act, the copula damns us to
reasoning. On the other hand, the copula has another significance for the mystic, as Rudolf Otto explains:

The word “is” in the mystical formula of identification has a significance which it does not contain in logic. It is no copula as in the sentence: S is P; it is no sign of equality in a reversible equation. It is not the “is” of a normal assertion of identity. . . . One might try to indicate this [significance] by forcing the language and making the word “be” into a medium of higher unity of intransitive and transitive. For instance one might say instead of: “I am Brahman,” “I am ‘existed’ by Brahman” or “essenced” by Brahman, or “Brahman exists me.” (104)

Blake’s tactic is to force the logical copula to perform the higher function of establishing a mystical identity among the infinitely various images of his One Thought, by this method, too, labouring to alter our finite reason to a faculty of infinite perception.

If the noun copula can be thought of as an ally of brace, it would be a blood relative of copulate, the verb everyone knows means “to unite in sexual congress” (OED). Both copula and copulate are derived from the Latin verb copulare, “to fasten together, link, or couple.” So in Blake’s humanizing Imagination the two words are etymological “brothers,” descendants of the same venerable parent. And thus Reason, compelling us to link terms with copulas, seduces us into mental copulation, that same “lovely copulation bliss on bliss” (VDA7:26; E50) or “happy copulation” (VDA7:1; E50) in which Oothoon’s eyes “are fix’d” in the Visions of the Daughters of Albion. And Oothoon, true to the open-centre ciphers of her name, o’s which mimic her open eyes, is “Open to joy and to delight wherever beauty appears” (VDA6:22-23; E50). Oothoon fastens her eyes upon intelligibilities wherever she finds them; definitions are, for her, joyful, delightful, beautiful (at least, that is how I read her). So too must the reader’s organs of perception be open, however shocking the “wanton play” (VDA7:25; E50) of Blake’s copulating words may seem.
Since the primary business of the Reasoning Negative is to seduce the reader into experiencing the pleasures of verbal copulation (and into error, we must not forget), Blake characterizes rational thought as “Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic” (J29:28; E175). Thus when the married Contraries proceed to verbal intercourse (or conversation), Reason, as the passive principle of the Intellect, functions as the seductive feminine and maternal principle, in its nursing and brooding shaping or forming the substance of Thought into things we can perceive and comprehend. The Imagination, meanwhile, as the active intellectual principle, takes on the masculine role of the courting and paternal power, providing the potent essence or substance of the Thought that Reason shapes. (So The Four Zoas “Begin[s] with Tharmas Parent power. darkning in the West” [FZ4:6; E301].) Or, being indistinguishably intertwined in the Reasoning Negative anyway, they may reverse roles, Reason (since it can be either the passive form bound or active binder of form) sometimes functioning as the “clod of clay” (see BU6:10) to be wrought into shape by the Imagination, the active “potter” we see working at his “Potters Furnace” near the beginning of the second, third, and fourth chapters of Jerusalem (28:22, E174; 53:28, E203; 78:5, E233). What the imaginative potter shapes from his union with his rational material is, of course, a double-sexed rational truth from which springs one tree of knowledge of good and evil: “A dark Hermaphrodite We stood / Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good” (KG E268). But the object of rational truth may also act as a facultative power, or become the whole process of “Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic”: the Reasoning Negative may go either the active or the passive way, being at liberty to allow its feminine or its masculine characteristics to dominate. So its Reason may be active, rebellious—as, say, the evil Satan—and hence masculine; and its Imagination may be
passive, obedient—as the good Jesus, for example, willing to sacrifice its thought/life for our sake—and hence feminine (which is why Blake often illustrates his Jesus with a rather womanly face or figure.)

The Imagination (or, more precisely, the imaginative aspect of the Reasoning Negative) is thus the male "father" of Truth, endowing it with the substance of its own infinite thought, its "life," its creative power. Like the human penis, it penetrates and enters the "womb" (or, in one notable image of fellatio in Milton [Bindman 434], the open mouth) of Reason’s Void of silence, there to disseminate its divine sparks or seed, which soon sprout into a universe of words, the “pleasant Shadow of Repose call'd Albions lovely Land” (J1:3; E144), or the earth of vegetation on which Blake writes, his poetry, his “miracle” and “new birth.”

Verbal copulation requires two sets of symbolic sexual organs (both of which the Reasoning Negative, as a hermaphrodite, possesses): the silent void left by Reason’s abstraction from the speaking Eternal Mind (a void that becomes a feminine womb when one enters it), and the desire to speak Truth that keeps the Imagination active and potent (a pleasure-giving tongue or a phallus). But the desire to speak Blake refers to as his Intellect’s “Female Will,” mainly because it requires a passive material body to gratify it, an empty verbal receptacle to receive the excess of its masculine delights—namely, its mental ejaculations (which may be either sudden emissions of intellectual seed or short earnest prayers “darted up to God” in emergencies [OED, ejaculation, 4b]). And since that receptacle of the word is made void (or avoided) by the Reasoning Negative miraculously born from it, and since the Reasoning Negative is Death, Blake identifies the word’s empty womb with the grave (here feminized): “The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes / Her
hollow womb, & clasps the solid stem: / Her bosom swells with wild desire” (SL7:35-37; E69).

Similarly, when Los in the Lambeth Books forms the body of Urizen so that we might perceive the “formless unmeasurable death” of Negative Reasoning or, in Milton, the “Abstract Horror” “Refusing all Definite Form” (M3:9; E97), there appears simultaneously a “round globe of blood / Trembling upon the Void” (BU13:58-59; E77), born of the abstraction “Pity” (BU13:51; E77), which globe resembles an outward-branching heart (like the Spectre’s “white dot”), and yet is much more than that:

8. The globe of life blood trembled
Branching out into roots;
Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds;
Fibres of blood, milk and tears;
In pangs, eternity on eternity.
At length in tears & cries imbodied
A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathy face

9. All Eternity shudder'd at sight
Of the first female now separate
Pale as a cloud of snow
Waving before the face of Los

10. Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads;
At the first female form now separate

They call'd her Pity, and fled

(BU18:1-15, 19:1; E78)

This female form, emerging from the heart of Los’s thought simultaneously with the concretized form of abstracted Urizen, embodies Los’s female will. And so she is born or created, along with the abstract idea of Reason which Urizen represents and which she will embody also, from Los’s desire to speak Truth, a desire that springs from his pity for those
who suffer in ignorance. She is, in short, Los's text. But her female form quickly becomes entangled in those fibrous vegetative roots that symbolize Los's painful dilemma: he longs to speak of the Ineffable through her, but, because she is created (she is his system) without Reason, she can only express his self-contradiction. By refusing to reason—Urizen has abstracted himself—the portion of the Eternal Intellect Los represents is no better than a vegetable, and his female text thus emerges as a tangled mass (or polypus) without thought or vision. She is the concrete expression, the very image, of his pity for others and his desire to communicate his Truth, but it is a desire he can satisfy only through sexual reasoning. Moreover, because she—and this female text is soon named "Enithaimon"—is formed at the same time as Urizen, she represents the verbal manifestation of Reason in an imaginative form; and therefore she initially refuses, as Urizen does, to satisfy Los's desire, to express his Truth:

1. But Los saw the Female & pitied
   He embrac'd her, she wept, she refus'd
   In perverse and cruel delight
   She fled from his arms, yet he followd

2. Eternity shudder'd when they saw,
   Man begetting his likeness,
   On his own divided image.

   (BU19:10-16; E79)

Once Los begets his likeness on Enithaimon—he successfully impregnates her "trembling womb" (BU19:22; E79)—she embodies the image of both Los (Imagination) and Urizen (Reason). In her, in this text, the two Contraries are married, and what finally issues from her womb (the embryo undergoes a series of changes: from worm to serpent to "Many forms of fish, bird & beast" [BU19:34; E79]) is the "Human shadow" (BU19:43; E79), the Spectre, the Reasoning Negative (here named Orc).
Let us look at the scene in *Milton* where this mythic event is repeated, just after Los has just finished giving Urizen a definite form (a “body”):

Terrified Los stood in the Abyss & his immortal limbs
Grew deadly pale; he became what he beheld: for a red
Round Globe sunk down from his Bosom into the Deep in pangs
He hovered over it trembling & weeping, suspended it shook
The nether Abyss in tremblings. he wept over it, he cherish’d it
In deadly sickening pain: till separated into a Female pale
As the cloud that brings the snow: all the while from his Back
A blue fluid exuded in Sinews hardening in the Abyss
Till it separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy

(M3:28-36; E97)

All these events, allegorically dramatizing in human forms the abstract act of thinking, speaking, or writing from the heart, occur simultaneously. The Imagination, standing in the abyss of reasoning, becomes the very Reason to which he has just given a definite form and now beholds—the very image of Reason, in other words, which he has just defined in the words he now reads and will be compelled to obey, a victim of his own written law. For what he beholds is a repetition of the sinking down into the abyss of the red round globe of his heartfelt Truth, a fall into error that marked the beginning of Urizen’s formation some twenty lines earlier: “Refusing all Definite Form, the Abstract Horror rood. stony hard. / And a first Age passed over & a State of dismal woe: / Down sunk with fright a red round Globe hot burning. deep / Deep down into the Abyss. panting: conglobing: trembling”

(M3:9-12; E97). What Los beholds is the new and definite form he gives his abstract Contrary, a form that will be exhaustively anatomized and redefined throughout the text. As in *The Book of Urizen*, this marks the moment Blake conceives—in sorrow, because it will make his readers suffer—his unique system of Negative Reasoning, a method of speaking Truth and jealously guarding it at the same time, a method is necessarily born
inside the female body of a text that issues straight from his pitying heart, but accompanied by a shadowy male thought—a negatively reasoning spectre, howling in inarticulateness—that will both protect words and pursue them.

Let us examine once again Jerusalem’s key passage concerning perceptive organs and objects of perception, this time with the addition of one more crucial line:

If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of Perception seem to vary:  
If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also:  
Consider this O mortal Man! O worm of sixty winters said Los  
Consider Sexual Organization & hide thee in the dust.  

(J30:55-58; E177)

Let us now imagine this whole text we are reading—a text I have been arguing all along is and always has been the true object of our perception—in its female form, as a “womb” (but a deceptive, illusory womb because “outside of existence”) which we mental “worms” have all along been trying to penetrate. (And like the figurative fly, the figurative worm insidiously makes its way into the secrets of another’s heart.) Now, if we are able to see the code covering this female form, we will see the text one way; if we do not, we will see it quite differently—hence the object of our perception will seem to vary, but will not really vary, for whether we see it or not, the code is there. And if we do not see the code, if we fail to rouse that active masculine principle in ourselves that seeks complete gratification of its desire to see, know, and understand, that sexual-perceptive organ ready and willing to engage in verbal copulation, then we will fail to strip the code away, remove the false body or shadowy surface. Unremoved, the code—the text’s “veil,” “garment,” “robe,” “clothing,” “curtains,” “tent,” “tabernacle,” “walls,” “snowy clouds,” or “whirlwinds”: whatever image could be thought of as covering a naked surface or enclosing something inside it—will prevent us from seeing the naked beauty of Blake’s Thought displayed (for it
is a principle of the text that “Art & Science cannot exist but by Naked Beauty displayd” [J32:49; E179]). Our desire for her Truth will thus be more and more easily restrained, until it eventually fades away into a mere shadow of desire, and her womb will close against our flaccid perceptive organ, ensuring that she, this text we are reading, remains “an Aged Virgin Form” (J39:25; E187), unpenetrated and unloved.

In reality, of course, it is as impossible to separate thought from language as it is imagination from reason. But in Blake’s terrible world of error and illusion, we can certainly distinguish them, because what we see in Blake’s world is the distorted and reversed reflection of the truth (that all things are interconnected and essentially one). Here we witness the horror of everything trying to divide and separate from everything else in a vain attempt to be perceived (i.e., thought of) as a distinct individual. In the quotation below we see feminine words separating from their masculine meanings, and both from the Man/Intellect that is their source. Assuming a mental life of their own, they turn on their source to “circumscribe” the centres of his thought, affections, and “sexual” instincts—that is, his Three Classes of Thought—thus comprehending them in rational (bounded) forms, making them comprehensible to us. Meanwhile—and everything in Blake happens simultaneously, in an eternal moment—the code language grows around them all like a veil or a net made of the blood of his heart (site of the desire that sets the whole process in motion, centre of pity and truth). This veil of blood (made of “flowers” of thought if viewed from the perspective of Beulah) conceals the Intellect’s own thoughts and words from him, making his work appear obscure, painfully difficult, impossible to embrace, not only to us but to the “man” himself:
The Feminine separates from the Masculine & both from Man, Ceasing to be His Emanations, Life to Themselves assuming! And while they circumscribe his Brain, & while they circumscribe His Heart, & while they circumscribe his Loins! a Veil & Net Of Veins of red Blood grows around them like a scarlet robe. Covering them from the sight of Man like the woven Veil of Sleep Such as the Flowers of Beulah weave to be their Funeral Mantles But dark! opake! tender to touch, & painful! & agonizing To the embrace of love, & to the mingling of soft fibres Of tender affection. that no more the Masculine mingles With the Feminine. but the Sublime is shut out from the Pathos In howling torment, to build stone walls of separation, compelling The Pathos, to weave curtains of hiding secrecy from the torment. 

(J90:1-13; E249)

Once the Sublime (the head, Reason) is shut out from the Pathos (the heart, Imagination) by the code's rational "stone walls" and imaginative "curtains of hiding secrecy," masculine thought can no longer mingle—converse, have intercourse—with feminine words, and we are prevented, ironically, from seeing the torment suffered by the very intellects (Blake's and ours) inside which this scene takes place.

Ideally, the rational copulation of male thoughts and female words should result in the miracle and new birth of a new conception of Truth, but realistically all it achieves is a succession of more thoughts, "infant joys" and "infant sorrows," on and on without end, an eternal cycle of imaginative births, reasoning deaths, and reconciliatory rebirths of male abstractions embodied in sensuous female images. The Proverb of Hell "Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth" (MHH8; E36) suggests that conceiving an infant truth is joyful because free of the pain of laborious reasoning, but bringing forth that truth, expressing it in words, never is. And what this implies is that no thought born in verbal form will escape the clutches of the Reasoning Negative: all infants must be delivered by the hand of Death:

I hear the screech of Childbirth loud pealing, & the groans Of Death, in Albions clouds dreadful uttered over all the Earth
What may Man be? who can tell! but what may Woman be?
To have power over Man from Cradle to corruptible Grave.

(J30:23-26; E176-77)

If *man* means "thought," *woman* means "word," and in Blake's universe of discourse, where words are in code, they have power over thought from its conception ("cradle") to its negation ("grave") by the decaying power of Reason. Here "Women the comforters of Men become the Tormenters & Punishers" (J72; E228) of minds for the sin of reasoning badly. But thought may have power over words also, and the negative process of decoding is self-evident proof of not only that fact, but also the comfort that understanding words may bring.

Naturally, the sexual metaphor controlling Blake's world of Generation, conceived by his Imagination to combat his Reason's dry and lifeless abstract philosophical propositions, is bound to cause his reader a certain amount of torment, or at least lead him down a few dead-end garden paths. But we need not understand the metaphor in order to consider, as we are instructed to do, the *organization* of Blake's reasonings, the logical patterns by which subjects and predicates are linked (by copulas, of course), one after another, term after synonymous term, in long, chainlike, equivalential definitions (that is, a definition that "asserts or implies that the definiendum term can replace the defining term—and vice versa—in any proposition without changing the truth-value" [Parry and Hacker 88]). These chains of reasoning help us begin to penetrate the text's sacrosanct space, and the longer they grow, the greater our power to remove "the Infernal Veil grow[ing] in the disobedient Female" (J69:38; E223). For Blake's female text is disobedient whenever it fails to obey Reason.

One verbal chain we have followed pretty far is this: *reason* = *rational power* = *
reasoning power* = *reasoning negative* = *angel* = *the religious* = *redeemed* = *ratio* = *spectre*
false body = incrustation over one's immortal spirit = abomination of desolation =

negation = abstract objecting power = polypus = rock = stone = serpent = Satan = evil =
destroyer of definite form = sleep = doubt = despair = death = Urizen = abstract horror =
self-contradiction, and probably a few more. However long this chain becomes, the limit
term remains reason, the word that functions as “the end of a golden string”—and here the
word end, synonym for limit, bound, point, or term, is every bit as significant as string.

Ignoring their definite forms in conventional English, the lost traveller must wind up all
these words into one “ball,” a single coherent spherical form signifying Reason, in order to
be led in “at Heavens gate, / Built in Jerusalems wall” (J77; E231). Still, the task of
decoding every word of Jerusalem remains, for if she is a text, she is also a woman, and to
enter her gate is to enter her womb; but rational-sexual “Embraces are Cominglings: from
the Head even to the Feet; / And not a pompous High Priest entering by a Secret Place”
(J69:43-44; E223). But, of course, entering by a secret place—if we can claim, with any
justice, that Blake keeps the word reason a secret from us—is exactly what we must do.

In A Vision of The Last Judgment Blake defines “Time & Space” as “Real Beings
a Male & a Female Time is a Man Space is a Woman & her Masculine Portion is Death”
(VLJ E563). Deducing that time = man = thought, and space = woman = word, we
understand that the “masculine” or abstract portion of a word—the thought it embodies—
is a want of thought (“death”) created by Negative Reasoning. This information permits
us to formulate even more precise answers to those key questions, “O what is Life & what
is Man. O what is Death?” (J24:12; E169): life means true thought, infinite and eternal
thought; and man refers to that thought embodied in words—or, more exactly, to the
infinite essence of imaginative thought bound in a finite verbal form by rational thought,
an apparent "death" to the infinite substance because, once bound by form, the Infinite takes on the appearance of its contrary, the finite. "Woman" thus has "death" built into her, for the Word is the Logos, the instrument of a Reasoning God.

*Milton* tells us more about the nature of the Word:

The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite.

And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space! Limited To those without but Infinite to those within . . .

(M10:6-9; E104)

In this vision of sexual reasoning, we see Thought rendered impotent in face of the Word, terrified at the prospect of its infinite essence being trapped inside a finite space. The very idea causes the male organ of thought to shrink (or contract) inside the word's bounded space while her womb (which is that space) seems to expand infinitely. Once inside the word, the infinite imaginative thought becomes finite and rational, and the word's masculine portion is now "death," for infinite thought reduced to finitude becomes a Reasoning Negative or Satan (and by definition, "Satan is the State of Death" [J49:67; E199]). This Satan "vibrates" inside the space of the word with the confined but continually expanding energy of the infinite thought that he, as a devouring power, has just consumed. And since Satan is a Negation, the Word is now a cipher, her inner space the home of Nothing, a void. She now has—for she is now the Reasoning Negative's "harlot," the same harlot that appears as a blasting curse in "London": she has sold her body to Reasoning—no meaning, no communicative function other than to act a code name for Reason. And yet, and yet: though she appears limited to those without Reason's bound (the bound or outward circumference of the energy that comes from and is
contained within this male/female body of thought that Blake lovingly personifies), she appears infinite to those within it.

If we focus our organs of perception on the material aspect of Blake’s personified Thought, its “body,” its physical manifestation as ink on paper, we will see it as a “female.” But if we focus on its immaterial aspect, its “soul,” the thought its words convey, we will see it as “male.” Blake’s Reasoning Negative takes cruel delight in confusing this distinction whenever it can, characterizing his Thought (and quite accurately) as “The Twofold form Hermaphroditic: and the Double-sexed; / The Female-male & the Male-female” (M19:32-33; E113); or as “the Female Males: / A Male within a Female hid as in an Ark & Curtains” (J75:14-15; E231); or as “the Male Females: the Dragon Forms / The Female hid within a Male” (J75:17-18; E231). Thoughts may be hidden within words, or words hidden within thoughts—either is accomplished whenever the word no longer signifies what it once did because it has been made to mean something else. As Vala cries,

The Human is but a Worm, & thou O Male: Thou art Thyself Female, a Male: a breeder of Seed: a Son & Husband: & Lo.
The Human Divine is Womans Shadow, a Vapor in the summers heat Go assume Papal dignity thou Spectre, thou Male Harlot! Arthur Divide into the Kings of Europe in times remote O Woman-born And Woman-nourishd & Women-educated & Woman-scorn’d!
(J64:12-14; E215)

Speaking here to a male thought, Vala—who, as her name suggests, is the text (for she is female) when veiled by the code; Vala is Jerusalem (who is liberty) before we have learned how to decode her—informs him that he is really a word, for a male thought is a mere “breeder of seed,” a generator of further thoughts that require words to express themselves. A thought, Vala implies, is the offspring of one word (a “son”) who will in
turn produce offspring with another (a "husband"). Even the "Human Divine," Vala claims, that is, the Image of Infinite Thought itself, is but the shadow of a word, an insubstantial word-generated image, an illusion "in the summer's heat"—a nothing in face of the Sun, Truth itself. So the veiled text commands the Reasoning Negative to assume its proper office, its restraining and controlling authority, though in doing so it will have to sell itself to the embrace of female words, just as harlot-words prostitute themselves to its code. Then Vala commands "Arthur" (king of the palace of wisdom) to divide into more and more kings "in times remote"—in remote thoughts, far removed from the central idea of One Thought, that "Human Divine" Vala disparages. For, she concludes, the authority over the text vested in male thoughts, whether "kings" or "popes," in reality redounds to the female word, since all thoughts in this world are born, nourished, educated, and finally scorned by the words that falsely express them. And Vala's commanding speech is itself proof of the truth she speaks.

Let us go back to the quotation from Milton concerning the satanic space of the female text which (from our point of view) shrinks the perceiver's organs of thought until they become finite and the text itself seems infinite, beyond his grasp or comprehension:

> And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space! Limited
> To those without but Infinite to those within: it fell down and
> Became Canaan: closing Los from Eternity in Albions Cliffs
> A mighty Fiend against the Divine Humanity mustring to War
> (M10:8-11; E104)

To those on the outside of Blake's text, unable to penetrate its protective code, it seems limited, finite, closed, incomprehensible; but to those on the inside, it looks like a work of infinite thought (and the reader may even be somewhere in between). But infinite thought, when expressed, falls down from above (where Truth resides) to a region of
error below, closing the Imagination from Truth within “Albion’s cliffs,” the bound of
Reason, itself a space of difficulty and opacity—or (the third line is ambiguous) Truth
itself may be in the bound of Reason (those cliffs are “rocky,” after all), and Los ends up
closed off from it, trapped inside the finite, fallen, erroneous text, which is here called
“Canaan,” a “land” (another space) of promise, because things may one day get clearer.
Canaan is also a land of heavenly rest—we should note here that the motto to The Four
Zoas is “Rest before Labour” (FZ2; E300), and that the land of Beulah is called “a mild &
pleasant Rest” (M30:14; E129)—because within the bound of Reason thought may safely
sleep/reason, or even relax before bracing itself for the hard labour of redeeming itself
from the lie of its finitude. This rest is “heavenly” because it remains obedient to Reason,
within its rocky cliffs. What all this means for the reader trapped inside Blake’s text is
that he ought to begin with this “rest,” ceasing to think independently and instead
obediently following Blake’s dictates, emptying his mind of all self-conceived ideas and
passively allowing Blake’s Reason to impose on him, and his Imagination to impregnate
his mind with its excess of delights. Only then will the reader be equipped to labour in
intellectual battle against the mighty Fiend of Righteousness mustering to war, the evil
Spectre or Satan he finds enclosed with him inside the text and vibrating in the immensity
of its space. For this fiend (careful attention to syntax tells us this) is ambiguously
Satan/Reason or Los/Imagination: both are, inside this single space, the Reasoning
Negative, for snared within the lie of a finite thought the Imagination is compelled to
reason, to become a self-negating, self-contradicting opposer of “the Divine Humanity”
who is the abstract form of the Imagination itself. Yet even when snared and caught and
snared and taken by its own text, the reasoning Imagination retains its power to perceive
the Infinite, along with its infinite desire to show it to us, which is why the fallen text may
transform itself into Canaan, a land of solid rocky cliffs.

When the Reasoning Negative takes over the inner space of words and becomes
their sole meaning, the sole object in their denotation, “All Things become One Great
Satan, in Holiness / Oppos’d to Mercy, and the Divine Delusion Jesus be no more”
(M39:1-2; E140). The Imagination’s divine body of Thought, the “divine delusion” of
Eternal Truth it posits in the word Jesus, because it is entrusted to those same words now
occupied by Satan, appears opaque, meaningless, completely closed to our organs of
perception. Yet there is hope, because

There is a limit of Opakeness, and a limit of Contraction;
In every Individual Man, and the limit of Opakeness,
Is named Satan: and the Limit of Contraction is named Adam.
But when Man sleeps in Beulah, the Saviour in mercy takes
Contractions Limit, and of the Limit he forms Woman: That
Himself may in process of time be born Man to redeem
But there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of Translucence.
In the bosom of Man for ever from eternity to eternity.
(J42:29-36; E189)

The difference between these two limits, that of opaqueness (Satan) and that of
contraction (Adam), is more apparent than real. “Adam” is, on the one hand, one finite,
bounded, rational thought (loathed by its possessor), but its internal energy makes it a
“breeder of seed,” infinitely productive, profusely fertile, or vegetative, “endowed with
the power or faculty of growth” (OED), capable of generating multitudes of successive
generations of “men”/thoughts as the “husband” of the female word (“Eve”), who is
herself formed from the limit he is. Together this original Adam-Thought and Eve-Word
produce the enormous human race of “sons” and “daughters” who will ultimately
populate the whole “earth”/text. “Satan,” on the other hand, is one opaque because void
thought of purely negative power, capable only of occupying the female space of the word by devouring the thought it contains. But Adam begins to look like Satan when we consider that a thought that refers only to itself and generates nothing but further thoughts of itself is essentially empty (for that is what Satan does). And Satan looks like Adam when we consider that any thought is only an image of Reality anyway, a nothing in comparison to it, and a thought that continually returns our minds to that truth (which is what Satan does) has tremendous generative power. The only real difference, then, between the limit of opaqueness and the limit of contraction—both reduce everything to One Thought of a Void Truth—is that the first represents the object of the text as perceived by Reason, the second by Imagination, and only the latter produces a word. “Adam” is One Thought speaking its Truth; “Satan” is that same Thought remaining silent, true to Truth’s ineffability.

When the Imagination (“the Saviour”) takes “Adam,” the thought that has contracted to the idea of Thought, and forms an “Eve” word from it, it speaks that word in order “That / Himself may in process of time be born Man to redeem,” that, in other words, the Imagination may in the process of thought be born a thought to redeem thought. Specifically, the Imagination will be born as a divine thought that will redeem “sinful” thought (erroneous reasoning). So it creates a text in which any female word or male idea has the potential to open our minds to its true meaning, because every word and every idea is a translucent image of Eternal Thought—another reason why there is no limit of either expansion or translucence.

When Blake expresses this idea imaginatively, he is not afraid to transgress (enter the state of Eternal Death) and return to the bound of Reason repeatedly—such are the
“vibrations” of his imaginative reasoning inside the text. We see him indulging himself in redundant repetitions of his one idea (which are “Too much”) while simultaneously keeping it within comprehensible limits (“Enough!”). The flexible imaginative excess makes for poetry, the rigid rational limit preserves intelligibility, and both are necessary to the imaginative work as a whole (for Contraries are necessary to human existence):

And Los beheld his Sons, and he beheld his Daughters:
Every one a translucent Wonder: a Universe within,
Increasing inwards, into length and breadth, and heighth:
Starry & glorious: and they every one in their bright loins:
Have a beautiful golden gate which opens into the vegetative world:
And every one a gate of rubies & all sorts of precious stones
In their translucent hearts, which opens into the vegetative world:
And every one a gate of iron dreadful and wonderful,
In their translucent heads, which opens into the vegetative world
And every one has the three regions Childhood: Manhood: & Age:
But the gate of the tongue: the western gate in them is clos’d,
Having a wall builded against it: and thereby the gates
Eastward & Southward & Northward, are incircled with flaming fires.
And the North is Breadth, the South is Heighth & Depth:
The East is Inwards: & the West is Outwards every way.

(114:16-30; E158)

Taken literally, this passage is mind-boggling, phantasmagorically absurd. Read poetically, it is enigmatic and forbidding—partly dazzling, partly monotonous. Read with the aid of the code, however, the “rod” that sees us through the Valley of Death, the passage betrays unmistakable evidence, in form and content, of an unbearable tension between an eloquent desire and its deliberate frustration. Beholding his own wondrous and translucent son-thoughts and daughter-words, the Imagination sees the gate of the “tongue” (a vegetated and false tongue) closed by a wall built against it. And, fittingly, it is a wall hermaphroditically composed of Los’s “sons” and “daughters,” the Imagination’s female code words and their silent male lovers, locked up inside them.
Indeed, "thereby," by the same devious cryptographic means, all the gates—of the heart (pathetic truth) and the head (sublime truth) and the loins (sexual reasoning or imaginative creativity)—are "incircled" (because the body of this Thought is a circle) with the flaming fires of negative reasoning, anxious to burn up the excess that surrounds each of the three centers of thought. A fine example of this impassable circle of fire or of the error it is designed to burn—it is impossible to say which, exactly—is the confusion of directions and spatial relations in the last two lines. Some of these, but under the alternate names of the "within" ("Inwards"), the "without" or "outside" ("Outwards" or "Breadth"), the "above" ("Heighth"), and the "below" ("Depth"), we have already expended a good deal of energy in deciphering (in Chapter 3). But this time the definitions are excessive: mixed up and confused, impossible to disentangle from their misleading geographical directions. No one could make sense of them, no sensible person would claim to find them understandable—and therefore they are not possible to believe. These two lines are not an image of Truth, and therefore they are an error—and an error is, at best, a truth told so as not to be understood. As such, they ought to be negated, cut off, circumscribed and circumcised, burned up and destroyed, for we will find, if we consign them to the Non-Entity, that we suffer no loss (no Los) of meaning.

Blake sees no contradiction in the idea of a formless and infinite Thought or Mind thinking finite thoughts, ideas that have form, are bounded, and yet partake of the same eternal substance that thinks them. And because they are of the same substance, "Eternity is in love with the productions of time" (MHH7; E36): the Eternal Mind loves those finite and temporal portions of itself that its male thinking produces in the female form of a body of Thought, which female body appears "clothed" when covered by the
Reasoning Negative's code language, but, when stripped of it by the deciphering Intellect, appears "naked," which is why "The nakedness of woman is the work of God" (MHH8; E36). But if all form emanates from an original in-formal Superior Principle, to be a form is to exist, because to exist is to stand outside the Principle of existence—or Absolute Being, God, the Infinite—and so be perceptible. On the plane of form, then, existing things are subject to the interplay of the two inferior contrary principles, affirmation/construction and negation/ destruction, which Blake assigns, in some ways arbitrarily, to his Imagination and Reason respectively, which together "build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating" (M30:19-20; E129). The Imagination cannot undertake the work of creating a universe of thought-forms all by itself, for no matter how completely Blake identifies his Imagination with his Intellect's consciousness of its essential infinity, it can create nothing without the bound of Reason. Only Reason can draw a line around the particular portion of Eternity to be manifested in a finite form, in time/thought and inside the space of a woman/word. Thus in the creation of a written work that will raise other minds from their erroneous belief in a "dark region" of nothingness where all thought terminates into the light of a perception of the Infinite, Reason and Imagination must collaborate,

Creating form & 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 & afflictions:  
Creating the beautiful House for the piteous sufferer.  

(M28:2-8; E125)

Without form—which in classical metaphysics is always rational—the Infinite would be appear to be a nothing, a void, a delusion, like "the Divine Delusion Jesus" (M39:2;
E140). This appearance of nothingness, which seems to be and so is for its perceiver, persists until the Infinite is bounded, whereupon the Void is transformed into a perceptible form of existence with a "name and a habitation," with a particular identity and a particular residence in time and space. The bounded form of thought thus has a body, finite in appearance but infinite within: hard and concrete on the outside, still void and infinite on the inside, a paradoxically finite/infinite form, holy, hole-y, wholly.

Binding or bounding the Infinite merely changes its appearance in the eye of the perceiver, from that of a dark region of sorrow lying boundless without the self to that of a boundless region of light and joy lying within it. If before being bound the Infinite appeared to be an indefinite nothing (in the sense of "without distinct limitation of being or character; having no clearly defined or determined character; indeterminate, vague, undefined" [OED, *indefinite*]), that idea is "put off" when Reason bounds it into a "this something," a definite object of perception and a minute particular, a concrete sheltering "house"-thought inside which the "piteous sufferer," who is having trouble reading the face of the universe, may contemplate the indefinable at its center. To bound is to define, but the Imagination can only compel Reason to define its perception of the Infinite as what it is not—the Infinite, in reality, is not a house. Clearly, the Infinite remains unbounded outside the bound of Reason, and so it remains an indefinite there (in the obsolete sense of "extending beyond any assignable limits; boundless, infinite" [OED, *indefinite*]), in the region of invisible error where it has been "put off" by being distinguished from form, and where it remains an imperceptible "Abstract Horror" "Refusing all Definite Form." The poet's speaking of the Infinite, then, his attempt to define it by simultaneously enclosing it and putting it off "into most holy forms of
Thought," constitutes a foolish attempt to change it into its direct contrary: the indefinite infinite formless becomes, through the agency of words, a definite finite form.

Speaking of the Infinite is also to cause it to fall from the realm of Absolute Being down to the world of relative existence. Keeping in mind that only Reason can define the Infinite, bounding/binding it into definite verbal forms, and that only the Imagination can provide the substance of infinite thought to be thus bound, we are ready to interpret a key passage in *Jerusalem* confirming that forms of Thought, if they are true (residing in "Great Eternity"), give light:

In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision And the Light is his Garment This is Jerusalem in every Man A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness Male & Female Clothings. And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion

But Albion fell down a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurld By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man Into his own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man

(J54:1-7; E203)

The apparent confusion of number and gender in the opening lines of this passage—are there many particular neuter forms, each with its own peculiar light, or just one male form, the Divine Vision?—dissipates when we interpret the particular form as a thought derived from Blake's Divine Vision of One Thought and so identical to it in essence, thought that is sexless when considered abstractly but male when imaginatively personified. And any thought that emanates the light of Truth is translucent or intelligible, clothed in a garment of light which is itself conceivable as either a female word conveying a male thought or a male thought embodied in a female word. This inseparably male-female form is, in Blakean shorthand, an "emanation," speech that
obscures in order to reveal, a protective covering ("tent" or "tabernacle") for the Divine Vision of Truth that is woven by the two Contraries reconciled by their mutual forgiveness for their respective sins against Truth.

Just as the female Jerusalem—or the poem Jerusalem—is the emanation of Albion (see Jerusalem's title-page, or M12:27; E106), Albion is the male Thought or Divine Intellect whose truth the vehicle Jerusalem embodies and must convey. And all Albion's "children," all its male thoughts and female words, define their mother-word Jerusalem as "liberty." Now, this definition is a work conducted under the authority of the Reasoning Negative, with Reason circumscribing its bound and Imagination providing the energy or substance of the idea defined. But the definition of any idea relating to the Infinite—and the sort of liberty Blake has in mind is the direct consequence of a direct perception of the Infinite—encloses the infinite idea in form, binding it down and imprisoning it in a self-cancelling contradiction (\(\text{infinite} \neq \text{finite}\)) that renders it meaningless. The result is an opaque finite form, an apparently unintelligible thought-object or "rocky fragment" of the original whole Thought or Divine Vision (code-named "Albion" when separated from itself by its own shadow-image). The male idea of liberty is now hidden within the opaque code word Jerusalem, a faint shadow of the original idea of infinite liberty clothed in the translucent "Male & Female Clothings" of the light of Truth. Jerusalem is thus a rock (the idea of liberty covered by a code word becomes opaque), liberty is an emanation (the covering of plain English is now translucent, light-giving), and the former becomes the latter when we connect them by the bracing power of the mind-forged manacle, the copula—when we allow Blake's Reason to impose the definition "Jerusalem is Liberty" on our minds and then passively obey it.
But the moment his Reasoning Negative encloses the idea of "liberty" in the code word
Jerusalem—which it does before the foundation of its text/world—it tears this idea (the
thought of liberation from the shackles of illusion through self-realization) from the
eternal realm of Absolute Being and hurls it down to the temporal world of existence,
where it lodges in a perceptible form and particular word that can be read, if not
immediately understood. This thought of liberty is also the Divine Vision, the male
Thought of God, which in this way lies hidden within the female Word, itself the
subsequent cause of much of the truth-teller's anguish:

O Albion why wilt thou Create a Female Will?
To hide the most evident God in a hidden covert, even
In the shadows of a Woman & a secluded Holy Place
That we may pry after him as after a stolen treasure
Hidden among the Dead & mured up from the paths of life

(J30:31-35; E176-77)

Only the "children of Albion," thoughts derived from Albion as Albion is derived from
One Infinite Thought, can translate the opaque code word Jerusalem back into an
intelligible form, the emanation or plain English word liberty—or, more precisely,
because Jerusalem is female, into the idea of a text which, against all logic, liberates
thought from form. So Jerusalem remains grounded in both concrete reality (the text
bearing that name as its title) and the Eternal Thought the whole poem derives from.

Albion, too, though a fallen rock (an infinite thought encrypted or encoded), remains
within Jerusalem a word that refers to and so remains grounded in its own absolute
source, the true Man/Mind, "the Eternal Man even Albion upon the Rock of Ages"
(M34:46), Eternal Thought founded on the solid rock of Truth (the rock of which Albion
is a rocky fragment). There are, then, two ways to perceive Albion (as there are
everything in Blake): as a “rock,” a word whose meaning is opaque to us as long as we
are ignorant of its definition; or as an “emanation” illuminated by the light of Truth, a
Form of the Divine Vision. (And an emanation is generally the feminine counterpart of a
male “star”—“He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star” [MHH7; E35]—
although Blake does speak of male emanations, too: “For Man [mind] cannot unite with
Man [mind] but by their Emanations / Which stand both Male & Female at the Gates of
each Humanity” [J88:10-11; E246].)

All this may lead us to suspect that Albion is the Divine Vision: going over the
lines quoted above from plate 54 of Jerusalem once again, and incorporating what we are
told there with fragments of information from elsewhere in Blake’s text—a line, for
example, from the Preface to the second chapter of Jerusalem: “Jerusalem the Emanation
of the Giant Albion! Can it be? Is it a Truth that the Learned have explored? . . .
Jerusalem was & is the Emanation of the Giant Albion. It is True, and cannot be
controverted” (J27; E171)—we can piece together the following syllogism:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jerusalem} & \text{ is the emanation of the Divine Vision.} \\
\text{Jerusalem} & \text{ is the emanation of Albion.} \\
\text{Therefore Albion is the Divine Vision.}
\end{align*}
\]

But this argument is fallacious—Jerusalem could be the emanation of two different
“men,” just as Albion has two “wives,” Jerusalem (J20:40; E166) and Vala (J63:7;
E214); and besides, we are told that Jerusalem is “in every Man”—so Reason fails to
prove what the reasoning Imagination urges us to believe. But in Blake’s world, we are at
liberty to believe what we find possible to believe, and to take that for an image of Truth.
If we are mistaken, mental suffering in the form of confusion will soon overtake us again.
If it makes sense to think of Albion and the Divine Vision as one and the same, or, in light of the passage we read earlier where Albion addresses “a Shadow from his wearied intellect,” as the image of an intellect adoring its own divine image in the “person” of a Divine Vision, then we are likely to find as much textual evidence for as against the identification. For words—even intelligible emanations, clearly defined words pointing directly to the identity of things at present only indefinite—are inevitably weak finite forms, and without Reason’s “bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements” (DC E550), they could not exist at all:

But the Emanations trembled exceedingly, nor could they Live, because the life of Man was too exceeding unbounded His joy became terrible to them they trembled & wept Crying with one voice. Give us a habitation & a place In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings For if we who are but for a time, & who pass away in winter Behold these wonders of Eternity we shall consume But you O our Fathers & Brothers, remain in Eternity But grant us a Temporal Habitation. do you speak To us; we will obey your words as you obey Jesus The Eternal who is blessed for ever & ever. Amen

So spake the lovely Emanations; & there appeared a pleasant Mild Shadow above: beneath: & on all sides round,

Into this pleasant Shadow all the weak & weary Like Women & Children were taken away as on wings Of dovelike softness, & shadowy habitations prepared for them But every Man returnd & went still going forward thro’ The Bosom of the Father in Eternity on Eternity Neither did any lack or fall into Error without A Shadow to repose in all the Days of happy Eternity

(M30:21-33, 31:1-7; E129-30)

Infinite Thought (or joy or delight or energy or life) that is unbounded becomes terrible to female words, who fear they cannot contain it. So they ask to be bound: given a “temporal habitation,” a male time and female space, to protect them in their finitude, a
place where they may be "hidden under the shadow of wings," hidden under the
Reasoning Negative's alternately aspiring and brooding wings (remember the Spectre has
a pair of them, named Voltaire and Rousseau). Thus enclosed in shadowy images, they
promise to be passively obedient to their male referents, thoughts which, being divine, are
inspired, possessed of the sort of wings necessary to fly beyond Reason's bound, up to the
eternal Truth above. Or perhaps not, for "every Man returnd & went still going forward
thro' / The Bosom of the Father," expanding the bound but then compelled to turn back
from it towards the Truth at the center of the Intellect. There is the further telling
recognition (line 27) on the part of words themselves that if they should transgress
Reason's bound, they would "consume," be burned up as errors in the burning fire of the
Reasoning Negative's eternal thought. In short, emanations know they will be
meaningless (no longer emanations) without Reason's formal power, however safely
lodged in eternal Truth the thoughts that inspired them remain.

For the reader ignorant of Blake's code, the relative world of existence his text
represents appears marred by chaos, particularly in the shadowy realm of his own
memory, for Blake never seems more incomprehensible than when one leaves off reading
and tries to recall some coherent idea. When the Reasoning Negative hurls Albion as a
rocky fragment "Into his own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man," the line
ought to remind us of what goes on between Blake and his reader. Fortunately, the cause
of the appearance of chaos is explained for us:

And this is the cause of the appearance in the frowning Chaos[.]
Albions Emanation which he had hidden in jealousy
Appeard now in the frowning Chaos prolific upon the Chaos
Reflecting back to Albion in Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic

(J29:25-28; E175)
The “frowning Chaos” is the work of the Reasoning Negative (the sullen, *frowning* fool), who is itself “Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic,” a half-rational-female and half-imaginative-male perceptive organ engaged in a deceptive communication. We know this communication involves the copulation of terms, the intercourse—sometimes loving and sanctioned, sometimes cruelly exploitative and illegitimate—of thoughts and words, the latter impregnated by the Reasoning Negative’s self-contradictory conceptions. This is the very “Sexual Organization” Blake asks us to “Consider,” and its encoded form is what causes the frowning chaos to appear. But Albion has an emanation—a meaningful, translucent, English-language text—which he has hidden “in Jealousy,” because he loves and feels protective of her truth (just as Reason loves and protects Absolute Truth by hiding it, not speaking of it). But Albion’s emanation, this already expressed truth, appears now to him (and to us, of course) in another, prolific form—the form of chaos itself (she is both “in” and “upon” it, because she in fact is it). And even this is intelligible, for when Albion chooses to hide his truth, he becomes a Reasoning Negative, and it is the business and chief characteristic of the Reasoning Negative to obscure Truth by shrouding the text in a code cruelly conceived. And so, Albion’s emanation Jerusalem, meant to liberate Thought, becomes a truth now told with bad intent, darkly clothed and difficult to penetrate, which means that Jerusalem is now “Vala,” a “veil” (or “live” and “love” disordered), a coded text that imprisons Thought (notably in the form of Luvah, her lover). Vala—chaotic, obscure, meaningless, for “the Veil of Vala, is composed of the Spectres of the Dead” (J47:12; E196)—is what Jerusalem appears to be when she is still “hidden,” her code not yet penetrated, when she is still the “frowning
Chaos” to whom Albion now speaks, struggling to identify her, bedazzled her appearance with its paradoxical mix of colour and chiaroscuro:

Albion spoke. Who art thou that appearest in gloomy pomp
Involving the Divine Vision in colours of autumn ripeness
I never saw thee till this time, nor beheld life abstracted
Nor darkness immingled with light on my furrowd field
Whence camest thou! who art thou O loveliest? the Divine Vision
Is as nothing before thee, faded is all life and joy

(J29:29-34; E175)

Albion sees, at least, that the veiled text “involves” the Divine Vision, in all the following senses: “to roll or enwrap in anything that is wound round, or surrounds as a case or covering”; “to environ, esp[ecially] so as to obscure or embarrass; to beset with difficulty or obscurity”; “to entangle (a matter), to render intricate”; or to “entangle (a person) in trouble, difficulties, perplexity” (OED, involve). And this involvement of the Divine Vision, Vala’s obscuring of the One Thought that is Albion himself, makes the Vision appear “as nothing” next to her: she makes all thought and the joy of thinking fade away. Until Albion beholds thought “abstracted” and objectified in and by the text, he can see neither her nor the Divine Vision she involves.

Vala replied in clouds of tears Albions garment embracing

I was a City & a Temple built by Albion's Children.
I was a Garden planted with beauty I allured on hill & valley
The River of Life to flow against my walls & among my trees
Vala was Albions Bride & Wife in great Eternity
The loveliest of the daughters of Eternity when in day-break
I emanated firom Luvah [pity and love] over the Towers of Jerusalem
And in her Courts among her little Children offering up
The Sacrifice of fanatic love! why loved I Jerusalem!
Why was I one with her embracing in the Vision of Jesus
Wherefore did I loving create love, which never yet
Immungled God & Man, when thou & I, hid the Divine Vision
In cloud of secret gloom which behold involve me round about
Know me now Albion: look upon me I alone am Beauty
The Imaginative Human Form is but a breathing of Vala
I breathe him forth into the Heaven from my secret Cave
Born of the Woman to obey the Woman O Albion the mighty
For the Divine appearance is Brotherhood, but I am Love
(J29:35-52; E175-76)

Vala claims to have been a “city,” “temple,” and “garden”—different kinds of female
spaces, all serving as temporal habitations for Thought (the first two built with stones and
rocks, the third vegetative). She also claims to have been Albion’s bride and wife in
Eternity, as does Jerusalem in an earlier speech addressed to Vala (J20:21-41; E165-66)
in which she confirms that Vala’s veil encloses pity and love and can be removed: “The
Veil shone with thy brightness in the eyes of Albion, / Because it inclos’d pity & love;
because we lov’d one-another! / Albion lov’d thee! he rent thy Veil! he embrac’d thee! he
lov’d thee!” (J20:34-36; E165). Rending the veil of Vala turns her into Jerusalem—that
is, removing the code (written out of pity and love for suffering humanity) completely
alters the text’s appearance: what was once obscure becomes intelligible, because

Man is adjoin’d to Man by his Emanative portion:
Who is Jerusalem in every individual Man: and her
Shadow is Vala, builded by the Reasoning power in Man
O search & see: turn your eyes inward: open O thou World
Of Love & Harmony in Man: expand thy ever lovely Gates.
(J39:38-42; E187)

So the object of perception depends on the organ perceiving it: as long as the
reader is ignorant of the code’s presence, it imposes on him and the text is Vala; when he
has broken or removed it, she becomes Jerusalem. Vala is the “outside shadowy Surface
superadded to the real Surface; / Which is unchangeable for ever & ever,” and the real
surface is Jerusalem, an English-language poem, “builded here, / Among these dark
Satanic Mills,” in “Englands green & pleasant Land” (M1:7-8, 16; E96), for land = space
= woman = word. Not surprisingly, then, Vala alludes to a time when she and Jerusalem were one in the Imagination's eye, "in the Vision of Jesus." Moreover, she defines herself as "Beauty" and "Love": an aesthetic expression of love inspired by love, but love of True Thought, whether it is called "Albion" or "the Divine Vision" or "God" or "the Imaginative Human Form." And this love, says Vala, "never yet / Immingle God & Man," never yet returned finite thoughts to their infinite Source, rejoined the image to its original—which, again, is not surprising, since Vala herself prevents it, as she explains to Albion, by shrouding Thought ("the Imaginative Human Form" which is Albion himself) in a code language: "when thou & I, hid the Divine Vision / In cloud of secret gloom which behold involve me round about." Together the Intellect and its text hide the Divine Vision, and then the Intellect "forgets" what he has done, unable to see the Vision himself any longer. So Vala exhorts Albion to identify her ("Know me now Albion") as Beauty, and to identify himself with her—know me now as Albion: I too am Albion, Vala implies. For Albion, the "Imaginative Human Form" of Thought, the image of Thought personified, is but a "breathing" of Vala (thought = life = strength = breath); Vala claims that the One Thought at the center of the work is a thought that emanates from her "secret Cave," her secret writing (for a cave is a space is a woman is a text). She concludes her speech (herself) by reminding Albion that Thought is born of the Word to obey the Word—which is why the human image of Thought gets breathed forth from Vala's secret writing into "the Heaven," heaven being the place (verbal place) where thought obeys Reason, the passive, feminine, maternal principle. Blake's "heaven" is the realm of the Logos, whose ordinary senses are "reason" and "word." For the divine appearance of Thought (as opposed to its appearance as the frowning chaos of Vala) is "brotherhood,"
as Vala rightly says—a "masculine" fellowship of interconnected thoughts, thoughts integrated in One Coherent Thought. But that brotherhood is impossible without words, without the love of words (and Reason), a love Vala herself symbolizes as much because of as despite her encrypted form.

Once we have found the center of certainty to which to return in times of doubt—namely, that everything is a form of True/Eternal Thought—we are free to move through the text by way of more imaginative interpretations, embracing the spirit Blake intends us to enjoy, yet without straying too far into subjective views. In time, all will be revealed, because “woman” is “space” (a text is a space that contains thought) and “man” is “time” (thought is a linear and yet circular process that leads to knowledge only with the passage of time), and “man cannot know / What passes in his members till periods of Space & Time / Reveal the secrets of Eternity” (M21:8-10; E115). More importantly, finite temporal thought delivers the mercy of inexpressible eternal Truth, for “Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Times swiftness / Which is the swiftest of all things: all were eternal torment” (M24:72-73; E121).

What is man? And what may woman be? Twice we are told (and whenever Blake takes the trouble to repeat himself, we really ought to pay attention): “The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom” (J5:34; E148; see also J90:27; E250). Blake metaphorizes Thought as a “Furnace of beryll” because a furnace contains fire, and the “burning fire of thought” is the instrument that consumes the errors of the text, the code and all its obscuring forms that obstruct the light of Truth (beryl is a transparent precious stone, contrary or perhaps brother of an opaque rock). And if the Word is a “golden Loom,” that is because she is a text in which thoughts and words are woven
together into that garment of light clothing Blake’s Divine Vision, “golden” because she has an underlying intelligible form, one that reflects the light of Truth. The imaginative connection between a poem and a loom is of course already embedded in the literal meaning of the word text, “that which is woven, web, texture” (we may recall the “Web of Life” here), which comes from the verb tex-ere, to weave (OED). Even in conventional speech, loom is used synecdochically for the whole “art, business, or process of weaving” (OED, loom). So in one especially translucent passage Blake describes his One Thought as

One Man Jesus the Saviour, wonderful! round his limbs
The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing
Is the Divine Revelation in the Littéral expression:
A Garment of War, I heard it namd the W oof of Six Thousand Years
(M42:11-15; E143)

Oolon, a female word whose orthography reveals her arithmetical origins in the system of the code (zero-one-zero-one-zero + no: Oolon says either one thing or nothing), is involved in clouds, and she is herself a cloud involving the One Man Jesus. We have seen that Vala too hides the Divine Vision in a “cloud of secret gloom” which then involves her “round about”; the “nameless female” of America is “Invulnerable tho’ naked, save where clouds roll round her loins” (Am1:7; E51); the “first female” of The Book of Urizen appears “Pale as a cloud of snow / Waving before the face of Los” (BU18:11-12; E78); and in Milton the red round globe of Los’s heart “separate[s] into a Female pale / As the cloud that brings the snow” (M3:33-34; E97). Now, the “cloud” is a key image of the Reasoning Negative obscuring its Truth (the Sun), a fact we discover by the attributes the cloud is associated with: despair (when Oolon speaks, she “repl[ies] in
clouds of despair” [M41:29; E143]); doubt (the emblem entitled “Air” from *The Gates of Paradise* depicts Man/Thought sitting holding his aching head “On Cloudy Doubts & Reasoning Cares” [GP E261]); and destructive chaos (Los tells the Spectre that his vision “is a Disorganized / And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War” [J91:22-23; E251]). A “female” clothed or involved in “clouds” is thus a text obscured by the Reasoning Negative’s code, while the code itself is a “Garment of War,” a code of war, a secret writing which is, paradoxically, ultimately a “Divine Revelation in the Littéral expression.” Such is the nature of the textual garment woven and worn by Blake’s desiring Imagination in its role as Jesus, the Logos, the Word, champion of the Divine Idea of God.

In a more spectacular vision of poetic excess, we have the negative version of this same garment delivered by the text herself, a “Shadowy Female” (no doubt a whore of the Reasoning Negative) whose “howlings” are ambiguously articulate and inarticulate:

And thus the Shadowy Female howls in articulate howlings

I will lament over Milton in the lamentations of the afflicted
My Garments shall be woven of sighs & heart broken lamentations
The misery of unhappy Families shall be drawn out into its border
Wrought with the needle with dire sufferings poverty pain & woe
Along the rocky Island & thence throughout the whole Earth
There shall be the sick Father & his starving Family! there
The Prisoner in the stone Dungeon & the Slave at the Mill
I 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
I will have Kings inwoven upon it, & Councillors & Mighty Men
The Famine shall clasp it together with buckles & Clasps
And the Pestilence shall be its fringe & the War its girdle
To divide into Rahab & Tirzah that Milton may come to our tents
For I will put on the Human Form & take the Image of God
Even Pity & Humanity but my Clothing shall be Cruelty
And I will put on Holiness as a breastplate & as a helmet
And all my ornaments shall be of the gold of broken hearts
And the precious stones of anxiety & care & desperation & death
And repentance for sin & sorrow & punishment & fear
To defend me from thy terrors O Orc! my only beloved!

(M18:4-25; E111)

The Shadowy Female’s garment—the garment that she herself is—is composed of cursed or damned words, code words that cause not only the reader but also the imprisoned thoughts and poorly expressed words of the text itself a wide variety of particular miseries. And like a garment, or like the layering clouds that also serve as an image of the text, the code literally folds the figurative back onto the literal. For example, the “Famine” of line 16 that clasps the textual garment together “with buckles & Clasps” puts us in mind of a lack of food; and since the only food in this universe is the nourishing food of thought (wheat, bread, and grapes we have already encountered), this “famine” can only signify that want of thought with which the Reasoning Negative (or Death) is identified. After all, mental famine (or absence of meaning) is produced by the Reasoning Negative’s damning of words by encrypting them: with their disguised appearance, they are unreadable; we cannot think—at least, not truly—of what they mean. And so, since “Damn. braces,” the damned word famine, as a code word for “want of thought,” literally functions as a brace—“a clasp, buckle, clamp, or other connecting piece or fastener” (OED)—ensuring that our minds are tightly manacled to ignorance, to the “sufferings poverty pain & woe” involved in struggling to interpret what we cannot understand. But the cruel code (“my Clothing shall be Cruelty”) braces us in another sense as well, by binding us tightly to its author’s strict circumference of meaning (One Thought). Inside that narrow, dark, and void space, we are—like prisoners in a stone dungeon, or slaves grinding at a mill of complicated wheels—its victims. But so is
Blake’s reasoning Intellect, along with its famished victims, all the empty-bellied boy-thoughts and girl-words it derives from itself: “the sick Father & his starving Family.”

The Shadowy Female’s garment—the coded text—is her (or Blake’s) armour (a “defensive covering worn by one who is fighting” [OED]) against the terrors of fiery Ore, the Reasoning Negative whom she calls her “only beloved.” Ore’s task is to consume the Imagination’s errors in the burning fire of his thought, and here he pleads with the shadowy Word not to become what she already is, a personified Form of Thought, lest she become what he is, an apparently non-existent Negation of uncontrollably burning energy:

Ore answerd. Take not the Human Form O loveliest. Take not Terror upon thee! Behold how I am & tremble lest thou also Consume in my Consummation; but thou maist take a Form Female & lovely, that cannot consume in Mans consummation Wherefore dost thou Create & Weave this Satan for a Covering[?] When thou attemptest to put on the Human Form, my wrath Burns to the top of heaven against thee in Jealousy & Fear. Then I rend thee asunder, then I howl over thy clay & ashes When wilt thou put on the Female Form as in times of old With a Garment of Pity & 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.

(M18:26-38; E111-12)

The Reasoning Negative named Ore (or Spectre or Satan) is himself an error, doomed to live in unquenchable burnings (remember that Los defines the Spectre as “a Non Entity for ever / And if any enter into thee, thou shalt be an Unquenchable Fire” [J17:44-45; E162]) and consume anything outside the bound of Reason—all imaginative sins and transgressions, including itself. The “Human Form” Ore regards as a “Satan,” a “covering” created and woven by the text (Shadowy Female) out of what Ore himself is.
Orc is therefore her lover—"O lovely Shadow of my delight," he calls her: and burning energy (which Orc is) is "eternal delight"—and she is the image of him, his harlot. The Human Form of the text is its coded form, and Orc warns her that in this form she, too, will consume in his consummation (poetic devices like personification belong to the Imagination's armaments of fictions and illusions). Compelled to "rend" her "asunder" (just as Albion rends the veil of Vala in order to embrace the pitying and loving Thought within) and reduce her to clay and ashes—to negate her, in short—Orc pleads with the text to take on another verbal form, one that cannot consume in Thought's consummation, the form of an emanation, a translucent garment of the Intellect/God like Jerusalem. For the satanic covering—also called the "Covering Cherub"—that the text now wears is what makes her an obscure or "Shadowy Female," a text with an "outside shadowy surface" that ought to be removed (and burned up) for the sake of the "real Surface" of English ("Jerusalem").

One way—and perhaps, other than closing the book, the only way—to put an end to all the "anxiety & care & desperation & death / And repentance for sin & sorrow & punishment & fear" that the code causes is to break it. And the only way to break the code is to obey its definitions. As infant spectres born into Blake's world, unable to speak his language, these definitions are what we must "read / And get by rote as a hard task of a life of sixty years," and we ought to "Damn. braces: Bless relaxes," grateful for the definition's blessed power to free us from obscurities we have every right to curse.

For, as the Spectre warns,

The Man who respects Woman shall be despised by Woman
And deadly cunning & mean abjectness only, shall enjoy them
For I will make their places of joy & love, excrementitious[.]
Continually building, continually destroying in Family feuds
While you are under the dominion of a jealous Female
Unpermanent for ever because of love & jealousy.
You shall want all the Minute Particulars of Life

(J88:37-43; E247)

The warning is dire: in this text, the mind that respects the Word—honestly trying to remain faithful to its conventional meaning, regarding it with deference and esteem, refraining from offending it by imposing illegitimate senses on it, trying not to harm or interfere with it, treating it with consideration—shall be despised by the Word. Only the cunning of Negative Reasoning (for “The weak in courage,” Reason afraid to speak Truth, “is strong in cunning” [MHH9; E37]), a faculty or power that is mean and abject (like the base man who avoids someone ready to speak his mind), will enjoy the “sexual” gratification Blake’s words offer. For the Reasoning Negative’s code has made the “places” (spaces) of words, normally reserved for the joy of thinking and love of Truth, “excrementitious,” full of wasteful errors and excesses, worthless matter no longer of nutritive value. We know also (such is the ratio of our knowledge) that Imagination and Reason are, as one Reasoning Negative, continually building this female universe of discourse and continually destroying it in “family feuds” of words and ideas forced together in unnatural and illegitimate relations. And this “feud” or war continues as long as the reader is under the dominion of a “jealous Female,” a text jealously guarding its beloved Truth by means of its code, but a text “unpermanent for ever” because it can change—will change once we decode it. But until we do, we shall want all the minute particulars of Thought. And we shall be reasoning negatively anyway, through our ignorance (or want of thought) negating all Blake’s particular ideas rather than just those outside the bound of Reason. Ironically, the only way to free ourselves from the
dominion of this cruel and jealous female is to give her total dominion, allow her to
dominate our minds totally by strictly abiding by her definitions.

I'd like now to look at the dreadful consequences of failing to respect the
definitive portions of Blake’s female text (even though we shall be despised for it). For
in Blake, what produces the “most dreadful” consequences—“even of / Torments,
Despair, Eternal Death”—is the fact that “What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It
seems to Be” (J32:51-54; El 79). Blake criticism is replete with demonstrations of this
truth, but I will take only one representative example from Northrop Frye’s seminal work,
*Fearful Symmetry*.

Frye recognizes that the language of Blake’s poetry is not just unconventional, but
unconventional even for poetry:

> you may show that Blake had one of the most powerful minds in the
modern world, that his thought is staggeringly comprehensive and
consistent, that his insight was profound, his mood exalted, and his
usefulness to critics unlimited. But surely all this profits a poet nothing if
he does not preserve the hieratic decorum of conventional poetic utterance.
And how are we to evaluate an utterance which is now lucid epigram and
now a mere clashing of symbols, now disciplined and lovely verse and
now a rush of prosy gabble? Whatever it is, is it really poetry or really
great and good poetry? Well, probably not, in terms of what criticism now
knows, or thinks it knows, about the canons of beauty and the form of
literary expression. (“Blake’s Treatment” 51-52)

Admittedly, one does not have to understand a poem completely to be sensitive to its
greatness, and appreciative of Blake’s genius Frye certainly is, perhaps never more so
than when he acknowledges “the possibility that the study of Blake is a long and tortuous
blind alley,” only to dismiss it: “but those who are able to use Blake’s symbols as a
calculus for all their criticism will not be much inclined to consider it” (51). But Frye’s
calculus, as it turned out, was to employ a Frygian interpretation of Blake’s symbols not
wholly of service to the poet. Frye muses, at one point, that "Jung's anima and persona are closely analogous to Blake's emanation and specter, and his counsellor and shadow seem to have some relation to Blake's Los and Spectre of Urthona" (49). The negative principle at work in this statement—Frye has to look outside Blake for answers to the puzzle of the meaning of spectre and emanation—puts him outside the bound of Blake's Reason where he cannot help but err. Yet his course starts off, as many interpretations of Blake do, from a point close to Blake's center; thus near the beginning of Fearful Symmetry Frye observes that "[a]bstract ideas are called spectres by Blake, and Spectre with a capital letter is the Selfhood. The corresponding term is 'Emanation,' which means the total form of all the things a man loves and creates" (73). Frye is here correct to suggest that the Spectre is the self-centered power and product of abstraction; and certainly an emanation, as the lucid form of the text, is the "total form" of Truth that Thought loves and creates. But Frye soon begins to stray off the path, distracted by the baroque complications of Blake's wheels, distancing himself further and further from the central Thought that is the hub of all of them: "The word 'emanation' in Blake means the object-world; creature in Eden, female in Beulah, object or nature in Generation, abstraction in Ulro. 'Spectre' means the subjective counterpart to this in the two fallen states" (127). By the end of his book, Frye is effectively lost in Blake's labyrinth of sorrow, unaware that he is being tripped up by the voids and ciphers of proper names:

The sons of Albion are Spectres, and must therefore have emanations or female principles which as long as they are Spectres will remain aloof from them and dominate over them by means of that aloofness, encouraging incessant war and a constant belief in mystery. These twelve daughters of Albion are named, in the order corresponding to that of the sons of Albion given above, Cambel, Gwendolen, Ignoge, Cordella, Mehetabel, Ragan, Gonorill, Gwinefred, Gwinevere, Estrild, Sabrina and
Conwenna. Most of these names seem to be taken at random from Geoffrey’s history: we recognize the three daughters of Lear, Arthur’s queen and the Sabrina of *Comus*. The meaning of these daughters is an aggregate one, and they cannot be individually distinguished, except that the first two are the ringleaders. They form a contrast to the daughters of Beulah who are Blake’s Muses and form a sympathetic chorus like the Spirits of the Pities in *The Dynasts*; and, like the sons, the daughters of Albion are associated in their fallen state with stars. (379)

But a spectre is always a rational power, and to interpret “Cambel,” “Gwendolen,” “Ignoge,” and the rest of the twelve “daughters of Albion,” the reader need only realize that they are female in order to know that they are words—*not* emanations, however, if they remain unintelligible, shedding no light. If we fail to interpret them as words, they will remain aloof, as Frye rightly says, domineering over our spectres and encouraging incessant mental war and a “constant belief in mystery,” for a mystery is something we cannot comprehend. Only when we interpret “daughters” as just words—but words whose inner space vibrates with the energy of their sole occupant, the satanic Reasoning Negative; words that are thus void spaces housing a Negation, mere fictions, virtually meaningless, deceptive errors: for “their Daughters govern all / In hidden deceit! they are Vegetable only fit for burning” (J32:47-48; E179)—do they become, for us, “stars.” For then we see them for what they truly are, and only then are we in a position to place these starry emanations within their proper context, that of the war between Blake’s Reason and Imagination. *Cordelia, Regan,* and *Goneril,* for instance, as the three daughters of a self-centered and tormented old king—one of them remaining true to her father by refusing to speak of her love for him, the other two voluble but false—can be revived, after their initial negation, in an illuminating correspondence between their original Shakespearean sense and their meaning in Blake, where they function as particularized
images of true silence (or the Reasoning Negative) and false words (the Two Contraries),
the former the wise king of the space of his text but pitiful victim of his daughter-words.

Let us examine in detail the passage Frye is discussing:

The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom;
I behold them and their rushing fires overwhelm my Soul,
In Londons darkness; and my tears fall day and night,
Upon the Emanations of Albions Sons! the Daughters of Albion
Names anciently rememberd, but now contemn'd as fictions!
Although in every bosom they controll our Vegetative powers.

These are united into Tirzah and her Sisters, on Mount Gilead,
Cambel & Gwendolen & Conwenna & Cordella & Ignoge.
And these united into Rahab in the Covering Cherub on Euphrates
Gwiniverra & Gwinefired, & Gonorill & Sabrina beautiful,
Estrild, Mehetabel & Ragan, lovely Daughters of Albion
They are the beautiful Emanations of the Twelve Sons of Albion

Lines 37 and 38 confirm, by nominal apposition, that the daughters of Albion are
“names”—this bit of information a significant spiritual gift—which “control our
vegetative powers,” our ability to generate thoughts. Later in Jerusalem Los tells us that
“General Forms have their vitality in Particulars” (J91:29; E251), and we know from
Milton that he is always “Within labouring. beholding Without: from Particulars to
Generals / Subduing his Spectre” (M3:37-38; E97). If we follow his example and compel
our rational power to reason inductively, looking for general forms by which to organize
confusing families of particular words, we will not have far to seek. In line 41 we behold
five of the daughters “united into Tirzah and her Sisters,” and the remaining seven (lines
43 and 44) “united into Rahab in the Covering Cherub.” We save ourselves the trouble of
trying to identify all twelve of Albion’s daughters individually, then, if we manage to
identify just Tirzah and Rahab. But let us first consider what Los has to say to his Spectre about the proper relation of particulars to general ideas.

Los accuses his Spectre of a certain kind of analysis, a kind that murders minute particulars:

You accumulate Particulars, & murder by analyzing, that you
May take the aggregate; & you call the aggregate Moral Law:
And you call that Swelled & bloated Form; a Minute Particular.
But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every
Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus.

(J91:26-30; E251)

Supposedly, the Spectre accumulates particulars (proper names, for example) and murders them by analyzing them. But by “analyze” Los cannot mean the breaking down of a complex whole into its simple constituent elements, because the Spectre accumulates particulars into a larger aggregate form, which it calls a “Moral Law” (and mistakes for a minute particular). Rather, the analysis Los here condemns must be the logical kind, “the tracing of things to their source, and the resolution of knowledge into its original principles; the discovery of general principles underlying concrete phenomena” (OED, analysis). But an aggregate—in contrast to, say, a system—is a mere heap of particulars without any organizing principle, and therefore none to discover. Underlying general principles or forms arrange particulars according to a definite order, according to some scheme or plan, and these Los does not condemn. Indeed, he insists that general principles have their “vitality” (life/thought) in particulars, which implies that, if abstracted from them (and every particular is a thought), general principles will “die,” become abstractions, spectres, agents of the evil Reasoning Negative engaged in false analysis. Aggregates are, in reality, neither minute particulars nor universals but merely
Swelled & bloated General Forms, repugnant to the Divine-Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form
To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy
All broad & general principles belong to benevolence
Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity.

(J38:19-23; E185)

There is only one general or universal form in Blake—and that, we know, is the Imagination’s image of Thought, or image of itself, for the Imagination is called, in its abstract form, “the Divine-Humanity.” The general idea of Thought is the only one capable of organizing all the particulars of Blake’s universe of discourse into a systematic whole, and so all the “lineaments” of his Body of Thought, all the lines forming the outline of its identity, tend towards this universal idea, are traceable to it, for it is their source: “The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (ARO E2), and \( \text{man} = \text{thought} \) and \( \text{poetic genius} = \text{imagination} \). And this true imaginative Thought, along with all its broad and general sub-principles, is truly benevolent because it protects particular thoughts from being totally negated by the Spectre’s murderous analysis, for as long as any particular word can be decoded as an image of Thought, it will survive and “live.”

It is a mistake, then, to accumulate the twelve particular daughters of Albion into an unorganizable group and try to abstract some general idea from it (Frye certainly errs in claiming that “the meaning of these daughters is an aggregate one”). Instead we must begin with the realization that each particular daughter-word is an image of Thought, and then reduce the “swelled and bloated” aggregate of twelve particulars to the trim general form of two, as the text instructs us—to Tirzah and Rahab.

Fortuitously, Tirzah has a Song of Experience devoted to her called “To Tirzah,” which runs thus:
Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth,
Must be consumed with the Earth
To rise from Generation free;
Then what have I to do with thee?

The Sexes sprung from Shame & Pride
Blow'd in the morn: in evening died
But Mercy changd Death into Sleep;
The Sexes rose to work & weep.

Thou Mother of my Mortal part.
With cruelty didst mould my Heart.
And with false self-decieving tears,
Didst bind my Nostrils Eyes & Ears.

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay
And me to Mortal Life betray:
The Death of Jesus set me free,
Then what have I to do with thee? (SE E30)

The speaker here is an infinite Thought enclosed in the body (“mortal part”) of a deceptive, cruel code word (Tirzah herself, with overtones of teaser, perhaps). But Tirzah is also the female incarnation of the Reasoning Negative, mother of the code. Binding the male Thought’s infinite senses and reducing its power of speech to the unintelligible matter of a female word (“senseless clay”), Tirzah betrays Infinite Thought to the confining form of “mortal” thought, the kind that is “born” (conceived in joy and expressed in sorrow) only to “die” (by the thoughtless hand of spectrous analysis) as an error, consumed with the whole earth/text and its labouring sexes (male thoughts and female words). But the “death of Jesus,” the Negative Reasoning of the Imagination, ultimately sets the thought free from its bondage to the word by destroying the rational connection between signifier and signified. What then, asks the Thought, have I to do with the word that embodies me?
If Tirzah is nothing more than a self-referential code word, then so must be Cambel, Gwendolen, Conwenna, Cordella, and Ignoge: all are particular code words informed by the general idea “code word.” Or one could say that the general form that lives inside any daughter (or wife, mother, bride, whore, harlot, sister, maid, virgin, girl) is the idea of “Woman,” which word itself functions as a code term for the more general and universal form of the idea of the “Word,” the English term that truly expresses what it means to say. “You are Albions Victim,” warns Jerusalem, “he has set his Daughter in your path” (J87:24; E246). But we would have no path if there were no women, as the traveller discovers at the end of “The Keys of the Gates,” when he finally sees the Immortal Thought that persists through the code’s illusory surface:

But when once I did descry
The Immortal Man that cannot Die
Thro evening shades I haste away
To close the Labours of my Day
The Door of Death I open found
And the Worm Weaving in the Ground
Thou’rt my Mother from the Womb
Wife, Sister, Daughter to the Tomb
Weaving to Dreams the Sexual strife
And weeping over the Web of Life. (KG E269)

And the same sad and redundant truth about words applies to Rahab:

No sooner she had spoke but Rahab Babylon appeard
Eastward upon the Paved work across Europe & Asia
Glorious as the midday Sun in Satans bosom glowing:
A Female hidden in a Male, Religion hidden in War
Namd Moral Virtue; cruel two-fold Monster shining bright
A Dragon red & hidden Harlot which John in Patmos saw

(Rahab is a hidden harlot-word because she has sold (for “Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason the Root of Good & Evil In The Accusation of Sin” [Laocoön E275]:

(M40:17-22; E141-42)
and the conventional trope of language as currency plays in the background here) her body to the sexual vibrations of Satan, in whose bosom the Sun of Truth glows, and with which Sun Rahab is identified. She is false to finite Reason, but true to Ineffable Reason. In giving herself up to an illegitimate meaning ("negative reasoning"), Rahab is a harlot and slave of the Reasoning Negative, just another cursed cipher.

We will recall that seven daughter-words are "united into Rahab in the Covering Cherub." Now, just as Rahab is "in Satans bosom glowing," Satan is in the Covering Cherub's: "I saw he was the Covering Cherub & within him Satan / And Rahab, in an outside which is fallacious! within / Beyond the outline of Identity, in the Selfhood deadly" (M37:8-10; E137). Satan's position here—inside the Covering Cherub in an outside within and beyond the outline of identity—is frankly hilarious, and certainly unorganizable. What matters is that we discover the identity of this Covering Cherub, and he turns out to be none other than the Spectre of Albion (M24:28; E120)—that is, the Reasoning Negative of the Intellect. But this is hardly a surprise, since everything in Blake is, like a vast web, connected to everything else, and everything is connected to either reasoning or imagining, which are themselves originally and ultimately connected to each other. But lest we doubt it, Blake goes on: "Rahab / Sat deep within him hid: his Feminine Power unreveal'd / Brooding Abstract Philosophy, to destroy Imagination, the Divine- / -Humanity A Three-fold Wonder: feminine: most beautiful: Three-fold / Each within other" (J70:17-21; E224) (the pronoun him, by the way, likely refers to "the mighty Hand," the evil Spectre again, but the antecedent is remote and uncertain). All Blake's human forms are eventually connected by identifying mind-forged manacles—*is, is, is*—into one enormous whole, one giant universal form. Rahab, as "Brooding Abstract
Philosophy," is the feminine verbal power of the Reasoning Negative, and as such identical to Vala, the encrypted form of the text, her true meaning as yet "unreveal'd":

"Her name is Vala in Eternity: in Time her name is Rahab" (J70:31; E224). No identity remains fixed: each one is lodged "within" another by the text's tendency to fold back on itself:

As a beautiful Veil so these Females shall fold & unfold
According to their will the outside surface of the Earth
An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface;
Which is unchangeable for ever & ever Amen: so be it!
Separate Albions Sons gently from their Emanations . . .

(J83:45-49; E242)

Again comes the advice to separate things, this time ideas from their words. But we must do it "gently," probably because in fact it cannot be done. Rahab separated from her male counterpart is both a cruelly deceptive code word and a figure for the coded text woven into its outside surface. In either case, her function is to obscure, to prevent her hidden truth from taking on a definite form and becoming self-evident, a clear and distinct Thought:

And Rahab like a dismal and indefinite hovering Cloud
Refusd to take a definite form. she hoverd over all the Earth
Calling the definite, sin: defacing every definite form;
Invisible, or Visible, stretch'd out in length or spread in breadth:
Over the Temples drinking groans of victims weeping in pity,
And joying in the pity, howling over Jerusalems walls.

(J80:51-56; E237)

It is Los who, "furious" and "raging," declares that "the Divine-Humanity" (which he is) "is the Only General and Universal Form / To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy" (J38:19-21; E185). But the objective observer of Los's universe soon sees that there are actually two general and universal forms protecting the sense of
particulars (although Los is right to imply that to only one of them do the lineaments of his Thought “tend and seek” with sympathy and love). And those two universals are, on the one hand, Los’s “Divine Humanity” of the Thought of Imagination and, on the other, the Rational Truth of the Abstract Reasoning Power, a hungry void that sucks up every last word into its devouring maw, including the word *imagination* itself, “Till All things become One Great Satan, in Holiness / Oppos’d to Mercy, and the Divine Delusion Jesus be no more” (M39:1-2; E140). Halfway through *Jerusalem*, the voice of the Imagination laments its having to resort to “deep dissimulation” and become its own enemy, “to become One Great Satan / Inslav’d to the most powerful Selfhood: to murder the Divine Humanity / In whose sight all are as the dust & who chargeth his Angels with folly!” (J49:29-31; E198). Yes, well, in whose sight exactly: Satan’s or the Divine Humanity’s? (And is Satan also the “most powerful Selfhood,” or is he rather enslaved to it? If the latter, would the Divine Humanity then be the most powerful Selfhood, giving Satan a reason to want to murder it?) On this occasion, however, the ambiguity is far too weak to argue for: the normal, sane, reasonable reading must conclude that all (all!) are as “the dust”—insignificant, transitory nothings—in the sight of the Divine Humanity. So much for the Divine Humanity who, roughly ten plates earlier, is “benevolence” itself, “protect[ing] minute particulars, every one in their own identity” (J38:23; E185). The withering vision of this second Divine Humanity reduces particulars to one identity, an indistinguishable mass of dust, no difference among its individual particles to be seen. But this Divine Humanity may be presently in the state of reasoning, and so “the soft smile of friendship & the open dawn of benevolence / Become a net & a trap, & every
energy renderd cruel, / Till the existence of friendship & benevolence is denied" (J38:25-27; E185), denied by the obstacle of yet another self-contradiction.

The Divine Imagining Humanity and the Evil Reasoning Satan are, of course, One, the latter devouring the former's text wholly. As we find this text, then, every male thought in it is rational, and every female word has been taken over by Reason—infected by it, eaten up by it, cursed by it, reduced to nothing by it, because redefined by it:

Then all the Males combined into One Male & every one
Became a ravening eating Cancer growing in the Female
A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death.
Going forth & returning from Albions Rocks to Canaan:
Devouring Jerusalem from every Nation of the Earth.

(J69:1-5; E223)

Frye (and those who have agreed with him) was certainly in error when he decided that Blake's Prophecies "can hardly be code messages. They may need interpretation, but not deciphering: there can be no 'key' and no open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation" (Fearful Symmetry 7). Perhaps he dismissed the possibility out of a fear of seeing Blake's sublime and vital poetry crushed and bled dry by the sort of bland commentary that nevertheless rolls over it with predictable regularity. Frye even seems to feel a little guilty for his own commission of this sin, wryly concluding after one particularly dogged attempt to unravel Blake's complexities that "[i]f this explanation has sufficiently damaged the tough and prickly shell of Jerusalem, we may proceed to extract the kernel" (380). But Frye needn't have worried, for no one could do more damage to Blake than Blake does to himself: the tears he sheds over his ruined work are real enough.

Let us look now at only one among many striking examples of this damage, damage done whenever Blake allows his negatively reasoning imagination to transgress
rational bounds, all norms of propriety of speech and canons of good taste, and wallow in
excrementitious excess:

Here Los fixd down the Fifty-two Counties of England & Wales
The Thirty-six of Scotland, & the Thirty-four of Ireland
With mighty power, when they fled out at Jerusalems Gates
Away from the Conflict of Luvah & Urizen, fixing the Gates
In the Twelve Counties of Wales & thence Gates looking every way
To the Four Points: conduct to England & Scotland & Ireland
And thence to all the Kingdoms & Nations & Families of the Earth
The Gate of Reuben in Carmarthenshire: the Gate of Simeon in
Cardiganshire: & the Gate of Levi in Montgomeryshire
The Gate of Judah Merionethshire: the Gate of Dan Flintshire
The Gate of Napthali, Radnorshire: the Gate of Gad Pembrokeshire
The Gate of Asher, Carnarvonshire the Gate of Issachar Brecknokshire
The Gate of Zebulun, in Anglesea & Sodor. so is Wales divided.
The Gate of Joseph, Denbighshire: the Gate of Benjamin Glamorganshire
For the protection of the Twelve Emanations of Albions Sons

And the Forty Counties of England are thus divided in the Gates
Of Reuben Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex. Simeon Lincoln, York Lancashire
Dan. Cornwal Devon Dorset, Napthali, Warwick Leicester Worcester
Issachar, Northampton Rutland Nottgham. Zebulun Bedford Huntng Camb
Joseph Stafford Shrops Heref. Benjamin, Derby Cheshire Monmouth
And Cumberland Northumberland Westmoreland & Durham are
Divided in the Gates of Reuben, Judah Dan & Joseph

And the Thirty-six Counties of Scotland, divided in the Gates
Of Reuben Kincard Haddnnt Forfar, Simeon Ayr Argyll Banff
Levi Edinburh Roxbro Ross. Judah, Abdeen Berwik Dumfries
Dan Bute Caithes Clakmanan. Naphthali Nairn Invernes Linlithgo
Gad Peebles Perth Renfru. Asher Sutherlan Sterling Wigtoun
Issachar Selkirk Dumbartn Glasgo. Zebulun Orkney Shetland Skye
Joseph Elgin Lanerk Kinros. Benjamin Kromarty Murra Kirkubiht
Governing all by the sweet delights of secret amorous glances
In Enitharmons Halls builded by Los & his mighty Children

(J16:28-60; E160-61)

One has only to ask oneself: is this a truth told so as to be understood and therefore
believed? Can it be the image of any truth whatever, other than the deformed one whose
lamentable task is to reflect the ugly consequences of refusing to obey Reason? Or is the passage not rather an object closed to our perception, a door so tightly shut and impregnably barred to understanding that no flood of tears could ever cleanse it? The eye of the ideal reader will likely slide down over this passage as quickly as it can, without stopping to travel horizontally over more than a line or two. The names are all proper, minutely particular, unanalyzable, harbouring no universal or even general form beyond the idea of "British county" and the poet-prophet's own mechanical attempt to give them Biblical counterparts, as though that alone were sufficient to endow the aggregate with sacred meaning and protect the minute particulars from being reduced to ashes and dust. Bloom, for one, assures us that in this "merciless listing" "there is considerable imaginative cause for Blake's imitation of Numbers 2, [although] the result is a little disconcerting, and the most devoted of readers might wish that Blake had been neither so strict nor so explicit in working out his analogies" (E933). Indeed. To the deciphering eye of a Reasoning Negative, there is hardly any imaginative cause here at all, for there is nothing much to see on the other side of this door: we are told only that there are "gates" in particular places, all of which "places" belong to the general form (or category) of the female "space." In sum, we are told ad nauseam that there are gates in words, gates in words, gates in words—promised openings somewhere—all "fixed down" by Los in the coded text he builds, those "halls" (spaces again) of Enitharmon (Los's text) mentioned in the final line, "governing all by the sweet delights of secret amorous glances." But the governing power is Reason; "sweet delight" (which the Reasoning Negative can never defile: "The soul of sweet delight. can never be defil'd" [MHH9; E37]) is the Imagination's own energy ("Energy is Eternal Delight"); and the "secret amorous
glances” must be those exchanged by the two married Contraries in their mutual love of Truth.

If there is any benevolent imaginative cause for Blake’s merciless listing of British counties on plate 16 of *Jerusalem*, it is intertwined with a cruel rational one, as W. H. Stevenson intuits when he observes that, although Blake’s associations between the counties and Biblical names “are quite arbitrary,” he has an underlying purpose, and that purpose “seems to be formal and rhetorical: to recollect the Old Testament passages where boundaries are carefully delineated” (656). That, surely, is the idea: we must carefully delineate the bound(aries) of Reason (figuratively, of course) as we travel through these hundred-odd British counties, for if plate 16 functions as the image of any kind of truth, it is a reflection of what the reader sees—nothing of significance—the moment he strays over the bound of Truth and enters the abyss of Error. As Bloom says, the work of Blake’s Reasoning Negative is here designed to imitate Numbers, for “Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory” (“On Virgil” E270).

A door without substance is a window already wide open: a passage that says nothing seems opaque only if we are convinced that it intends to say something. Blake says that “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite” (MHH14; E39). But in Blake’s world only things that exist can be true; words that say nothing are nothing, and it is easy to see through their empty bodies—non-entities being limitlessly translucent—to the light of the Sun. Once Blake’s reader has shed copious tears over the doors and walls barring him from the Divine Vision, and still finds he cannot cleanse them, one last sad, hard truth ought to open his eyes. Here on plate 16, as in so many other places, Blake is laughing at us—“And many of the Eternal
Ones laughed after their manner” (J32:43; E179)—for being gullible enough to take his nonsense (Frye’s “rush of prosy gabble”) seriously. The hard truth is finally a sublime joke: “Excess of sorrow laughs” (MHH8; E36). Besides, if the reader who takes all of Blake too seriously risks mockery, if such a reader is a fool, the victim of a hoax, it is comforting to remember that “The fox condemns the trap, not himself” (MHH8; E36).

Frye’s question—“Whatever it is, is it really poetry or really great and good poetry?”—is a crucial one. Clearly, Blake’s poetry is sometimes (although the degree to which this is so remains open to debate) really bad poetry. Passages like Jerusalem 16 are revealing examples of how the dilemma-bound Blake felt compelled to ruin his own work, to cover it with a repulsive surface of blots and blurs and blemishes, to leave incrusted pox (remember the harlot’s curse) and other marks of his reasoning’s disease all over the lovely face of his Woman/Text, embodiment of his true spirit, just to make an abstract point: that one must “bathe in the Waters of Life [Thought]; to wash off the Not Human” (M41:1; E142), and what is “not-human” is that rationally- and self-conceived code language, an “Incrustation over my Immortal / Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway / To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination” (M40:35-37; E142). Self-examination implies thinking for oneself in deciding what is true and what false, for a self-examination is not only an examination of oneself, but also an examination conducted by it. Much of Blake is undeniably ugly; there are long stretches of terrible writing. At times—carefully chosen ones—an anti-aesthetic principle is clearly in the ascendant, and only our critical reason can make the final judgment as to exactly where it has left its awful tracks:
to be an Error & to be Cast out is a part of Gods Design No man can Embrace True Art till he has Explord & Cast out False Art <such is the Nature of Mortal Things> or he will be himself Cast out by those who have Already Embraced True Art Thus my Picture is a History of Art & Science [& its] <the Foundation of Society> Which is Humanity itself. What are all the Gifts of the Spirit but Mental Gifts whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual[.] (VLJ E562)

But even in the midst of bad writing, one can find intellectual beauty, and I suspect that Blake, as he came to trust words less and less, put his trust more and more in that. For words are weak corporeal things, while thought—the whole intellectual spirit—is life and strength and breath. And so, within the narrow space of one line, negatively manacled or positively embraced by a pair of deceptively modest brackets (braces, too, no doubt), is enclosed a set of reverberating words telling us explicitly to “(Mark well my words! Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies)” (M4:26; E98). In Blake we must mark words, but also fight against their masked appearance, lest “Women the comforters of Men become the Tormenters & Punishers” (J72; E228).

“Where the Starry Mills of Satan / Are built beneath the Earth & Waters of the Mundane Shell / Here the Three Classes of Men take their Sexual texture Woven / The Sexual is Threefold: the Human is Fourfold” (M4:2-5; E97): the “sexual” form of reasoning in Blake—which goes on inside the Reasoning Negative’s starry mills, built beneath the surface of the text—is threefold, an involved and multilayered process of reasoning and imagining alternately or at once. But the “human” form of thinking is fourfold, for it incorporates (1) Reason, (2) Imagination, (3) the hermaphroditic Reasoning Negative, and (4) the female Word—the “texture,” written fabric, or Web of Life—within which the Three Classes are inextricably woven into One Thought.
Much of plate 81 of Jerusalem is taken up by an illustration of a group of naked women, one of whom, enveloped in obscuring clouds and hiding a falsehood (the code itself) behind her back in her sinister hand (see J82:19-21; E239), points to these words written across the clouds: “In Heaven the only Art of Living / Is Forgetting & Forgiving / Especially to the Female.” The advice is sound: in obeying Blake’s Reason, the only art of thinking is forgetting conventional denotations and forgiving logical sins, especially those occasioned by female words. But forgiveness is possible only through understanding, for the message continues: “But if you on Earth Forgive / You shall not find where to Live”: that is, if in reading the earth-text we forgive Blake’s logical sins prematurely—overlook his contradictions, excuse them, rationalize them away, before we have, through passive obedience to his Reason, entered into his allegorical Heaven—we will find nowhere to ground our thoughts.

1In Chapter X of Book III of his Essay.

2Compare Benoit:

The natural egotistical man desires to be free, unconditioned, while thinking of himself as a distinct individual. I can envisage myself thus as a distinct individual, as a psycho-somatic organism, but I ought then to understand my liberation from partial determinism as a passing-beyond, an accomplishment of this partial determinism in the total determinism of the Supreme Principle. When I have attained Realisation my psycho-somatic organism will no longer be governed only by the apparently disordered laws of partial determinism but by the total law of universal and cosmic equilibrium, a law rigorously ordered which is the principle of all the apparently disordered laws of partial determinism. If I suppose myself to be liberated by Realisation I ought not to imagine my organism escaping all determinism, but as being conditioned at last by the total determinism of the Supreme Principle which is my ‘own nature’; I ought not to imagine my organism no longer obeying any cause, but as obeying at last the First Cause which is its own Reality. In short my liberty does not reside in the absence of all
causation geared on to my organism, but in the perfect equivalence in me between that which is caused and that which causes it, between that which is conditioned and the Principle which conditions it. If, at the moment at which I attain Realisation, I cease to be constrained, it is not because that which was constraining me has been wiped out, but because that which was constraining me has expanded infinitely and has coincided with the totality in which Self and Not-Self are one, in such a way that the word 'constraint' has lost all sense. *(Supreme Doctrine 64-65)*

3 My thanks to Thomas Cleary for bringing this sense of the word to my attention.
13. The Mathematic Power of Systems

Does Blake actually have a system? Is he logical by any accepted standard? To answer such questions, the reader must experience Blake’s thinking, and therefore be willing to leap into an intellectual abyss, be chained to the wall of the cave of ignorance, or sucked into a “raging whirlpool [that] draws the dizzy enquirer to his grave” (E10:31; E64). The inquiring reader is made dizzy upon being whirled around inside Blake’s mental vortex, which, like its physical counterpart, is a “rotatory movement of cosmic matter round a centre or axis, regarded as accounting for the origin or phenomena of the terrestrial and other systems” (OED, *vortex*), with the sole difference that the cosmic matter of the Blakean vortex is verbal and its centre is a Divine Vision of One Thought. Blake insists that the “traveller thro Eternity” (M15:22; E109) must pass through this vortex if he wants to see the Infinite, for

The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity. Has passd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward behind His path, into a globe itself infolding . . .

(M15:21-24; E109)

In the infinite realm everything may have its own vortex, but in the finite realm “Every Thing has its Vermin O Spectre of the Sleeping Dead!” (J1; E144). And a vortex, too, has its verminous side, from which it looks very much like a whirlpool or blizzard or fog or snowy cloud or stormy sea—anything within which one may get hopelessly lost, mesmerized by a disorganized mass of particulars in which distinct objects are overwhelmed and dissolve.

This negative vortex is, of course, the work of the Spectre or Fiend of Righteousness or Reasoning Negative, the dangers of which Los warns against here:
he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized & not as thou
O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine is a Disorganized
And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War
(J91:20-23; E251)

But as those with experience of blizzards will know, being caught in one forces one’s
attention back down to the small patch of ground before one’s feet, a contraction of one’s
mental space that will prove, in reading Blake, to be the reader’s salvation. Thus
focussed on the ground, he is primed for the discovery, every once in a while, of a
“flower” (or, if he is upside down, a “star”)—that is, a definition, axiom, or other
organizing principle, the kind of vegetative verbal structure it takes the poet the labour of
ages to create.

At the beginning of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (visions of the words of
the Intellect), the enslaved Oothoon “wander[s] in woe”—and she is the very labyrinth of
woe through which she wanders: all the Intellect’s words are “Enslav’d,” as the first word
of the poem tells us, to the Spectre’s code—“seeking flowers to comfort her” (VDA1:3-4;
E45). When she finally finds a “bright Marygold” (VDA1:5; E45) to speak to, Oothoon’s
vision suddenly blurs and goes double:

> Art thou a flower! art thou a nymph! I see thee now a flower;
> Now a nymph! I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!

The Golden nymph replied; pluck thou my flower Oothoon the mild
Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight
Can never pass away. she ceas’d & closd her golden shrine.

Then Oothoon pluck’d the flower saying, I pluck thee from thy bed
Sweet flower. and put thee here to glow between my breasts
And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks.

(VDA1:6-13; E46)
Oothoon is uncertain whether the Marygold is a flower or a nymph—the latter a semi-divine maiden or unravished virgin, like herself, or perhaps an immature insect, like the human infant-pupa asleep on a leaf in “For the Sexes” above the caption “What is Man!”

In *The Book of Thel*, Thel questions a worm in terms remarkably similar to those in which Oothoon questions her flower: “Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm? / I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf” (BT4:2-4; E5). But the infant, the worm, the flower, and the female nymph are interchangeable images of Truth—hence Oothoon’s confusion. And while she hesitates to “pluck” the flower from its “bed”—that is, take the truth out of context—the Marygold assures her there is no danger in it, because “the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away.” Indeed, the flower’s words themselves constitute the little flower of a truth, a principle of Blake’s text, here expressed as a slight variation on the Proverb of Hell “The soul of sweet delight. can never be defil’d” (MHH9; E37). Intellectual delight is eternal, whatever might become of its body, and this truth Oothoon takes to heart, as it were, putting the Marygold “here to glow between my breasts”: another way of nursing the infant desire to speak.

The *Visions*’ scene of flower-plucking is repeated in the prefatory poem to *Europe*, where a fairy promises the speaker to “write a book on leaves of flowers” that shows the world “all alive,” with “every particle of dust breath[ing] forth its joy” (Eur iii:14, 17-18; E60). But here it is the fairy who is taken to heart, while the flowers—*wild* flowers that are also “eternal” flowers, no doubt sprung from the seeds of lost moments or the pleasures of unredeemable folly planted among our wheat—more explicitly transmogrify into something readable, the leaves of the poem we hold in our hands:
I took him [the Fairy] home in my warm bosom: as we went along
Wild flowers I gatherd; & he shew'd me each eternal flower:
He laugh'd aloud to see them whimper because they were pluck'd.
They hover'd round me like a cloud of incense: when I came
Into my parlour and sat down, and took my pen to write:
My Fairy sat upon the table, and dictated EUROPE.

(Eur iii:19-24; E60)

The fairy must do the speaking, for he is an imaginative creature, reliant on the
intoxications of “A cup of sparkling poetic fancies” (Eur iii:16; E60). But he must also
passively obey the rational human speaker and remain within his bound: “Seeing himself
in my possession thus he answered me: / My master, I am yours. command me, for I must
obey” (Eur iii:11-12; E60).

So, too, the reader who plucks Blake’s flowers from the ground must obey them,
apply their commands, even if the plucking appears to destroy the flower itself (it can’t
and it won’t). For if the reader has any wish or “sexual” desire to see Blake’s Divine
Vision, he will have to do the labour of organizing it, systematically arranging its minute
particulars into “a perfect Whole.” And since the resulting whole is an organized body of
particulars, the Vision itself must be a system, complete with organizational principles or
general forms. The reader who doubts all this will find himself in a “destructive War”
with the text, trapped inside its vortices of snowy clouds, tempests, whirlwinds, and
whirlpools.

Yet even a vortex has a shape, and it is this general form which Blake’s female
text most closely resembles—“Round her snowy Whirlwinds roard” (KG E268)—when
the traveller first approaches her outer circumference. Once sucked into her vortex (or
vagina), however, he is pulled downwards by its centripetal force, spun round inside an
ever narrower space. And that increasing confinement ought to be encouraging, for it
tells the traveller he is nearing the centre. As Milton helpfully explains,

The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its
Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
Has passd 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
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.

(M15:21-35; E109)

Heaven is a vortex, and so is earth: moreover, it is probable that they are one and the
same vortex, the difference in its appearance attributable entirely to the perspective of the
subject travelling through it. Once the earth is passed through, it looks like a heaven, an
infinite plane. A heaven not yet passed through looks like the earth, an enclosed and
confining space or “moony shade,” a place for rational reflection and contemplation,
where the direct light of the sun is obscured. But if “this earth of vegetation on which
now I write” (M14:41) is the earth referred to here—and, on the ground that Blake
practises a merciless terminological consistency, I would argue that it is—then we are
talking about one text that looks like a lucid heaven if we have passed its vortex, an
obscure earth if we have not.

Now, the earth of vegetation on which Blake writes, the flat piece of mundane
document, has the potential to become an “infinite plane,” a heaven of divine Thought entirely
within the bound of Reason. Once ensconced in this heaven, the reader has safely passed the vortex and now looks at the text anew. No longer a chaotic blizzard of particulars, it appears instead a coherent whole—like a globe, like the sun of Truth itself, or a contemplative moon reflecting truth, or a starry universe of discourse. But for the code-breaking reader the key image of the vortical text remains the friendly human form, the body of male thoughts and female words with whom he has indeed “lived” or thought “benevolent”: he informing them and they informing him, offering him wisdom, understanding, delight.

Although the individual reader’s perception of the text helps to determine its appearance, there are, in general, but two determinations available to him: one chaotic and one orderly. And the orderly can only be had on Blake’s terms if it is to be more real than illusory, more a perception of the object in its truth than a remaking of the object in one’s own image. Still, so crucial is the reader’s perception to the appearance of the object—“As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers” (E702); “For the Eye altering alters all” (E485)—that Blake transfers (in lines 28-29) the vortex-image from his own text to the reader’s eye, envisioning it now as an empirical eye positioned at the centre or apex of two conjoined vortical cones. The outward-facing vortex takes in the objective world—whatever the eye can perceive of it in every direction, east and west, north and south—while the inward vortex opens up inside the head of the perceiver into his subjective vision of that world, its “reversed Reflexion” projected on his retina. In his discussion of Milton as an empiricist epic, S. H. Clark observes that “[t]he ‘corn-fields’ and ‘valleys’”—which are, by the way, precisely measured by mathematical Reason: “five hundred acres square”—“are bounded by the
daily cycle of the ‘rising sun’ and ‘setting moon,’ and it is because of this comfortable acceptance of limits that the earth becomes ‘one infinite plane/plain’ (476). Clark argues (and rightly, I think) that “Milton itself could be seen as a meditation on living within [what Locke calls] ‘the Horizon . . . which sets Bounds between the enlightened [sic] and dark Parts of things’ (482). But Blake’s choice of the abstract and geometrical plane over the concrete plain cues us to his figurative use of the empirical realm here. As a textual ground, Blake’s earth is not a level tract of grass but a plane of thought or knowledge, a surface of plain if inexhaustible meanings, and not, as it appears to the “weak” traveller (too weak to break the code, perhaps), a confining, limited, shadowy space.

Under the constraint of the empirical metaphor, however, we are urged to infer that the earth/text is an empirical object also, its female spaces as real as our corn-fields and valleys—and similarly bounded. Clark maintains that the “ultimate reality [of the vortex] lies in its relation to a perceiver/voyager, whose course through Eternity involves a temporal engagement with phenomenal reality” (475-76)—and for travellers through it, that phenomenal reality is Blake’s text. The Blakean fictional universe shifts the usual orientation of empirical reality and its representation in art: where other works of art may use the empirical world to body forth an image of the human inner world, Blake uses images of the empirical world to remind his readers of the empirical reality of his fictional mental universe, to wake them up to the fact that it is a real existing object perceptible to their senses, a text that needs reading above all else and, indeed, can only come alive within the limits set by its logos. Having argued most convincingly that Locke has a positive role to play in Blake's epistemology, Clark concludes thus:
What is finest in Locke’s psychology stresses the necessity of choice and determination at every moment; the exposure to time of all human action; and a just recognition of the empirical, the intractability of the world to which we must conform, however reluctantly. This need not condemn us to a regime of leaden reiteration and deforming confinement but can instead promote a powerful and enabling humility. And to the extent that *Milton* embraces these qualities, it may legitimately be described as an empiricist epic[.] (482)

But of course *Milton* is also a spiritual and intellectual epic, and as such it recognizes the total determinism of the First Cause, Principle of the temporal laws of the partial determinism governing empirical phenomena. Blake’s invocation of empirical limitations on the earthly plain points upwards to the plane of heaven, where Divine Reason binds Thought to a regime reiterative but not leaden because infinitely variable, confining but not deforming—indeed, the more rigorous the confinement, the freer and more shapely the mind’s response. But if there is an analytical distinction, there is for Blake no real separation between the empirical body and its Infinite Principle: he finds the Infinite and Eternal nowhere but in “all things” finite and temporal, including the rising sun and setting moon the human subject perceives from his standpoint on earth, but whose infinite essence the empirical eye can never perceive. Only the spiritual eye perceives it, but not until the perceiver has passed through the phenomenal vortex.

A successful passage through Blake’s vortex, then, follows this basic pattern: first, one encounters a chaotic multitude of disorganized particulars, in the midst of which Blake plants his “wild flowers” or “stars,” carefully wrought definitions and propositions. These are reducible to the Three Classes of Men, the Two Contraries and the Reasoning Negative, a set of principles that, when embodied in the Female Word, completes a fourfold system. Gradually this system leads us to the One Thought at its center, a
comprehension of which then thrusts us back out to undertake an interpretive revision of all the particulars encompassed within the "perfect Whole."

But this system is still a double system, a fusion of opposite systems, one rational and the other imaginative. When Los, refusing to reason and compare, declares, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (J10:20-21; E153), he acknowledges that his system is a defense against enslavement to another man's (or mind's). So there must be two systems operative in the world of the text, Los's and "another man's." Let us examine the latter first.

On plate 43 of Jerusalem, the Divine Vision "like a silent Sun appeard above / Albions dark rocks," setting in "clouds of blood," in order to narrate a little history, and "in the Sun, a Human Form appeard / And thus the Voice Divine went forth . . ." (J43:1-5; E191). What the Divine Voice of the silent solar Divine Vision then tells us is that Albion (image of his Intellect) was once his particular glory, "the Angel of my Presence: and all / The Sons of God were Albions Sons: and Jerusalem was my joy" (J43:7-8). But now Jerusalem, the holy "city" (or female space), has been "taken," leaving things in ruins—terribly disorganized—and everyone is at war:

. . . and Jerusalem is taken!
The City of the Woods in the Forest of Ephratah is taken! London is a stone of her ruins; Oxford is the dust of her walls! Sussex & Kent are her scatterd garments: Ireland her holy place! And the murderd bodies of her little ones are Scotland and Wales The Cities of the Nations are the smoke of her consummation The Nations are her dust! ground by the chariot wheels Of her lordly conquerors, her palaces levelld with the dust I come that I may find a way for my banished ones to return Fear not O little Flock I come! Albion shall rise again.

So saying, the mild Sun inclosd the Human Family.  
(J43:17-27; E191)
The "Human Family" the ineffable Sun encloses are the words we have just read, delivered through the agency of its Divine Voice, which dwells on the theme of disorganized and destroyed particulars. And so the particulars of its speech are a little disorganized themselves: the holy city of Jerusalem is composed of other cities, as well as counties and countries; the "murdered bodies of her little ones" are Scotland and Wales; Sussex and Kent are her "scattered garments." But we know that Jerusalem herself is a "garment," the textual garment of light or emanation clothing the Divine Vision himself, his "joy"—which explains why he is devastated by her devastation. For Jerusalem is now being consumed in a fiery consummation, and "cities" and "nations" are her "smoke" and "dust," the mere residue of burned-up errors. Reading this, and perhaps emboldened by having burned up a couple of hundred British counties himself (on J16), the experienced reader will have few qualms about negating a few more imaginative errors, namely, the proper names Ephratah, London, Oxford, Sussex, Kent, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Jerusalem herself. This he does by organizing the particulars, chaining them thus: cities = nations = counties = spaces = women = words. But he cannot be merciless: to resurrect all the consumed proper names eventually, to find a way for the banished ones to return, he must negate them in the spirit of understanding, in the knowledge that these are not ordinary words but unique spaces, holy places, whose purpose is to house a Divine Thought—like Ephratah, "a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Psalms 132.5).

Just before this passage, the Divine Voice reveals the cause of both Albion's fall from a glorious, holy state and the destruction of Jerusalem's particulars, her "little
ones”: it is that other system, the one belonging to the “other man,” whom the Divine Vision beholds and identifies for us:

... and all
The Sons of God were Albions Sons: and Jerusalem was my joy.
The Reactor hath hid himself thro envy. I behold him.
But you cannot behold him till he be reveal'd in his System
Albions Reactor must have a Place prepar'd: Albion must Sleep
The Sleep of Death, till the Man of Sin & Repentance be reveal'd.
Hidden in Albions Forests he lurks: he admits of no Reply
From Albion: but hath founded his Reaction into a Law
Of Action, for Obedience to destroy the Contraries of Man.[] He hath compelld Albion to become a Punisher & hath possess'd Himself of Albions Forests & Wilds! and Jerusalem is taken!
The City of the Woods in the Forest of Ephratah is taken!
(J43:7-18; E191)

Now, this man—a man of sin (he speaks, then) but also, fortunately, repentance (he will atone for his verbal sins by negating them)—hides himself through envy, perhaps envy of Los’s system, which does not require one to reason and compare. And someone, the “you” the Voice addresses, must prepare a place to reveal him “in his system.” We are told also that this Reactor “admits of no Reply” from the Intellect: perhaps he negates all its possible replies or admits only its negative ones. But to what question would his negation be a reply? Remember the “idiot Questioner who is always questioning, / But never capable of answering” (M41:12-13; E142): if this man questions, he also admits of no reply, and his unanswerable questions are all variations, no doubt, on the fundamental “What is Truth?” which the Reactor is determined not to answer. His “no reply”—his reaction to the question—he lays down as a law of action, a law of speech and thought, which all the Intellect’s thoughts—the Sons of God and the Sons of Albion—must obey, compelled thus to think nothing and say nothing. And since to think nothing is to reason negatively or “die” from a want of thought, obedience to the Reactor’s law of action will
destroy the Contraries, since both of them, being Positives ("Contraries are Positives / A Negation is not a Contrary" [M30; E129]), are intended to think and speak. By this method, then, this system of a continual questioning of Truth that negates any reply from Reason and Imagination (who, together, are Albion, the Intellect), the Reactor murders the Contraries of Man/Thought and takes possession of the text (spaces again, but now dark and confusing ones: Albion’s “forests” and “wilde”), compelling the Intellect to become a punisher of the sin of speaking, of any transgressions of its bound or limit of opaqueness, which limit is the word “No”—the zero, nothing, or void which is its Selfhood.

When we negate the Imagination’s particular images of Truth in a Human Form—many of which are entrusted to minute fragments of unanalyzable proper names like London, Oxford, Sussex, Kent—we behold the Reactor, revealed in his system, but as in a mirror, for it is we who by this act are obeying the Law of Action which is founded on Blake’s refusal to respond to questions about his sacred Absolute Truth. And like the Reactor, we have hid ourselves through envy, for we desire the good the Imagination’s words possess and want to consume its eternal delight. For the Reactor or idiot Questioner, whether in the shape of Blake’s own Spectre or ours, is that want of thought whose “pretence to knowledge is Envy, whose whole Science is / To destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous Envy; / That rages round him like a Wolf day & night without rest” (M41:16-18; E142). The good we envy is “the wisdom of ages,” knowledge of Truth embodied in finite words.

The Reactor has several aliases—the Spectre, the Holy Reasoning Power, the Abstract, the Negation, the idiot Questioner, the dark Hermaphrodite, Satan—that enable
him to disguise his true identity and hide himself. To prepare a place for his exposure, or
to clear a space in the text’s forests (overrun with vegetation) where he lurks, the reader
must memorize and lump together in one aggregate all the Reactor’s various names.
Thus turning his own system on him, we can negate the pseudo-significance of his code
names (though never forgetting them, of course: we will need to recognize them on our
second journey through the text, on our way back out of the vortex) by contracting his
denotation to just one object, the one he most truly is: the Reasoning Negative, the term
that denotes a singular class, that class of Thought (there are only three) with just one
member in it.

In reading Jerusalem 10:7-16, we saw that the Sons of Albion evolve a system
whereby the Reasoning Negative is abstracted from their previous abstraction of the Two
Contraries or “Qualities” from the body or substance of Thought they clothe. But this
Thought can be regarded from two different perspectives, one rational and one
imaginative. Reason sees Thought in its own image, as abstract and universal form, but
the Imagination sees it as a human form existing in a human body. For Reason, the two
contrary principles of Thought, Reason and Imagination, are logical qualities, affirmative
or negative; whereas for the Imagination they are qualities in the sense of “a mental or
moral attribute, trait, or characteristic; a feature of one’s character” (OED, quality), that
which distinguishes a mind as good or evil. In the Imagination’s view, then, Reason
murders the substance of Thought by abstracting the two Contraries from the human
being whose qualities they are, while in Reason’s view the Imagination negates Thought
by assigning its Contraries opposite moral values and setting them at war. Or perhaps
I’ve got it reversed, for in The Marriage it is the religious reasoning Angels who derive
Good and Evil from the Contraries, and the imaginative Devil who is logical, thinking in terms of Truth and Error. Or perhaps the blame for the whole murderous process of abstracting the Contraries from One Thought must be laid at the door of the Reasoning Negative the two Contraries become. In any event, since all three Classes of Men are derived from one substance, the substance of Thought (the Contraries primarily and the Negation secondarily), they are of the same essence (the eternal delight of Energy). But we know that Thought = Intellect = Man = Albion. So the Three Classes of Men form a Holy Human Trinity: One Man named "Albion," or "the Eternal Man even Albion" (M34:46; E134), or the "Giant Albion" (J7:49; E150), or the "Ancient Man" (FZ title; E300), or the "Eternal Individuality" (J48:3; E196). And it is this One Thought which the Divine Vision elected for its glory and now comes to resurrect from "death," from its abstraction from its own imaginative verbal body and all its minute particulars: “Fear not O little Flock I come! Albion shall rise again.” But Albion has even more names:

Albion the Vortex of the Dead! Albion the Generous!
Albion the mildest son of Heaven! The Place of Holy Sacrifice!
Where Friends Die for each other: will become the Place,
Of Murder, & Unforgiving, Never-awakening Sacrifice of Enemies
The Children must be sacrific’d! (a horror never known
Till now in Beulah.) unless a Refuge can be found
To hide them from the wrath of Albions Law that freezes sore
Upon his Sons & Daughters, self-exiled from his bosom

(J48:54-61; E197)

If Albion is the One Thought from which all Three Classes are derived (and everything in the text is woven from these Three Classes: “hence they overspread the Nations of the whole Earth” [M6:33; E100]), then Albion must be their father and they his sons. And so, when “the Sons of Albion in their strength” (J10:7; E152)—and thought is strength—abstract first the Two Contraries from the body of their father and then the Negation from
the Contraries, they become the murderers of Albion—parricides—in order to recreate themselves in the hermaphroditic form of One Holy Reasoning Negative. And that Spectre is a “murderer of its own Body,” “the Substance from which it is derived” (J10:11-12; E153), because it destroys the substance of Thought either by abstracting it from its embodiment in particulars or by denying the law of non-contradiction, for as Lear points out, Aristotle “accuses those who deny the principle of non-contradiction of destroying substance” (260) and with it the possibility of discourse.1

Because they abstract and murder and contradict one another, the Sons of Albion are by definition Negations, Spectres—“the Spectre Sons of Albion” (J65:56; E217) or, more elaborately, “the Twelve Spectre Sons of the Druid Albion” (M37:34; E138). It is therefore the Intellect’s own abstracted faculties—or, we could say, its good and evil, affirmative and negative qualities—which murder its textual body, as well as “every Divine Member” or minute particular of that body. And that is why this Intellect, code-named Albion, earns the title “Vortex of the Dead,” its body “the place of holy sacrifice where friends die for each other.” For, as the Sons of Albion, the two Contraries ought to be “friends,” two speaking Positives, but once abstracted from their father Reason refuses to help create a body for the now-disembodied Infinite Thought, a body that is “a Refuge . . . To hide them from the wrath of Albion’s Law” against speaking, leaving the Imagination no alternative but to sacrifice itself and its self-exiled “children” (thoughts and words) by engaging in abstract reasoning. But if this account is accurate, there will be no recognizable difference between the system Los (or the Imagination) creates and that of the Reactor (or Reasoning Negative or Spectre).

Steven Shaviro turns our attention to plate 11 of Jerusalem, where
Los is described as “Striving with Systems to deliver individuals from those Systems” (11:5, E153). Let this phrase stand as an emblem for the contradictory determinations of Blake’s poetry. For “with” must be read as meaning both ‘against’ and ‘by means of,’ while “deliver” must be read as meaning both ‘rescue’ and ‘aid in the birth of’. Thus creating a System is conjoined with attacking, destroying, or evading a System; and an Individual is constituted both as one whose individuality is realized only in the process of being freed from the constructions of a System, and as one who is only produced or defined as individual within and by virtue of such a System. (273)

Reading the passage Shaviro is discussing, we see Los “labouring at the roarings of his Forge”

Till his Sons & Daughters came forth from the Furnaces
At the sublime Labours for Los. compell’d the invisible Spectre

To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains,
In pulsations of time, & extensions of space, like Urns of Beulah
With great labour upon his anvils, & in his ladles the Ore
He lifted, pouring it into the clay ground prepar’d with art;
Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems;
That whenever any Spectre began to devour the Dead,
He might feel the pain as if a man gnawd his own tender nerves.

(J10:64-65, 11:1-7; E154)

Interpreting these lines is made difficult (but only apparently so) by Blake’s chronically ambiguous pronoun reference. But although the antecedents of all those he’s and his’s cannot be identified with certainty, there are only two real possibilities: Los or his Spectre. We clearly see Los compelling the Spectre to “labours mighty;” and the ambiguous pronouns make it possible that those labours include ladling the ore, pouring it into the ground, and striving with systems. In other words, it may be the Spectre, not Los (as Shaviro claims), who is striving with systems, perhaps even the very system Los vowed to create some fifty lines back (J10:20-21). But if the Spectre is the “other man” by whose system of abstraction Los refuses to be enslaved, then the question is, are there
two systems here—the word is pluralized on plate 11—such that the double meanings
Shaviro notes can be resolved by separating the two conflicting interpretations and
assigning them to different systems?

If “striving with” must be interpreted as both “striving against” and “striving by
means of,” Los could be striving against the Spectre’s system by means of his own. And if
“deliver” must be read as both “rescue” and “aid in the birth of,” then Los’s system could be
designed to deliver—rescue, free—individuals from the Spectre’s system by destroying it
(after all, “The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries” [M40:33; E142]). The
Spectre’s system, meanwhile, could be designed to produce or give birth to individuals—
other spectres, probably—who, in being defined within and by virtue of that system, as
Shaviro says, are an integral part of it. Individuals delivered by the Spectre’s system would
be born dead (because the Spectre is the Abstract that is a Negation that is Death): they
would be “born a Spectre or Satan,” as the Preface to Chapter 3 of Jerusalem puts it (J52;
E200). And because Life/Thought lives on the Spectre’s consuming (see J10:55-56; E154),
“devouring the dead” means thinking in abstractions—something the Spectre’s system
apparently requires its stillborn members to do. And so, when any Spectre begins to devour
the dead, he will feel the pain as if a mind were gnawing his own tender nerves, because an
Abstract that consumes abstractions is self-devouring.

But a Spectre is not wholly dead, for he has “tender nerves”—vital connections to
the energy and life of Thought. Hence Satan, listening to the loud furnaces of Los, cannot
bear the pain of his own self-devouring:

Then loud the Furnaces of Los were heard! & seen as Seven Heavens
Stretching from south to north over the mountains of Albion
Satan heard; trembling round his Body, he incircled it
He trembled with exceeding great trembling & astonishment
Howling in his Spectre round his Body hungering to devour
But fearing for the pain for if he touches a Vital,
His torment is unendurable: therefore he cannot devour:
But howls round it as a lion round his prey continually

(M39:14-21; E140)

Much is made of Blake’s “discontinuous,” or crooked, narrative line, and here we have an
eexample of it: the loud clamouring of Los’s furnaces seems unconnected to Satan’s
encircling his own body. But this appearance is false: what issues from Los’s furnaces is
his son-thoughts and daughter-words (“his Sons & Daughters came forth from the
Furnaces”), the divine members of his body; and Los’s body becomes Satan’s body the
moment he “hears” it, for Los and Satan, Imagination and Reason, are one inseparable,
falsey divided, Reasoning Negative.

Thus the pronoun he of the lines “That whenever any Spectre began to devour the
Dead, / He might feel the pain as if a man gnawd his own tender nerves” is quadruply
ambiguous. “He” could be Los, or the Spectre who labours with Los, or just any spectre, or
one of the Dead. If it is Los who is striving with systems, then it would be a compassionate
Imagination, allied with the sympathetic heart and a “living man,” who feels the pain of the
dead victim he is trying to rescue from the Spectre’s devouring system. But if it is the
Spectre who is striving, then it is the pain of self-devouring, the he referring indifferently to
the Spectre who labours with Los or to any other spectre born from its system, which
compels all spectres to devour the dead. But he may refer to one of “the Dead,” an
individual delivered from the system in both the ways Shaviro outlines, in rescue and in
birth: for a dead spectre’s liberation from a system of abstract reasoning is a rebirth, a being
born again in a new imaginative body, so that when any spectre begins to devour an abstraction's dead finite form, the pain it feels signals the reawakening of its tender nerves, the abstract idea's return to the strenuous "life" of Thought. Life lives on the Spectre's consuming: Thought thrives, in other words, on Reason's consumption of ideas, whether "dead" (forms abstracted from their material embodiment) or "alive" (forms vitally connected, by "nerves" and "sinews," to their verbal bodies).

Los creates his own system so that he will not have to "Reason & Compare," which is what the Spectre's system of death would enslave him to. A thought or word that is "dead" expresses only a want of thought, the void result of the separation of a thought (or form or idea) from the substance of the One Thought of Absolute Reality that is its source and living principle, a substance that must remain united with its written expression in order to remain alive. When "the Sons and Daughters of Los came forth [from his furnaces] in perfection lovely!" (J11:11; E154), they ask him why he is determined to embody an abstract idea or shadowy image of Thought in words—their question is essentially "Why speak?" or "Why write Jerusalem?" About to be abstracted from his own text (the emanation Enitharmon), Los affirms that his God, Infinite Thought, while lying both within and without the bound of Reason, requires the formation of a rational body so that falsehood can be made perceptible:

Why wilt thou give to her a Body whose life is but a Shade?
Her joy and love, a shade: a shade of sweet repose:
But animated and vegetated, she is a devouring worm:
What shall we do for thee O lovely mild Jerusalem?

And Los said. I behold the finger of God in terrors!
Albion is dead! his Emanation is divided from him!
But I am living! yet I feel my Emanation also dividing
Such thing was never known! O pity me, thou all-piteous-one!
What shall I do! or how exist, divided from Enitharmon?
Yet why despair! I saw the finger of God go forth
Upon my Furnaces, from within the Wheels of Albions Sons:
Fixing their Systems, permanent: by mathematic power
Giving a body to Falshood that it may be cast off for ever.
With Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon with his own bow!
God is within, & without! he is even in the depths of Hell!

Such were the lamentations of the Labourers in the Furnaces!

And they appeared within & without incircling on both sides
The Starry Wheels of Albions Sons, with Spaces for Jerusalem:
And for Vala the shadow of Jerusalem: the ever mourning shade:
On both sides, within & without beaming gloriously!

(J12:1-20; E155)

Here the systems of Albion’s Sons take the form of “Starry Wheels” (illuminating circles bounded by Reason) which must be “fixed” by the “finger of God” in order to give a body to falsehood that can be cast off. Los uses the plural “systems,” but their systems—not ours, mine and my Spectre’s, but theirs, those of the Sons of Albion. Is Los one of Albion’s sons? Well, Los is definitely called the “friend” of Albion: “Los was the friend of Albion who most lov’d him” (J35:12; E181; see also J90:63; E250). And Albion has a spectre, called both “Satan” (M32:12; E131) and “the Covering Cherub” (M24:28; E120), who turns out to be Los’s Spectre as well, the one who labours at the furnaces with him—or so we may surmise if what that same Spectre tells Los is true:

wretched Luvah
Is howling in the Furnaces, in flames among Albions Spectres,
To prepare the Spectre of Albion to reign over thee O Los,
Forming the Spectres of Albion according to his rage:
To prepare the Spectre sons of Adam, who is Scofield: the Ninth
Of Albions sons, & the father of all his brethren in the Shadowy Generation. . . .

(J7:38-44; E150)
Albion has many sons, and Blake does supply some of their names—Scofield, Kox, Kotope, Bowen, Hand, Hyle, Koban, for example—but Los never appears among them.

So perhaps Los’s system, created to defend him against reasoning, escapes being “fixed permanent” by the finger of God and cast off as a body of falsehood. Or perhaps his system is designed for this very purpose of “fixing” the systems of Albion’s sons (Los does do a lot of fixing) who are also Albion’s spectres, or Albion’s spectre sons—Reasoning Powers all. Yet if the Spectre’s claim that Albion’s Spectre is being prepared to “reign over” Los is true (and in imparting this information, the Spectre would be speaking of himself in the third person)—if, that is, the Reasoning Power is going to reign over the Imagination—then when, a few plates further on, Los’s speech to his Spectre concludes with the narrative marker “So Los in secret with himself communed” (J17:48; E162), that “reigning over” must be a “union with.” And in that case, Los will “fix” rational systems with a rational system designed to cast off and destroy rational systems.

Are there, then, really two systems in this text? Clearly not, because while Los claims to create a system that will organize his minute particulars into a “perfect Whole” and while he characterizes his Spectre’s system as “a Disorganized / And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War,” this is really only one system (or one text) seen in two contrary ways, as good or evil, depending on the perceiver’s point of view. Now, if the systems of Albion’s Sons, their “starry wheels,” are one system pluralized to confuse our reasoning power, then those wheels will also appear to be either good or evil, as the narrator of Jerusalem confirms in the “awful Vision” that comes to him when he beholds the “places” of learning in the text:
I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe
And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire
Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black the cloth
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic
Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which
Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace.

(J15:14-20; E159)

Recalling that "The bounded [Thought] is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round
even of a univer[s]e would soon become a mill with complicated wheels" (NNR[b] E2),
we see the complications of those systematic wheels clearly in evidence in these lines, as
both subject and method of encryption. Here the mill—unquestionably a textile mill—
churns out a "black cloth" (opaque text), its woof woven by the "Loom of Locke"
(writing instrument of Reason) and washed by the "Water-wheels of Newton" (rational
systems)—though of course syntax makes it difficult to disentangle the cloth from the
water-wheels and the woof from the loom. But the cloth is black, and the mill's wheels
cruel and tyrannic, only if we cannot decipher the cryptonyms: Europe as a coded textual
space, Locke as the Reasoning Negative, Newton as the same, and Eden as Europe freed
from its code, when the wheels of the system—the same wheels—are moving ours no
longer by compulsion in an effort to make us obey Reason but with our full consent.

Some time ago, we learned that the Reasoning Negative is a "false body": "The
Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man / This is a false Body" (M40:34-35;
E142). If the finger of God "Fixes their Systems, permanent: by mathematic power /
Giving a body to Falshood," then what the Intellect must be doing here is giving a textual
body to the Reasoning Negative (just as Los forms a body for Urizen), for falsehood with
a body is surely a false body. Hence the Reasoning Negative (or the Reactor) is not just the
possessor of a bounded system, but the system itself, a false system permanently fixed and made bodily by the mathematic power of the Intellect so that it can be perceived, recognized as false, and cast off. But this mathematic power must belong to Reason, author of mathematical form as Blake defines it: "Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence. / Grecian is Mathematic Form / Gothic is Living Form" ("On Virgil" E270). Mathematic power is rational, but it is appropriated and used by the Imagination to fix and destroy rational systems (i.e., to negate the Reasoning Negative), "With Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon"—the Devil as destroyer—"with his own bow!" (J12:10-14; E155).

Blake has more to say about mathematic power, here used imaginatively by the negatively reasoning Los:

But in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed To Death in old time by Satan the father of Sin & Death And Satan is the Spectre of Orc & Orc is the generate Luvah But in the Nerves of the Nostrils, Accident being formed Into Substance & Principle, by the cruelties of Demonstration It became Opake & Indefinite; but the Divine Saviour, Formed it into a Solid by Los's Mathematic power. He named the Opake Satan: he named the Solid Adam (M29:32-39; E127-28)

I will decode this, phrase by phrase (reducing some of them to ashes). "In the organs of perception, finite reasoning was transformed to negative reasoning in 'old time,' excessive (or primordial) thought, by the Reasoning Negative, author of erroneous speech and empty thought. And the Reasoning Negative is the Reasoning Negative of the Reasoning Negative, and the Reasoning Negative is pity and love (Luvah) in textual form (generate). But in inspired thought, the accident of naming (and we must remember that "Names alter, things never alter" [DC E533]; that "Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer
change nor decay” [DC E532]) being formed into the substance and principle of the work
by the cruelties of demonstration (Reason’s method of deductive proof), “it” became
opaque and indefinite. (Here we must pause to note the usual difficulty in nailing down a
pronominal antecedent: perhaps it refers to Accident, which would mean that the process of
naming became opaque and indefinite; or perhaps it refers to the more remote Sleep, code
name for natural or finite Reason, which would mean that the process of reasoning became
opaque and indefinite when it turned crooked and negative. But most likely it refers to
both, as well as to a word that remains invisible here: text.) But the Imagination formed it
(the accident of naming, negative reasoning, or the text) into a solid—a foundation, a
ground, a truth—by its mathematic power. And, accidental naming being now the
substance and principle of this text, the Imagination named the opaque aspect of this truth
and its text after the evil Negative Reasoning that ensures its opacity, and its solid aspect
after the One Original Thought on which it is founded.

So Blake’s text is built on the opaque but solid foundation of a metaphysical
accident turned substantial truth. And this truth, or one aspect of it, is the fact that Thought,
within this bounded universe of discourse or mill with complicated wheels, is forever
assuming a bewildering number of new names, giving it the false appearance (or false body)
of increasing indefiniteness. Indeed, the opaque and indefinite form of the non-existent
Reasoning Negative itself becomes the solid foundation of Blake’s work once his
Imagination gives it a perceptible body by its mathematic power. But the Reasoning
Negative has its own mathematic power, which it uses to form “Shapeless Rocks /
Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness” (M32:17-18; E132). Once again, we must ask
ourselves: Can we truly distinguish Satan’s indefinite rocks from the Divine Saviour’s solid
ideas, Reason’s “cruelties of demonstration” from the Imagination’s benevolent
“demonstrative science,” Reason’s mathematic power from the Imagination’s? I don’t
think so, but if (being fools) we wish to persist in the folly of trying to do so, we may be
forgiven for not finding it an easy task.

Let us see how Blake’s mathematic power helps fix his systems into something
opaque, indefinite, and yet solid. As epic poet, Blake keeps varying the names of his
mythic characters for much the same reason that, as a painter, he kept “varying the color
of his inks and his translucent and opaque tints and washes, and varying the sequence of
his plates”—which he did, according to Erdman, “to keep his poems in motion” despite
the “monolithic character of his pages” (E789). But continuous motion means no
solidity; a world of constant variation or nervous vibration is bewildering, unsettling—it
affords no resting place. And on that shaky ground, Blake’s war against bad reasoners is
largely won. But constant motion or unceasing mental fight is not the whole truth of
Blake’s world. There is Beulah, a place of “mild & pleasant Rest” (M30:14; E129) for
reasoners who still sleep, and The Four Zoas invites us before the poem begins to “Rest
before Labour” (FZ2; E300). In other words, we have to discover and rely on the rock-
solid principles of the work, its resting places, before we can do proper battle with the
chaos of the text.

Fortunately, the human forms of Blake’s myth, who are also its principles, are as
monolithic as his pages. Underneath the ever-varying array of proper names lie only three
classes of thought, and beneath those, only One Thought: after all, what alters in the text
is the accident of naming, not the substance constantly being renamed. As, Blake says,
Chaucer numbered the classes of men, Blake numbers his classes of Thought, two living
and substantial ones (the Two Contraries: Positive Reason and Positive Imagination) and one dead and empty one (the Reasoning Negative). And from these three classes—in agonies of endless separations, divisions, derivations, and deductions—all the rest of his “men,” all the infinitely various multitudes of perceptible bodily things, are derived, everything from concrete objects to abstract states of mind or systems of thought.

Throughout Blake’s corpus, these three classes appear in different guises, masked by different names. But experienced readers will recognize the following:

- angel, spirit, and demon: *All Religions are One*
- philosophic and experimental character, poetic or prophetic character, and God: *There is No Natural Religion*
- innocence, experience, and the human soul: *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
- wise man, fool, and knave: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- devil, angel, and young man: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- Urizen, Los, and Orc: *Lambeth Books*
- Satan, Palamabron, and Rintrah: *Milton*
- Elect, Reprobate, and Redeemed: *Milton*
- Albion, Los, and the Spectre: *Jerusalem*
- God, Jesus, and Satan: *Jerusalem*

From the outset, in *All Religions are One*, Blake informs us that this classically metaphysical patterning of his three classes—two inferior contrary principles reconciled in a third superior conciliatory principle—derives all its particular members from one source: “As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius” (ARO E1); and “The true Man is the source he being the
Poetic Genius" (ARO E2). But the correspondence between individual and class immediately becomes confused, as do the number of classes themselves: "Likewise . . . the forms of all things are derived from their Genius, which by the Ancients was call’d an Angel & Spirit & Demon" (ARO E1). Do we now have four different beings here (angel, spirit, demon, and genius), or just one (the genius) with three different names?

In Milton the confusion between three and four crops up again: "Here the Three Classes of Men take their Sexual texture Woven / The Sexual is Threefold: the Human is Fourfold" (M4:4-5; E97). Or Blake will use his mathematic power to confuse one, two, and three, when for example we are told that Tirzah "ties the knot of milky seed into two lovely Heavens, / Two yet but one: each in the other sweet reflected! these / Are our Three Heavens beneath the shades of Beulah, land of rest!" (M19:60, 20:1-2; E113). Still, the unfixable number makes imaginative sense: since "the Sexual is Threefold," Tirzah’s "two lovely Heavens" of "milky seed" are analogous to the pair of testicles that feed their semen into one ejaculating penis, which taken together make "Three Heavens." And these three compose "yet but one" set of male genitalia, instrumental in the joys of conception. Finally, when this imaginative phallus enters the Reasoning Negative’s womb outside of Existence, joining active male Thought with passive female Word, we have one complete Fourfold Human Form: One Man/Thought.

More explicitly than anywhere else, in his Descriptive Catalogue Blake outlines, in suitably poetic mythical terms, his system of the “three general classes of men who are represented by the most Beautiful, the most Strong, and the most Ugly” (DC E542):

The Strong man represents the human sublime. The Beautiful man represents the human pathetic, which was in the wars of Eden divided into male and female. The Ugly man represents the human reason. They were
originally one man, who was fourfold; he was self-divided, and his real humanity slain on the stems of generation, and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. How he became divided is a subject of great sublimity and pathos. The Artist has written it under inspiration, and will, if God please, publish it; it is voluminous, and contains the ancient history of Britain, and the world of Satan and of Adam. (DC E543)

Here again we find the basic structure of the Blakean system: two contrary classes (strong and sublime Divine Reason, and beautiful and pathetic Divine Imagination) and a third class (the ugly Reasoning Negative) identified as mere "human" Reason. These three classes were originally one "man" or mind or Divine Intellect, fourfold because incorporating the other three within itself and likened to Jesus. The only real mystery here is the identity of the "real humanity" that gets slain on the vegetative stems of the self-generating text.

We must also take into account the female form resulting from the self-division of the compassionate and sorrowing Imagination, the text it creates to ward off its tragic transformation into a Negation by Reason's divisive refusal to speak (for a thought without material expression is sure to disappear into the non-entity—in short, a thought not spoken dies). Counting her, the fourfold system incorporates five human forms, whom we see safely enclosed in the bottom third of a design from The Book of Job (see Fig. 12).

The Job picture functions as a useful primer of Blakean mathematics, its static and rigidly formal composition suggesting that it is, indeed, a place of rest, a stone on which to lay one's sleepy rational head, or an image of truth for our Spectres to feast their hungry eyes on. Near the center we find the originating circular Void, blank but white with light—like the sun, or the Spectre's white dot. But it also serves as a halo for the
Fig. 12. Illustrations of The Book of Job, plate 14.
head of Blake’s Intellect-God, whose image emanates in human form from his own abstract conception of this One Void Thought of the Absolute. Characteristically garbed in white robes—again, “pure, perfect, holy: in white linen pure” (J 43:38; E 191)—the luxuriously bearded figure mimics in his cruciform bodily posture his own trinitarian system: his arms the Two Contraries, his leg the Reasoning Negative, who base but grounding foot is bathed, like a moon, in the reflected light of the halo-sun. Beneath his outstretched arms (or brooding wings), we find the two divine principles (both are winged) deriving from his first self-division. Imagination appears on our left (his right), blessed with an identical halo, riding its horses of desire and instruction, his arms outstretched like his Father’s, but his hands firmly pressed against the cloudy bound, heroically trying to push it back or expand it. Reason appears on our right (God’s left), his head crowned by a crescent moon (part light, part shadow), guiding a pair of serpent reasonings.

The design is divided into three sections by three lines that, far from being hard or wirey, resemble a cross between an obscuring cloud and a devouring intestine. These bounds of Truth and Reason grow thinner as we move upwards; the middle one coincides with the outstretched arms of the Intellect, the God who sets them. Beneath the lower bound, enclosed in a cavernous abyss of error, we see the Two Contraries and Reasoning Negative on the right, the latter in the middle of the group, and the Imagination on the far right, made in the image of its God above. The remaining man and woman represent the male Thought and female Word into which the speaking Imagination (“the Human Existence itself,” made in the image of its Intellect God) divides. Finally, in the region of Truth above, a row of naked (but genital-less) angels reveals the truth of which the five
clothed figures below, falsely divided and encrypted, are merely a "distorted and reversed reflection in the darkness": that these are all divine thoughts, identical in essence and substance, their arms raised in a chain of jubilant praises of the God on whose arms they stand. The many are really One—"All Be One"—which makes the whole design a portrait of Albion, waiting patiently, like Job, for his release from the tortures of Satan.

Emblems, diagrams, and little pictorial images of varying degrees of obscurity illustrate not only Blake's physical pages, but also their content. In Chapter 3 we looked at one key diagram from plate 33 of Milton (probably the one the Intellect-God draws on the face of the abyss with his compasses), which outlines the figures of the Four Zoas or "Living Creatures" of Blake's thought (see Fig. 5). Here again, as in the Job illustration, we have five bounded figures: four males—Urthona, Urizen, Luvah, and Tharmas—depicted as abstract circles, and one central oval, a female egg. And that egg, while enclosed within the four circles (the whole resembles a handful of dividing cells, organic, living, but potentially cancerous), itself encloses sections of each, along with flames of the energy shown burning outside their bounds. The egg thus integrates and unifies the Four Zoas and their Other (the Not-Thought: the burning hell without them) into one "perfect Whole." The egg represents the Imagination's One Thought, and the diagram as a whole captures it at the moment it begins dividing under the intense heat of brooding and the pressure of being written down. This is the big-bang moment of the "Universe of Los" (M34:32; E134). It is also the fertilized ovum of Being: the "Mundane Egg" (M19:15; E112), or the "Mundane Shell" (M36:13; E136), or "the Egg form'd World of Los" (M34:33; E134). Or one could think of it as that empty but fertile womb where the "miracle and new birth," Blake's original conception of Reality, lodges itself, finally to be
delivered as a World of Generation, to be hatched once the winged thought has reached significant proportions:

Fig. 13. *For The Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, plate 6:
“At length for hatching ripe / he breaks the shell.”

The *Milton* diagram shows us a total of five figures, the fourfold human form in one. And the dominant pattern of the self-division of one thing remains intact.

Beginning with one Intellect or Thought or Void, we see it divide in two (the Contraries Reason and Imagination). The self-division of each Contrary results in one Negation (leaving Three Classes of Thought). But Reason’s self-division gives rise to an invisible evil Spectre (already counted), while the Imagination’s produces a positive female text (yielding four: Three Classes of Men and one Female). And, finally, reincorporating these four back into the body of One Original Thought gives us a total of five mental things.
But the flexibility of Blake’s system permits itself to be reconceived in various configurations, in slightly different terms. On plate 54 of Jerusalem we see a plaintext version of the Milton diagram, the Four Zoas’ code names translated into English:

![Diagram of Milton diagram from Jerusalem, plate 54](image)

Fig. 14. Jerusalem, plate 54.

When Reason and Imagination (known here by its chief attribute, the Desire to speak) divide, and when the Imagination (or Intellect) is divided from its affections, Pity and Wrath, the result is the Four Zoas (and in both The Book of Urizen and Milton, Pity or Luvah is identified with the female text). But whatever their names, the essential unity of the four males and one female remains “fixed” in one universe (see also J59:10-21; E209):

Four Universes round the Universe of Los remain Chaotic
Four intersecting Globes, & the Egg form’d World of Los
In midst; stretching from Zenith to Nadir, in midst of Chaos.
One of these Ruind Universes is to the North named Urthona
One to the South this was the glorious World of Urizen
One to the East, of Luvah: One to the West; of Tharmas.
But when Luvah assumed the World of Urizen in the South
All fell towards the Center sinking downward in dire Ruin

(M34:32-39; E134)
This passage faithfully illustrates the diagram on *Milton* 33 (Fig. 5). But looking again at the diagram on plate 54 of *Jerusalem* (Fig. 14), we see that the circle of “This World” requires a hundred-and-eighty-degree revolution from that of Los’s “Egg form’d World”—not a complete change, but an overturning or inversion. *Jerusalem*’s plaintext diagram inverts *Milton*’s coded one, and we know this because we know that Urizen is Reason (here positioned in the north, not south), Urthona is Desire, Luvah is Pity, and Tharmas is Wrath. And that fact we know from reading the text:

They saw their Wheels rising up poisonous against Albion
Urizen, cold & scientific: Luvah, pitying & weeping
Tharmas, indolent & sullen: Urthona, doubting & despairing
Victims to one another & dreadfully plotting against each other
To prevent Albion walking about in the Four Complexions.

(J38:1-5; E184)

Restored to the English language, Reason resumes its rightful seat in the north as governor of the Mind’s Universe, one happy outcome of which event is that the lines dividing the Intellect’s faculties and affections begin to dissolve (see the *Jerusalem* diagram again), so that Albion is no longer prevented from walking about in his own four “complexions”—that is, “the natural colour, texture, and appearance of the skin, esp[ecially] of the face” (OED, *complexion*). For the natural condition of Albion’s face is to give light, which he can only do when he is translated back into his natural language. But “when Luvah assumed the World of Urizen in the South / All fell towards the Center sinking downward in dire Ruin”: that is, when Pity (for it is pity or compassion for the suffering of others that first moves the wise man to speak) assumed the place of Reason, all—Pity, Reason, Wrath, and Desire—fell towards the center, the Imagination’s universe of discourse, sinking downward in dire ruin into error.
Beyond the point where Blake’s Intellect divides into four mental forms embodied in one universe of discourse, we enter uncharted waters. Five is “Enough!”; “More! More!” than that soon becomes “Too much.” To adhere to the strict truth, we would have to call any number greater than one an error. But to know truth, one needs to experience the error of too much, so we must persist in trying to keep track of ever-growing numbers of men:

Cambel & Gwendolen wove webs of war & of Religion, to involve all Albions sons, and when they had Involv’d Eight; their webs roll’d outwards into darkness And Scofield the Ninth remaind on the outside of the Eight And Kox, Kotope, & Bowen, One in him, a Fourfold Wonder Involv’d the Eight—Such are the Generations of the Giant Albion, To separate a Law of Sin, to punish thee in thy members.

(J7:44-50; E150)

Here the four Zoas have doubled to eight sons, on the outside of whom we find the usual one extra, “Scofield the Ninth,” to disrupt the symmetry. Apparently within this ninth son, there is a group of three, which form another one, which is therefore fourfold and in turn “involves” the original eight. But this is mightily confusing: it seems that one son on the outside of the eight sons involves—includes or contains—those same eight. The key to what’s going on here is not the number of sons but the verb involve.

To involve is to enfold, envelop, or entangle, or “to wind in a spiral form, or in a series of curves, coils, or folds; to wreathe, coil, entwine” (OED). When the poet cries out in Jerusalem, “Reasonings like vast Serpents / Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations” (J15:12-13; E159), his involvement in reasoning implies that he is “beset with difficulty or obscurity” (OED, involve), entangled in intricacies and perplexities from which he cannot withdraw. And his poetry sustains the inevitable
injury of an unintelligible complexity. His vision of “the Four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep / And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow” (J15:6-7; E159)—how many “things” does he see here: one, two, four, or eight?—becomes numerically overwhelming, “till the Twelve sons of Albion / Enrooted into every Nation [space]: a mighty Polypus growing / From Albion over the whole Earth: such is my awful Vision” (J15:3-5; E159).

Human figures involved in the coils of serpents or worms are an important Blakean iconographic motif (a particularly lovely example is Elohim Creating Adam). On plate 75 of Jerusalem (Fig. 15) we see two of Blake’s female minute articulations in the confused but clearly loving, if not blatantly sexual, embrace of numerous serpent reasonings, one of them turning to serpent form herself. Across the upper part of the page runs an orderly chain of linked circles, each enclosing a winged human form remaining obediently within its circumference—an angel safely within its heaven. Since it is Serpent Reasonings of good and evil, virtue and vice, that entice us to into “struggles of intanglement with incoherent roots” (J77; E231), and since mathematical reasoning entangles us in numerical complexities faster than anything else (generally speaking, the greater the number in Blake, the greater its insignificance), what we see illustrated on plate 75 of Jerusalem is our own involvement with the text.

So plate 75 compels the reader to devour the dead, but warning him first that, by means of the poisonous appearance created by the code, the poem is destroying itself:

And Rahab Babylon the Great hath destroyed Jerusalem
Bath stood upon the Severn with Merlin & Bladud & Arthur
The Cup of Rahab in his hand: her Poisons Twenty-seven-fold
Fig. 15. Jerusalem, plate 75.
And all her Twenty-seven Heavens now hid & now reveal’d
Appear in strong delusive light of Time & Space drawn out
In shadowy pomp by the Eternal Prophet created evermore

(J75:1-6; E230)

What significance does the repeated number twenty-seven have? Perhaps the threefold system has tripled itself, or more accurately become involved in self-multiplication of its root (three) to attain its present power, for involve in the mathematical sense means “to multiply (a quantity) into itself any desired number of times; to raise to a power” (OED). It is of course Rahab we see embracing the involved serpent on the lower portion of the page, and if she manages to delude us into thinking that we must identify her twenty-seven heavens—the angel-chain shows us a full third of them, with enough of two more to indicate that the chain goes on—the text above the picture offers up their dead names for our consumption:

And these the names of the Twenty-seven Heavens & their Churches
Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch,
Methuselah, Lamech; these are the Giants mighty, Hermaphroditic
Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Cainan the Second, Salah, Heber,
Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terhal: these are the Female Males:
A Male within a Female hid as in an Ark & Curtains.
Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul, Constantine, Charlemaine,
Luther. these Seven are the Male Females: the Dragon Forms
The Female hid within a Male: thus Rahab is reveal’d
Mystery Babylon the Great: the Abomination of Desolation
Religion hid in War: a Dragon red, & hidden Harlot

(J75:10-20; E230-31)

Blake delivers his twenty-seven heavens (twice: see M37:35-43; E138), duly named and identified as human forms, in three not quite evenly divided groups: nine hermaphroditic giants, eleven female males, and seven male females. And clearly the middle group, the eleven “female males”—code words that hide their senses “as in an Ark & Curtains”—are more dead than the last group of “Dragon Forms,” the seven “male females.” That is
to say, a thought hidden within a word is less meaningful than a word hidden within a thought, and it is plain to see why. Pursuing the names Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul, Constantine, Charlemaine, and Luther, even if it leads the reader astray (that is, outside the circumference of Blake’s selfish centre), is nevertheless bound to enlighten him to some extent on the general subject of religion and war (or, in Blake’s phrase, “Religion hid in War”). So Rahab, with both her front and back presented to our view, entangles herself in the illustration with these seven “Dragon Forms” (we can count their seven heads), although the linked circles decorating the chief serpent’s body are empty—perhaps all that Abraham, Moses, Solomon, et al., will ever tell us is that the defense of religious truth, an Absolute Truth or God, inevitably leads to war, mental or physical. The empty circles remind us, too, of the occupied ones higher up the page, which we may wish to count as nine or eleven. Whether there any significant names amongst either the nine hermaphroditic giants or the eleven female males—although Adam is surely one, and Cainan, which links the two groups and reminds us of both Canaan (the promised land) and Adam’s eldest son Cain (the human form with a sinister mark on his forehead), is surely another—is up to the reader to decide. But if some of those twenty names are occupied by a substantial thought, others—perhaps Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terhal?—are surely empty circles, themselves occupying a space for nothing more significant than laughter. While the illustrated body of Serpent Reasonings clearly contains a chain of such ciphers or verbal zeros (male no-thoughts hidden within female words), it is important to note that the chain of orderly angels fills those same empty words with a series of essentially identical positive thoughts. And the vital link between the two illustrations, the image that enables us to see their connection, is the circle, key image of
that single thought of Truth we can either conceive of as an abstract void or imagine as a human form.

Beyond the limit of the reasonable number, somewhere between three and five, the reader will find himself involved in a burgeoning number of insignificant "men." As the mathematical meaning of involve suggests, the original One Thought has the power to multiply itself by constantly dividing, until we can no longer keep track of the growing multitudes of minute particulars. At this point Blake's thought becomes too much; some passages become impossible to make sense of, the author having himself become involved in the obsolete sense of "not straightforward and open; underhand, covert, crooked, reserved" (OED).

By way of illustration, let us explore Los's mathematic power a little further. A while back (J7:44-50), we had eight, possibly nine, sons of Albion. These soon grow to "Twelve Sons of Albion, join'd in dark Assembly" (J18:5; E162), then double to "the Twenty-four in whom the Divine Family / Appear'd; and they were One in Him. A Human Vision!" (J36:45-46). Several plates further on, we have "the Seventeen conjoining with Bath, the Seventh: / In whom the other Ten shone manifest, a Divine Vision!" (J40:37-38; E188). Then, a few lines further, we are given "the names of the Eighteen combining with those Ten" (J40:40; E188), only to end up back at "the Four in whom the twenty-four appear'd four-fold" (J41:23; E188). And the more "folds" there are to count, the more involved we become, helpless to do anything but laugh at the inventiveness with which Blake frustrates our reason and blurs our vision. Finally convinced of the impossibility of sorting out these numbers, we become receptive to the meaning of lines like this one: "The Human form began to be alter'd by the Daughters of
Albion / And the perceptions to be dissipated into the Indefinite” (J66:46-47; E219). And so when we are told, on plate 13 of Jerusalem, that

sixty-four thousand Genii, guard the Eastern Gate:
   And sixty-four thousand Gnomes, guard the Northern Gate:
   And sixty-four thousand Nymphs, guard the Western Gate:
   And sixty-four thousand Fairies, guard the Southern Gate
   (J13:26-29; E157)

we understand that the natural (and reasonable) response is not to think about the numbers. It is one thing to take Zoas or biblical figures seriously, but gnomes and fairies?

The “Mundane Shell” of the “Egg form’d World of Los” encloses the potential for a new thought, something contained within a female word (the egg itself), sparked by a male thought (whose milky seed is celebrated in the Proverb of Hell “Joys impregnate” [MHH8; E36]), and delivered as a human infant, the one that hatches from the Mundane Shell or Egg once we have intellectually matured enough to be able to personify thoughts and words. But as Jerusalem warningly asks,

Why wilt thou number every little fibre of my Soul
   Spreading them out before the Sun like stalks of flax to dry?
   The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its anatomy
   Horrible ghast & deadly! nought shalt thou find in it
   But dark despair & everlasting brooding melancholy!
   (J22:19-24; E167)

It is foolish to try to number every little thought of Blake’s verbal imagination, because the anatomy of his Infant Joy, the system that organizes and supports its form, is the work of the Reasoning Negative, which is itself unorganizable. The Spectre, after all,

“Produc[es] many Heads three or seven or ten, & hands & feet / Innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator” (J29:22-23; E175), and it does so through the voice of the
Imagination: “And the Divine voice came from the Furnaces, as multitudes without / Number! the voices of the innumerable multitudes of Eternity” (J31:3-4; E177).

How, then, do we recognize the difference between the Imagination’s counter-system, which “fixes” rational systems and gives a body to falsehood, and Reason’s evil system of abstraction, which murders or negates the substance of Thought and all its “divine members” by dividing it from its textual body? How do we distinguish Eden’s wheels, revolving in harmony and peace, from Reason’s complicated wheels with tyrannic cogs, moving each other by compulsion? We might suppose that Los’s system is creative, organized, but not rational, while the Spectre’s is rational but disorganized and forever unorganizable, and, moreover, destructive, since it involves the devouring of dead words. The fundamental question is this: How do we distinguish between an empty term and an eternal form, between a rational idea and an imaginative idea, a dead thought and a living thought, a falsehood and a truth?

1See Metaphysics IV.4, 1007a20-27.
14. Compelling the Reasoner to Demonstrate in the Furnaces of Reductive Affliction

Blake’s Divine Vision of Truth, perceived by his Imagination and bounded by Reason, is hard and opaque to those on the outside, infinite to those within—or, in imaginative terms, a rock. But forced by necessity to give the invisible and subjectively known Infinite this rocky appearance of either a finite and visible object or a comprehensible idea, Blake must turn his truth into a lie, and in the worst sense: “a false statement made with intent to deceive; a criminal falsehood” (OED, *lie*). Blake’s lie thus assumes the appearance of its contrary and “cloaks” the real or intended truth—a cloak being a “garment,” a verbal covering—just as “Folly is the cloke of knavery” or “Shame is Prides cloke” (MHH7; E36). This change of Truth into a falsehood as a result of being spoken (but it is only an apparent change, and therefore deceptive) occupies the opening lines of the second chapter of *Jerusalem*:

> Every ornament of perfection, and every labour of love,  
> In all the Garden of Eden, & in all the golden mountains  
> Was become an envied horror, and a remembrance of jealousy:  
> And every Act a Crime, and Albion the punisher & judge.

And Albion spoke from his secret seat and said

> All these ornaments are crimes, they are made by the labours  
> Of loves: of unnatural consanguinities and friendships  
> Horrid to think of when enquired deeply into; and all  
> These hills & valleys are accursed witnesses of Sin  
> I therefore condense them into solid rocks, stedfast!  
> A foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth:  
> That Man be separate from Man, & here I plant my seat.

(J28:5-12; E174)

In Blake a “crime” is a lie, a mental act (or thought) that sins or errs in breaking Reason’s law against speaking truth, and Albion, as an essentially rational Intellect, is compelled to
judge and punish the transgressor. The crimes are "ornaments," figures of speech, false images—trees, rocks, chains, veils, cloaks, flowers: truths masquerading as objects of sense—fashioned by the Imagination in its labours of love (of Truth) in the hell of burning thought outside Reason's bound. More precisely, criminal ornaments are code terms born from "unnatural consanguinities and friendships" between male ideas and female words, whose etymological or metaphorical connections remain invisible until one engages in "struggles of intanglement with incoherent roots" (J77; E231). Copula and copulate, for example, are blood relatives; loom and text are just friends.

But all Blake's lexical connections trace back to his holy image of Thought in its human form, first born as the infant conception celebrated in the Song of Innocence "A Cradle Song": "Sweet babe in thy face, / Holy image I can trace" (E12). So Albion misleads us when he says these unnatural verbal relations are "Horrid to think of when enquired deeply into": so much to the contrary, they become the threads, fibers, nerves, and sinews that connect the chaotic elements of the text into more and more comprehensible forms. And these forms become the principles of an organic system—"Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land" (J4:8; E146)—leading us to discover that all along we have been inside one divine body of Thought. But if there is any horror involved in thinking of them, it rests with their initial power to deceive, to separate the envying reader from the jealous poet in an adversarial relationship analogous to that between Blake's Reason and Imagination.

When Albion says that his imaginative "crimes" are to be "condensed" into "solid rocks" and established as "a foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth," he implies that he will turn his apparent lie back into the truth it really is. But he will need our help:
we must be obedient and do our rational duty, which is “plowing”—simply following his words, for “As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers” (MHH9; E37):

Every one knows, we are One Family! One Man blessed for ever

Silence remained & every one resumed his Human Majesty
And many conversed on these things as they laboured at the furrow
Saying: It is better to prevent misery, than to release from misery
It is better to prevent error, than to forgive the criminal:
Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones:
And those who are in misery cannot remain so long
If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth.

They Plow’d in tears, the trumpets sounded before the golden Plow

(D55:46-54; E205)

Does everyone know Blake’s words are “one family” that embodies One Thought? If not, this universal truth is something everyone ought to know. Moreover, this one family here offers some advice: it is better to prevent the error of falsehood than to forgive the criminal for lying, which we can do by “attending to the little ones” or “labouring well the minute particulars,” paying attention to and thinking about every little word. For what looks false initially may prove, upon examination, to be true, and thus we prevent ourselves from making the error of mistaking a truth for a lie and avoid all the miseries that follow in the wake of misinterpretation.

Those who pray for comprehension must plow “in tears,” the labour made difficult by the fact that the earth of vegetation on which Blake writes is teeming with particulars and clogged with tangled roots. But as we trace the furrows of Blake’s lines, with trumpets sounding the imminent arrival of the Last Judgment, imaginatively conceived as “the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations” (M43:1; E144), we are again given some useful advice (to which I will be returning repeatedly in this chapter):
They Plow'd in tears, the trumpets sounded before the golden Plow
And the voices of the Living Creatures were heard in the clouds of
heaven
Crying: Compell the Reasoner to Demonstrate with unhewn
Demonstrations
Let the Indefinite be explored, and let every Man be Judged
By his own Works, Let all Indefinites be thrown into Demonstrations
To be pounded to dust & melted in the Furnaces of Affliction:
He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer:
For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power.
The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity
Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falshood continually
On Circumcision: not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion

Whoever admits to being a reasoner is here compelled (by an imperative) to compel the
Reasoner to “demonstrate with unhewn demonstrations,” which a logical person could be
forgiven for interpreting as proofs, though ones not “hewn,” not cut into shape by the sharp
ax or knife of Reason closed in steel. Since we normally require a demonstration to have a
proper deductive form or shape, why this strange advice?

Albion himself must be a Reasoner, because in Jerusalem we see how,

From willing sacrifice of Self, to sacrifice of (miscall'd) Enemies
For Atonement: Albion began to erect twelve Altars,
Of rough unhewn rocks, before the Potters Furnace
He nam'd them Justice, and Truth. And Albions Sons
Must have become the first Victims, being the first transgressors
But they fled to the mountains to seek ransom: building A Strong
Fortification against the Divine Humanity and Mercy,
In Shame & Jealousy to annihilate Jerusalem!

Albion erects altars of “rough unhewn rocks,” unhewn this time in the sense of
“unpolished, rough, rugged” (OED). Albion's rocks are thus unhewn demonstrations or
“Indefinites” which we reasoners must explore and throw into demonstrations, to be
“pounded to dust & melted in the Furnaces of Affliction.” Albion names his unhewn demonstrations—quite naturally—“Justice” and “Truth,” multiplies (pointlessly) the two abstractions to twelve solid rocks, and erects them as altars, a place for the holy sacrifice of error (or images of truth). And his own thoughts, the first transgressors of Reason, would have become the first victims, the first Negations to be annihilated, had they not fled to build yet another destructive rational structure.

We are told that “All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore” (J27; E171): that is, everything begins and, upon returning from a period of wandering in error, ends with Reason’s bound, which is also the bound of Truth. The rocks, the bound, the rocky shore, and the truth all belong to Reason—or, if one prefers, the rational Intellect—and now, we discover, so does Justice. Justice to truth demands that errors be burned up, pounded to dust, cut away, or otherwise sacrificed to Reason (as is, for example, the weeping boy-thought of “A Little Boy Lost,” who is “burn’d . . . in a holy place, / Where many had been burn’d before: / The weeping parents wept in vain. / Are such things done on Albions shore” [SE E29]). For “rocks” (let us retrace this particular thread or fiber carefully) are “unhewn” demonstrations, and unhewn demonstrations are “indefinites” which need to be pounded to dust or melted in the “Furnaces of Affliction.” And that whole process of testing and demonstration is, simply, Negative Reasoning, whose burning fires and sharp instruments alone can hew the rough shape of Blake’s rocky truths into something shapely, recognizable, intelligible. And it is a mighty task, for the whole text, the whole “Labour unparalleled! a wondrous rocky World of cruel destiny / Rocks piled on rocks reaching the stars” (J66:6-7; E218), which we are inside right now, this “beautiful house” built for us piteous sufferers, is made of such rocks: “a stupendous
Building on the Plain of Salisbury; with chains / Of rocks round London Stone: of
Reasonings: of unhewn Demonstrations / In labyrinthine arches” (J66:2-4; E218; my
emphasis).

How the female text is woven from rocks is explained to us in some detail:

And the Twelve Daughters of Albion united in Rahab & Tirzah
A Double Female: and they drew out from the Rocky Stones
Fibres of Life to Weave[,] for every Female is a Golden Loom
The Rocks are opake hardnesses covering all Vegetated things
And as they Wove & Cut from the Looms in various divisions
Stretching over Europe & Asia from Ireland to Japan
They divided into many lovely Daughters to be counterparts
To those they Wove, for when they Wove a Male, they divided
Into a Female to the Woven Male. in opake hardness
They cut the Fibres from the Rocks groaning in pain they Weave . . .
(J67:2-11; E220)

Living fibres of thought are drawn out of rocky truths—indefinite or obscure because still
unhewn—and woven by female words into (redundantly) more male thoughts and their
divided female verbal counterparts. Some of those females, like the code words Rahab and
Tirzah, become rocks themselves, “opake hardnesses” covering all Blake’s vegetated
thoughts but enclosing a truth within. And to get at that truth, we must pound them to dust
or melt them down into ore in our mental furnaces, destroy them or refine them, as Los and
his Spectre do in their striving with systems to deliver individuals from those systems: “&
in his ladles the Ore / He lifted, pouring it into the clay ground prepar’d with art” (J11:3-
4; E154). Ore from melted rocks poured onto a ground “prepared with art” suggests the
method of Blake’s writing process: indefinite truths are refined (or defined), obscurities
are clarified or purified in mental fires, and then poured like ink onto paper or into the
engraved lines of his copper plates. The image recalls the six chambers (the five mental
senses and the whole mind) of the “Printing house in Hell” in The Marriage, where “In
the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids” (MHH15; E40).

But all this molten ore or living fluid runs through the lines of the poetry in obscure forms, in code words. Tirzah, for example, who like Vala represents the coded form of the text, laments her role as the binder of the infinite Thought she loves (and as the literal binding of a book). To prevent this Thought from wandering (erring) and herself from being consumed as a dead cipher, she must ensure its rationality, a binding or bounding that is accomplished (in writing) with molten metal:

O thou poor Human Form! said she. O thou poor child of woe! Why wilt thou wander away from Tirzah: why me compel to bind thee[!] If thou dost go away from me I shall consume upon these Rocks These fibres of thine eyes that used to beam in distant heavens Away from me: I have bound down with a hot iron. These nostrils that expanded with delight in morning skies I have bent downward with lead melted in my roaring furnaces Of affliction; of love; of sweet despair; of torment unendurable My soul is seven furnaces, incessant roars the bellows Upon my terribly flaming heart, the molten metal runs In channels thro my fiery limbs: O love! O pity! O fear! O pain! O the pangs, the bitter pangs of love forsaken . . .

(J67:44-55; E221)

What runs out of the tormented lines here—love, pity, fear, pain—are refined English nouns, their hard, cryptic surface melted away. All the reader need do is bind them down to the larger context of the sad story of Blake's forsaken love of Truth.

If Blake's text is woven in looms out of living fibres drawn from rocks, and if rocks must be crushed to dust, or melted down into ore, or cut and polished till they are gem-stones, the truth we can abstract from all these figurative acts is that his text is indefinite—opaque, obscure, hard to read, encrusted with errors—and needs reshaping into a definite and determinate form. For "The Infinite alone resides in Definite &
Determinate Identity / Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falsehood continually.” This action takes place in Los’s furnaces, and since “The Male is a Furnace of beryll,” the destruction of falsehood takes place in the burning fire of male thought (that same fiery consummation that burns up vegetative forms). The Spectre tells Los, “O! thou seest not what I see! what is done in the Furnaces. / Listen, I will tell thee what is done in moments to thee unknown” (17:28-29; E149), momentarily forgetting, perhaps, that “Los is the Demon of the Furnaces” (J46:6; E195) and so ought to know what goes on in them. More likely, the Spectre’s remark is directed at us. At any rate, he soon recovers his memory under Los’s severe command:

While Los spoke, the terrible Spectre fell shuddering before him Watching his time with glowing eyes to leap upon his prey Los open the Furnaces in fear. the Spectre saw to Babel & Shinar Across all Europe & Asia. he saw the tortures of the Victims. He saw now from the out[side] what he before saw & felt from within He saw that Los was the sole, uncontrold Lord of the Furnaces (J8:21-26; E151)

But of course the distinction between Los and the Spectre is false anyway: as a “Demon,” “uncontrolled,” disobedient to Reason, Los is an evil Reasoning Negative, too.

What does Los do in his furnaces? Aided by his Spectre, he quite simply reasons: “But mark,” he says to the Spectre, “I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours. To beat / These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death” (J8:14-16; E151).

“Selfhoods” or “self-righteousnesses” are the images of his own Truth or Thought, and at the same time Negations of it, coded forms whose rocky coverings must be destroyed, put to death by negative reasoning: Los with his mace of iron Walks round: loud his threats, loud his blows fall On the rocky Spectres, as the Potter breaks the potsherds;
Dashing in pieces Self-righteousnesses; driving them from Albions
Cliffs: dividing them into Male & Female forms in his Furnaces
And on his Anvils: lest they destroy the Feminine Affections
They are broken. Loud howl the Spectres in his iron Furnace

(J78:3-9; E233)

The male and female forms are also Los's sons and daughters. Subjecting them to
refinement means subjecting them to a process of reasoning that will destroy their
indefiniteness. What goes on in the Furnaces of Affliction, then, is just reasoning. Here
words are consumed by the devouring Rational Power, which is why "The Furnaces [are]
the Stomach for digestion. terrible their fury" (M24:59; E121). And so is Bowlahoola—
which "is named Law. by mortals, Tharmas [Wrath] founded it: / Because of Satan"
(M24:48-49; E120)—because "In Bowlahoola Los's Anvils stand & his Furnaces rage"
(M24:51; E120) and therefore "Bowlahoola is the Stomach in every individual man"
(M24:67; E121).

The Reasoning Negative must dash its own erroneous Negations in pieces or crush
its indefinite rocks or hew its unhewn demonstrations, and so it acts like an ax, knife, mace,
sword—any sharp cutting instrument enclosed in steel. And so Tirzah—who, as a code
word, is a Negation herself, the product (or whore) of the Spectre—"sits weeping to hear the
shrieks of the dying: her Knife / Of flint is in her hand: she passes it over the howling
Victim" (J67:24-25; E220). Like a dead Spectre devouring the dead, Tirzah binds and cuts
victims identical to herself. But that is the law of the text: the Negation must be negated to
redeem the two Positive Contraries. And since "Mathematic Form is Eternal in the
Reasoning Memory," it is Reason who establishes the mathematical law that \(-1 \times -1 = +1\)
(not to mention the law that says that one divided by zero equals infinity).\(^1\)
Only a knife, moreover, can cut off the "false body" that covers the head of the
Intelect in its penetrating or phallic mode, when as an active Imagination it enters the Void
of the Negation to impregnate its silent womb. Only Reason, in short, can do the work of
circumcision on which the establishment of Truth depends, for we have been forewarned
too that the "Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falshood continually / On
Circumcision: not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion." It is Reason we see at the end of
Jerusalem "Circumscribing & Circumcising the excrementitious / Husk & Covering into
Vacuum evaporating revealing the lineaments of Man" (J98:18-19; E257). These lines
describe the process of decoding, when Reason finally removes the false surface of the code
superadded to the text's real surface of English.

Circumcision, consummation, consuming, devouring, dashing to pieces, pounding
to dust, melting down—all these rational acts have one thing in common: they are forms of
reduction, condensation, or contraction. In furnaces is where we reduce the "Swelld &
bloated General Forms" (J38:19; E185) of aggregates of particulars to the "perfect
Whole" (for a consummation is also the action of perfecting) of One Thought. That One
Thought, as we know, is the text's first principle, the source of all its minute particulars as
well as "All broad & general principles [that] belong to benevolence / Who protects
minute particulars, every one in their own identity" (J38:22-23; E185). And
"benevolence" itself is "the Divine- / Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal
Form" (J38:19-20; E185) because it is the sole existing Positive Contrary in the text: the
Human Imagination. If we arrange these three categories of Thought—the Universal,
General, and Particular—in a quantitative hierarchy, we will have a pyramid with One at
the top, Some in the middle, and Many at the bottom:
We have been warned that “he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole / Must see it in its Minute Particulars; *Organized,*” and the Living Creatures’ imperative concerning compelling the Reasoner to demonstrate included the information that “Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely *organized* Particulars / And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power.” Accordingly, we must somehow climb to the top of this pyramid by organizing the particulars at the bottom. And that can only be accomplished by means of the generals in the middle, for without broad and general principles to organize particulars into classes—and, fortunately, “General Forms have their vitality in Particulars” (J91:29; E251)—the whole text will remain chaotic, “a Disorganized / And snowy cloud” (J91:22-23; E251). Like Los, “Within labouring, beholding Without: from Particulars to Generals / Subduing his Spectre” (M3:37-38; E97), we must compel our rational power to reduce individuals to Three Classes of Men who then resolve in the Trinity of One Intellect-God. The transition will be smooth, for as the pyramid above indicates, Blake leaves a connecting
link between each level: the universal One Thought is also a *general* form, and a general form is an aggregate of *particulars*.

When we enter Los's furnaces of affliction, then, we will see the reduction or condensation of his text from the bloated form in which it initially appears to us, minute particulars being gathered into classes or "sheaves" and sacrificed on the rocky altars of more comprehensive general principles for the sake of the "True Man" or One Thought who is their source. Such *condensation* achieves "the compression of thought or meaning into few words; reduction (of a literary work, etc.) within small or moderate compass by due arrangement, and omission of unessential details" [OED]). But the process is slow, painful, and laborious: every word must read, given some amount of thought, beginning with proper names, the most minute of the minute particulars. For example, we may recall (from Chapter 5) "Oxford," name of the "immortal Bard" who "speak[s] the words of God / In mild persuasion: bringing leaves of the Tree of Life" (J41:7-9; E188). Let us watch what happens to him as he stands before the furnaces:

Oxford trembled while he spoke, then fainted in the arms
Of Norwich, Peterboro, Rochester, Chester awful, Worcester,
Litchfield, Saint Davids, Landaff, Asaph, Bangor, Sodor,
Bowing their heads devoted: and the Furnaces of Los
Began to rage, thundering loud the storms began to roar
Upon the Furnaces, and loud the Furnaces rebellow beneath

(J41:17-22; E188)

The particular name *Oxford* is defined for us by the text: he is an "immortal Bard," a Poetic Genius, and therefore a code name for the Imagination. The error of the word's false appearance is burnt up for us already, by the definition provided to us. But it is different with *Norwich, Peterboro, Rochester*, and the rest: they must enter Los's furnaces of affliction, heads bowed in humble devotion, and submit to their terrible fate: these names
are ciphers “only fit for burning” (J32:48; E179). They must be sacrificed, pounded to dust, condensed, reduced to one form (the One General and Universal Form), and their denotation contracted to one object: Thought.

To condense is “to reduce (a substance) from the form of gas or vapour to the liquid or (rarely) the solid condition, or from the state of invisible gas to that of visible vapour or cloud” (OED), and when Albion condenses the hills and valleys of the earth/text (“accursed witnesses of Sin,” he calls them) “into solid rocks, stedfast! / A foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth,” he is also condensing his truths into denser forms. But Blake must also condense invisible things into visible ones, which is why his Hand must condense his invisible thoughts, beginning with the absorption of his particular brothers into his one general form:

In the Wars of Babel & Shinar, all their Emanations were Condens’d. Hand has absorbd all his Brethren in his might All the infant Loves & Graces were lost, for the mighty Hand

Condens’d his Emanations into hard opaque substances; And his infant thoughts & desires, into cold, dark, cliffs of death. His hammer of gold he siez’d; and his anvil of adamant. He siez’d the bars of condens’d thoughts, to forge them: Into the sword of war: into the bow and arrow: Into the thundering cannon and into the murdering gun

(J8:42-44; 9:1-6; E151-52)

Similarly, Los beholds his invisible “soft affections / Condense beneath [his] hammer into forms of cruelty” (J9:26-27; E152), condensing his subjectivity so that its unseen truths may be seen. But the resulting cruelty of the particular forms the translation assumes stems from their power to deceive, whatever their originating intention. Language is (to borrow the Heideggerian phrase) “always already” a code, even though—if Locke is correct that people’s intentions in speaking are, or should be, to be understood—a code whose
purpose is to define and determine the conceptual representations of Being, not obscure them. But Blake’s private code laid over our common code as its evil mirror image or dark reversed reflection, moves the wheels of our thinking in the opposite direction, towards darkness and ignorance, away from light and knowledge. Hence Blake’s printing press, the “wine-press” from which we extract the intoxicating and condensed forms of knowledge, being opposed to the moral purpose of a text, “is call’d War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press / Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain / As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel” (M27:8-10; E124). While the wheels of common language revolve in harmony and peace, carrying us towards the goal of enlightenment (Blake’s Eden), Blake’s code takes us there in reverse, adversely furthering the purpose of language-wheels by exacerbating the contrast between the dark and the light. Language strives (or ought to strive, as Locke says) for the lucid and definite: “the great Wars of Eternity” (M30:19; E129) translate simply into the struggle to articulate truth. And Blake’s private, “selfish,” secret language serves those wars by consolidating the error of their contrary: the obscure and indefinite. What Los condenses from his soft affections is thus a form of cruelty aimed at kindness, a “cloud” whose eventual evaporation will make the Sun seem all the brighter.²

Blake’s invisible Truth, then, emerges from Los’s furnaces in the condensed form of a “cloudy” (coded) text, in the definite form of an indefinite opposed to the definite: “Vala comes from the Furnace in a cloud” (J7:38; E150), and Rahab (who is Vala) “like a dismal and indefinite hovering Cloud / Refusd to take a definite form. she hoverd over all the Earth / Calling the definite, sin: defacing every definite form” (J80:51-53; E237). So too the Divine Vision itself is condensed:
The clouds of Albions Druid Temples rage in the eastern heaven
While Los sat terrified beholding Albions Spectre who is Luvah
Spreading in bloody veins in torments over Europe & Asia;
Not yet formed but a wretched torment unformed & abyssal
In flaming fire; within the Furnaces the Divine Vision appear'd
On Albions hills: often walking from the Furnaces in clouds
And flames among the Druid Temples & the Starry Wheels
Gather'd Jerusalems Children in his arms & bore them like
A Shepherd in the night of Albion which overspread all the Earth
(J60:1-9; E210)

But the Divine Vision gathers Jerusalem's "children" in the single embrace of his two
"arms," by this means helping to organize them, encircling or circumscribing all the little
particulars in one, or at most two, general classes.

Naturally, the more its thought is condensed, the more the text and its various
imagistic objects appear to shrink: "the Sun is shrunk: the Heavens are shrunk / Away into
the far remote: and the Trees & Mountains witherd / Into indefinite cloudy shadows in
darkness & separation" (J66:50-52; E219). Clouds can even condense into rocks, becoming
"rocky clouds" (J35:18, E181) or "rocky clouds of death & despair" (J45:1; E194). But at
their most definite they are "clouds of reason" (SE E31) or "Cloudy Doubts & Reasoning
Cares" (FS E261) or the "indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning" (M3:8; E97). At one point, Albion's Sons, "Who are the Spectres of the Twentyfour, each Double-
form'd"—and we will recall that the "twenty-four" are the Two Contraries multiplied a
number of times to confuse us—begin "Raging against their Human natures, ravning to
gormandize / The Human majesty and beauty of the Twentyfour. / Condensing them into
solid rocks with cruelty and abhorrence" (J19:20, 23-25; E164).

"Rocks" and "clouds" are always images of obscurity, and that obscurity is always
the product of the Reasoning Negative and its secret code of war. But it does not follow
that these images are always images of Reason (the Reasoning Negative is also imaginative) or that obscurity and condensation are always negative or evil. For instance, *The Book of Los* describes how "first from those infinite fires / The light that flow'd down on the winds / He siez'd; beating incessant, condensing / The subtil particles in an Orb" (BL5:27-30; E94). Here the sense of *condense* is drawn from both physics—"to bring the particles of (a substance) into closer aggregation, so that they occupy a smaller space; to reduce in volume"—and optics: "to bring (rays of light) to a focus or into a smaller space, so that the brightness is increased; to concentrate" (OED). Los's "Orb" of light is, of course, the sun, the central star in his universe, image of the One Universal Form of Truth that gives light and life to every lesser derivative form. And so the act of condensing thought is "double-formed" also, resulting either in obfuscation (an indefinite, generalized "cloud" or "Rock & Sand Unhumanized" [J63:18; E214]), or in lucidity (an "emanative," clear, definite, universal "sun"). Indeed, a single image may be also double, and we will find "Clouds of Blessing" (J24:21; E169) in addition to "clouds written with curses" (MH27; E45). Or the opaque, hard, heavy, inert rock may turn up as "the Rock of Ages" (M15:36, E109; M34:46, E134; J48:4, E196; J57:16, E207), never more revealingly than in *Jerusalem*’s opening prayer to the Saviour Imagination: "Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the rock of ages, / While I write . . ." (J5:23; E147). This same Hand, the one that invents its code by forging bars of condensed thoughts into instruments of mental war, "Condens[ing] his Emanations into hard opake substances" (J9:1; E151), also turns those rocky code words—proper names, as we see below—back into precious stones by submitting them to the refining fires of his furnaces, which burn the code away:
I saw terrified; I took the sighs & tears, & bitter groans:
I lifted them into my Furnaces; to form the spiritual sword.
That lays open the hidden heart: I drew forth the pang
Of sorrow red hot: I work'd it on my resolute anvil:
I heated it in the flames of Hand, & Hyle, & Coban
Nine times; Gwendolen & Cambel & Gwineverra
Are melted into the gold, the silver, the liquid ruby,
The crysolite, the topaz, the jacinth, & every precious stone.
Loud roar my Furnaces and loud my hammer is heard . . .

(J9:17-25; E152)

* * *

The word *indefinite* means “without distinct limitation,” “indeterminate, vague, undefined” (OED), while *obscure* refers to what is “without clearness of form or outline; indistinct, undefined” (OED). The term these two denotations have in common—*undefined*—is their tie of blood: *indefinite* and *obscure* are “sisters.” When we are told, on plate 55 of *Jerusalem*, to “Let the Indefinite be explored,” we can assume with some assurance that we are being commanded not just to look into obscurities but to define them.

“Pounding a rock to dust” suggests the annihilation of not the rock’s substance (which, if it is eternal delight, can never be annihilated anyway) but rather its indefinite form. If the furnaces of affliction are places of Reasoning/Death, then it is important to remember—at least, for the rock—that the “State . . . / Called Eternal Annihilation that none but the Living shall / Dare to enter” is a state that the Living Thought “shall enter triumphant over Death / And Hell & the Grave!” (M32:26-29; E132). A true Thought, however it is expressed, must enter the state of Negative Reasoning expecting to *appear* to undergo annihilation. But it ought to have faith that it will rise again as a living form at the Last Judgment, triumphant over its Negation. And all Negations, anything indefinite—a word, a proposition, an idea, a sentiment—ought to be thrown into the furnaces of affliction to
prove itself, because if the indefinite form encloses a substantial truth within, that truth will emerge from the consummation still living, having lost none of its content but only its opaque, obscure, shadowy, cloudy, rocky shape, which Reason alone can circumcise and cut off as an error, an unnecessary excess. Thus is the indefinite transformed or metamorphosized, the lie changed back into a truth, into something definite, because truth is infinite and "The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity."

When it comes to statements, logic regards the particular categorical—"Some S are P"—as indefinite, since its predication is limited to an indefinite portion of the denotation of the subject (Coffey 1:194). Most logicians interpret the quantifier some to mean "at least one," but others interpret it as "some, possibly all" (Coffey 1:194). Some, argues Coffey, "merely assures us that the reference of the predication is to the denotation of S: whether to one single S, or to all S’s, or to some number intermediate between one and all, it does not inform us" (Coffey 1:194). Another sort of indefinite proposition (now called "indesiginate") is the one lacking any mark of quantity limiting its subject term, and which thus fails to distinguish between "some" and "all." Only the universal statement is definite, for the reference of its predication is to a definite portion of the denotation of its subject class, namely, to "all" or "none." With these "fixed or exact limits," the universal is "clearly defined, determinate, fixed, certain" (OED, definite).

Blakean discourse abounds in definite universals. We find them everywhere, beginning with the two titles of his three early tractates, the affirmative All Religions are One and the negative There is No Natural Religion. As Cox points out, Blake has a "strong tendency to universalize (it is no accident that ‘all’ is the word of greatest frequency in Erdman’s concordance to Blake, and ‘every’ not far behind)” ("Methods")
37-38). But it is unlikely that he universalizes without an awareness of the logical
implications. When, for example, in “London” he “mark[s] in every face I meet,” “In every cry of every Man, / In every Infants cry of fear, / In every voice: in every ban,” the
mind-forged manacles of Reasoning, he is also marking the shadowy face of every one of
his indefinite human words with every, the affirmative universal quantifier (and as such, perhaps, another one of Reason’s mind-forged manacles), in order to restore them to
definite and determinate truth.

The affirmative universal (the A proposition: All S are P) is what scientific
demonstration establishes by way of the first-figure syllogism in the mood Barbara
(AAA-1). Says Coffey, “it is A propositions that all the sciences aim at establishing.
Hence, the proofs found in all the ‘exact,’ or ‘abstract,’ or ‘mathematical’ sciences, run in
the mood Barbara” (1: 343-44). Indeed, science,

in the strict Aristotelean meaning of the term . . . is apparently confined to a
knowledge of things “that cannot be otherwise,” i.e. of abstract, metaphysically necessary truths, truths that are in materia necessaria, that may not be denied without violating some law of thought or involving some contradiction. (Coffey 2: 225)

But Blake’s Living Creatures argue that “Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely
organized Particulars / And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power.”

Apparently they intend to contradict Aristotle, for whom science is specifically
demonstrative understanding, epistêmê, or certain knowledge. But not necessarily, for not
all universals depend on demonstration. There are also axioms (first principles, “first” or
“primary” truths), which are self-evident—the kind of truth that Blake, as we saw in
Chapter 6 of Part I, evidently loves most:
Self Evident Truth is one Thing and Truth the result of Reasoning is another Thing Rational Truth is not the Truth of Christ but of Pilate It is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil (Marg E621)

Self-evident truths or axioms, as the premises of the demonstrative or apodeictic syllogism, are the foundation (the rocks) on which demonstration rests. Moreover, they themselves require no demonstration because “[t]he concepts embodied in them are so simple that the relations expressed between these concepts are immediately apprehended by the intellect, without recourse to any simpler concepts as middle terms” (Coffey 2: 226).

And Blake does provide us with several axioms: “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man” (J74:10; E229), for one. But this particular axiom doubles as a definition: it tells us how to interpret the word spectre, a circumstance which violates no logical principle. As Aristotle says in the Posterior Analytics (the very book which the narrator of one of the Marriage’s “Memorable Fancies”—half-rational, half-imaginative anecdotes, surely—takes with him into the mill of syllogistic reasoning [MHH20; E42]), “the basic premisses of demonstrations are definitions, and . . . these will be found indemonstrable; either the basic premisses will be demonstrable and will depend on prior premisses, and the regress will be endless; or the primary truths will be indemonstrable definitions” (90b24-26). If we required all truths to be demonstrable, then, we would be trapped in infinite regress. And therefore science cannot ultimately exist, as Blake quite correctly but clearly misleadingly argues, in nothing but “generalizing demonstrations.”

Aristotle goes on to say that there can be no demonstration of the definable because definition is of the essential nature or being of something, and all demonstrations evidently posit and assume the essential nature. . . . Moreover, every demonstration proves a predicate of a subject as attaching or as not attaching to it, but in definition one thing is not predicated of another. . . . Again, to prove essential nature is not the same as to prove the
fact of a connexion. Now definition reveals essential nature, demonstration reveals that a given attribute attaches or does not attach to a given subject. . . . So it emerges that not all the definable is demonstrable nor all the demonstrable definable; and we may draw the general conclusion that there is no identical object of which it is possible to possess both a definition and a demonstration. (90b30-91a10)

On the basis of this, we cannot expect to demonstrate or prove that “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man.” This is a definition and as such cannot be hewed, pounded to dust, or in any way reduced to simpler concepts: it stands, rock-like, as a self-evident truth, an abstract, metaphysically necessary truth, one on which the whole system of Blake’s negative reasoning is based. Nevertheless, Blake attempts to demonstrate it in the more original sense of that word: “to point out.” We possess a demonstration of the essential nature of the Spectre by experiencing it, by being brought under the tyrannical government of a text that forces us to labour in its satanic mills without rest.

Of course, not all the principles and premises of Blake’s system are axiomatic: if they were, there would be no need to hew them or pound them to dust. So when we run into an obscure truth, one not compelling immediate assent because not understandable (truth must told so as to be understood in order to be believed), it will be up to us to discover and establish the truth (if any) it contains. And, to repeat, we will need our rational intellect—our knife, ax, plow, harrow, mace, hammer, tongs, chains, sword, spear, arrows: any potentially destructive instrument enclosed in “Iron and steel, dark and opake, with clouds & tempests brooding” (J34:5; E179)—because “Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falshood continually / On Circumcision: not on Virginity.” Whatever lies outside the bound of Reason and Truth must be mentally cut off and destroyed. Such “circumcision” readies our virile principle, the Imagination, for
its penetration of Reason's silent female womb, where, as the Reasoning Negative, it will
impregnate what it has just voided and then void (or deliver in deathly sacrifice) the
children it has just conceived. This image—of death consuming life and life reawakening
the dead, joyful creation following sorrowful deliverance in an unbroken circle—is just
another image of the Truth that, in order to remain a human truth, to exist for us, must be
continually spoken. If the female Word, conceived in the sexless Spirit and delivered to
us with a comprehensible, rational, male Form vibrating inside her, is to establish Truth,
the whole process does not depend on the "virginity" of her womb, on the text being
untouched, unentered, and unexplored.

What an unhewn generalizing demonstration, with its "Swelld & bloated Form,"
most needs is reduction, a "diminution, lessening, cutting down" (OED), given that to hew
is "to cut with blows so as to shape, smooth, trim, reduce in size" (OED, emphasis mine).
If the "human worm" the Imagination calls divine represents Blake's Thought in the
pathetic state we first find it, either as a reasoning phallic insect devouring beautiful images
(or sexually penetrating them, as the "invisible worm" with its "dark secret love" does in
"The Sick Rose" [SE E23]), or as a female "Worm Weaving in the Ground" which is
Thought's "Mother from the Womb / Wife, Sister, Daughter to the Tomb" (KG E269), then
we can rest assured we will be forgiven for circumcising it in a thoroughly rational
demonstration, for "The cut worm forgives the plow" (MHH7; E35). Even if we make fatal
mistakes in analysis, no real harm can be done to Blake's text, for it is also true that "A dead
body. revenges not injuries" (MHH7; E36).

If bloated indefinites are "Shapeless Rocks / Retaining only Satans Mathematic
Holiness, Length: Bredth & Highth" (M32:17-18; E132), formal truths that must be
trimmed or cut down in size, and if Albion’s “rough unhewn rocks” must be smoothed and shaped into gems, the place where this reduction goes on has to be within the “Furnaces of Affliction,” because it is here that “all Indefinites [are] thrown into Demonstrations / To be pounded to dust & melted.” And we know this from the expansive senses of the word reduce,⁴ which means “to turn to, convert into, a different physical state or form; esp[ecially] to break down, grind, or crush to powder, etc.” (OED), and in metallurgy specifically, to convert ore into metal. Here, too, error is burned up, contributing to the perfection and completion of the Divine Vision as a “perfect Whole,” a consummation for which “Los siez[es] his Hammer & Tongs . . . [and] labour[s] at his resolute Anvil / Among indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning” (M3:7-8; E96-97). For if Los’s furnaces of affliction are also furnaces of reduction, we must note that while the modern connotation of reduce is “to bring down or diminish,” its original meaning was the more positive “to bring back” (OED), reflected in the obsolete sense (still current in the seventeenth century) “to lead or bring back from error in action, conduct, or belief, esp[ecially] in matters of morality or religion; to restore to the truth or the right faith” (OED). Reducing Blake’s indefinites ought, then, to bring us back from errors in reasoning to his truth, especially in matters of intellectual morality and religion.

We must remember, too, that the thrust of the Living Creatures’ contradictory imperative for and against demonstration is to encourage us to organize minute particulars and restore order to the Divine Vision, to establish its truth. To that end, we are being compelled by the Living Creatures to compel the Reasoner to demonstrate with unhewn demonstrations. And if we are ourselves reasoners of Albion (but we are: that is the cruel destiny we cannot escape so long as we continue to read), we are also being compelled to
demonstrate his indefinites. We are, in short, being compelled to obey Reason, so it may help to know that reduce has another sense relevant to us: “to bring to (or into) order, obedience, reason, etc., by constraint or compulsion” (OED). And because in Blake what “the religious” call “Good is the passive that obeys Reason,” if we obey Reason passively enough there may be a chance that we and the demonstrations we are reading can all be restored to the truth and right faith. Those who resent being reduced to this state—for to be reduced is also to be made humble—may take comfort in the Proverb “The most sublime act is to set another before you” (MHH7; E36).

Nor can we ignore the meaning of the word reduction in logic: “the process of reducing a syllogism (or proposition) to another, esp[ecially] to a simpler or clearer, form; specifically by expressing it in one of the moods of the first figure (direct or ostensive reduction)” (OED). Let us consider the reduction of propositions first, for any proposition that is to function as the premise of a syllogism must first be reduced to standard form, that is, to one of the four categoricals, A (universal affirmative: All S is P), E (universal negative: No S is P), I (particular affirmative: Some S are P), or O (particular negative: Some S are not P).

The process of propositional reduction gives us the logical right to “vary the form of expression as much as we please provided we retain the meaning intact” (Coffey 1: 239, emphasis removed). But the reduction of some statements, especially those in natural language, may be impossible. Sometimes meaning cannot be retained intact unless we leave the proposition untouched in its original—or, to use Blake’s term, “virgin”—form, exactly as its author worded, punctuated, capitalized, and in every other sense wrote it. The Blakean interpreter often finds himself caught in this dilemma: if he varies Blake’s
expression in the slightest, he will to some degree alter his meaning. And yet a hands-off interpretative method is hardly one Blake advocates or encourages, however resistant the proposition may seem. This, at least, seems to be the figurative implication of the following Proverb of Hell:

Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity. (MHH7, E35)

How might we reduce this to a definite statement? “All Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity”? If so, the reduction tells us nothing much: courting it with Reason hardly compels it to yield up either its charms or its riches. But with Blake himself—who makes a rare appearance here in Milton, permitting factual biographical detail to intervene in his imaginative visions—we might plead with the virgin Word to speak from her position inside the polypus of roots of reasoning and doubt and despair, also “a Fibrous Vegetation / A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision” (M24:37-38; E120) or a “Satanic Space”:

For Ololon step’d into the Polypus within the Mundane Shell
They could not step into Vegetable Worlds without becoming
The enemies of Humanity except in a Female Form
And as One Female, Ololon and all its mighty Hosts
Appear’d: a Virgin of twelve years nor time nor space was
To the perception of the Virgin Ololon but as the
Flash of lightning but more quick the Virgin in my Garden
Before my Cottage stood for the Satanic Space is delusion

For when Los joind with me he took me in his fiery whirlwind
My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeths shades
He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepar’d a beautiful
Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions
To display Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural Religion[…]
Walking in my Cottage Garden, sudden I beheld
The Virgin Ololon & address’d her as a Daughter of Beulah[…]

Virgin of Providence fear not to enter into my Cottage
What is thy message to thy friend: What am I now to do
Is it again to plunge into deeper affliction? behold me
Ready to obey, but pity thou my Shadow of Delight
Enter my Cottage, comfort her, for she is sick with fatigue
(M36:13-32; E136-37)

It is the message itself that is still virgin—Ololon is an unexplored indefinite—and so the poet invites her to “enter” his “house,” though the seductive invitation may plunge him into even deeper contemplation, even more distressful reasonings. He is ready to “obey” her—is she a sadistic whore of Reason?—if only she will take pity on his “Shadow of Delight,” his “wife,” the poor verbal image of his truth sick with the disease of the Thought that desires but acts not, and weary from unceasingly rational labours (expanding Reason’s bound) that have born little fruit. The Virgin may illuminate the Wife, may become a wife, if courted by someone other than Incapacity, someone who “in three years”—three being a significant number in Blake’s world—“might write all these Visions.”

“It is often not easy in practice,” observes our logician,

to distinguish between meaning and implication; and hence, in reducing ordinary statements to logical form . . . we have sometimes to overstep the limits of mere verbal change, to have recourse to what is really inference, and thus erect into meaning what was originally only an implication. Logic postulates the right of mere verbal transformation, the right to vary, as we find it necessary, the mode or form of expression, so long as we do not interfere with the meaning of the judgment expressed. Hence, the legitimacy of any change of wording which involves inference—which puts into the meaning of the new form what was only an implication of the old—must be determined by reference to the ordinary logical canons of inference. (Coffey 1: 166)

But not in Blake, where the half-logical canons of Negative Reasoning permit fanciful interpretations based on poetic logic—on, for example, such flimsy stuff as metaphorical connections or figurative senses. Besides, the Proverb “Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity” suggests that, however irreproachably faithful to a statement’s
intended meaning, a “male” interpretative strategy so prudent as to shy away from altering it, afraid to risk impregnating it with illegitimate (because imposed) implications, will be impotent. And the “female” statement itself is thus left a barren “old maid,” a virgin who is “old” because she resists being reduced to a new form, but still “rich” in unexplored meanings, all of them rational, all forms of “Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason the Root of Good & Evil In The Accusation of Sin” (Laocoön E275). To interpreters of weak desire (the kind Reason finds it easy to restrain), Prudence is a virgin; to Reason itself, she is a whore. (“In a wife I would desire / What in whores is always found / The lineaments of Gratified desire” [E474].)

Logic characterizes terms as “rich” or “poor” in connotation and denotation, positing an inverse relation between the two such that “if connotation be increased or diminished, denotation will either remain unaltered or will change in the opposite direction” (Coffey 1: 56, emphasis removed). As a general rule, “the less a name implies the wider the group of things to which it applies” (Coffey 1: 56), and vice versa. In Blake, “Every one knows, we are One Family! One Man blessed for ever”: if my interpretation is correct, these words of Jerusalem are exclaiming the saving, illuminating, and self-referential truth (not wholly self-referential, however) that they are one group of interrelated terms emanating from One blessed (as opposed to accursed) Thought. And Jerusalem’s words go on to tell us that “We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses / We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one, / As One Man all the Universal Family” (J34:17-19; E180). Here is another truth: if we contract the “infinite senses,” the connotative senses, of Blake’s words to their Limit of Contraction (the one attribute that belongs to all of them is mental form: they are all thoughts), then their
denotation or extension will expand to include “multitudes” of thoughts, everything we see. The centre of Thought thus opens out into a vast expanse, a denotation to which there is no bound or limit (there is no Limit of Expansion, remember). Contracted in connotation, the text denotes just one class of mental things, but with an infinite number of members, as many thoughts as we want to see in Blake’s text (and to which, in fact, we have not yet seen a limit). But if, on the contrary, we expand the text’s connotative senses to include all the figurative attributes that Blake’s Thought might possibly have (and there is no limit to expansion in this direction, either), we contract its denotation to—what is easy to comprehend—One Thought, One Man. And that “man” is the unique thought of William Blake, bestowing on his family of words a wealth of implications.

But let us return to “Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.” Now, an abstract term like prudence is “the name of an attribute considered alone or apart from any thing” (Coffey 1: 57, emphasis removed), which means that it implies a great deal without applying to anything in particular. Abstract terms in isolation are therefore rich in connotation but poor—stony broke, really—in denotation. Their extension is empty, as logic explains:

Extension in general we have understood to mean the reference of our concepts and terms to things. If, therefore, we have concepts which represent as their objects attributes apart from all reference to things—and we undoubtedly have such concepts, purely abstract and potentially applicable to things, though not actually applied to things by the mind,—and if we have abstract terms which express the attributes conceived in this way, then consistency would demand that we deny such concepts and terms all extension and recognize for them only one kind of meaning, viz. implicational or intensive meaning. It would seem that we cannot with propriety speak of the extension or denotation of such concepts and terms at all[.] (Coffey 1: 61)
Prudence, as a word, is rich in connotation but poor in denotation, wide or bloated in intension but narrow or contracted (actually void) in extension, pregnant with implications but barren in the application. For speaking with propriety is, as we shall see, very much at issue in the Proverb.

If, according the second part of its compound predicate, Prudence is courted by Incapacity, then Incapacity is what it is—incapable, powerless, incompetent; weak in desire; a shrunken and shrivelled penis—precisely because there is no sphere of things, no class of objects, to which it can apply the richly connotative but only potentially applicable abstract term prudence. We might imagine male Incapacity as it courts Blake's female text—which is itself defined as “a Sexual Machine: an Aged Virgin Form” (J39:25; E187)—crying out, “By Laws of Chastity & Abhorrence I am witherd up” (J49:26; E198), driven to desperate measures by her stubborn reliance on abstractions and by his own unsatisfied desire for even a shadowy image of Truth:

I am drunk with unsatiated love
I must rush again to War: for the Virgin has frownd & refused
Sometimes I curse & sometimes bless thy fascinating beauty
Once Man was occupied in intellectual pleasures & energies
But now my soul is harrowd with grief & fear & love & desire
And now I hate & now I love & Intellect is no more:
There is no time for any thing but the torments of love & desire
The Feminine & Masculine Shadows soft, mild & ever varying
In beauty: are Shadows now no more, but Rocks in Horeb

(J68:62-70; E222)

The Proverb implies, moreover, that the prudent interpreter, careful but incapable, seeks out the text’s richly connotative abstractions for the very reason that they permit his interpretations to imply a great deal without the necessity of being applicable to anything in
particular. Hence swelled and bloated general forms, abstracted from the text’s minute particulars, murder its substance.

What is prudence? The dictionary defines it most widely as a kind of wisdom, knowledge, or skill. More specifically (and ironically), prudence is the exercise of sound judgment in practical affairs, sagacity in adapting means to ends, or discretion that follows the most suitable or profitable course of action (OED, prudent). Prudence is discreet, circumspect, discerning, careful—it obeys limits and respects bounds. But Blake’s Proverb characterizes prudence pejoratively as an unattractive (“ugly”), barren, even frigid kind of wisdom desired only by the incapable or impotent. Traditionally, prudence is a rational kind of wisdom that restrains and subdues unruly desire. But Blake fails to tell us, within the context of the Proverb, why he endows prudence with negative connotations. He gives no explicit reason for the judgment, and we are forced to make something up, resort to our speculative imaginations, if we are not to remain impotent ourselves, unable to say anything germane about the Proverb because we cannot ground it in a sphere of objective reference.

The Proverb has further curious logical features. “[N]o matter how evidently abstract be the form of the term,” writes Coffey, “the subjects of all our judgments are used concretely” in the sense that they are always “used as subjects of attributes” (1: 60). Indeed, as the subject of his Proverb, the abstract term prudence is used by Blake doubly concretely, for he personifies it, endowing it with the “human form” of a virgin woman named Prudence. Conversely, logic regards the predicates of all judgments as used abstractly, no matter how evidently concrete their form, insofar as they are always used as attributes of subjects (Coffey 1: 60). Blake evinces his thorough understanding of this rule by, again, doubling the abstractness of his predicate. The first predicate, “rich, ugly old maid,” which
in itself is thoroughly concrete, is transformed into an abstraction when (sexually) coupled by the copula is with the abstract term prudence: now only the abstracted attributes suggested by the phrase—wealthiness, ugliness, virginness, agedness—can, with propriety, be applied to the subject term prudence, which is, as I have just argued, being treated concretely, as though it were a living human being, a woman named Prudence. And there is more. When we enter and explore the virgin Proverb, we find it folding back abstract layer upon concrete layer, for what we have defining the subject term (courting it to reveal its true essence or naked being or real nature as an abstraction) is a doubly abstract predicate term: first, one explicitly concrete term (“old maid”) which turns out to be an implicit abstraction (rich but ugly and ultimately barren wisdom), followed (or pursued) by a second explicit abstraction (incapacity). Without things, or classes of things, to tie all these abstractions down to, we must frankly admit that we do not know exactly what Blake is referring to nor why he denigrates prudence. But in the context of his work as a whole, “old maid” provides a clue: we are talking about Blakean human forms, not real, living, breathing human beings, but—since what we are really dealing with is personified abstractions—disembodied (abstracted) human attributes, qualities, and states of mind, re-embodied in the material form of words. Clearly, on the face of the Proverb Blake is concretizing mental attributes by personifying them but, again, for reasons that remain inexplicable unless we decide, quite arbitrarily, to tie them down to things. And if the decision is to be arbitrary, the reader may choose any class of things he wishes, whatever suits his interpretative fancy. This, unfortunately, makes the reader a prisoner of his own imaginative freedom, a shackled victim of the virgin text. For, as Benoit pointed out, “my mind is freer in the degree in which that which I have to elaborate is more rigorously defined” (Supreme Doctrine 66).
As I have tried to argue throughout this study, the objective sphere of reference in Blake is restricted to that of suprasensible realities and his own thoughts and words, with the reader making a solid appearance by implication, by what Blake can infer from his knowledge of the process of reading, which includes both reasoning and imagining. Thoughts and words are the two classes of objective "things" to which all his abstractions, including prudence and incapacity, can be tied down or manacled. Thus the implicit personification of the mental state of incapacity as an impotent male lover alludes to the courting of a prudently worded statement, rich in implication but hard to open up, by an impotent mind, impotent because its desire for truth is weak. For in addition to being a proper (unanalyzable) name, prudence embeds prude, "[a] woman who maintains or affects excessive modesty or propriety in conduct or speech" (OED). No doubt her male lover wants to induce her to speak more freely, to expose and display her naked beauty, yield up her mental charms. And authorial prudence creates this verbal prude, so carefully worded, to seem logically irreducible, untranslatable, and excessively proper. And certainly, to reduce this or any other of Blake’s Proverbs of Hell to standard logical form, were such a miracle possible, would be to kill them, or at least be "Punishment enough to make them commit Crimes" (J69:27; E223), where a "crime" is a falsehood.

But a statement that is logically irreducible is not necessarily uninterpretable, all its connotative riches without use. All Blake’s axioms and definitions, for example, are virgins: "The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man" should never, ever be touched, if by "touching" we mean altering its wording. But because "The soul of sweet delight can never be defil’d" (MHH9; E37), it doesn’t hurt to try, and the reader may find that, having invited the virgin to enter his house, he can ravish it without altering it. For even as virgins,
Blake’s definitions are of considerable value to the interpreter of capacity in his attempts to compel the Reasoner to demonstrate with unhewn demonstrations, mainly because the definition will turn the rocky indefinite into a bride, wife, and mother. The virgin Prudence is therefore something the reader who feels impotent in face of Blake ought to court ardently indeed: can he recognize a statement that resists his best interpretative efforts, and yet hold onto it until such time as it yields? For he ought not to be put off by her ugliness, her unattractive “face”: even though no one wants to look very long at a statement or a text he cannot interpret or has much use for one from which he can draw no probable (much less certain) conclusions, Blake does not countenance unravished prudes and virgins, because the “Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falshood continually / On Circumcision: not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion.”

At times we must be bold enough to circumcise, rather than respect the integrity of, Blake’s propositions—an action that, like hewing, implies cutting off, cutting short, limiting, abridging, or circumscribing (OED, *circumcise*) their superfluous matter, leaving behind only the bare meaning directly and explicitly conveyed by the statement. And still we may find logical formulation extremely difficult. Blake is rarely explicit and highly, if not ultimately, abstract, forcing his reader to go to prodigious lengths to determine his referents. As interpreters, we must remain cognizant of the logical distinction between “the meaning or import of a given propositional form, and what are called its implications, i.e. all the truths that are necessarily involved in it, and which may be extracted from it by careful and prolonged mental scrutiny” (Coffey 1: 165)—that is, by brooding with our two spectrous wings. For while logic recognizes that “ordinary language is too rich and multiform to permit a complete set of rules for . . . translation” into standard form, it
nevertheless maintains that “[i]n every case the crucial element is the ability to understand the given nonstandard-form proposition” (Copi and Cohen 218).

When we do understand Blake in all his minute particulars, prudence may force us to admit that he is for one reason or another irreducible or untranslatable—outside the scope of logical analysis. More imaginative readings, less careful but more skillful, may see that same text as whorishly permitting a wealth of inferences, some of which may erect, legitimately or illegitimately, mere implications into explicit meaning. But whatever the case with a given Blakean statement, virgin or whore—and obviously no single interpreter can decide the question one way or the other—the collective body of his readers must all concur that the degree of Blake’s accessibility to reason and logic cannot be determined without putting his judgments to the test of our judgment, even to what his metaphors of “hewing” and “pounding to dust” suggest must be a rigorously logical reduction or analysis. His works must be given a fair trial, especially in light of his own categorical imperative: “let every Man be Judged / By his own Works.”

Besides, logical judgment will soon inform us that, indeed, “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man” needs no reduction: it is already in standard form, a definite universal affirmative. And the poet himself benevolently demonstrates that the wording of the definition can be safely altered without changing its meaning, for he also tells us that “The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man” (M40:34; E142), and that “This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power” (J10:15; E153). And logic, in reducing the latter two definitions to standard form, tells us that in essence all three are the same thought.
“Listen!” Los commands his Spectre; “Be attentive! be obedient! Lo the Furnaces are ready to receive thee. / I will break thee into shivers! & melt thee in the furnaces of death” (J8:8-10; E151). Los implies that the Spectre is a rocky indefinite. But he is more than just a proposition (like the Proverb of Hell about prudence). He is an entire argument, the whole “unhewn Demonstration” with which Los-the-Reasoner demonstrates, labouring by Los’s side and compelling him to demonstrate. The Spectre is the rocky indefinite, the rocky fragment of Albion, that has to be thrown into demonstration, an abstract logical process reified by the deceitful daughters of the text into a concrete “furnace of affliction.”

So we must turn now to the reduction of syllogisms in our search for definite universals or axioms, for to reduce an unhewn argument is to express it in the form of a “perfect” syllogism (in itself a kind of logical consummation). Reduction is crucial because the major task in analyzing deductive arguments

is not handling perfect syllogisms, but the matter of testing arguments in ordinary language which are usually not stated in the strict form of perfect syllogisms. The general procedure followed by Aristotle, and by mediaeval logicians, was (a) to analyze the arguments, if complex, into simpler arguments with two categorical premisses, a categorical conclusion, and three and only three terms; (b) to translate all propositions into one of the four strict forms, A, E, I, or O; (c) then, if the argument was imperfect, to try to replace it by a perfect syllogism composed of “necessary consequents” of the premisses set down (gotten by conversion or implication). This process was called “reduction” to perfect syllogism. (Angell 104)

In every one of the six moods of the first figure, and in this figure alone, the conclusion is seen to follow necessarily from the premises by the direct application of Aristotle’s dictum de omni et nullo (Coffey 1: 344), a rule which Blake parodies with his dictum that the point of “Enough!”—also, significantly, the bound of Reason—is either an imaginative All or a rational Nothing. So if anything survives the crucible of the fiery furnace of affliction, it
ought to be an axiom, a truth established as the conclusion of a perfect syllogism. And such truths are, “in the strict Aristotelean meaning of the term,” scientific, “confined to a knowledge of things ‘that cannot be otherwise,’ i.e. of abstract, metaphysically necessary truths, truths that are in materia necessaria, that may not be denied without violating some law of thought or involving some contradiction” (Coffey 2: 225).

We may recall that Los constructs a first-figure syllogism early on in Jerusalem concerning the very subject matter—the system of Contraries and Negations—that we have been struggling all along to comprehend:

Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs
Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever[.]
(J17:33-35, E162)

We have here three terms denoting three classes of things: negations, contraries, and existing things. (Exceptions, objections, and unbeliefs may for the moment be put aside.)

First, we must reduce Los’s propositions to three categoricals, two premises and one conclusion (all in one of the four strict forms, A, E, I, or O), much like the argument metaphorically prefigured by his own Three Classes of Men (the two Contraries are like the two premises from which one conclusion, the Reasoning Negative, is derived):

Negations are not contraries.
Contraries are mutually existing things.
No Negation is an existing thing.

There is no indefinite particular categorical here (I or O): all three are definite universals (A or E). But, even thus reduced, the propositions are more logically troublesome than they appear.
To begin with, we cannot—at least not by the Aristotelian interpretation—reduce the statement “Negations exist not” to the standard form of the universal negative categorical “No S is P,” where S is a “negation” and P an “existing thing,” without risking self-contradiction, for the Aristotelian universal assumes that its subject term is an existing thing. That is, “[t]he traditional doctrine on opposition did not consider the existence of S (or P or S or P) to be implied as part of their meaning by the A, E, I, and O propositions, but to be presupposed by them, so that the possible consequences of the non-existence of any such class could not arise at all for discussion” (Coffey 1:254). On the traditional or Aristotelian reading, then, “No Negation is an existing thing” is a self-contradiction, or perhaps a nonsensical statement, or a redundancy. It is difficult to see how an unself-contradictory argument can be made employing a term whose existence must be presupposed if it is to be the subject of a universal statement and then is subsequently denied by one of the premises. Certainly, Los cannot logically go on to argue (as he soon does) that the Negation is “an Unquenchable Fire” (J17:45; E162), or “an Objecting & cruel Spite / And Malice & Envy” (J17:37-38; E162). One cannot make true positive assertions about something whose existence is denied. (Ah, we may say, Los is no better than a vegetable!)

Blake’s problem here, at least from our modern point of view, is the fallacy of existential assumption, where “[i]f it is not stated explicitly that a class has members, it is a mistake to assume that it has” (Copi and Cohen 184). Modern logic now regards universal propositions as having lost their existential import:

Around 1870 to 1880, several logicians who were interested in the development of mathematical logic attacked the “existential import” which, they said, Aristotle attached to universal propositions. In the Aristotelian
logic, they held, “All ghosts are immaterial” can be true only if ghosts exist; if there are no ghosts, it would have to be false. But this they denied, holding that the proposition “All ghosts are immaterial” means “Whatever x may be, if it is a ghost, then it is immaterial.” A conditional statement like this . . . does not require that either the antecedent or the consequent be true in order that it be true. Thus ghosts do not have to exist for “All ghosts are immaterial” to be true. In other words, they held that the truth of a universal proposition does not imply the existence of anything at all.

In contrast, they held that all particular propositions do imply existence. (Angell 127-28)

We may now more justly appreciate the prudence with which Blake formulates his conditional propositions in “The Fly,” beginning with the all-important “If thought is life, then am I.” As we saw in Chapter 2, the statement can be true without implying anything about the truth of its antecedent or consequent. The formula is offered as a “mere possibility.” But when it comes to Negations, Blake is not so cautious, especially if, as is most likely, he is operating under the assumptions of the old logic.

The existential presupposition of Aristotelian logic “makes it impossible for any standard-form categorical proposition to deny the existence of members of the classes designated by its terms” (Copi and Cohen 183). As Kneale and Kneale point out,

In order to justify Aristotle’s [logical] doctrine as a whole it is necessary . . . to suppose that he assumed application for all the general terms with which he dealt. To a modern logician this seems a rather curious restriction of the scope of logic. For it is not at all difficult to construct a general statement in which at least one of the terms lacks application, e.g. ‘No mathematician has squared the circle’; and once this has been realized, it becomes clear that there are advantages in a system where postulates of existence occur only explicitly. How was it that Aristotle failed to notice this? (Kneale and Kneale 60)

Did Blake fail to notice it? The fact is, he does not state that “No Negation is an existing thing” (as I mistakenly interpreted him above), but rather that “Negations exist not.” And in this form the statement is what the Kneales call a “postulate of existence,” or an existential
proposition—that is, a proposition that explicitly denies the existence of its subject term.

Los states that the class of Negations is empty; it has no members; and in so doing he permits himself (and his Spectre) to formulate any number of logically consistent and true propositions with the non-existent Negation as either the subject or predicate term.

If we examine universal affirmatives, we find that concrete or collective universals, which are the result of observation and enumeration of instances, naturally involve, by implication or assumption, the existence of their subjects; but that the abstract or generic universal—which is reached by reasoning, or by an analysis of the notions compared: the universal which expresses a law—does not necessarily carry any such implication, and sometimes even makes the latter impossible. For example, the first law of motion, "Every body not compelled by impressed forces to change its state, continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line," makes a statement about a condition of things that is believed never to have been realized. Similarly, a rule or direction laid down in such terms as "All trespassers are prosecuted" does not imply the existence of its subject. (Coffey 1:258-59)

Thus when Los states "The Negation is an unorganizable entity" or "The Negation is an unquenchable fire," he may be either formulating a conditional ("Whatever X may be, if it is a Negation, then it is an unquenchable fire") or expressing a universal law. In expressly denying that the class of Negations has members, he is not foreclosing the possibility that at some future time—if such and such a thing were to happen, such as the separation of Reason from him ("If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation," he says at J17:36)—it may. If Reason separates from Imagination, the class of Negations will have an existing member (or two), and it will then prove itself to be all the positive things Los says: an unquenchable fire, a distorted reflection of the truth, despair, death, horror, agony, malice, spite, and so on.

But until the Negation comes into existence, it is perceptible only in our imagination—only Los can see the invisible Spectre—as an illusion. So we are
forewarned—our reason is forewarned—that “Negation” is an empty term by the existential postulate “Negations Exist Not.” What the Negation might subsequently appear to be or to do are illusions, “States that are not, but ah! Seem to be” (M32:29; E132), for, as those who contemplate on the Negation-that-is-Death say, “What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful / Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be: even of / Torments, Despair, Eternal Death” (J32:51-54; E179). Illusions are truly dangerous, especially to the reader of Blake, and if we mistake them for real existences we becomes members of the class of Negations. The reader who mistakes the Spectre for something that exists and responds to it as though it were not an empty term will fulfill Los’s prophecy, and find himself in the midst of an unquenchable fire with a distorted reflection of the truth, in torments, despair, and endless reasoning.

Perhaps in rebellion against the restrictive scope of Aristotelian logic, but wisely in any case, Los formulates a proposition in the existential form “S does not exist” or “There is no S” (There is No Natural Religion is another), which precisely captures his meaning. Thus his opening premise, “Negations are not Contraries,” avoids committing the fallacy of existential assumption by carrying no existential import with regard to Negations. The truth of this second universal negative proposition (in standard form: “No S is P,” “No Negation is a Contrary”) need not imply nor depend on the existence of Negations. Negation is an empty term, what I have been calling a cipher—and so are exceptions, objections, and unbeliefs: all are terms denoting classes with no members, or perhaps all members of the class of non-existent things (which, the Imagination claims, are all rational things).

Next, Blake gives us a second existential proposition, “Contraries mutually exist,” which affirms the membership of all Contraries in the class of existing things (also the class
of true or eternal things). But there is an implicit condition attached to Contraries by that qualifier *mutually*: the two must exist together for either one to exist. If Imagination negates Reason or Reason negates Imagination, the surviving Contrary automatically becomes a Negation, identical to the Contrary just negated. Hence there must always be *two* Negations in non-existence or the Non-Entity, although one (and I cannot tell whether it's the rational one or the imaginative one) "flees" there voluntarily, either by wilful abstraction or self-sacrifice: "One Dies! Alas! the Living & Dead / One is slain & One is fled / In Vain-glory hatcht & nurst / By double Spectres Self Accurst" (KG E268).

Now let us try articulating the relationship between the Contrary and the Negation by a syllogism in the first figure, where $S =$ Negation, $M =$ Contrary, and $P =$ existing thing:

- No $S$ is $M$. No Negation is a Contrary.
- $M$ is $P$. A Contrary is an existing thing.
- Therefore no $S$ is $P$. Therefore no Negation is an existing thing.

This syllogism, in the perfect first figure (although the order of the premises is reversed, the minor being stated before the major), has the appearance of a fairly faithful reduction of Los's virgin statements "Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist: / But Negations Exist Not." But the appearance is specious: the syllogism is invalid, and for highly technical reasons. For one thing, the minor premise must be affirmative, and Los's is not; and for another, the argument violates the rule that no term may be distributed in the conclusion which was undistributed in its premise. But as Locke might protest, any clear-thinking person unschooled in the arcane points of syllogistic analytics can see for himself that a Contrary's being an existing thing and a Negation's not being a Contrary are not
sufficient grounds to conclude that there might not be other existing things that a Negation
could be.

The syllogism just formulated, of course, ignores the existential character of Los’s
own propositions. And, indeed, his argument can be saved. Note that he does not introduce
his third statement with therefore but rather with the conjunction but, thus “[i]ntroducing a
statement of the nature of an exception, objection, limitation, or contrast to what has gone
before” (OED, but). “But Negations Exist Not” cannot, therefore, be the conclusion; it is
rather an exception, objection, or limitation—a member, remarkably, of two of the three
classes of statement (exceptions, objections, and unbeliefs) which Los’s larger argument
claims do not exist—or actually three, because as an existential postulate denying the
existence of its subject term, it is also a negation. Then again, the conjunction but may also,
“in its weakest form . . . emhasiz[e] the introduction of a distinct or independent fact, as
the minor premiss of a syllogism” (OED, but). So let us organize the syllogism properly,
changing the pseudo-conclusion into what a good reasoner would intend it to be, the minor
premise. And this time $S =$ Contrary, $P =$ Negation, and $M =$ existing thing:

$S$ is $M.$  
A Contrary is a (mutually) existing thing. 
No $M$ is $P.$  
But no existing thing is a Negation. 

Therefore no $S$ is $P.$  
Therefore no Contrary is a Negation. 

If we begin by positing the major premise that “Contraries are mutually existing things” (a
reduction of Los’s “Contraries mutually Exist”); then introduce the independent fact in the
minor premise that “No existing thing is a Negation” (which by simple conversion is
equivalent to Los’s “Negations Exist Not”); and conclude that “No Contrary is a Negation”
(which, again by conversion, is equivalent to the proposition with which Los opens his
argument: “Negations are not Contraries”); then we have successfully reduced the argument to a perfect syllogism.

Working through Los’s syllogism in this way enlightens us on two important points. First, we cannot infer from the two stated facts ([1] that Negations are not Contraries, and [2] that Contraries mutually exist) that therefore Negations do not exist. This is something we have to be told, a third fact given to us, laid down as an *a priori* axiom of the system. It is not a conclusion we can reach by deductive reasoning, by a generalizing demonstration. But (and this is the second point) we *can* infer from the two stated facts ([1] that Negations do not exist, and [2] that Contraries do) that therefore Negations are not Contraries. But in making this inference, our reasoning merely obediently confirms an axiom of Los’s system, what he states for us explicitly, right at the start, as an abstract, necessary truth, a conclusion already established.

The first-figure syllogism, Coffey explains, is “perfect” because it “embodies the most usual and scientific form of syllogistic inference, viz. the application of some abstract, necessary truth, or general law, to concrete, particular cases subsumed under it” (1: 343). It is this characteristic of truth the Living Creatures must be thinking of when they insist that “He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars / General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer.” But “General Forms have their vitality in Particulars” (J91:29; E251), so if a general form or law is to do us any good, it must be applicable to all the concrete, particular cases subsumed under it. A general good existing in and of itself, on the other hand, abstracted from particulars but retaining no vital connection to them, underlies the arguments of the immoral character, the “scoundrel hypocrite and flatterer,” the Reasoner who aims to deceive. This is the character who fails
to make his actions conform to what he professes (and Blake is such a hypocrite: he reasons while arguing that reasoning is evil), or who exaggerates the good points of someone or something (Blake exaggerates the power of imagination). The wise man, in contrast to both the fool and the knave, is in Blake’s philosophy much the same as he is in Aristotle’s: “the wise man knows all things, as far as possible, although he has not knowledge of each of them in detail” (982a9-10), and this characteristic “of knowing all things must belong to him who has in the highest degree universal knowledge; for he knows in a sense all the instances that fall under the universal” (982a21-23).

What the wise reader has to recognize is the difference between a generalizing demonstration—one formed from an aggregate of particular ideas but with no power to organize them—and a particularizing one, a general truth, definition, or axiom in the form of a definite universal, which will “do good” to particulars by being not only applicable to them but also capable of organizing them. In exploring and judging the works of the indefinite Reasoner—that is, in examining the anatomy of his body of thought—we ought to demand unhewn demonstrations so as to be given the chance to hew them for ourselves, “hewing” being, of course, analyzing. In short, we must become spectres and devour the dead we have ourselves murdered by analysis, striving with systems of thought to deliver ourselves from them. The pain our reason feels whenever we sink our teeth into an indefinite proposition or opaque passage of text—its suffering, confusion, frustration, turmoil, and unsatisfied desire—will undoubtedly feel like a gnawing upon its own tender intellectual nerves. And yet, should we stumble into a solid axiom or a perfect demonstration that establishes the “Definite & Determinate Identity” of a particular idea, we will have found that Rock of Ages, an infinite truth in a rational form.
According to the mathematicians, the creators of analysis in the nineteenth century had insisted that the lack of clarity about ‘infinity’ (like that about infinitesimals) was to be removed by abandoning any attempt to treat infinity as a number. Instead they restricted the discussion to quantities which could become ‘as large as one liked’, which were ‘potentially’, not ‘actually’, infinite. In a calculus course one is discouraged from writing $1/0 = \infty$, since $\infty$ is not a number like 5 or $\pi/2$; but one may say that $1/x \to \infty$ as $x \to 0$, which means that $1/x$ can be made larger than any given (finite) number $N$ by making $x$ small enough; note that here the ‘infinitesimally small’ $x$ and the ‘infinitely large’ $1/x$ appear together. This caution about $\infty$ is essential, because the standard rules of arithmetic . . . apply to finite numbers only; carelessness about this point leads to the familiar mathematical paradoxes which arise when we secretly ‘divide by zero’. (Sondheimer and Rogerson 147)

One may read, in this context, the Song “The Little Black Boy”: here a black code word looks forward to the day “When I from black and he”—his English-language counterpart—“from white cloud free” (SI E9), a day that arrives after their death-by-reasoning, when both have been “consumed” and resurrected and are now basking in the light of their Father-God-Sun. This reading of the poem, by the way, need not deter good reasoners from inferring that it also makes an anti-racist statement. But such readings must be abstracted secondarily from the explicit statement, the one made, ironically, to seem covert.

So the little black boy’s mother tells him, “Look on the rising sun: there God does live / And gives his light, and gives his heat away. / And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive / Comfort in morning joy in the noon day” (SI E9).

*Reduction* is also “the action or process of making a copy on a smaller scale” (OED), for which purpose “compasses of reduction” are used. Two of Blake’s most celebrated pictures—the frontispiece to *Europe* and *Newton*—depict reasoning figures with their compasses in the act of making a minutely particular copy of some greater abstract truth, perhaps in the form of a Euclidean proof (see also the geometer pictured in the “Application” to *No Natural Religion* [b]). The copy may be struck on the abyss, on the ground, or on paper—in *Newton*, the scroll of paper on which he has drawn his bisected triangle (two-in-three-in-One, the triangle itself the spitting linear image of the “real” compasses, an image repeated in human form, but less definitely, in the shape of Newton’s hand) seems to emanate from a piece of drapery growing out of Newton’s left shoulder (or perhaps the region of his closed mouth). So the paper = clothing = covering = garment of light = text: one of Blake’s more illuminating terminological chains of imagistic association.
My thanks to Anthony England for pointing this out to me. Thomas Cleary notes that the mythological figure of Prudentia is female.
15. Defining the Divine Vision: The Form of a Perfect Whole

The great irrefutable *a priori* axiom engraved in stone and handed down to the suffering reader by Blake’s Intellect God, the holy truth revealed once the whirlwinds have subsided and the flames of fierce contention have all died down, is simply that “Negations Exist Not.” But it is a dependable and pregnant truth, particularly when coupled with the definition “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man.” For the Spectre is the Negation, and therefore the reasoning power, along with all its productions (for nothing can come of nothing), does not exist. Thus the reader reaps, as a reward for all his hard labours, the inexorable implication: everything you have reasoned out, all the fine inferences and deductions you have wrought, are (worth) nothing.

Now, this bracing slap in the face is bound to raise the Cartesian hackles of any self-respecting reader, who must protest that his reasonings are thoroughly real, palpably in existence, if not exactly what one would call “alive.” He might also point out that the accusation catches Blake in a performative as well as (by the Aristotelian tradition) formal contradiction: Blake reasons to argue that Reason does not exist. He responds to all that, however, with his argument about illusions: “What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful / Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be” (J32:51-53; E179). What *seems* real to the reader—his own rational thoughts—are merely illusions, and Blake is himself unhappily but admittedly caught in the creation of such errors when he argues against Reason.

Since even the committed rationalist must admit that errors in reasoning are possible, the onus is thus on the reader of Blake to prove that, at any given moment, he is not consolidating an error but discovering a truth. And since whoever insists on the truth...
of his rational activity and its productions has only the material forms of language (words, numbers, diagrams, shapes he can draw, his bounding lines) to prove their existence, and since those forms are never self-evident and always interpretable, any reader who defends their limited power to express truth is logically bound both to refute Blake’s lie (that the Reasoning Power exists not) and to defend his truth (that Thought does). The argument is a version of Augustine’s:

I am not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians, who say, What if you are deceived? For if I am deceived I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am. And since I am if I am deceived, how am I deceived in believing that I am? for it is certain that I am if I am deceived. Since, therefore, I, the person deceived, should be, even if I were deceived, certainly I am not deceived in this knowledge that I am. And, consequently, neither am I deceived in knowing that I know. For, as I know that I am, so I know this also, that I know. (26)

But philosophical Reason can always convince the self that it does not know itself, that the “I” may be thoroughly deceived even with respect to the question of its own existence.

And that conclusion is useful to religion—as that word has meaning for Blake, as an expression of the desire to unite with the Being of God—which begins where the cold abstractions of philosophy end: we are self-deceived, and to come to the “eternal one and undivided Being” is “therefore to come to ‘Life’ out of the illusory life of divided and dissipatated will and desire, which is really death” (Otto 248). Revelation (or any similar experience of enlightenment or self-realization) clinches the argument by convincing the self that it never knew itself as it really is until this very moment:

The natural man is only conscious of images, so it is not astonishing that he should be unconscious of existing, which is real, which has three
dimensions. In short I am unconscious of that in which I am real, and that of which I am conscious in myself is illusory.

The attainment of satori is nothing else than the becoming conscious of existing which actually is unconscious in me; becoming conscious of the Reality, unique and original, of this universal vegetative life which is the manifestation in my person of the Absolute Principle (that in which I am I and infinitely more than I; imm[a]nence and transcendence). (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 25)

Or we could compare Meister Eckhart’s description of the moment when the soul,

“[t]ranscending her own rational powers[,] . . . comes to the ‘dark’ power of the Father where all rational distinctions (and predicates) end” (Otto 197):

Without sound, for it is an inward immediate perception in pure feeling: without light, for it is an apprehension, beyond determination and opposites, of the ‘nothing’ (not this, not that); without ground for every attempt to love sinks endlessly away before the overwhelming miracle; without form, for the spirit then is informed by that form which has neither form nor figure, by God himself. It is without essence, for her separate essence so completely disappears, that there is nothing left but one single ‘is.’ This ‘is’ is the Oneness which is Being itself—her own and that of all things. (qtd. in Otto 197-98)

For Blake, Reason without this incommunicable experience of the Absolute is as sterile as the incommunicable experience would be without the desire to enlighten others, a desire whose satisfaction depends, for him, nearly equally on philosophical Reason and the aesthetic Imagination.

The records of the mystics suggest that this certain truth known only by revelation, by a subjective experience of inner certainty so powerful it cannot be doubted, is typically preceded by vigorous intellectual exertions followed by a grave and overwhelming doubt. The natural Selfhood, to use Blakean terms, must be swallowed up by its own Negation before the light which it blocks out can break through. The Selfhood casts an obscuring shadow, but it is also the negative image of the positive or true self,
and hence Blake links the two (or three-in-one) by a series of identifying colons: "for when he entered into his Shadow: Himself: / His real and immortal Self: was as appeared to those / Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch / Of gold" (M15:10-13; E109). The shadowy Negation is what the Reasoning Power finally produces, and one should enter into it, as Blake's mythic character of Milton does here, to find one's immortal Self. The goal is reached, in other words, only by intense reasoning:

Man attains satori, then, as a result of turning his back, as thoroughly as possible, on his centre, as a result of going right to the ultimate limits in this centrifugal direction, as a result of pushing to its ultimate degree of purity the functioning of the discursive intelligence which keeps him away from Wisdom. He ought to accomplish formal thought to the point of breaking up the form. In order to do that he ought to make his formal mind function in a persevering attempt to perceive, beyond its limits, the in-formal; an attempt that is absurd in itself but which brings about the release one day of the miracle of satori, not as crowning the success of the ridiculous efforts accomplished, but as the defeat, definite at last, and triumphant, of those efforts. It is like a man separated from the light by a wall and who cannot touch this wall without making it higher and higher; but a day comes when all these absurd efforts have built up the wall to such a height that it becomes unsteady and collapses suddenly, a catastrophe that is final and triumphant, and which leaves the man bathed in the light. (Benoit, *Supreme Doctrine* 61)

It is at the moment we finally see that our unceasing efforts to build up the crumbling walls of the holy city of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land are doomed finally to collapse in defeat—the walls of Jerusalem, that is: Blake's continually building, continually destroying expression of Truth in the English language—that the work is finally complete.

In Blake's self-division we may see something like a satirical reenactment of the Scholastic attempt to integrate two existing bodies of knowledge separately acquired, that of classical philosophy and that of Christian revelation. The Scholastics regarded their
God as the source of both knowledges, and since He was a God of truth, He could not
contradict himself, although He could speak in two distinct and very different voices.
Under their two great authorities, Aristotle the Philosopher and the Fathers of the Church,
the Scholastics strove to reconcile reason and faith along lines fundamentally similar to
those pursued by Blake, with faith being, of course, the final arbiter in all disputed
matters. Yet the outcome of Blake’s project is worlds apart from that of the Scholastics,
unless we invoke comparisons between him and a mystic like Eckhart (1250-1327), who,
as Rudolf Otto points out, can easily be proved “a thorough Scholastic” (185). But with
“the intellectual material which he snatches from the Schools,” Eckhart builds a system of
thought wholly “strange,” “bewildering,” even “magical” or “Gothic,” “fantastic rather
than abstract” (Otto 185), since its elements are, according to Otto,

non-rational, and their non-rationality is increased by contrast with the
austerity of the construction. An example of this is found in Eckhart’s
“modeless Godhead,” the “wheel revolving out of itself,” the “stream
flowing into itself,” “God flourishing and growing in the ground of the
soul,” Himself an abyss of wonder, bristling with paradox and
contradiction, which yet resolve and are fused together in the unity of one
great fundamental intuition, that burns and stirs in the soul of Eckhart like
the word of Jehovah in the bowels of Jeremiah.

His mysticism is quiveringly alive and of powerful vitality, and
therefore far removed from “Abstraction.” (186)

The parallels with the late eighteenth-century poet and painter and self-styled prophet are
obvious here: far removed from an Abstraction nonetheless dearly loved.¹

If for some philosophers (the Averroists, for example) the theological truths of
revelation as embodied in myths and parables are imperfect imaginative expressions
designed for the vulgar mind of authentic truths accessible only to philosophy, then
Blake’s reply is to allegorize Aristotelian metaphysics with a great measure of self-
mocking respect, turning the Philosopher’s ideas into mythic human figures in a tragically
solipsistic epic drama. (And seeing how he does this will reveal why Los laments that
“British Women were not Jealous when Greek & Roman were Jealous” [M10:15; E104].)
In allegorizing Aristotle, Blake argues implicitly that philosophical truths are imperfect
rational expressions designed for the learned of those more authentic inexpressible truths
accessible only in images and symbols, only to an enlightened imagination engaged in the
practise of religious art (see The Laocoön).

To interpret that art, we need to make one crucial distinction between Revelation
as sacred text (written by the hand of God, an authoritative Word to be obeyed), and
revelation as a private and subjective experience (not to say, however, non-objective: for
it involves the recognition of oneself as the Other). The first kind, I would say Blake
believes, is intended to engender faith in the believing soul that the second kind is
possible for him, that he too may have a direct and immediate understanding of God.

*   *   *

I have argued that Blake gives us three categories of mental thing: (1) One
General or Universal Form; (2) some broad and general principles; and (3) multitudes of
minute particulars or individual identities. And what all Blake’s minute particulars need
to be organized into is that One Universal Form, the Divine Vision of One Thought
incorporated in a coherent body of knowledge, a “human” body Blake identifies in his
Imagination with that of Jesus, as Jerusalem’s words exclaim: “Every one knows, we are
One Family! One Man blessed for ever” (J55:46; E205). We have also heard these
words describe their contractable and expandable connotations in relation to their double
denotation (as infinite multitudes of particular thoughts contained in one universal
thought): “We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses / We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one, / As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man / We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him” (J34:17-20; E180).

But this Jesus is an organized man-thought, his body an organic system with a dynamic principle (energy) of motion and rest. And if we want to “see” this Jesus, we must find him in his family of words, for Jesus is the Johannine Logos, the Word made human flesh. To repeat a key passage:

He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children
One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family, & in the midst
Jesus will appear; so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized & not as thou
O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine is a Disorganized
And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War

But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every
Particular is Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus.

(J91:18-23, 29-30; E251)

Therefore if we are to save Blake’s minute particulars from slavery and destruction, if we want to do good to his “children,” we must see them as a “family” of interrelated and deeply connected ideas and words, as living/thinking beings whose form and essence is the universal principle of Truth that organizes them into one coherent body of knowledge, a body articulated through the paradoxically warring collaboration of his Reason and Imagination.

But the cohesive substance holding this body together and preserving its “life” is the same as that which preserves the hierarchical relations among the universal, general, and particular: the Greek concept of Form or, alternatively, the Christian concept of the Logos. Blake’s “Only General and Universal Form” (J38:20; E185) is his First
Principle—and that form resides is his Intellect as an Absolute Thought. The rest, the broad and general principles, are secondary and merely organizational. Minute particulars, finally, constitute the matter of knowledge that requires organization into a living system before it can speak intelligibly.

According to the Proverb of Hell "One thought fills immensity" (MHH8; E36)—a terse but powerful Proverb, a "key" statement, a "flower" or "star"—the immensity of the "Universe stupendous" of "Mental forms" created by the Universal Form of the Divine Humanity is filled with particular images of itself: all human forms, all of the same substance or essence as itself—which is, of course, energy, the life and eternal delight of thought. One Thought is thus the first principle of all Blake’s particular thoughts; and since Blakean metaphysics is also, as is in Greek thought, the “first philosophy” or science of first principles, our search for this One Thought (or Divine Vision) ought to set us on the road to certain knowledge. As Witt explains,

three crucial features of Aristotle’s conception of knowledge are directly relevant to his investigation of being and substance: (i) the idea that knowledge is of principles and causes; (ii) the idea that wisdom, or the highest form of knowledge, requires a grasp of first principles and causes; and (iii) the idea that knowledge is systematic. The first feature amounts to the position that knowledge is explanatory. For Aristotle, to know something is to understand it, and to understand something is to grasp its principles or causes. The second point is that knowledge, since it is explanatory, necessitates a grasp of first principles and causes, because knowledge of what is explained by a principle requires an understanding of that principle. And that principle, in turn, is understood through another principle—and so on, until the first principles are reached. The third feature is a consequence of the first two. Knowledge, for Aristotle, does not come in discrete bits; rather, it consists of the grasp of a connected body of truths. Knowledge is explanatory, and, as we have seen, our grasp of any part of the system depends ultimately upon our grasp of the first principles. The phrase "body of knowledge" describes the systematic nature of Aristotelian epistēmē. (15)
But the organ of perception—that is, the intellectual principle—attempting to comprehend Blake’s body may vary. We may see the textual object rationally or imaginatively, grasping it with our abstract intellect or with our empirical imagination and its five figurative “senses.” If the body of knowledge we are looking at, this connected body of Blakean truths, is perceived by Reason, it will appear to us as One Abstract Thought or Universal Idea (or Form); if by the Imagination and its senses, it will look like a book full of humanized words.

Here again, for confirmation of the Blakean idea one may appeal to logic, which holds that the abstract object is the object considered apart from all the particularizing conditions with which it is really endowed when existing in the actual order of things . . . for to abstract mentally any object is precisely to consider apart—“separatim considerare”—that which the thing or object is, while laying aside the particular characteristics which give it this, that, or the other definite and determined individuality. Once an object is thus conceived in the abstract by the intellect, it is seen to be capable of being embodied or realized equally and indifferently in an indefinite multitude of individual instances: which is the same as saying that it becomes or is made universal by the consideration of the intellect. (Coffey 1:4)

Considering Blake’s Thought apart from the particularizing conditions with which it is really endowed as a thing existing in the actual order of things and which give it its definite and determined individuality, we perceive it as One Abstract Thought (or Rational Truth), void but infinite, a universal form also called, appropriately enough, “the Divine Humanity.” But this abstraction becomes “the Poetic Genius” or “the true Man” as it moves down the pyramidal hierarchy and proceeds to take on once again the definite and determined individuality from which it was originally abstracted. If “The Infinite alone
resides in Definite & Determinate Identity," then Infinite Truth must reside in the definite and determined individuality of an object (but a human one).

What we need to know is whether that object will be a particular minute particular or the "perfect Whole" formed from their organization. Probably it is both. For the perfect Whole, the Divine Vision itself, can be either a particular concrete thing, like a word or a book, or a universal abstract idea, an invisible thought, but one made definite and determinate by the body in which it must necessarily exist, a body that defines and identifies it by means of its labouring particulars. Outside that body, the universal idea is a dead abstraction, a negation of itself. In either case, dead or alive, particularized or universalized, it is only one object we perceive, as logic proposes:

Precisely the same realities which are apprehended by our senses as concrete, individual, determinate, and incommunicable, are apprehended by our intellect in a state in which they appear abstract, universal, indeterminate, and common or communicable, i.e. realizable equally in an indefinite multitude of individuals. In other words, our senses and our intellect attain to the same realities but in different ways. While our senses apprehend material things in the condition in which these really exist, i.e. as concrete, individual, separate from one another, changeable and changing in time and space, our intellect grasps a portion—greater or less—of the nature of these things, the portion common to larger or smaller groups of them, the common or class essences, the generic and specific essences of these things, and it conceives this common portion in the abstract, i.e. in a static, unchanging condition, apart from the influences to which it is submitted in the state in which it is actually found in individual material things. (Coffey 1:6-7)

Thus the one reality of Blake’s text, appearing to our senses as a changeable mass of material words, concrete, individual, separate from one another, can also be apprehended by our intellect as an abstract, static, unchanging, universal, eternal Thought, realizable equally in that indefinite multitude of individual words we behold when we contract our (and their) infinite senses.
But in Blake’s world, in contrast to the real one, the minute particular or concrete individual thing is not by nature “incommunicable”: it is, on the contrary, a word or other significant mark whose sole purpose is to communicate. Moreover, the material of those signs manifested in ink and paper has been shaped by an active intellect with an infinite desire to speak Truth. Still, all Blake’s nouns—even proper names, which normally point to only one particular object—refer to essences abstracted from sense-data. His nouns always refer to ideas, never to things or even, strictly speaking, concepts of things. He uses the word oak, for example, to refer not to a particular oak tree existing in time and space (which we could never see anyway, unless he took us by the hand and led us to the one he was talking of), nor even to the concept of a stationary thing with a woody trunk, branches, and green leaves. Rather, he uses oak to refer to a thought whose structure or function is in certain ways (the reader must imagine these) analogous to that of a real tree, or more exactly to the reader’s concept of an oak tree, already abstracted from all the oak trees he has seen. In this way, all Blake’s nouns (including proper names) refer to ideas of concepts, and are thus doubly abstract, each word occupied by universal or eternal form produced exclusively by his Spectre, or by our two reasoning powers together, and re-embodied by his Imagination in verbal material, in images from which our imaginations must extract the divinely analogical truth.

In one sensuously graphic passage, the Imagination (as Los) enters the bosom of Albion, his own personified Universal Form (of One Thought or Mind)—or one could say that Blake enters the heart of his own poem, which is the body of his darkened Intellect—to search out the abstractions that have tempted him to the sin of erroneous reasoning. What Los finds is that all his minute verbal particulars have been possessed by the Reasoning
Negative, turned by its threefold system into code words, the opaque “bricks” of its pyramidal structure:

Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision
Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions
Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves
Of despair & death, to search the tempters out, walking among
Albions rocks & precipices! caves of solitude & dark despair,
And saw every Minute Particular of Albion degraded & murdered
But saw not by whom; they were hidden within in the minute particulars
Of which they had possessed themselves; and there they take up
The articulations of a mans soul, and laughing throw it down
Into the frame, then knock it out upon the plank, & souls are bak’d
In bricks to build the pyramids of Heber & Terah. But Los
Searchd in vain: closd from the minutia he walkd, difficult.
He came down from Highgate thro Hackney & Holloway towards London
Till he came to old Stratford & thence to Stepney & the Isle
Of Leuthas Dogs, thence thro the narrows of the Rivers side
And saw every minute particular, the jewels of Albion, running down
The kennels of the streets & lanes as if they were abhorrd.
Every Universal Form, was become barren mountains of Moral
Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend into grains of sand:
And all the tendernesses of the soul cast forth as filth & mire,
Among the winding places of deep contemplation intricate . . .

(145:2-22; E194)

Here Los sees the minute particulars of Albion only as words, for Los can see only “the
concrete, individual thing, which is the object of mere sense perception or imagination.”

And that is because the Imagination, without its divided Spectre, cannot see “the abstract,
universal object, which is apprehended by thought proper” (Coffey 1:4). Closed within the
world of his senses, Los sees all the highest abstractions of the text, “Every Universal
Form,” as “barren mountains of Moral Virtue,” empty laws requiring virtuous obedience to
Reason (e.g., “Good is the passive that obeys Reason”). And because he cannot “see” the
rational ideas embodied in Albion’s minute particulars (they mean nothing to him: he will
not reason and compare), Los is “closd from the minutia,” words which, once “jewels” of
truth, appear to him now to be senseless, thus hardening into “grains of sand” (like opaque rocks, only smaller, even less significant). And the text gives us examples: the proper names Highgate, Hackney, and so on (although here, too, elemental truths appear: in high and gate and hack). Watching Albion’s minute particulars reify, we too see the articulations of his soul transform into the names of things we can perceive only with our senses as concrete, individual, determinate, but incommunicable—and hence impenetrable, dull, repulsive, without distinctive character, words that are like bricks, grains of sand, filth and mire. But without these “things” or nouns and all the other parts of speech appearing here, the Universal Form of Blake’s Thought would forever remain invisible to us, and we would be as Los is here, unable to see who possesses his words.

When Milton insists that “Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot / The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife / But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever” (M32:36-38; E132), the logician and philosopher would have to agree that, yes, particular, concrete, individual lambs and oaks as they exist in the state of nature, in time and space, are subject to death, whereas abstract lambs and oaks, which exist as ideas only in the generalizing intellect (if one is an Aristotelian realist) or in a separate eternal realm (if one is a Platonic idealist), are universals, unchanging and eternal forms. But in Blake, the minute particulars lamb and oak refer not to animals but to his own humanized words, the female portion of which can be annihilated, while the male eternal form (or simply, the thought) they embody cannot. For there is only one Thought, One General and Universal Form, sympathetically conceived by Blake’s affectionate heart as the “Divine Humanity,” and that Thought is the one identity that informs all its little-ones, the minute particulars. From their First Cause or First Principle, the
multitudes derive their identity, which is why the Universal Form of Thought "protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity" (J38:23; E185).

But what exactly is the identity of minute particulars as a class? As Jesus, the Imagination claims that all particulars are members of its own divine body, because "every / Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus" (J91:29-30; E251). Here we have two universal affirmatives, one half-buried: "All particulars are men" and "All particulars are divine members of the Imagination." If we treat these two statements as deductive premises, what conclusion can we draw? Only that some men are divine members—at least one, possibly all. But, as a particular conclusion, this is an indefinite. And since we must either "explore" indefinites or throw them into demonstrations in the fiery furnace, the benevolent reader (the "friend" who hesitates to murder the proposition) is compelled to rummage through the text for additional information, some definitive moment with the power to make its brother statement more definite.

In Milton we find some related rocky fragments alluding to how "Brotherhood is changd into a Curse & a Flattery / By Differences between Ideas, that Ideas themselves, (which are / The Divine Members) may be slain in offerings for sin" (M35:4-6; E135). The parenthetical remark (deceptive braces again) offers a possible premise: "Ideas are the divine members," convertible to "All divine members are ideas." Now, if some men are divine members, and all divine members are ideas, then some men are ideas—or thoughts, as we have been assuming all along (and specifically thoughts of the Imagination, the faculty that speaks and thinks). But still we are stuck with an indefinite particular. Could some men possibly be all men? We need to go a bit further.
I have been assuming all along (and quite reasonably, I think: some assumptions will get us into heaven) that Blake is using the terms *imagination* and *poetic genius* synonymously: they refer to the self-same or identical entity. And since “The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (ARO E2), the Imagination (calling itself “Jesus”) is the True One Man, the One true Idea who is both the universal source and incorporated form of *all* particular “men,” who are its “divine members,” which are ideas. But we have just heard that there are differences between ideas (which fact changes brotherhood into a curse and flattery), and so there must be differences between “men.” No doubt they contradict each other, because whatever “men” there may be who are not divine members of the Imagination (if there are any) must be non-imaginative “men.” And since the Negation of the Imagination is Reason, non-imaginative “men” must be rational “men.” But are rational “men” ideas also? Knowing that *some* men are ideas, can we be certain that *all* men are ideas?

We do know that both truths and errors are “men.” Blake says that the combats of truth and error “are not only Universal but Particular. Each are Personified There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [Actor] Agent that is it is a Man. There is not a Truth but it has also a Man” (VLJ E563). Let me recapitulate the chain argument thus far:

- All particulars are men.
- All particulars are divine members of the Imagination.
- All divine members are ideas.
- Some men are ideas.
- All truths are both universals and particular men.
- All errors are both universals and particular men.

But we also know that an error is an illusion created to be burned up or cast off: errors are also mental things. So we have true mental things and false mental things, true ideas and
erroneous ideas. And since errors are also “men,” all men must be ideas, but only some of them are imaginative and only some of them are true. Are imaginative ideas, then, necessarily true and rational ones necessarily erroneous? Apparently so, because “Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists” (VLJ E554); and “Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation” (VLJ E563); and “Error is Created Truth is Eternal” (VLJ E565): Imagination represents Eternal = Existence = Truth. Only imaginative ideas are true, because “All Things Exist in the Human Imagination” (J69:25; E223); “Cities / Are Men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers & Mount[a]ins / Are also Men; every thing is Human, mighty! sublime!” (J34:46-48; E180).

At last we have the definite universal we require: if every thing that exists is human, every thing that exists is a man. And since all errors (existing only as illusions fabricated by fallacious reasoning) are men also, everything, existing or not, is a man, an idea. With everything divided into two universal classes, Imaginative Existence and Rational Non-Existence, there is nothing left to account for: we have reached the root of dualism.

While the class of existing things is identified with true ideas or True Thought, the class of non-existent things belongs to No-Thought, the Negation of Thought, Death, “the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens / Of Death” (J98:33-34; E258), or the state of Non-Existence, which Blake often refers to as just a “state”:

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination
The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
But their Forms Eternal Exist, for-Ever. Amen Hallelujah

(M32:32-38; E132)
Any mental experience—affections, memories, rational ideas—divided from subjective imagination does not exist. Any subjective experience, turned into an objective thing, is a self-created error. But there is a difference here: Reason is not (like memory) a state always. Rational ideas may be created errors, but they can be annihilated and recreated and annihilated again—apparently the cycle is endless, and so eternal, unless, perhaps, the new Ratio created from the annihilation of the old erroneous Reason is eternal and true (like the fire “That end[s] in endless Strife” [FS E262]). Imaginative ideas or forms, on the other hand, exist eternally. So if particular oaks and lambs are creations subject to annihilation and yet their forms are not, they must be double: half-rational idea, half-imaginative idea.

Or perhaps the rational abstract idea of the oak or lamb is annihilated by the Imagination (reasoning negatively: as a destructive ax or knife) in order to make the word over into an imaginative image of infinite Truth. But because only Reason can abstract the idea of Truth from the subjective experience of it, and because that abstraction (a universal form) is required to turn the word into an imaginative image of Truth, the inner space of the words oak and lamb must be occupied by a rational idea: Satan now vibrates in the immensity of the female space, whose masculine portion is now death. The same process of abstraction that first murders the particular image now resurrects it as an image of Truth.

What distinguishes the Imagination’s “Form Eternal” from Reason’s universal abstract idea? Nothing. For on the inside, looking at the concept to which the particular word oak or lamb refers, we see a double form: the idea of Imagination or the idea of Reason. Either way the minute particular is a code word, a living “emanation” or a dead “rock,” depending on its reader’s point of view.
The words *reason* and *imagination* are themselves minute particulars, and the ideas they embody must be universal or eternal forms. Yet the text insists there is only one "General and Universal Form," the idea of Imagination as the "Divine Humanity." The other general form, the "swelled and bloated" one which is "repugnant" to the Imagination, is Reason—and, separated from Imagination (who keeps trying to change it), it becomes an evil non-existent murderer of particulars. The Divine Humanity, on the contrary, protects minute particulars, every one in their own *identity*. The "eternal forms" of minute particulars like *oak* and *lamb* are therefore also "individual identities," which we must distinguish from non-existent "states": "Distinguish therefore States from individuals in those States. / States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease" (M32:22-23; E132). And they are individual identities precisely because the Universal Form (Divine Humanity) is immanent in them as their first cause and principle, because they are "divine members" of it. So Form (or Thought) may be either one or many, either the "Only General and Universal Form" or the many particular forms that emanate from it, which is why "In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates / Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision / And the Light is his Garment" (J54:1-3; E203; my emphasis). The syntactical confusion here between the neuter particular and male universal is deliberate, underscoring as it does the idea of One Universal Form of Thought, the Divine Vision itself, immanent in and yet transcendent to its many particular thoughts, which in themselves (as bare words) would have no identity and hence fall, like the lamb and oak, by the knife of abstract reasoning. Like all universals, the Divine Vision has the power to multiply itself into a multitude of individual forms which partake of its essence and thus its identity. Moreover, because form is essence or substance, the multiplication of the One
Universal Form into many particular forms of itself gives each particular an *identity* in the sense of “essential sameness; oneness” (OED).

To be a particular form of the One Form is thus to be a particular one, an individual identity. And each of those ones (“men”) will share the prerogatives of its one source (the true “Man”)—its ability to emanate light, for example. Defined thus, each individual thought embodied in a particular word is an eternal form that exists forever, protected in its identity by the Universal Form from which it emanates—and that form, whether a particular “man” or a universal “Genius,” is Thought. Only when the eternal form is separated by abstract Reasoning from its peculiar manifestation in a particular word and forgotten or ignored will the particular word “die,” the oak cut down by the ax, the lamb felled by the knife. In short, we murder Blake’s text when, in our analysis of it and commentary on it, we fail to see the Form of Thought in every word—and keep it there. For if Blake’s infinite Thought were not present (and perceptible to Reason) in all his particulars (in all things), they would all—particular “men” and universal “Man”—appear alone in their distinct “selfhoods,” empty words created to be annihilated. Thus when the individual William Blake abstracts the idea of Divine Humanity from his own person,

The Man is himself become
A piteous example of oblivion. To teach the Sons
Of Eden, that however great and glorious; however loving
And merciful the Individuality; however high
Our palaces and cities, and however fruitful are our fields
In Selfhood, we are nothing: but fade away in mornings breath.

(J40:8-13; E187)

The Imagination’s ideas are individual identities we must distinguish from the self-centered or “selfish” states in which they may be found: states of affection, love, memory, or reason—but only *negative* reason. For when Reason works alongside the Imagination to
abstract the thought of Thought needed to keep the latter's images alive. Reason as the 
destructive creator of erroneous ideas—indeed, the whole realm of the Selfhood's Non- 
Existence—is regenerated:

... & the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens 
Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent varying 
According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character 
Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or 
Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time & Space 
Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary & they walked 
To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen 
And seeing: according to fitness & order. 

(J98:33-40; E258)

The idea of the Imagination itself is a minute particular, an individual identity, a 
“man.” And “Every Mans Wisdom,” as we know, “is peculiar to his own Individ[u]ality” 
(M4:8; E98). But the Imagination enters the state of reasoning when it becomes divided 
from itself, which it does by abstracting an idea or image of itself from its body. At that 
moment it ceases to be an individual identity or minute particular: it becomes instead a 
universal abstraction, the Divine Humanity—and hence a Reasoning Negative. This is 
dangerous, because as Los informs us by way of a definite statement (a universal negative), 
no individual idea ought to assume universality:

Los cries: No Individual ought to appropriate to Himself 
Or to his Emanation, any of the Universal Characteristics 
Of David or of Eve, of the Woman, or of the Lord. 
Of Reuben or of Benjamin, of Joseph or Judah or Levi 
Those who dare appropriate to themselves Universal Attributes 
Are the Blasphemous Selfhoods & must be broken asunder 

(J90:28-33; E250)

Los is purposely confusing our spectres here, attributing universal characteristics to 
individuals—David, Reuben, Benjamin, Joseph, Judah, Levi—in the context of a warning 
to all individuals) not to do that very thing. The irony is self-evident. Only “the Lord”
and "the Woman" are appropriate titles for universal forms. The rest of the names (David, Eve, Reuben, Benjamin, Joseph, Judah, Levi) are proper, referring to particular individuals. But they may also be read more imaginatively as biblical characters, individuals who have become over the course of time mythic figures, or what in his Descriptive Catalogue Blake calls characters that "for ever remain unaltered, and consequently . . . are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life" (DC E532-33):

Visions of these eternal principles or characters of human life appear to poets, in all ages; the Grecian gods were the ancient Cherubim of Phoenicia. . . . These Gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which, when erected into gods, become destructive to humanity. They ought to be the servants, and not the masters of man, or of society. They ought to be made to sacrifice to Man, and not man compelled to sacrifice to them; for when separated from man or humanity, who is Jesus the Saviour, the vine of eternity, they are thieves and rebels, they are destroyers. (DC E536)

All the proper names Los lists, then, may be read as divine names of eternal attributes—"David" is a poet and wise king, "Eve" is an originating word tempted by knowledge of good and evil, and so on—which, as divine members of the Imagination's body of Thought, are eternal principles directly affiliated to the Universal Form. As such, they share its characteristics or attributes, which are not, however, something the particular word possesses uniquely, each one unto itself. To possess them in this way would be a false appropriation of something not belonging to the particular idea alone, in its "selfhood." Rather, as the Universal Form tells its particulars in the passage below, they share its essence and universal attributes because (a form being a principle) it is their Principle, immanent in and yet transcendent to them, both the source of their bodies and the one universal body of which they are all members:
I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;  
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:  
Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil; Not seeking recompense!  
Ye are my members . . .

(J4:18-21; E146)

Again, logic confirms the thrust of Los's moral-metaphysical argument that individuals ought not to appropriate universal attributes. As Coffey explains,

[w]hen . . . I interpret any individual object of sense experience by attributing to it the object of some universal idea—when, for example, I say “John is a man”—I mean to assert that the object of my universal idea, the entity, essence or nature represented by it (e.g. human nature) is embodied in, and constitutes (partially, at least), the individual sense object (John). I do not mean to assert that the object of my universal idea exists in the individual sense object in the same way in which the former is apprehended by my mind. If I did, my statement that “John is a man” would be false—and so would all statements asserting universal attributes about individual things. (Coffey 1:7)

The statement “John is a man” does not assert that John is universal human nature, but rather that the universal form of human nature is embodied in John. Similarly, when Los asserts, “I am a Living Man” (J17:16; E161), he does not mean to appropriate to himself alone the universal attributes of Thought, but only to maintain that the nature or essence of Thought—Energy, “the only life”—is embodied in and constitutes the individual word “Los” (his name being the only object of our senses). The interpretative difficulty, of course, is that Los is not a whole flesh-and-blood man but a partial and divided thought or mind who has tried in vain to separate himself from certain universal attributes he mistakenly considers his moral failings, negations of his better and creative self, and to identify them all with his Reasoning Power: “Thou art my Pride & Self-righteousness,” he admonishes his Spectre; “I have found thee out: / Thou art reveal'd before me in all thy magnitude & power / Thy Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity must be cut in sunder!”
Los’s own moral failings—his pretence to intellectual purity, the proud and self-righteous refusal to engage in the dirty machinations of sexual reasoning (“I will not Reason & Compare”)—he attributes entirely to his Spectre. If, ignoring the swift ironic reversal here, we can justly call Los’s laying of blame an appropriation of universal characteristics or attributes on the part of his Spectre, then (as Los declares at J90:28) that Spectre is indeed a “Blasphemous Selfhood” who must be “broken asunder” or (as Los says here) “cut in sunder,” “circumcised”—his excesses cut off, his errors eliminated, and his being reduced to its definite and determinate identity as an individual (which the oft-repeated definition of the Spectre will help us do).

But then, we must ask, how is it that Blake’s individual Imagination can so freely call itself “the Divine Humanity”? That, surely, constitutes a prodigious appropriation of a universal. If the Bard in Milton correctly identifies the Imagination for us (and he claims to: he knows what he says is truth), then that Imagination obviously thinks of itself as the One Universal Form, the abstract Principle of “Human Existence,” thus erecting itself (as Blake says in his Descriptive Cataogue) into a God “destructive to humanity” by inspiring idolatry, the one-sided worship of the Creative Principle at the expense of its destructive Contrary, blinding its worshippers to the real order of temporal dualism:

I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing

According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen
(M13:51, 14:1-3; E107-108)

The essential quality (for that is what both an attribute and a characteristic are) of the Universal Form of human nature is, according to the speaking Imagination,
specifically imaginative thought, for "The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself" (M32:32; E132), and "the Human Imagination . . . is the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally" (M32:19-20; E132). Imaginative thought is true, the only place where Thought can think truly. Its minute particulars, as members of its body, are all imaginative ideas—and all imaginative ideas are "men." So imaginative thought is the essence that all forms, the one universal and its many particulars, have in common. "David" or "Reuben" or "Benjamin" are thus names of particular ideas personified (given human form) by the Imagination, which bestows on each particular in blessing the universal attributes of its own Divine Humanity. But when we call the particular idea named "David" a "man/thought," we do not mean that he in himself, in his "selfhood," is to be understood as the One True Man/Thought whose universal attributes he embodies. The divine name David is a particular object of our senses, and a member of the class "Poetic Genius." But the true Man, the Poetic Genius itself in its universal form, can only ever be the object of our thought.

So when the Imagination speaks, generating its immense universe of minute particulars, it falsely appropriates universal attributes by declaring itself God, Jesus, the Divine Body, the One True Man, the Absolute Principle of Eternal Truth, Reality, and all Existence. And it does so precisely because it speaks, for speech would be virtually impossible if the speaker were restricted to the use of signs whose signifiers referred exclusively to particular objects. Without referring to universal concepts (only proper names escape this fate), one's tongue would literally cleave, as Milton says, to the empirical dust:
O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,
Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd
Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord
Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity.

(M20:15-18; E114)

And so, one cannot speak without reasoning, without abstracting universal concepts from particular objects. Words can never be “pure” or “chaste,” unpolluted by the sick and dirty Reasoning Negative, particularly if the speaker’s intention is to refer not to the empirical world but to those suprasensible realities of the human spirit. If a female word who harbours an abstract idea is a “harlot,” we must understand that “Every Harlot was once a Virgin: every Criminal an Infant Love!” (J61:52; E212). As the word Mary says in her appeal to the Abstract Divine Humanity itself, “If I were Pure I should never / Have known Thee; If I were Unpolluted I should never have / Glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great Salvation” (J61:44-46; E212). It was only “When the Druids demanded Chastity from Woman [that] all was lost,” for “How can the Female be Chaste O thou stupid Druid” (J63:25-26; E214). The sin of reasoning is inseparable from the sin of speaking of the Ineffable, a sin that will be forgiven by that “God of Mercy,” the Intellect of “Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion” (J61:43-44; E212).

Simply to speak, then, is to “appropriate universality”:

For Los said: When the Individual appropriates Universality
He divides into Male & Female: & when the Male & Female,
Appropriate Individuality, they become an Eternal Death.
Hermaphroditic worshippers of a God of cruelty & law!
Your Slaves & Captives; you compell to worship a God of Mercy.
These are the Demonstrations of Los, & the blows of my mighty Hammer

(J90:52-57; E250)

In the real order of things, Blake’s Imagination is a particular, an “individual identity,” and individual identities are not supposed to “change or cease”: they are eternal, true. But
an individual identity can enter the state of non-existence—and Reason is the governor of that state. Therefore when the Imagination speaks, entering the state of Reason, it divides into (active) male and (passive) female principles: a male Thought ("Adam") that becomes the father of a multitude of particular thoughts, and a female Word ("Eve") that becomes the mother of their verbal counterparts. And when this Thought and Word appropriate individuality—that is, when they divide into separate beings, at war with each other—the text they generate becomes an "Eternal Death," the site of endless reasoning, given over to worshippers of the Reasoning Negative, the "God of cruelty & law." As the Reasoning Negative's law forbids speaking, it punishes transgressors—all the Imagination's indefinite minute particulars—with "death," throwing them into its furnaces of affliction (and illuminating beryll). Worshippers of the Reasoning Negative are, like their God, "hermaphroditic," practitioners of the art of negating words and ideas by speaking in code. And, ironically, they compel their "slaves" and "captives"—the victims of their code: their own words and ideas, but also their readers—to worship the Imagination, a "God of Mercy" (because it does not reason and compare) as the only General and Universal Form (Divine Humanity). If slaves and captives wish to be released from their mind-forged manacles, they must, it seems, break logical laws and think imaginatively. But if they worship only the Imagination, they will end up back where they started: idolizing an abstraction. Indeed, Blake's merciful Imagination is compelled to become a Rational God of cruelty and law by its own desire to speak, appropriating universality and dividing into male and female forms, for without Reason the Imagination would be inarticulate, unintelligible, its voice prevented from reaching its slaves and captives—and that, clearly, would make mercy towards them impossible.
No particular in Blake is more minute and no identity more individual than the referent of a proper name. The error entailed by the individual’s appropriation of universality is therefore at its greatest and most delusive when a proper name seeks to represent the One Universal Form:

in Selfhood Hand & Hyle & Bowen & Skofeld appropriate
The Divine Names: seeking to Vegetate the Divine Vision
In a corporeal & every dying Vegetation & Corruption
Mingling with Luvah in One. they become One Great Satan
(J90:40-43; E250)

But is the appropriation described here essentially—not morally but essentially—different from the one implicit in the Imagination’s claim that “Every one knows, we are One Family! One Man blessed for ever,” and “that One Man / We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him”? Surely, because it is merely an individual identity, the Imagination’s appropriation of divine names like Jesus or God amounts to the sin of blasphemy. And it must become guilty of this sin the moment it speaks, creating images of Truth without reasoning. For in negating Reason, erring outside its bound, the Imagination also “vegetates” (contradicts its true self: the whole Intellect) and corrupts its Divine Vision in the corporeal form of its text, no matter what its intention, even though it speaks from its “heart,” its love (Luvah) of Truth. The moment the Imagination, calling itself “Jesus,” speaks, it acts on its Female Will, gives birth to a text, of which it claims to be “God,” transgresses the bound of Reason and Truth, and becomes the negatively reasoning “Satan” or a “vegetated Christ”—which is fortunate, because it will then have the power to negate its own errors:

Those who dare appropriate to themselves Universal Attributes
Are the Blasphemous Selfhoods & must be broken asunder
A Vegetated Christ & a Virgin Eve, are the Hermaphroditic
Blasphemy, by his Maternal Birth he is that Evil-One
And his Maternal Humanity must be put off Eternally
Lest the Sexual Generation swallow up Regeneration
Come Lord Jesus take on thee the Satanic Body of Holiness
(J90:32-38; E250)

As the Imagination’s errors all reduce to sins against Reason and speech (the Logos: Christ: himself), we must “put off his maternal humanity” because “by his maternal birth he is that Evil-One”: all the pronouns slyly refer back to either the male half of the “Hermaphroditic Blasphemy” or the “Vegetated Christ,” who are really the same thing: the negative reasonings of the Imagination manifested in a self-contradictory text. We are instructed to “break asunder” or divide the rational form of the text, its “maternal” verbal expression, from the imaginative Thought at its center. For the Imagination’s “maternal humanity,” this textual “Eve” who remains a virgin if we shrink from exploring her, appears to us in the delusive form of the blasphemy itself, a coded text in which words are violated and holy names profaned the Holy Reasoning Power of Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic. The regeneration of this text is possible, but only if we allow the Imagination (Jesus) to reason negatively (become Satan) and compelling all thoughts to remain within its bound:

Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity.
Compell’d others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission
Being call’d God: setting himself above all that is called God.
And all the Spectres of the Dead calling themselves Sons of God
In his Synagogues worship Satan under the Unutterable Name
(M11:10-14; E104)

The “unutterable name,” the most universal of all divine names (like Yahweh or the Tetragrammaton), is the one the Reasoning Negative appropriates here. The name is to
be had just for the calling, and the Imagination has, unbeknownst to us, already taken it on.

But is a name an attribute, an essential and permanent quality of something, or just an accident, "a property or quality not essential to our conception of a substance; an attribute" (OED)? Since Blake himself puts names in the class of accidents—"Names alter, things never alter" (DC E533), and "Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay" (DC E532)—it could be argued that the appropriation of a divine name is the appropriation of a mere accident, not of a universal attribute. But then Milton recounts how "Accident being formed / Into Substance & Principle, by the cruelties of Demonstration / It [the text or its Thought or the accident?] became Opake & Indefinite" (M29:35-36; E128). If naming is an accident, then by the cruelties of Blake's demonstrative reasonings—the axioms he lays down for us to follow—naming becomes the very substance and principle of the work, which thus blossoms into an allegory of, or a philosophical meditation on, the poet's own blasphemous misappropriation of divine names and the subsequent fall of his Truth into opaque and indefinite "rocky fragments."

When Reason—originally one of the two contrary qualities of the substantial Universal Form ("the Two Contraries . . . called Qualities, with which / Every Substance is clothed") and therefore one of its attributes—abstracts itself from that universal Mind or Intellect (and from its other attribute, Imagination), it becomes not a "man" but the Spectre of Man, an abstract universal; not an individual identity, but a state individuals may enter into. Reason, in other words, appropriates the universality that properly belongs only to Substance, to the Intellect with its two contrary qualities, the true Mind lodged within the definite and determinate identity of a particular individual—whose
proper name is William Blake. It is thus as the Spectre of himself that Blake’s Reason compels all his words and their readers to obey his moral principles “Of Good & Evil: Virtue & Vice” (KG E268):

He created Seven deadly Sins drawing out his infernal scroll,
Of Moral laws and cruel punishments upon the clouds of Jehovah
To pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth
With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease
Punishments & deaths musterd & number’d; Saying I am God alone
There is no other! let all obey my principles of moral individuality
I have brought them from the uppermost innermost recesses
Of my Eternal Mind . . .

(M9:21-28; E103)

This is pure black humour: Blake’s Reason compelling his readers and all wayward thoughts (his and theirs) to obey the moral principles of his text, brought from, derived from, his unique identity, upon the threat of punishment by “death” (more reasoning).

Perverting the “Divine voice” of his Imagination, Blake here again has his Reason appropriate universality by assuming the name of God—making itself a god by calling itself “God”—in order to rule as Absolute Principle by laws derived from its own identity, that is, by strictly rational laws.

The principle of identity, one of logic’s three “Laws of Thought” or “First Principles of Thought” (the other two being the laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle) which are “absolutely primary and self-evident, springing directly from our very notion of being or reality” (Coffey 1:25), “is simply the self-evident truth that Everything is identical with itself; Everything is its own nature” (Coffey 1:23), or that “Everything is what it is: Whatever is, is: Once true always true: Truth is at all times true: Truth must be ever in conformity with itself” (Coffey 1:24, emphasis removed). This principle
is involved in every judgment—more directly in every affirmative judgment—and demands that throughout every thought-process the objects represented by our concepts and expressed by our terms remain identical with themselves. It thus expresses the unambiguity of the judgment and the immutable character of truth. It does not give us any positive information about a thing, beyond what we possess by thinking of the thing. But we cannot think definitely about anything without mentally marking it off from all that is not itself. . . . But identity is more than unity. We cannot conceive identity unless we conceive diversity: and what the principle really expresses is identity amid diversity. (Coffey 1:23)

Just as Blake imaginatively violates the law of non-contradiction (by becoming, as we saw in Chapter 5, a vegetable) and the law of the excluded middle (by excluding the Reasoning Negative that stands between human end terms Reason and Imagination from the realm of existence), he violates the principle of identity as well—and repeatedly. We cannot be certain, for example, whether the term reasoning negative refers to Blake’s Imagination or his Reason or both: it is not clearly fixed. And so the object represented by the concept and expressed by the term cannot remain identical with itself—or not for long. It keeps transforming itself by means of its objecting power from one “thing” into another, as though it were trying to achieve identity amid a self-generated diversity. Besides, the Reasoning Negative is the Negation; and the Negation does not exist: in what sense, then, can a non-existent thing remain identical with itself? Perhaps it can, but not if its non-existence is continually expressed in positive terms (like despair or death). Or perhaps it is the function of the Reasoning Negative to establish the identity of the positive term—namely, the Contrary—by representing all that is marked off as not-itself: the not-Contrary.

Thus one can discern amid Blake’s diverse particular forms two individual identities, Imagination and Reason, defined as contrary to each other but behaving as
though they were contradictories, each one all that the other is not. The Imagination is consistently identified with Existence, with the Positive, with Life; and Reason with Non-Existence, the Negative, and Death. Ultimately it is more useful, if not accurate, to conceive of them as material rather than formal contradictories, terms that are “mutually exclusive in their connotation and collectively exhaustive in their denotation” (Coffey 1:64, emphasis removed):

Material contradiction can be discovered only by an examination of facts. The two terms themselves do not reveal it in their form. Both have positive connotations and stand on equal and independent footings. They always possess a certain amount of connotation in common—that portion, namely, which indicates their common sphere of denotation. In addition to this, each includes an attribute (or group of attributes) peculiar to itself and such that every individual denoted by the terms must possess one or other of these attributes (or groups) while no individual can possess both. (Coffey 1:64-65)

From Los’s statement that “Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality” (M4:8; E98), we may infer that the wisdom of the imaginative mind is peculiar to itself as an individual, and likewise with the rational mind. But the root meaning of individual is “not capable of being divided,” and Blake’s misspelling of the word as individuality (or perhaps individuality) surely emphasizes that original sense (the obsolete indivisible means “not dividable”). But if indivisibility is an attribute of God as the Universal Form of One Thought or Intellect, the division of Reason and Imagination into separate individuals must be a false appropriation of universality, a negation of Thought’s true nature, and its self-identity, along with the logical law that “Truth must be ever in conformity with itself” (for the One Thought is Truth, the “true Man”). Once they have become false individuals, the two Contraries become material contradictories—for they possess a certain amount of connotation in common, namely, their common sphere of denotation: both are thoughts or
intellectual faculties—each of which possesses an attribute peculiar to itself, imaginativeness on the one hand and rationality on the other. And their mutual contradiction is expressed in their struggle over Truth, two particulars vying for the universal status of the Intellect and thus for sole dominion over the text, to be God of all its particulars, so that each may tell Truth in its own peculiar way, according to the wisdom it possesses (which in Reason's case is a not-telling). In short, instead of remaining contrary intellectual qualities or attributes (which is what they originally are), Reason and Imagination become falsely divided individual identities appropriating universality, each one trying to win the reader over to its “camp” or point of view.

But the soldier who fights for Truth calls his enemy his brother: the Imagination that fights for Truth calls Reason not an enemy Negation but a brother Contrary, because only the Imagination (as Los, our trustworthy narrator) seems to realize that for the sake of human truth, for the sake of the limited mind of the envious reader who wants to know what Blake knows, it cannot “cease from Mental Fight” (M1:13; E95) against the cold indifference of a Reason convinced that all is well and as it should be, that one cannot change the mind that will not change itself. Or perhaps that, too, is the other way around.

In Blake's world, the false opposition of Reason and Imagination is thus true friendship. But in logic, opposition refers to “the relation, in respect of quantity and quality, between any two propositions which have the same subject and predicate; or, the relation between two propositions identical in matter and different in form” (Coffey 1:219; emphasis removed). Blake's Reason and Imagination, too, are identical in matter (insofar as their matter is their substance: thought) but different in form. We have already examined how Blake conceptualizes both the quality and quantity of his Thought: its affirmative (or
positive) and negative qualities are its “life” and “death”; and its two quantities are also positive (the logical quantifier “all” translates here into “Enough! or Too much”; but “some” implies the need for “More! More!” because it is less than “All”) and negative (“none” or “want”). Now we shall see how, in this intellectual battle where false opposition must be true friendship, Blake’s Imagination turns the logical opposition of propositions into living human forms.

Trying to imagine Blake’s two abstracted Contraries as categorical statements, we might think of them as the universal contraries “All S is P” and “No S is P.” But then, from the perspective of truth, one would have to negate the other because both cannot be true (though both may be false). It is kinder, then, to think of them as particular contraries, the subcontraries “Some S are P” and “Some S are not P,” both of which may be true (and here, fortunately, both cannot be false). This manner of conceiving them, this place in our minds where we demote Reason and Imagination from absolute universal truths to relative or particular truths, is code-named Beulah, that familiar place where the Contraries are reconciled in one equally true Reasoning Negative: “There is a place where Contrarieties are equally True / This place is called Beulah, It is a pleasant lovely Shadow / Where no dispute can come” (M30:1-3; E129). So Beulah is located not in the “above,” at the top of the Square of Opposition where we find universals, but in the below, at the bottom of it, where particular categoricals are: “Beneath the bottoms of the Graves, which is Earths central joint, / There is a place where Contrarieties are equally true” (J48:13-14; E196). We must not think that, for example, “All ideas are imaginative” in Blake, or that “No ideas are rational,” but rather that “Some ideas are imaginative” and “Some ideas are not imaginative” because they are rational (Reason and Imagination being material
contradictories). There is only one universal truth in Blake: "Everything is an idea," a form of Thought. And it is this truth, the truth that brings Negations back from Eternal Death, for which Imagination fights when it declares that Negations (non-thoughts) do not exist in its text.

However wrong or in error the Imagination may be when it appropriates universality and declares itself God, it is not wrong to fight for its status as a particular Contrary, because if it ceased to do so, Reason would be victorious, the text would become wholly philosophical, and poetry would die. But to correct its error, the Imagination must humble itself and accept its particularity, which means that, as "Some $S$ are $P$," as the possessor of only some of the text's ideas, it is an indefinite human proposition. As such, the Imagination must submit to demonstration in the furnaces of affliction, from which it may not emerge alive. Furthermore, a portion of the text must be sacrificed to Reason, and that portion will be its underlying form or structure. Reason must be compelled (in those same furnaces) to exercise its formal powers in the organization of the Imagination's minute particulars, which it can do in perfect silence, without speaking.

Here an aggregate of particulars—or "combination of individuals"—speaks for itself:

We are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals
We were Angels of the Divine Presence: & were Druids in Annandale
Compelld to combine into Form by Satan, the Spectre of Albion,
Who made himself a God &, destroyed the Human Form Divine.
But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human Form
Because we were combind in Freedom & holy Brotherhood
While those combind by Satans Tyranny first in the blood of War
And Sacrifice &, next, in Chains of imprisonment: are Shapeless Rocks
Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Bredth & Hight
Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition
In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against
Its own Qualities, which are Servants of Humanity, not Gods or Lords.

Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States.
States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease . . .

(M32:10-23; E131-32)

This especially rocky passage tells us that Thought lives eternally (or thinks truly) in the

Divine Vision of the Imagination. But the speakers are “states” who were once

“individuals,” and their history of psychic events implies that individual thoughts must enter
the state of Reason to undergo a period of negative reasoning (hence “Death is for a period”
[J48:17; E196]). Accordingly, they describe the division of one original “we” into two

classes of individual thoughts, combined into two contrary states: good “Angels of the

Divine Presence” (positive reasoners) and evil “Druids in Annandale” (negative reasoners).

But one or both of these aggregate states also appears to be a “Form” combined by Satan,

the Reasoning Negative, who has (we know) itself assumed a universal form. Thus making

itself a God, the Reasoning Negative destroys the “Human Form Divine” belonging to the

Imagination—which is now an abstract universal form itself (the “Divine Humanity” of line

14)—by compelling both the Angel individuals and the Druid individuals or just the latter
to combine in classes, to “combine into Form.” But the Imagination “gave us”—now a

group different from the original “we”? for we can’t identify the plural speakers except as

states who were once individuals—a human form anyway (apparently the Human Form

cannot be destroyed), because (what is coming is a reason) “we” were combined in freedom

and brotherhood (not by compulsion or arbitrarily but by ties of loving relation). But

combined by whom: Reason/Satan or Imagination/Divine Humanity? Presumably the

latter, because those combined by Satan are combined “first” in the blood of war and

sacrifice and “next” in chains of imprisonment. So Satan combines its individual thoughts
into two groups? Or is this a chronological distinction: he combines the same group twice?

In any case, Satan’s combinations collapse into one class of “Shapeless Rocks,” opaque, obscure, indefinite forms, marked by only the abstract outlines of form: length, breadth, and heighth. How many combinations of individuals do we have, then: one “we,” two “we”’s (angels and druids), one satanic form, one human form, two satanic forms, or one human and one satanic? Or are there three: one human and one satanic who were originally one “we,” one unified body of individual thoughts, one universal form? If so, would that be a satanic or human one? In any event, the shapeless rocks or class of rational individuals call the Imagination’s idea of One Eternal Thought madness and blasphemy, against that Thought’s own qualities, which we know are Imagination and Reason, and which ought to be the mutual particular servants of Thought, not two contending universal Gods or Lords.

So we must distinguish the individual thought from the class of thought or “state” it is in, for a thought can change classes (from positive to negative), but it remains a thought, a member of the human body of the One Thought conceived by the Imagination, which insists that it is not a state: “The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself” (M32:32; E132).

In Platonic philosophy an idea is “a supposed eternally existing pattern or archetype of any class of things, of which the individual things in that class are imperfect copies, and from which they derive their existence” (OED). Blake’s “Divine Members” or minute particulars are such ideas, more or less imperfect copies of his original One Thought. But they are also Aristotelian composite forms, enmattered ideas: they exist in a body of thought, and their abstraction from that body kills them. But the matter of this body—its words—are in themselves unintelligible. Working by not divine but parodic analogy here,
Blake identifies the idea of language as material with the Greek notion of matter (*hyle*). And as Aristotle says, matter is “unknowable in itself” (1036a9); it “provides [only] the brute particularity of an object: it can be perceived, but not understood” (Lear 27).

Analogously, looking at Blake’s physical book lying on a table, or looking at his words without reading them, we perceive the matter of language without understanding it: we see its material form, but not its spiritual Form, its Principle. And so it appears closed to us: “No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation / A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision” (M24:37-38; E120), where “affections” are the words Blake loves.

While matter is, for Aristotle, the underlying subject of properties, it “lacks ontological independence and definiteness” (Lear 280), and so is “indefinite, lacking order” (Lear 20). Form makes matter intelligible, knowable, and definite by organizing it according to certain principles, and is thus, in the case of living organisms, the internal principle of the individual, its formal cause. In Blake, too, a word’s intelligibility is owing to its form, the unannihilable “eternal form” that the word, as an individual *oak* or *lamb*, embodies. The eternal form of the living /thinking *oak* or *lamb* is also its internal principle, a particular manifestation of the Principle of principles, the Universal Form of the Divine Vision (or Thought). And because “In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates / Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision / And the Light is his Garment,” every intelligible word is so in its own peculiar way: it has its own “light,” its own sense. Unintelligible words, by contrast, do not exist in Great Eternity: they do not exist at all, except as meaningless lumps of matter that deceive their unwary victims.

If the essence of Blake’s Thought is energy, its eternal form has to be the *logos* of that essence: that which instantiates the order, proportion, or *ratio* in its verbal matter. And
since to define something is to give the *logos* of the essence, the definition of Blake’s

Thought involves the abstraction of its form from the verbal matter in which it actually
exists. We must murder Thought to resurrect it in a renovated form. By the divine or
Christian analogy, the *Logos* must be crucified to reveal and convince unbelievers of the
truth of its eternal spirit.

On the subject of definition, Aristotle describes the difficulties involved in finding

the *logos* of the essence (or formula of the form):

> Another question is naturally raised, viz. what sort of parts belong to the
form and what sort not to the form, but to the concrete thing. Yet if this is
not plain it is not possible to define anything; for definition is of the
universal and of the form. If then it is not evident what sort of parts are of
the nature of matter and what sort are not, neither will the formula [*logos*] of
the thing be evident. . . . [B]ut it is hard to eliminate it [i.e., to effect this
severance of form from matter] in thought. E.g. the form of man is always
found in flesh and bones and parts of this kind; are these then also parts of
the form and the formula? No, they are matter; but because man is not
found also in other matters we are unable to perform the abstraction.

(1036a26-b6)

The act of “murder” in Blake is this very abstraction: the sharp instrument of the reasoning
intellect must sever the form of the individual thought from its matter—or the eternal
thought (an individual identity) from the word, the male from the female—in order to define
it, to give the *logos* of its essence or its universal form (because Aristotle demands that
definition be “of the universal and of the form”). And because Blake’s Thought cannot be
found in any matter other than that of words (and in the denotation of “word” I include all
those marks that constitute his signifying system), we are unable, when all is said and done,
to perform the separation of his thought from his words: his rocks cannot be cut. For
without words, on the outside of his textual body, his Thought can never, never, be
organized.
So we must discover (or uncover) the “Only General and Universal Form” of Blake’s Divine Vision in the midst of words. We must define it by discovering, in the midst of the hard and erroneous matter that envelops it, its “Definite & Determinate Identity.” While the Divine Vision remains a pure form in thought—the abstraction “the Divine Humanity”—the particulars it derives from itself are composites, individual identities composed of mental form and verbal matter. If Reason must abide by the principle that nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu; if rational knowledge is to be had only “by reasoning intellectually from what is revealed to our senses” (Coffey 1:6); then rational knowledge of Blake’s Universal Form can come only through his words, because only Blake’s words (some immediately intelligible, others obscure), and not his ideas, are the direct objects of our sense perception.

But if Blake’s words must define his Divine Vision, does that imply that for him definition is nominal, that the universal forms that words name do not really exist, and that therefore abstract thoughts can be arbitrarily assigned any name whatever and remain what they are, for whatever we call them, they remain non-existences? By this line of argument, blasphemy, Blake’s quintessential sin, would be impossible. We do know, however, that Blake regards Thought as Spirit, the one true substance, however accidental the names attached to individual thoughts might be. Blaspheming a holy idea, then, by subjecting it to the accident of naming, may appear to injure it but can never really kill it or even defile it (this is a general principle: the soul of sweet delight can never be defiled or pass away). The holy idea need not fear the knife of abstraction:

O Lord & Saviour, have the Gods of the Heathen pierced thee?
Or hast thou been pierced in the House of thy Friends?
Art thou alive! & livest thou for-evermore? or art thou
Not: but a delusive shadow, a thought that liveth not.  
Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son of God  
That thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body art all  
A delusion, but I know thee O Lord when thou arisest upon  
My weary eyes even in this dungeon & this iron mill.  
The Stars of Albion cruel rise; thou bindest to sweet influences:  
For thou also sufferest with me altho I behold thee not;  
And altho I sin & blaspheme thy holy name, thou pitiest me;  
Because thou knowest I am deluded by the turning mills.  
And by these visions of pity & love because of Albions death.

(J60:54-64; E211)

As long as his Intellect is reasoning, Blake is deluded by its “turning mills” or circular wheels—and it is reasoning that compels him to name his ineffable Thought, to blaspheme in calling it “Lord” and Saviour.” But to define a thought—and it is Reason, with its definite and determinate bounding line, that accomplishes this, too—is to do more than just name it. Definition helps others to see it. Definition gives us, Blake’s readers, a vision of his truth, a sense of what it is.

Definition for Blake is real, not nominal, as it is for Aristotle. To state the form of the essence is to state both what the individual identity is and (because the individual’s eternal form is also its principle) what causes it to be what it is. Simply put, the First Principle of Thought causes Blake’s minute particulars, composites of form and matter, to be thoughts (or “men”). But we must keep track of two secondary principles (or three), both derived from the eternal substance of the First: the principle of Reason (or Satan) and Imagination (or Jesus), which correspond in turn to the Abstract Universal (or Platonic Form) and the Living Form (or Aristotelian Form), or to the logos as both the Form of Greek philosophy and the Living Word of Christian revelation.

Like the form of Aristotelian metaphysics, a universal grasped by the abstracting intellect from the material of sense perceptions, Blake’s eternal form is, as Coffey says,
As the cause of the individual thought, the Blakean form gives the annihilable particular word its eternal individual identity. Witt points out that “Aristotle describes form or essence as the cause of being of individual substances. What he means is that the form or essence is (i) the cause of there being an actual individual substance and (ii) the cause of its being a unity rather than a heap” (3). And a “heap” is what Blake calls an aggregate, something lacking in organization—a swelled and bloated general form, a dead abstraction.

In Aristotle, the individual’s form is the cause of its unique identity because, as Edward Halper argues, form is itself “individual” or “one in number”: “in virtue of its unity, form has the degree of separation necessary for it to be a principle of knowledge; but, also by virtue of its unity, form can be the principle of many composites without making them one” (245-46). Witt agrees: “Aristotle thought that its form or essence is the cause of being of an individual, composite substance; its essence is responsible for there being an actual, determinate, unified substance rather than a heap of matter, potential and indeterminate” (143). So in Blake’s furnaces of affliction, the purpose of pounding an unhewn demonstration or indefinite statement to dust is to discover its form (if it has one), that which gives it its definite and determinate identity, causes it to be worded exactly as it is.

Plato elevates form to a universal “one over many,” whereas Aristotle, according to Witt, “demotes the epistemological priority of the universal in relation to the individual substance by claiming that actual [as opposed to potential] knowledge is of the individual” (124, n.12). Blake’s General and Universal Form is, as its name implies, a hermaphroditic fusion of the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions, for abstracted from the particulars of its
text, it is a mere general, an empty term or a void, a tyrannical One ruling over its meaningless Many. But it is, nevertheless, a Void of tremendous potential, for when "seen" in all its particulars (as the infinite God must be seen in all things), it gives them an identity and turns them into individuals: it becomes a true Universal, intelligible to us only in its perceptible particulars, which, as their First Principle, it has the power to organize.

Aristotle's philosophy is "centered in biology and the concrete individual substance rather than in mathematics and the abstract universal substance" (Bambrough 20), as Plato's is. Blake leans towards Aristotle by centering his Thought in a metaphorically literal biology of "Living Form": the specifically human form of personified abstract thoughts enmattered in personified concrete words. But Blake embraces, too, the "mathematic power" of Reason and its abstract universals, parodying it, as we have seen, with his visionary arithmetic. But numbers—simple integers like one, two, three, four, five, and six (as three doubled), along with the Almighty Zero and unreachable Infinity—are important to and even beloved by him, both as objects of sublime contemplation and (like his anagrammatic neologisms) sources of light-hearted amusement. And so he makes use of both Living Form and Mathematic Form in his divine analogy, elevating both in "On Virgil" to the status of the eternal or true:

Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence.
Grecian is Mathematic Form
Gothic is Living Form (E270)

Here we find a starry definition: "Grecian is Mathematic Form," associated with abstract Reason. And we know it is bad because it is "The Classics, it is the Classics! & not Goths nor Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars" (E270). But perhaps Blake associates Grecian
Form only with Plato’s general and abstract universals, mostly perfectly realized in mathematics. For in declaring that “Gothic is Living Form”—which is good, because it is neither the Goths nor the monks who desolate the text with wars—Blake appears to associate both the Living Form perceived by his Imagination and all its minute particulars with the concrete individual substances of Aristotle. The clue here is the word “Gothic,” Blake’s shorthand for the Middle Ages, the same period during which Aristotle was revered as “the Philosopher” by the Scholastic monks. More importantly, the medieval monks were also philosophers who “devoted themselves for the most part to painstakingly thorough examination of two very technical problems—the status of universals and the relation between the spheres of faith and reason” (Jones 185), both problems of profound interest to Blake. And like the Scholastics, who regarded philosophy as the servant of theology and used it to interpret Revelation, Blake ultimately refers insoluble conflicts (those “wars” that desolate his text) between God’s revealed Word and philosophic reasoning to faith. As Jerusalem must remind Albion, “thine own Minute Particulars, / Belong to God alone. and all thy little ones are holy / They are of Faith & not of Demonstration” (J45:44-46; E195).

Despite his faith in a revealed truth beyond reason, or perhaps because of it, Blake (like Aquinas and others) attempts to solve logical problems within the context of that truth. And the problem of the ontological status of universals—are these objects of reason merely the names of likenesses we perceive amongst certain particulars of sense perception (nominalism), or are they real entities existing incorporeally and separate from the particulars of which they are predicable (realism)?—seemed to hold a peculiar fascination for him. The medieval philosophers, according to W. T. Jones, worked out a compromise position (conceptualism) “strikingly similar to Aristotle’s theory”: 
Aristotle's revision of the Platonic theory of forms was essentially the kind of compromise the medieval philosophers were seeking. Forms, Aristotle had held, are neither wholly independent entities nor wholly subjective mental states. They exist apart from the activity of minds in that they are embedded in, and indissolubly bound to, the particulars of sensation. Yet the human mind, by observing a number of similar particulars, has the capacity to separate the universal from them and to consider it in isolation. Accordingly, what the universal word names is a mental product (that is, the form "collected" by the mind); but it is not merely a mental product, for it is based upon real similarities in the objects themselves. (Jones 190)

Translating these ideas back into Blake's system, we might say that his universals or "General Forms" cannot exist as independent entities, for when they are abstracted from particulars, they become evil non-existent Abstracts or Negations, illusions which are nothing more than subjective mental states, "States that are not, but ah! Seem to be" (M32:29; E132). But general forms do have their vitality in particulars, so that when embedded in particulars or indissolubly bound to them, general forms, abstractions, become "Living Forms" or "Eternal Existences," forms of in-formal Truth.

If form must be understood as the logos of the essence given in definition, Blake's Reason and Imagination express their understanding of this truth in very different terms. For Reason, the logos is an abstract universal form—one, says Imagination, that kills its own substance. The Imagination's Logos is, in stark contrast, Jesus, the Living Word, unintelligible verbal flesh animated by spirit, which spirit (or soul) thus defines and determines the identity of the composite human being who is Jesus (and us)—One Man who, says Reason, would be unintelligible without incorporating his (Reason's) own definitive rational power. So in Blake's miracle and new birth, Reason must deliver Jesus, the Logos (Son) of the essence (God) of Thought, with its own deadly Hand. And by the Hand of the Imagination, the Word is then made flesh, to dwell among us as a
living text, which can be “pierced” or “crucified” by Reason’s soldiers repeatedly, without harm. Because in the body of Jesus we will find the Infinite Truth dwelling in the definite and determinate identity or living form of a human word, a word personified but definable—a bounded truth. The female Jerusalem thus embeds (if we double her s) the masculine Jesus.

If the Infinite alone resides in definite and determinate identity, it resides in any word of fixed or exact limits, any word clearly defined, determinate, made clear and certain. Thus its residence in an organized multitude of finite forms establishes Truth by making it identifiable, intelligible, comprehensible. Moreover, that carefully positioned minute word alone defines the Infinite’s essential oneness, the fact of its being a unified determinate being, an individual substance, since the word was “originally a phraseological combination of ALL 
adv verb ‘wholly, quite,’ + ONE; emphasizing oneness essential or temporary, ‘wholly one, one without any companions, one by himself’” (OED). And this sense of alone returns us to the name “Albion,” whose anagrammatic implications we can now interpret as including “All B One I” along with its negative reverse image, “All B No I”—all of Being is Self plus Not-Self.

Truth is thus, for Blake, rational when bounded (that is, when spoken) and imaginative when infinite (not-spoken). And this fact revolutionizes the error of his textual spaces (including those code-named “France,” “Europe,” and “America”) by bringing his argument full circle: it is not Imagination who should speak and demonstrate truth, but Reason; not Reason who should keep silent, but the Imagination—which faculty, in the man of faith, connotes certainty.
Form is a principle of knowledge, and a principle in Greek thought is an archē. In Blake, principles become imaginative arch-ways, "gates" and "doors," means of entry into his meaning. As doors of perception, Blake's archai are often drawn (on the title-page of There is No Natural Religion, for example, or on the frontispiece to Jerusalem) as Gothic arches. Of course, the idea of a principle does not become intelligible until we abstract the notion of "entrance"—an entrance to a perception of the Infinite in all Blake's "things"—from the word door, window, or gate. Thus Blake's First Principle of Thought becomes heaven's gate built in Jerusalem's rocky wall of words, a gate at which we arrive once we have obediently wound up the string of words associated with reason, a word itself translatable back into Greek as logos.

While the modern interpretation of principle is rule, law, or basic truth, the Aristotelian sense of archē is closer to the idea of an origin or source (Witt 16-17). "It is common," Aristotle says, "to all beginnings to be the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known"—which first point Blake metaphorizes as the "springs of life" or a "fountain"—"but of these some are immanent in the thing and others are outside" (1013a17-20). A "beginning" is also "that part of a thing from which one would start first, e.g. a line or a road has a beginning in either of the contrary directions" (1012b34-1013a1). So Blake's point of "Enough!" (or white dot), which is both the beginning and end of his imaginative road or rational line, is also a principle or archē. Contrasting the modern and Greek notions of principle, Witt asks:

What intuitive difference is there between the idea of a rule, or law, and the idea of an origin or source? Rules and laws are regulative notions: the behavior of entities is governed (or ought to be governed) by them. An origin or source, in contrast, is more loosely tied to the notion of regulation (where an entity comes from might or might not govern its behavior). The
idea of an origin or source carries with it another association, the idea of
dependence, which is not associated with the notion of a rule or law. A
child comes from, and is dependent upon, its parents. Aristotle’s statement
... that some principles are internal to the entity and some are external to it,
makes sense if we understand “principle” to mean “source” or “origin,” but
it does not make sense if we understand it to mean “rule” or “law.” A
child’s parents are its external source of generation, its archai, but it sounds
peculiar to characterize them as rules or laws. In order for many of
Aristotle’s comments about principles to make sense, it is crucial to think of
an Aristotelian principle as an origin or source of something, not as a rule or
law or basic truth. (16-17)

When Blake states in the seventh Principle of All Religions are One that “As all men are
alike (tho’ infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similars have one source,” and then
concludes that “The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (ARO E2), what he
is really saying is this: “All my ideas are alike, though infinitely various, in being derived
from the source or origin or principle of my One Thought, which resides in my Imagination,
where it is personified as the Poetic Genius or true Man. So all my religions (whether they
worship the God of Reason or the God of Imagination or the God of the Intellect that
reconciles them) and all ‘similars,’ all my systems of thought, are likewise derived from this
one source or principle.” The first Principle of the same work informs us “That the Poetic
Genius is the true Man. and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the
Poetic Genius,” so we know that the material body of this One Thought, the universe of
particular words that embody it in an “outward” form visible to our senses, is also derived
from this First Principle of Thought. But because the dualistic world of visible things can
emerge only from the antagonistic but complementary interplay of opposites, the Poetic
Genius must divide itself into two first principles, Imaginative Man (or Time) and Rational
Woman (or Space, whose masculine portion is death), in order to fill the immensity of its
universe with perceptible words. Together these two subprinciples provide the First
Principle of the Poetic Genius with a self-generating material body (his own universe) which is both a body of knowledge and a vehicle of communication. Reason-as-logos assumes the role of the passive maternal principle governing words; and the Imagination-as-logos that of the active paternal principle governing forms or ideas. But once the two Contraries begin to quarrel over the wisdom of speaking Truth and Reason refuses to exercise its power, they divide into separate individuals, with the Imagination trying to remain, as Jesus does, true to its infinite source, while Reason negates its authority, as Satan does, by refusing to entrust it to forms ("Satan Refusing Form"): either to finite ideas or to the changeable, corruptible, and annihilable body of the Word. And so Blake weaves together both interpretations of principle, his Imagination upholding its meaning as origin or source, a benevolent father to his "One Family" of dependent particular children, his "Little-ones," protecting "every one in their own identity" by incorporating them into his own as "One Man blessed for ever"; while Reason cruelly governs his slaves, victims, and captives by the tyrannical rule of his one law, prohibiting his words from speaking any name but his own.

Knowledge of first principles enables us to grasp the "why" of any thing, and it is these two principles—the rational tyrannical ruler and the benevolent imaginative father—that (in collaboration, of course) must organize Blake’s minute particulars. Although Blake’s Divine Vision is his truest and highest First Principle, its Thought has two distinct faces: as "the Divine Humanity," it is a God of mercy, forgiveness, and loving-kindness; but this same Divine Humanity is also an "Abstract Horror," a God who is (seen through the Spectre’s eyes here) "Righteous: he is not a Being of Pity & Compassion / He cannot feel Distress: he feeds on Sacrifice & Offering: / Delighting in cries & tears &
clothed in holiness & solitude" (J10:47-49; E153). It is this one double Form that the reader really needs to "see," for an objective, morally impartial, and complete understanding of the Divine Vision is what makes the whole of Blake intelligible, given that it alone is the cause, source, nature, first principle, and essence of all the things we do see (with our eyes). The vision of Positive and Negative reconciled in One Positive alive in its textual body is, in short, the truth of things, the central image of the universal Truth of which Blake's text as a whole is an image.

Blake remains, therefore, unintelligible, indefinite, self-contradictory, inconsistent, confused, and chaotic, until we discover this Form, the work's First Principle. This Thought alone, as his words' first cause, essence, and substance, gives them an individual identity, protects them from eternal (though not temporal) annihilation, and organizes them systematically into one intelligible Divine Body of knowledge that is both alive, vibrating with vital energy, and statically definite and determinate.

Now, to organize anything (and we may assume this applies to visions) is "to form into a whole with mutually connected and dependent parts," or "to co-ordinate parts or elements so as to form a systematic whole," or "to give a definite and orderly structure to; to systematize; to frame and put into working order" (OED). Blake employs (both with positive and negative connotations) a family of organizational terms: portion and whole, particular and universal, individual and state, order and system, fixed and definite—even the verb frame. So the reader, wanting to see a Vision or "perfect Whole," is finally forced to ask: "What organizes particulars?" This question is something of a breakthrough, and so not coincidentally echoes the unanswered question of Blake's celebrated "The Tyger" (asked of the—a specific or generic?—tyger): "What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame
thy fearful symmetry?" (E25). For symmetry—“due or just proportion; harmony of parts with each other and the whole; fitting, regular, or balanced arrangement” (OED)—is clearly a term of organization.

All the ordering, organizing, and systematizing that goes on in Blake must be done by the Divine Vision itself, by its infinitely fragmentable eternal form—which is to say, by the logos of the essence given by definition, for the logos is form, and only form can instantiate an order or proportion in the matter of words. (As a child might put it: we must think.) For in Blake, as in Aristotle, form is “the cause of there being an actual individual substance” and “the cause of its being a unity rather than a heap” (Witt 3). Since Blake’s form is Thought, the expression of his thought is an organized, systematic, and self-caused substance—and hence a “living body” whose particulars are organizable only by thinking on thinking. Thus Blake brings his reader round to that divine activity of the nous poiētikos or maker mind, noēsis noēseōs noēsis, allowing him to participate in what Aristotle calls “the most excellent of things,” for “it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks . . . and its thinking is a thinking on thinking” (1074b33-34). Imaginatively speaking, that same activity is the contemplation of God in art, or what Blake identifies with prayer, praise, and fasting: “Prayer is the Study of Art / Praise is the Practise of Art / Fasting &c. all relate to Art” (Laocoön E274).

Since the universal form of Thought organizes all Blake’s particulars, and since form is the logos of the essence given in definition, we ought to take another look at Blake’s definitions of those key words man and reason. The definition “The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man” tells us what the spectre is per se, by genus (“human mental power”) and species (“rational”). It is also a universal affirmative, a proposition in materia
necessaria, its two definite articles universalizing its classes so that “the connexion between
the predicate and the subject is a necessary one,” in which case “the predicate must be
affirmed . . . about every single member in the denotation of the subject” (Coffey 1:201).

Every spectre is a reasoning power, which is why we must—we are compelled by the
definition—interpret the term spectre as such every time we see it.

On another interpretation, however, the statement is a singular proposition: it merely
tells us something about one spectre and one man—a definition of one particular spectre.
Fortunately, that does not necessarily make the proposition indefinite. In modern logic,
singular propositions are treated separately from universals and particulars, but in
Aristotelian logic “singular statements were treated as universal propositions, and thus
brought within the four strict forms” (Angell 76). The Aristotelian rationale is “that the
subject is a single individual and that the predication is made definitely about that one
individual, about the whole denotation of the subject—which is unity” (Coffey 1:192).

While some schools of logic also recognize the indefinite singular, it is classed as a
particular—that is, an indefinite—“because the reference in the predication is to an
indefinite portion of the denotation of the subject-class . . . indefinite inasmuch as, although
limited to one individual, it leaves that individual undetermined, unidentified” (Coffey
1:193), much as the signature to All Religions are One—“The Voice of one crying in the
Wilderness” (ARO E1)—leaves the identity of the individual author undetermined,
unidentified (except as “one,” which for close readers of Blake may be determination
enough). The definite singular proposition, by contrast, the universal one, explicitly
determines or points out its subject, either by the use of a proper name (“John is a man”) or
a qualifier ("This person is a man"; "The thirty-fifth President of the United States was a man").

Who exactly, then, is the "Man" in whom we find the Spectre? In Jerusalem we find a passage referring to "this Man" and "the Man," and we might wonder, given the context of his message about individuality, whether to place him in the class of indefinite particulars, definite universals, or (what is my preference) definite singular universals:

O Albion mildest Son of Eden! clos’d is thy Western Gate
Brothers of Eternity! this Man whose great example
We all admir’d & lov’d, whose all benevolent countenance, seen
In Eden, in lovely Jerusalem, drew even from envy
The tear: and the confession of honesty, open & undisguis’d
From mistrust and suspition. The Man is himself become
A piteous example of oblivion. To teach the Sons
Of Eden, that however great and glorious; however loving
And merciful the Individuality; however high
Our palaces and cities, and however fruitful are our fields
In Selfhood, we are nothing . . .

(J40:3-13; E187)

We cannot determine the identity of this "Man" without making a number of inferences: without the bound of our reason, he is truly a piteous example of unidentified oblivion. Some of the possible inferences are straightforward: we could read the signature of the work, and decide that the subject in question is one William Blake. But if Blake is setting himself up as a "great example," he is universalizing himself: and what Blake’s example is intended to teach us is that the individual in his selfhood is "nothing." The identity of the individual self is nothing, even that of the greatest, most glorious, honest, benevolent, and merciful man. But the identity of the Self, which incorporates all these things, is universal: a man fit to be an example for all men, even though he remains nameless, an anonymous One crying in the wilderness of his ruined text.
We may choose, then, to attach Blake's proper name to "The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man"—the man, that is, named Blake. He alone thinks of his reasoning power as a spectre, a shadow of himself, a Not-Self. And only in his imagination can he see this Not-Self, this illusion that doesn't exist. Only Los sees the Negation, though he misleadingly characterizes it as an evil for the sake of our greater good, so that we may understand that we have to embrace what we most fear. Blake's Imagination asks of himself what Fichte asks of every true religion: "To go so far, that one is inwardly convinced of one's own Not-being, and one's Being solely in God and through God" (qtd. in Otto 244). Or as Eckhart says, "So long as man desires to be something himself, God does not come to him, for no man (qua man and creature) can become God. But so soon as he destroys his own self purely, wholly and to the very root, God alone remains and is all in all" (qtd. in Otto 250).

The definition of man as "imaginative idea" is, as we have seen, more remote than that of spectre. It must be hammered out of indefinites thrown into demonstration, in particular the clauses "that Ideas themselves, (which are / The Divine Members)" coupled with the definite universal "every / Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus" and with other fragments or portions of Blake's body (thus we organize: coordinating parts or elements so as to form a systematic whole). The resulting definition—"Man is an imaginative or rational idea"—fulfills the requirement that it be of the universal and the form, giving us the genus of the being in question (idea) and its double differentia (imaginative or rational). This definition gives us the logos of the essence, and though Blake's "man" is an enmattered form, a composite being, the definition need not mention his flesh-and-bone matter (his verbal body, in other words) from which, for the
purposes of definition, we must abstract him. Moreover, we must distinguish the Man from
his God, the Universal Form of Divine Humanity which exists eternally but only in thought,
evident to the intellect but invisible to the senses until, of course, it comes down a step in
the hierarchy of Being to take on the inferior form of a composite being with a physical
body (as Jesus does). So the Divine Humanity is the "true Man," the particular man's
"soul," the One True Thinker, Truth itself, father of all thoughts, capable of existing as a
pure form (an abstract universal) or of becoming a particular "man" as soon as it is spoken,
enmattered in words: "Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (NNR[b]
E3). And that is why the combats of truth and error "are not only Universal but Particular.
Each are Personified There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [Actor] Agent that is it
is a Man." As for the word God, Blake defines it for us as clearly as he possibly can: "there
is no other / God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity" (J91:9-10;
E251). For the strictly rational mind, this may be an insufficiently logical definition—the
metaphorical fountain throws us off a bit, unless we ravish the virgin statement with our
spectrous power and turn that fountain (like spring) back into an abstraction like one source
or first principle or cause. In fact, the definition is extremely precise: God is not the human
intellect (as I have been erroneously supposing all along), but the source of it, a source in
itself indefinable.

We must reconsider also the axiom (laid down as the second premise or principle of
There is No Natural Religion [b]): "Reason or the ratio of all we have already known, is not
the same that it shall be when we know more" (E2). This proposition raises several
tormenting questions (what will Reason be when we know more? what is "more"?), but its
peculiar virtue lies in the way it sets off its subject term from its predicate with a period.
The complete subject is thus permitted to transform itself into an embedded definition:

"Reason is the ratio of all we have already known." Still, it is a faulty one, breaking at least two of the four basic rules of definition: (1) a definition must not repeat the name nor contain terms synonymous with the name of the thing being defined (and *ratio* is a synonym for *reason*), or else we have a *circulus in definiendo* (a Blakean "starry wheel"); and (2) a definition must not be ambiguous (Coffey 1: 108). Blake's transgression of the second rule is the more interesting of the two. According to the medieval logician Peter of Spain, *ratio* is a protean term:

In one way it is the same as a definition or a description, as in this passage, 'Univocal things are those that share a name, and the definition (ratio) of the substance corresponding to that name is the same.' In another way it is the same as a certain power of the soul [i.e., reason]. In another way it is the same as discourse that proves something—e.g., the reasonings (rationes) of the participants in a disputation. In another way ratio is the same as the form imposed on matter—e.g., in a knife iron is the matter, and the arrangement imposed on the iron is the form. In another way ratio is the same as a common essence predicatable of many things—e.g., the essence of a genus, a species, or a differentia. In another way ratio is the same as a middle implying a conclusion[.](Kretzmann and Stump 226)

Is Reason (in Blake's mind) the *definition* of all we have already known, or the soul's power to understand all we have already known, or the discourse that proves it, or the form or arrangement imposed on the matter (words) of our knowledge, or the common essence (thought) of it? Or is, indeed, *reason* the *existing thing* that stands as the middle term between the extremes of the Contrary and Negation and thus implies the conclusion that "Negations exist not"? (And isn't that conclusion itself a negation of a negation: a double negation implying a positive?) If any or all these interpretations of Blake's use of *ratio* are accurate, then (according to *No Natural Religion* anyway, surely as reliable a text as any of Blake's others) Reason must be the universal form of our present knowledge; the *logos* of
it; the essence of it; and the proportion, order, or arrangement instantiated in its matter. In
sum, Reason makes our knowledge what it is (but what that is will not be the same when we
know more).

Since definition bounds by marking the limits of concepts, Blake is arguing here that
rational knowledge is bounded knowledge, that which we know definitely. And yet, “The
bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a univer[s]e would soon
become a mill with complicated wheels” (NNR[b] E2): that is, bounded knowledge,
however intelligible or comprehensible, is loathsome to its possessor because the ratio of that
knowledge, the definition itself (the very thing that makes it intelligible) is a dull round that
never changes, tempting its bored possessor to complicate what he knows. Even a definition
of the entire universe—as, say, One Thought: “All is Thought”—must, for the sake of our
entertainment and delight, be turned into a mill with complicated wheels. Here the poetic
Imagination, “perciev[ing] more than sense (tho’ ever so acute) can discover” (NNR[b] E2),
steps in to turn the definite knowledge of philosophic Reason, the ratio of all we have already
known, into something new but necessarily indefinite: a complex system that includes its
knowledge of the “more,” the Infinite Self that man infinitely desires to possess: “The desire
of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite” (NNR[b] E3). Since this
infinite desire—to experience the Absolute Being that is absolute joy or perfect felicity—is
at the root of all limited desires, Blake concludes: “If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic
caracter [of the Mind: namely, the Imagination]. the Philosophic & Experimental [Reason]
would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same
dull round over again” (NNR[b] E3). The Imagination does not negate Reason and its ratio
or definition: rather it changes the former by compelling it to take the Infinite into account,
and then complicates its expression of the whole to make it more interesting, if also
laborious, for Reason to comprehend and make definite again.

In applying classical metaphysical concepts of form and matter to his own thinking,
Blake implies (with an undercurrent of rage) that the matter of his knowledge can be made
intelligible to us only by the imposition on it of our ratio—another reason why “He who has
sufferd you to impose on him knows you” (MHH9; E37). Blake’s Thought (the “he” here)
suffers the reader to impose his (the reader’s) ratio on it, but what the reader gains in
knowledge is no more than he already knew, though perhaps less definitely. And what
Blake gains is knowledge of the impositions of his readers (but only if they have the
courage or temerity to put their interpretations into words). If, on the other hand, the reader
voluntarily assumes the position of the antecedent of the Proverb’s third-person pronoun
and suffers Blake (as the second person) to impose the ratio of his knowledge on him, then
(and only then) he will know what Blake really thinks.

And one of things Blake really thinks is that Reason, the ratio, is a principle
necessary to organize and arrange the brute particularities of our sense perception, all those
concrete linguistic and semiotic objects whose intricacies of meaning are lost upon us if we
fail to grasp their symmetry, their order or arrangement. Several critics have commented on
the formal fact that “The Tyger” is a series of unanswered questions (with some of them
arguing that it ought to remain that way). But these questions—and this is true of Los’s
whole egg-formed universe—prompt us to seek the reason of the thing, and thus to
understand it. Blake admits, however, in graphic form, that the nature of his question is
both boring (in the sense of drilling) and tormenting:
Aristotle insists that we do not understand something "until we have grasped the why of it," this why being "an objective feature of the world" and "penetrat[ing] to the world’s most basic reality" (Lear 26). The world does answer our questions, but those answers "are not merely responses to man’s probings: they manifest the ultimate intelligibility of the world" (Lear 26). The great question of not only "The Tyger" but of Blake’s whole world is just this: it provokes us to grasp the why of it and thus prove its ultimate intelligibility. Lear continues:

To grasp the why of a thing, Aristotle says, is to grasp its primary cause. . . . One would expect Aristotle to identify the why with a thing’s nature. . . .
This expectation is, I believe, realized: Aristotle did identify the why with an object’s nature or form...[He] believed that for the generation of natural organisms and for the production of artefacts there were at most two causes—form and matter. And matter ultimately has to be relegated to a secondary position, for it is ultimately unintelligible: at each level of organization what we come to understand is the principle of organization or form. The matter provides the brute particularity of an object: it can be perceived, but not understood. Unintelligible matter cannot, in a strict sense, give us the why of anything. . . . The form really is the why of a thing. (27)

The speaker of “The Tyger,” addressing the creature directly, does not ask whether it possesses the symmetry characteristic of intelligible form—that symmetry is assumed—but rather who or what has framed it:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water’d heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry? (SE E24-25)
The speaker questions the identity of the tyger’s creator, but also the source of the tyger’s matter, the nature of the tools used to create it, and, finally, whether the creator was pleased with his twisted creation, given that he may have also created the tyger’s straightforward contrary (the lamb). With the exception of the last question, which pertains to matters of the heart and its affections, these are all questions of form and matter, and hence of the primary and secondary causes of the tyger. And since its matter is unintelligible (or would be if it weren’t verbal), all we can ever grasp of the tyger is its primary cause, its principle of organization or its form—that which effects its symmetry. If we can grasp this First Principle or Cause, we will have grasped the identity of its creator. And in grasping this, we will understand its why—we will have defined the object, given the logos of its essence.

But is the form or ordering principle of the tyger’s symmetry instantiated by the essence of the tyger itself or imposed on its matter from without? Is its principle internal or external? Is the tyger, in other words, a natural organism or an artefact? For Aristotle argues that what distinguishes natural things (plants, animals, their parts, and the “simple bodies” earth, fire, air, water) from non-natural things (like artefacts) is that every natural thing “has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness” (192b13-14), a principle of change and rest. In the creation of artefacts, by contrast, “[t]he craftsman has his art or techne in his soul: that is, the form which he will later impose on external matter first resides in his soul” (Lear 33). The tyger that suffers his Creator to impose His Form on him knows his Creator. This tyger might be us, if we can identify with it—a mental act for which we have been given the exemplar in Blake’s identification with the fly.
Certainly the poem depicts the tyger as half artefact, half natural organism. It has eyes and (like the fly) a heart and brain. But it has been crafted, probably forged, with hammer, anvil, and chain in that familiar Blakean location of continual imaginative creation and logical destruction: the furnace. And here Blake fuses organism and artefact in one individual identity, the single tyger, in order to focus our attention on what is common to them both: a principle. Presumably the tyger’s principle is both internal and external to it, for the tyger is a “made” thing, a “work,” the sinews of its heart twisted by “art,” and yet it is alive and can change. And changeability is, of course, one of the criteria of judgment on which Blake exhorts us to rely: “Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore / What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!” (M32:30-31; E132).

The tyger undergoes a series of changes during the course of the poem (reminiscent of the “dark changes” of Urizen, which Los must “bound . . . With rivets of iron & brass” in *The Book of Urizen* [8:10-11; E74]), changes apparently wrought by the creator who binds it (for the tyger is a bounded being: no symmetry without form). It begins its existence as pure fire—a natural object, but without symmetry—burning in “distant deeps or skies” (it is a question: in truth above or error below?). Originally the tyger is—and we can assume this definition by applying the metaphors of Blake’s system—the burning fire of thought existing infinitely beyond the bound of Reason. And this fire the creator has had the audacity, because he considers himself (his true Self) immortal, to seize. Moreover, if the creator has used wings to reach this fire—but the nature of the wings is in question: “On what wings dare he aspire?”—it must have been burning in the “skies,” in heaven, in Truth above, unless the wings are infernal, like Lucifer’s—or like Blake’s Spectre’s (Voltaire and
Rousseau). In any case, it is out of the material of this fire that the creator shapes the
burning tyger (an animal but also, as we shall see, a human form), beginning with its eyes.

By the time (in line 10) the tyger’s heart begins to beat, the distinct, sharp, and wirey
bounding line separating the form of the beast from the indefinite form of its (divine,
demonic, or human?) creator begins to blur. Creator and creature are no longer separate, or
perhaps never were. The question that follows—“What dread hand? & what dread feet?”—
leaves its subjects dangling without predicates: to whom do they belong? But to ask who
possesses this hand and these feet (innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator) is
also to ask the explicit question “Which ones?” as well as the implicit “What are they made
of?” or “What is their nature?” To answer the identity question is to answer the other two: a
tyger does not normally possess a hand, but neither do we normally characterize human (or
divine) feet as “dread” (demonic ones, however, we do). If the hand belongs to the creator,
we are witnessing a devolution from the “immortal hand” (of line 3) to the mundane “the
hand” (in line 8) to this “dread hand,” probably infernal, certainly negative—a downward
slippage on the ladder of Being that reflects the irony of the poem’s abstract theme: the
divine (fire), seized and reshaped by the human (hand), results in a brute creation (dread
feet): a creature unable to reason and speak, something not-human, and therefore a
Negation.

But if we jump, as we might naturally do, from reading about the tyger’s beating
heart in lines 10 and 11 to the assumption that the hand and feet of line 12 both belong to
the tyger (the adjective “dread” links the hand with the feet, however weakly), then his
“dread hand”—and the personal possessive pronoun would now be appropriate, for this
assumption changes the tyger from a brute beast to a human creature—would be made in
the image of his creator's immortal one, just as his fiery eyes are made in the image of his creator's immortal eye (in line 3). But as the tyger imperceptibly grows more human, its (probably) human creator likewise grows more brutal, and we are left wondering what has become of his original divinity, which he seems to lose the moment he twists the sinews of the beast's heart. Indeed, that twisting—given the associations of the heart with Truth throughout Blake—marks the moment the creator imposes the badly intended form of Truth in his soul on his unintelligible material, the formless fire he has seized. And it is that savage moment—violent, painful, bitter, wrathful, sinister—that seems to set the tyger's heart in motion and make it beat. Thus does the form of the tyger—for the tyger is a symbol of (or code word for) its own fearful symmetry as a wrought object of Thought—originally resident in the creator's soul but now imposed on the matter of fire become internal to the created object, turning it into a living creature. But it is a form of wrath, for a key Proverb of Hell tells us that "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction" (MHH9; E37). And this wrath springs, perhaps, from the human soul's rage, the sort of boundless rage described by Eckhart, which is "for the arrears withheld from [the soul] in God, because she is not all that God is by nature, because she has not all that God has by nature," and "in her greatest rage she wishes to be not 'God' but simply pure 'being' in which God and the self together disappear" (qtd. in Otto 197).

The hands and feet, whoever they belong to, now manifest symmetry—a fact we know thanks to the blessing of another Proverb: "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion" (MHH10; E37) (and note how the Proverb identifies concrete objects with abstractions or forms). But in fact only one hand appears in the poem—or one at a time—and for a bilaterally symmetrical creature, one hand is only
half a hand until it finds its mirror opposite and clasps it (as in prayer) to make one whole again. The question of line 14—"In what furnace was thy brain?"—asserts another fact: the tyger now has a brain as well. The only real question is the nature of the furnace, or which furnace, that brain was made in. Reading again by the light of Blake’s system, one is prompted to rephrase the question: was the tyger’s brain made in the furnace that creates living words or the one that destroys indefinite ones? For by the time the tyger has been endowed with a brain, an object whose connotations are distinctly (but not exclusively) human, the living beast of immortal substance has become even more distinctly a tool or instrument or machine, hammered out of metal—more definitely a dead artefact.

The “deadly terrors” clasped by the dread hand of the now fused creator-creature—and again, the pronoun its in the last line of the fourth stanza is ambiguous: the antecedent of the “deadly terrors” could be anvil, brain, chain, hammer, or the tyger as a whole, the aggregate form of all those minute particulars, or even the dread hand of the preceding stanza, self-reflexively clasping its own “dread grasp” of Nothingness (terrifying to some) as well as all the instrumental terrors enumerated for us—are unquestionably the attributes or qualities of the tyger’s fearfully symmetrical form, which seamlessly incorporates the two contradictories of the non-natural (supernatural or infernal fire, man-made artefact) and the natural (fire, human being, animal) in one object. Still, once made into an object, the tyger is half living, half dead (“One Dies! Alas! the Living & Dead” [KG E268]), its original form of divine fire having been condensed and hardened during the act of creation into solid ore, probably rock. From its source in an eternal realm of pure but formless Truth (or Error?), the tyger’s substance has fallen to assume a rocky form—it is now an indefinite, an
unhewn demonstration that needs to be thrown into the furnaces of affliction before it can be forged into a definite shape of fearful symmetry.

The twofold action of the stars—"When the stars threw down their spears / And water'd heaven with their tears"—is similarly ambiguous. Are they, warrior-like, surrendering in the face of this new sublime creation or attempting to kill it? Are they putting out the fire of heaven with tears of pain and suffering, or pity and sorrow, or the excess of joy, which weeps? Or is heaven already bereft, left void by the creator's theft of its fire? Perhaps a rational heaven devoid of divine fire is just a rocky shore (or a hell), of the same natural substance as the tyger. Perhaps when the tyger's creator dared seize the fire of heaven (or hell), turning the infinite substance into material for the manufacture of a limited earthly creature, he left heaven dark, and the stars are trying to spark light in it again, illuminate it, by throwing down their spears (metal hitting rock produces energy and light), or to spark new vegetative growth on heaven’s rocky shore with their tears. The reader is encouraged in this interpretation by a similar complex of imagery introduced in *The Book of Ahania* (which we have read before), in the scene where Urizen begins to write in silence, his book of iron:

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For when Urizen shrunk away
From Eternals, he sat on a rock
Barren; a rock which himself
From redounding fancies had petrified
Many tears fell on the rock,
Many sparks of vegetation;
Soon shot the pained root
Of Mystery, under his heel:
It grew a thick tree; he wrote
In silence his book of iron . . .
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(BA3:55-64, 4:1-8; E86)
If we push hard on the parallels established by the imagery, we may link the actions of the stars in “The Tyger” to Urizen’s sparking the growth of a tree with his tears, a tree that is also a book of iron. And so we might see the stars—light-giving bodies of rock themselves; intelligible verbal forms—as inscribing legible characters on the face of heaven with their tears, but with their spears also, which are, after all, like the tyger itself, products of the furnace. Curiously, the stars’ crying is chronologically identified with the creator’s (possible) smiling on his newly wrought miracle (or evil maternal birth): “When” is simultaneous with “Did.” What makes one weep may make another smile—but there is only one object of perception available to both onlookers. For what we see in Blake is always only one written work, its characters permanently inscribed in a ground of iron or rock by tears of joy and sorrow, and simultaneously being destroyed by corrosive fires and burning light, being forever melted away.

What is most fearful about the symmetry of “The Tyger” is that the verbal beast never quite assumes a definite form: it is, after all—and we see this most plainly—nothing but an aggregate of questions. Yet assertions are buried in those questions, demanding intellectual warriors to help define them back into the life of thought. And so the divided action of the stars, their merciful crying and their wrathful spear-throwing, may be wholly sympathetic. Perhaps they feel pity for the fiery infinite substance (identical to themselves) now bound in the finite form of a metal-and-rock tyger—Thought now confined to a poem—half alive, as I said, and half dead in the vegetative darkness (“forests of the night”). But the code dictates that we interpret living and dead as “thinking” and “not-thinking.” The artefact-beast created in the furnace is something simultaneously intelligible and unintelligible, half speaking and half silent, half lucid and half obscure, half light and half
rock or metal—light closed in steel. And naturally so, since the artefact, the poem “The Tyger,” is the creation of Blake’s Reasoning Negative, who thinks and thinks not, imagines and reasons, rages and pities, speaks truth and simultaneously hides it in jealousy and wrath.

If the brain of the tyger is formed in an unknown furnace, we may, through the experience of reasoning (this is, after all, a Song of Experience), come to know that furnace as the male brain of the tyger’s creator. And since the infernal heaven to which the creator flies up (or “aspires”) on his two wings (one of inspiration, the other of inference) contains fire too, the brain-furnace is the temporal image of that fiery heaven. But all three, furnace and heaven and brain, are the image of the Absolute Thought inside the creator’s head (defined by the Proverb as “Sublime”), a “place” where eternal mental fires burn safely contained within the bound of Reason—or not, if the Reason is infinite. So it is a rational head where indefinites are thrown into demonstrations, bound round with chains of syllogisms, pounded to dust so that errors may be hammered out of them, and then turned out transformed, into infinite truths resident in definite and determinate identities. Such are Blake’s minute particulars: sharp spears ready to do intellectual battle, or tygers of wrath capable of illuminating what is dark, burning up what is erroneous, or remaining hidden within the obscure vegetation generated by an overactive but creative Imagination, who has difficulty, as we see in “The Lamb,” with names. For although the speaker of “The Lamb” has the answer to the question of the identity of the lamb’s creator—he knows and can name the Source: “Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee / Little Lamb I’ll tell thee” (SI E9)—he cannot locate that identity outside what the postmodernists call the endless chain of signifiers. But Reason can: Reason knows what is beyond language, but—self-evidently this must be so—cannot name it, cannot speak the unutterable name.
How do we define the tyger? We give the logos of its essence: it is a form created by self-contradictory thinking. Its principle, internal and external, is Thought; its formal cause is Thought; it is an expression of Thought, half positive and half negative, but struggling to overcome its dualistic condition and be wholly positive again, like the Source from which it first emanated.

"The Tyger" evokes the deadly terror of something utterly mysterious, beyond comprehension, only if its perceiver cannot grasp—as its creator’s hand grasps—the principle of its organization, its true form as opposed to its false appearance. The tyger’s symmetry is fearful only in the negative state of being not understood (the illustration to the poem presents the image in the contrary form, as understood, and as such it looks innocuous, innocent, almost comically simple). But we can perceive the tyger’s symmetry (which is something more than sense can discover) only with our abstract Reason, whereas the instruments of its formation or binding (the hammer, chain, anvil, furnace), and even its own heart and brain, are objects perceptible to our Imagination’s senses; and as such, they are metaphors for the matter of our knowledge of the tyger. To be more precise, the words hammer, chain, anvil, furnace, heart, and brain are images of material objects from which we can abstract the idea (or general form) of matter itself. Since matter is unintelligible, we understand by analogy, and learn by hard experience, that the verbal matter of "The Tyger" is unintelligible or, at best, indefinite, puzzling, just a series of questions, and therefore fearful, terrible, deadly to thought, until our minds grasp its form and impose order on it, until we know not only the "what" of "The Tyger," but its "why." We cannot know what "The Tyger" means until we know the reason for it and can define it, and definition in turn leads us to its creator: Blake’s own reasoning imagination. And then—the miracle and new
birth happens here—the hammer, chain, anvil, furnace, and especially the tyger’s own heart and brain, transform themselves into images of Thought, the verbal matter revealed to be as essential to the form of the Divine Vision of the tyger as the particular abstract thoughts instrumental in choosing and arranging those particular words in the precise order they appear.

"Creation," in Aristotelian metaphysics, “consists in the realization of a form in matter” and “depends on some antecedently existing matter or other. The form, however, is never created” (Lear 281). In Blakean metaphysics, matter is language, paper, ink—but form is thought. “What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!”: form or thought is eternal, verbal matter is changeable, and error is annihilable. Blake’s creation, too, consists in the realization of the form of Thought in the matter of words, but that creation is an error, and “Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear.” But what can be burned up or annihilated? The whole created poem, composite of form and matter? No, not its form—“The Tyger,” like “The Lamb” and the oak, and the ax and knife that cut them down, has an eternal form, which, as Aristotle says, is neither created nor destroyed. And the tyger’s form is its original “fire,” its thought: that is eternal and true, and it is not created but rather imposed on the matter. Only the verbal matter gets burned up or annihilated, and by the very thought it contains. Words in Blake are changeable—tyger to rational system of thought, lamb to imaginative image—and what is changeable is also annihilable: “Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot” (M32:36; E132).

But it is not language existing prior to Blake’s creation of his text that we are speaking of now. The matter of the English language used by Blake in his creation is not
what we wish to burn up. Rather, it is Blake’s code words— the matter, flesh and bones, of
his created “Man”— that we ought to annihilate, but all the while remembering that
individual words (or “identities”) can “change states”: death as a code word for Reason can
and must be annihilated, but it can then be resurrected after the last judgment as a perfectly
good English word, its original meaning restored. So, too, the words of “The Tyger” must
be annihilated—decoded—to reveal the truth beneath their surface. The stars weep at the
creation of “The Tyger” because its creator must abuse language to create it: the matter of
English must take on a certain form in Blake’s poem, an awful form, terrible, sinful, evil,
blasphemous—if one regards communicating by secret code as an evil. And yet Blake
maintains that “Creation . . . was an act of Mercy” (VLJ E563), for error teaches us to
distinguish truth; and the sun, for having broken through clouds of obscurity, shines all the
brighter.

1Blake’s approving “This is true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction” (Marg
E584) is applied to an aphorism of Lavater’s that is of particular relevance to the ideas
pursued in this chapter: “Know, in the first place, that mankind agree in essence . . . ” (qtd.
E583). “Essence,” of course, is not only an abstract idea, but one of the highest.

2Remember that when Albion sees rising above him a “Shadow from his wearied intellect: /
Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy” (J43:37-38; E191), an image he addresses as “Lord,” he
affirms that without it he is nothing: “I am nothing: and to nothing must return again: / If
thou withdraw thy breath. Behold I am oblivion” (J43:51-52; E192). Albion is speaking
here to pure Form, principle of substance, without which particular objects are unknowable
nothings, and of which Albion himself is a particular concrete realization, which is why the
abstract idea to which he speaks is ambiguously the “shadow” of his own substantial self
and yet its true substance. In sum, particular objects perceived as mere bits of matter are
“selfhoods” and will be unintelligible—they will close—because (as Aristotle teaches) the
matter of a composite substance is unknowable: only its form is intelligible, and that form
derives from its principle.
3This possible intention behind Blake's "misspelling" was brought to my attention by Thomas Cleary.

4The mutual relations between the pairs of categorical propositions are as follows:

1. Between a universal and the particular of the same quality (A and I; E and O)—called SUBALTERNATION.
2. Between a universal and the particular of different quality (A and O; E and I)—called CONTRADICTION.
3. Between a universal and the universal of different quality (A and E)—called CONTRARIETY.
4. Between a particular and the particular of different quality (I and O)—called SUBCONTRARIETY. (Coffey 1:220)

5The square of opposition sets forth the above relations between the various pairs of the four categorical propositions, A, E, I, and O.

6If Blake's archai enable us to see into the origins and essential nature of his universe of things, then windows they will prove to be. But his Gothic arch also functions as an allusion to the familiar eighteenth-century aesthetic distinction between the Gothic and the Classic, where "Gothic implies vital, primitive, but irregular work, with the qualities of the barbarian North," while "Classic implies lucid, rational, and idealized work, as in the sunlit Southern civilizations of Greece and Rome" (Abrams 2595-96). For Blake, the dichotomy is purely formal:

Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence.
Grecian is Mathematic Form
Gothic is Living Form (E270)

A more rigorously logical formulation—coldly objective, like the "snows of doubt & reasoning" (M3:8; E97) that freeze the text into a solid object: "Round her snowy Whirlwinds roard / Freezing her Veil the Mundane Shell" (KG E268)—could hardly be imagined for this set of contrary propositions. But if we make the (perhaps wild and certainly irregular) assumption that they refer to Blake's own work, they are perfectly clear. Like the ambiguously Greek-Gothic arch-door-window through which we enter his world, Blake has two faces: one rational, mathematic, idealized, classical, lucid, sunlit; the other vital, unique, sui generis, irregular, confused, wild, sometimes barbaric, often dark, always paradoxical (or, by the negative interpretation, self-contradictory). The formal dichotomy plays itself out throughout Blake's corpus, until the reader reconciles the two forms—Grecian and Gothic, mathematic and living—in the superior principle of the Eternal. They are, indeed, one Thought at their origin or source. As we are told early on, in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the two inferior contrary principles are complementary, necessary to
each other: as Frye observes, “the Gothic arch and spire would soon collapse without mathematical principles” (*Fearful Symmetry* 34).

7We could also regard it as an equational proposition whose terms are interchangeable and which expresses “an identity analogous to mathematical equality, to numerical identity” (Coffey 1:216). Interestingly enough, an equational proposition is “perfectly symmetrical” and “may be read equally well backward and forward” (Coffey 1:217), which may explain why Blake writes two of his key propositions, “Contraries are Positives” and “A Negation is not a Contrary” (M30; EI29), in reverse script beneath the title of Book the Second of *Milton*.

8Lear argues that

[p]recisely because the essence does instantiate an order, it is intelligible. Mind can grasp the order manifested in an essence, and thus we can give an account or definition of it. Aristotle is translated as saying that what is potentially flesh has not yet its own nature until it receives ‘the form specified in the definition.’ A more literal rendering would be: until it receives *the form according to the logos*. Here again ‘definition’ is the wrong translation. For Aristotle does not mean that the potential flesh is in the process of conforming to a linguistic entity. It is rather that the potential flesh is in the process of realizing a certain order, and this order is the *logos*. Yet Aristotle does move from the order of a form to its definability. For example, he says that the form according to the *logos* is that ‘by which we, when defining, say what flesh or bone is.’ This is not an equivocation. Aristotle thinks the *very same logos* present in the form and in the definition: that is why the definition is a definition. It is a *logos* which gives the *logos*: the definition states the essence. Aristotle thinks that order is ultimately intelligible: it is that which is realized over and over again in natural organisms, it is that which a single definition can capture as the essence of these organisms, it is that which the mind can apprehend. Because the form of a natural organism or artefact gives us what it is to be that thing, *the why* and *the what* converge. (Lear 29)

9Undoubtedly there are readers who would argue that the indefinite form of this poem, like the indefiniteness of Blake generally, is not a problem but rather something to be celebrated. I would have to disagree. “What is it men in women do require / The lineaments of Gratified Desire / What is it women do in men require / The lineaments of Gratified Desire” (E474–75): I believe Blake is anxious to gratify the reader’s desire for a definite truth, even if it must take the “sexual” form of a rational one, issuing from the intercourse of thoughts and words.
16. Organizing Particulars: The Tree that the Wise Man Categorically Sees

If Blake’s Divine Vision must be seen “in its Minute Particulars; Organized” as “a perfect Whole” (J91:20-21; E251), and if “Every one knows, we are One Family! One Man blessed for ever” (J55:46; E205), then Blake’s minute particulars must be organized with the aid of “general forms” (which have their vitality in particulars) into classes of words traceable to their source in one personified Thought. We must organize “from Particulars to Generals” (M3:37; E97), and then from Generals to One Universal. Reason and Imagination work together here, too, Imagination turning the abstract classes of Reason into imaginative categories, verbal “families” of human forms. Once this is done, there should not be a line or a word in Blake the reader is unable to decode. Given the principle that “less than All cannot satisfy Man” (NNR[b] E2), being able to read all Blake’s words comes as a supreme consummation, the absolute gratification of readerly desire. Still, interpreting those words is another matter, however readable or even lucid they seem: stripped of its shadowy surface, Blake’s text is left with its real surface and becomes like any other, more or less difficult.

We have seen Blake apply parodie versions of Aristotle’s ten categories—Substance or Being, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Place, Time, Posture, Possession, Action, and Passion—in his ongoing definition of his Thought, which has substance or essence (energy); various quantities (less than enough, enough, and more than enough); qualities (positive and negative, good and evil); relations (divided by wrath or joined by pity); places (in verbal space); times (measured in units from moments to ages); posture (inside and outside states, laid down in propositions); one possession (always truth,
whether bounded or infinite); and, finally, actions and passions (as an active evil or passive good). The ten Aristotelian categories were also called by Scholastic logicians

"praedicamenta" (from praedicare, to predicate); and, since they are ultimate classes, to one or other of which every conceivable notion can be referred, and beyond which "it can get no further, hence has arisen, by a strange freak of language, the familiar expression of 'getting into a predicament,' to express the unpleasant situation of one who has involved himself in circumstances from which he would fain escape but cannot".

(Coffey 1:137)

Blake’s rational categories are certainly predicaments in both the logical and figurative senses, since they are used by his Reasoning Negative to place the reader in trying or dangerous positions. Blake puns more explicitly, however, on the etymology of category in the legal sense of a charge or accusation. The Greek verb category meant to speak against, to accuse. . . . Legally, the accused person was the subject against whom the heads of accusation, the charges, were preferred: about whom they were made. Transferred to logic, the things that were asserted about the logical subject of the judgment or proposition came to be called categories, heads of predication. (Coffey 1:136, n. 2)

Thus Blake’s most logical creature, the Spectre or Satan, is “the Accuser,” for the mortal sin against which he speaks is that of predication itself (another mode of his self-contradiction). Waiting for Milton to come and “break the Chain / Of Jealousy from all its roots,” Los urges:

be patient therefore O my Sons
These lovely Females form sweet night and silence and secret Obscurities to hide from Satans Watch-Fiends. Human loves And graces; lest they write them in their Books, & in the Scroll Of mortal life, to condemn the accused: who at Satans Bar Tremble in Spectrous Bodies continually day and night While on the Earth they live in sorrowful Vegetations

(M23:37-44; E119)
Then there is the Epilogue to "The Keys of the Gates" (E269), addressed "To The Accuser who is The God of This World":

Truly My Satan thou art but a Dunce
And dost not know the Garment from the Man
Every Harlot was a Virgin once
Nor canst thou ever change Kate into Nan

Here the Accuser is accused of being a poor interpreter: "Truly, my Reasoning Negative, you are nothing but a dunce—or alternatively: you are, you do exist, but only as a dunce—and do not know the word from the thought, or the verbal covering from the idea it garbs. Every code word, unlawfully (illogically) polluted by you, was a pure English word once; nor can you ever change one word into another.” Satan, in short, confuses both proper names (individual identities) and categories.

But Blake’s Imagination has its own peculiar and far more benevolent set of ten categories. As with Aristotle’s, however, their precise interpretation is open to debate. Some logicians have held that the Aristotelian categories

were ‘a classification of all the manners in which assertions may be made of the subject’, others that they were ‘an enumeration of all things capable of being named, the most extensive classes into which things could be distributed’, or again, that they were ‘the different kinds of notions corresponding to the definite forms of existence’. (OED)

Blake’s imaginative categories embrace these several interpretations in being an enumeration and classification of all the concrete images into which his One Thought fragments when it begins to fill up the immensity of its universe of discourse. For once Blake’s Thought has divided into Man/Time and Woman/Space (a division coincident with that of the Three Classes of Men), his Imagination then divides it again into the
following ten categories of images (a division, again, coincident with his Spectre’s into

Aristotelian predicaments):

1. The Human Body
2. Food, Clothing, and Shelter
3. Earth, Heaven, and Hell
4. The Three Ages of Man
5. The Four Elements
6. The Four Seasons
7. Occupations of Man
8. Animal, Vegetable, Mineral
9. The Five Senses of Man
10. The Four Periods of the Day

This formulation of Blake’s categories (even their number) is certainly open to revision,
but the underlying interpretive principle—that particular images must be organized into
general classes to achieve intelligibility—is unalterable. And we can be certain of this
because Blake defines his categories, within flexible bounds, by way of both picture and
text, alerting us to the organizeable classes of, for instance, “boy & girl, & animal & herb,
& river & mountain / And city & village, and house & family” (J18:25-26; E163); or
“The summer & winter: day & night: the sun & moon & stars / The tree: the plant: the
flower: the rock: the stone: the metal: / Of Vegetative Nature: by their hard restricting
condensations” (J73:19-21; E228); or “Beasts & Birds & Fishes, & Plants & Minerals / Here fixd into a frozen bulk subject to decay & death” (M34:53-55; E135), thanks to the
organizing power of Reason. (For a pictorial version, we may look again at the design
from The Book of Job on page 517, in whose margins we see the creation of six “days”—
thoughts as time—of key images.)

Each of the above ten categories is divisible into subcategories, which in turn
divide down levels of increasing particularity until finally terminating in proper names.
The fifth category, for example, the Four Elements, naturally divides into Water, Earth, Air, and Fire, as we see them depicted below:

Fig. 17. *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*; plate 2: “Water / Thou Waterest him with Tears”; plate 3: “Earth / He struggles into Life”; plate 4: “Air / On Cloudy Doubts & Reasoning Cares”; plate 5: “Fire That end in endless Strife.”
Every image in Blake is an image of thought, and every thought is human, and so fire-as-thought appears in the form of a man—as do water, earth, and air. Now, if we confine ourselves to just the “Earth” category—Thought shown here struggling into life—we will recall its earlier definition as “the earth of vegetation” on which Blake writes. This earth/text is particularized in several places, notably the lengthy passage quoted in Chapter 3 (pp. 312-13), which begins with “the Cave; the Rock; the Tree; the Lake of Udan Adan; / The Forest, and the Marsh, and the Pits of bitumen deadly” (J13:38-39; E157) and ends in “A Concave Earth wondrous, Chasmal, Abyssal, Incoherent!” (J13:53; E157). However accurately these five abstractions describe Blake’s text, it remains the last—incoherent—only if we fail to interpret earth as the text itself, a place where infinite thought struggles to free itself from its embodiment in a dark and forbidding ground of rocky material.

One especially fruitful way to conceptualize the organic unity of Blake’s ten categories is to imagine his Thought growing into the form of a tree, for we are told by “The Keys of the Gates”—and the tree is throughout Blake a key image—that his system of Contraries is found beneath one:

My Eternal Man set in Repose  
The Female from his darkness rose  
And She found me beneath a Tree  
A Mandrake & in her Veil hid me  
Serpent Reasonings us entice  
Of Good & Evil: Virtue & Vice  

(KG E268)

The companion illustration to these lines transfers the first-person narrating voice from the male thought to the female text: “I found him beneath a Tree,” reads the caption, words speaking directly to us.
Fig. 18. For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, plate 6:
"I found him beneath a Tree."

Here we see the female Word plucking two male infants from the ground, as though they were human vegetables or even flowers. They are certainly, as the Key tells us, one mandrake, a word whose associations with noisome growth and forked roots are especially illuminating in regard to Blake:

The mandrake is poisonous, having emetic and narcotic properties, and was formerly used medicinally. The forked root is thought to resemble the human form, and was fabled to utter a deadly shriek when plucked up from the ground. The notion indicated in the narrative of Genesis XXX, that the fruit when eaten by women promotes conception, is said still to survive in Palestine. (OED)

Genesis 30 tells the story of Jacob and his two wives, Leah, who bears him many sons, and Rachel, who is barren. Leah’s son Reuben brings mandrakes to his mother, which Rachel obtains by striking a bargain with Leah, and soon Rachel conceives. In Blake, too, “Reuben found Mandrakes in the field & gave them to his Mother” (J93:8; E253), for
the barren or virgin female must consume the poison fruit of the male mandrake in order to conceive an infant thought. Or one could say that the word must admit serpent reasonings into her womb (as Enitharmon does in Chapter VI of The Book of Urizen), in order to bear her infant of inextricably woven joy and sorrow (for “Joy & Woe are woven fine / A Clothing for the Soul divine” [Augl E494]). But the biblical Reuben who finds the mandrakes becomes in Blake’s text the mandrake itself, both a forked root of dualistic reasoning and a human form that utters a deadly (because inarticulate) shriek when plucked (like Leutha’s flower) from the ground of the text. Like Hand, Reuben is the Reasoning Negative’s cryptonym, and hence the two are woven together by the text: “Hand! art thou not Reuben enrooting thyself into Bashan / Till thou remainest a vaporous Shadow in a Void!” (J30:36-37; E177).

But let us go back to the first couplet of “The Keys”: “My Eternal Man set in Repose / The Female from his darkness rose.” Here Blake metaphorizes the desire to speak (or Female Will) as a moon rising in darkness. But first there must be a fall: the “Eternal Man” (True Mind), as the “sun” or source of Truth, must descend to the horizon of Reason. The sun’s light darkens upon reaching the realm of words (the earth), and the Mind falls into the reasoning “Sleep of Ulro,” a repose that is both a cessation of divine activity and the beginning of the infernal kind, or perhaps the passive contemplation of Truth that restores its mental powers, or else the “death, decease (of a saint)” (OED). However we conceive of this repose, the Eternal Mind gradually ceases to think (truly) as it begins to speak (falsely), consequently suffering the want of thought that is both death and a sleep, for its wisdom as a “sun” is “from before the foundation of the World” (M7:1; E100): it pre-exists the creation of the female text. And the bottom limit of its
Thought is the rational horizon of that world, the limit of contraction and opacity which marks the place of Reason in its black Void and from which words begin to arise. In short, as soon as the Mind begins to reason, it begins to speak.

The Eternal Mind's descent, then, into the sleep, death, or darkness of reasoning marks its "fall into the Generation of Decay & Death," but also its "fall into Division" (FZ4:4-5; E301), the abstraction humanized in the vegetable form of the forked-root mandrake, which turns back into the abstract "Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good" (KG E268). The female text, then, rising out of the male Mind's rational darkness, does so in the form of a poison tree. "I have planted a false oath in the earth," laments Enion in The Four Zoas; "it has brought forth a poison tree" (FZ35:2; E325). But Enion, who will not reveal her true identity as a word, is also the false oath she plants; and the woman we see plucking mandrakes from the ground is also the tree beneath which she finds them. We are told by the Keys that she hides the infant mandrake "in her Veil," covering her dualistic infant thought with her code. And the code itself—a code of images, many of them stolen from the Bible: hence "The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" (Laocoön E274)—springs up into the Tree of Words pictured on the following page, a tree of death if we can't decipher its words, a tree of life if we can.

This diagram tries to show how Blake's One Imaginative Thought arises from its roots in the Void of Reason, its trunk dividing first into the two head categories of Man and Woman, or Thought conceived as Time and the Word as Space (the two minutest particulars of this category are the grain of sand and moment of time that Satan's Watch-Fiends never find). The second division of his Thought results in the ten categories of images listed above, each of which subdivides into still narrower branches. The
Fig. 19. The Tree of Thought
“Animal” branch of “Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral,” for example, splits into “Bird, Beast, and Insect,” and “Beast” into “Beasts of Prey” and “Beasts of Pray.” The reader’s ability to organize the continually branching categories depends, of course, on the depth of his familiarity with Blake’s engraved canon (and knowing less than all of it will never satisfy his desire to know it all). If he is passively obedient and sufficiently steeped in the poetry, it will condition him to recognize a number of key images: the tree, the rock, the cloud, the building, the flower, the serpent, the plow, the furnace, the mill, the infant, the worm, the veil, and so on. Each key image is defined somewhere, often in several places, throughout the corpus.

In the Proverbs of Hell, for example, one may unearth an especially rich vein of partially defined (or half-digested) images. If the reader wants to know, say, what the difference is between a beast of prey and a beast of prey, a couple of Proverbs provide the answer: “The fox provides for himself, but God provides for the lion” (MHH9; E37), because “As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers” (MHH9; E37). In further clarification, Blake shows us a pair of human lions plowing on plate 29 of Jerusalem, eyes turned heavenward: the lion is a beast of prey (a human one, of course). The sort of mental food (and here one must invoke the category “Food, Clothing, and Shelter of Thought”) that a mental beast desires depends on whether he actively pursues his quarry and thinks, as the fox does, cunningly, for himself; or whether he passively follows the godlike Intellect that will eventually enlighten him, as the lion does: hence “If the lion was advised by the fox. he would be cunning” (MHH10; E38). Or the beast may prefer the poison food of rational truth, as the rat (or, among the birds, the crow) does, or more wholesome fare, like the bread for which the lion prays without resorting to cunning:
hence “All wholsom food is caught without a net or a trap” (MHH7; E36). Nets and traps naturally belong to the Reasoning Negative, whose desire to capture and devour its prey outweighs its courage to speak Truth, for, as we know, “The weak in courage is strong in cunning” (MHH9; E37).

In this way, piecing Proverbs together, we learn to divide the big, open, and honest beasts of intellectual pray from the sneaky little beasts of rational prey: “The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbet; watch the roots, the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant, watch the fruits” (MHH8; E36). Praying beasts are concerned with the fruits of words, preying beasts with their tangled roots. But if something doesn’t seem to fit—the vegetarian rabbet, for example, is no beast of prey—we may have to invent a criterion (a rabbit, like the rat, mouse, and fox, lives in a hole) or look the word up in the dictionary (a rabbet is a groove that receives a tongue, and has associations with fixing or joining things) or simply forget about the nonconformist element (and forgive him, for this is not a wholly rational text).

All Blake’s key images are minute particulars whose precise imaginative definitions we must painstakingly trace, somewhat in the fashion I have just outlined, through the dark labyrinthine passages of the whole text, particularly Milton and Jerusalem. Nothing can substitute for that hard labour: it is an essential element of our “experience,” whether we take that word to refer to the long torment of reasoning with the text or the blessed moment of revelation that issues from the rational torment but can never precede it: the experience of breaking the code. Both kinds of experience are celebrated in the Songs and rather dolorously defined by Enion (an anagram for the
positive "I one" or the negative "I none" or "I no one") as the price of everything the reader (or the poet) has in him:

What is the price of Experience do men buy it for a song
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath his house his wife his children
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy
And in the withered field where the farmer plows for bread in vain

(FZ35:11-15; E325)

“There is something very curious,” Stephen Cox reminds us,

about Blake’s denunciation of intricate machinery made to “perplex youth in their outgoings” (J65:21-22, E216)—in a work that is merely perplexing, rather than rousing or disturbing, to people who lack specialized training in its own intricate machinery. We cannot ignore this tired and obvious, but politically significant problem: in several ways Blake’s works were, indeed, unduly “Expensive to the Buyer.” (“Methods” 35)

The closing phrase, from a letter of Blake’s to a casual customer, seems less ironic than wistful in its full context, Blake describing his works as “unprofitable enough to me tho Expensive to the Buyer” (E771): that is, expensive to everybody concerned. But he proudly points out in the same letter that “[t]he few [works] I have Printed & Sold are sufficient to have gained me great reputation as an Artist which was the chief thing Intended” (E771): expensive to all concerned, but especially to the many hardworking critics who over the years ensured that Blake’s chief intention was realized. What Cox reminds us of is perfectly true, but the problem is not politically significant. Like few other artists, but like most mystics, Blake concerns himself only with the state of the individual soul.

The experience of reading Blake begins in negative reasoning, in error, but ends, after one moment of revelation positioned at the center of his vortex, in reasoning imaginatively, in retracing images and deciphering them—an experience, still laborious
though it is, full of surprising twists and fascinating turns. And once the reader knows how the code works, all he really has to do is read, making good Blake's other claim: that his visions of images could be elucidated by a child.

Once the reader has fixed the tree's ten branches of categories—or whatever number he wishes (within reason), for we must not forget the Spectre's devouring white Dot, "from which branches out / A Circle in continual gyrations. this became a Heart / From which sprang numerous branches varying their motions / Producing many Heads three or seven or ten" (J29:19-22; E175): this white Dot, with all its branches, is a kind of tree, too—he has found the "General Forms" that have their vitality in particulars and serve in their organization. He can then move further outward on its limbs, into the "leaves," which are even more particular (and therefore generally less significant) members of the tree's Divine Body, many of them proper names. And some of those, again, will be "key" proper names, names defined more or less clearly, as we have seen, somewhere in the vast body of the text. But others, many of them, are ciphers, empty words marking empty spaces, filling up pages with lines of exuberant excess, swelling and bloating the universal form of Blake's Thought in malicious revenge on bad reasoners.

Such is Blake's tree as I see it, a structure of pure thought and impure words: a parody too, perhaps, of the Tree belonging to Porphyry, the medieval logician who classified the objects of human knowledge, commencing with Aristotle's *summa genera*, "substance," and ending with "man" as *infima species*, to illustrate the relations between genera, species, and individuals (Coffey 1:78). Blake qualifies his textual tree positively and negatively, as a deathly evil or a living good, depending on the character of the organ...
perceiving it. For “A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees” (MHH7; E35): by the time the fool has reached the end of the crooked portion of the road of excess, he finds his palace of wisdom, and that palace is this tree, a tree of words. What the fool sees is something else: what exactly, God knows, but no doubt something peculiar to his own individuality.

The text tells us repeatedly that everything in it appears to us in human form—and so it does. Blake’s Imagination keeps turning his Reason’s abstract ideas into concrete objects, but they are always humanized because all that really exists in Blake’s universe are men-thoughts and women-words (and perhaps because the concrete object of the greatest fascination to man is man himself). So Blake’s “birds” are human, his “flowers” are human, his “insects” are human. Those passages where a category of images is particularized make this abundantly clear. We may recall seeing, for example, in Chapter 5 a “vision” of flowers which begins, “Thou perceivest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours!” (M31:46-63; E131). And perceive them we do: various sorts of flowers, each one given its own particular and colourful shade of meaning by its immediate context, but all very human flowers, feeling and doing things only humans can feel and do. Blake repeats the device with similar “visions” of particular birds (“The Thrush, the Linnet & the Goldfinch, Robin & the Wren” [see M31:28-45; E130-31]), particular insects (M27:12-24; E124), buildings, gates, cities, British counties, even trees: “in the Forests / The Oak frowns terrible, the Beech & Ash & Elm enroot / Among the Spiritual fires” (J16:3-5; E159).

Los claims to “act with benevolence” (J91:25; E251), and his frequent particularization of his categories of images is his way of helping us organize his
confused thoughts, demonstrating by practical means in our concrete experience that his images are “not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals” (M32:10; E131), rationally and unconsciously organizable “families” of related words. For all this is natural to us, as science confirms:

Students of human language acquisition have long known that children automatically form conceptual categories for the new words they learn. Chairs, tables and lamps are organized into a “furniture” category and the category of “chairs” is subdivided into subordinate categories such as rocking chairs and armchairs. Such categorization is essential to the rapid acquisition of words, and word storage in the brain is probably organized as a categorized filing system. The effects of small strokes, which can kill small regions of the brain, seem to reflect such a system: their victims sometimes lose an entire category of words, for instance the names of flowers. (Gould and Marler 84-85)

But as Blake begins to write his poetry, laying down lines and passages, he proceeds to mix up the divine members of his ten categories, weaving together an image from one with an image from another and then another and another. This cross-weaving results in a tangled web of egregiously mixed metaphors: that same polypus of twisted roots or labyrinth of sorrow or self-enrooting tree or chaotic veil of words his female looms are so adept at weaving, drawing out their fibres from the opaque hardnesses of mental rocks: “As a beautiful Veil so these Females shall fold & unfold / According to their will the outside surface of the Earth / An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface” (J83:45-47; E242). While it prevents the casual reader from penetrating her and thus preserves her “chastity,” the female text’s initially veiled appearance—“In chaste appearances for sweet deceits of love & modesty / Immingled, interwoven, glistening to the sickening sight” (J83:31-32; E241)—is merely superficial. But it jealously guards Blake’s beloved Thought and its truth by ensuring that no reader shall enjoy the sight of
its naked beauty displayed without having first understood something about the cunning nature and nasty habits of sexual reasoning. As Jerusalem puts it,

The Man who respects Woman shall be despised by Woman
And deadly cunning & mean abjectness only, shall enjoy them
For I will make their places of joy & love, excrementitious[.]
Continually building, continually destroying in Family feuds
While you are under the dominion of a jealous Female
Unpermanent for ever because of love & jealousy.
You shall want all the Minute Particulars of Life

(J88:37-43; E247)

“Family feuds” we may now understand as the literal strife and confusion the cunning Blake incites between his categories of words, illogically woven together in defiance of conventional aesthetic principles. As long as we are under the dominion of this jealous text with her cryptographic veil, we shall be in the negative state of “want[ing] all the Minute Particulars of Life”: wanting, in short, an understanding of how the minute particulars, members of the Divine Body, have been woven together.

And thus the female text becomes “Mystery the Virgin Harlot Mother of War, / Babylon the Great, the Abomination of Desolation!” (M22:48; E117). Jerusalem warns that

Unless we find a way to bind these awful Forms to our
Embrace we shall perish annihilate, discovered our Delusions.
Look I have wrought without delusion: Look! I have wept!
And given soft milk mingled together with the spirits of flocks
Of lambs and doves, mingled together in cups and dishes
Of painted clay; the mighty Hyle is become a weeping infant;
Soon shall the Spectres of the Dead follow my weaving threads.

(J82:3-9; E239)

We find “mingled together” in these lines images from the categories of “Intellectual Food” (which is always Truth), “Animals” (peace-loving animals, the lamb and the dove), and “Artefacts” (cups and dishes of painted clay). This last category derives from that of
“Occupations of Man,” which purely mental occupations include, besides hunting for truth and defending it in war, all the activities associated with the harvest and vintage and with the furnace, also called “the Potters Furnace” (J53:28; E203). The excessive imagery following the piercing phrase “Look! I have wept!” thus reduces to a simple assertion: “I have thought with the compassionate intention of furthering peace and spiritual harmony; I have put this intention into my art.” What is more vigorous, charged with significance, are the opening lines fearfully anticipating the discovery of “our Delusions.” “Look,” Blake then says, trying to rouse our attention to the work in front of us: “I have wrought without delusion.” Delusions wrought without delusion: lies told by a compulsion to defend Truth.

Chinese wisdom (among others) holds that order is brought into the world of visible things by the principle of opposites, which makes the differentiation by categories possible. In Blake too, we discover the principles of feminine Reason and masculine Imagination that give birth to his egg-formed universe by tracing all its minute particulars back to their source, first in these two Contraries, and then in the One Thought that unifies them. Thus we condense his work, compressing his thought into fewer and fewer words, reducing it within a rational compass by omitting unnecessary details and subduing particulars to general classes but also by understanding its First Principles. Los tells his Spectre that evil reasoning accumulates particulars in aggregates, murdering them when it analyzes them in search of first principles, sources, or origins. But really, there is no real difference between this method of reasoning and what positive reasoning does when it organizes particulars. Indeed, they are complementary, necessary to each other. How could we organize particulars without first discovering the general principles that must do the organizing? Besides, any indefinite that survives Reason’s various forms of negation
(murdering by analysis, pounding to dust, melting down, burning up, circumscribing and circumcising, annihilating, destroying, decaying, axing, knifing, cutting), whether that indefinite be a generalizing demonstration or a proper name we cannot identify, will live to see its own resurrection as a relative truth directly affiliated to Absolute Truth, a divine member saved by the whole Body. Anything that survives the process of reasoning will be a minute particular, capable of being organized into that coherent whole Blake calls his Divine Vision, the perfect Whole we see when see it “in its Minute Particulars; Organized.” But the Vision itself is a Void of plenitude: we see it in itself as Nothing, for Blake’s One Thought is the thought of pure Form: it is an empty abstraction we can “see” only in our thought, as a revelatory reflection—reversed, sadly, and dark—of the unseen living power that would, if we would only allow it to, inform our every thought and act.

Blake’s God is not the intellect, but the fountain of the intellect, or what Otto calls “a living process”: “it is activity, mighty[,] self-positing, a procreation not under the compulsion of laws or blind impulse but in the creative power and freedom of sublime wonder” (188). Yet this activity flows from “the deep unmoved repose at the center, in unshakable unity and security. It is this inward calm which lying below the play of ‘forces,’ gives them power and is the ground for ceaseless living activity” (194). “Thou shalt have,” in the words of Eckhart, “a flaming spirit bathed in a void and silent” (qtd. in Otto 194).

But why must minute particulars be annihilated? Why does Blake destroy the normal and natural reference of his words and consign them to the curse of a deceptive code? Why does he subject his children, the children of Jerusalem, to slavery? The answer, I believe, lies in Blake’s conviction that reason—but this is no less true of
imagination—can never grasp what is beyond form and therefore beyond thought. If the only truth of which one can be absolutely certain is an absolute truth, then we cannot look to reason to discover what is known only by revelation, by a subjective experience that produces its own inner certainty. And one who speaks this truth, as all Blake’s little thoughts and words do, must suffer the fate of the particular idea expressed in “A Little BOY Lost”:

Nought loves another as itself
Nor venerates another so.
Nor is it possible to Thought
A greater than itself to know:

And Father, how can I love you,
Or any of my brothers more?
I love you like the little bird
That picks up crumbs around the door.

The Priest sat by and heard the child.
In trembling zeal he siez’d his hair:
He led him by his little coat:
And all admir’d the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,
Lo what a fiend is here! said he:
One who sets reason up for judge
Of our most holy Mystery.

The weeping child could not be heard.
The weeping parents wept in vain:
They strip’d him to his little shirt.
And bound him in an iron chain.

And burn’d him in a holy place,
Where many had been burn’d before:
The weeping parents wept in vain.
Are such things done on Albions shore. (SE E28-29)

The little boy sets his reason up for judge—as the priest, standing on the altar high, will in turn judge him—of “our most holy Mystery” (which is what: God? or God’s book? or
some other thing which, because it is a mystery, we cannot identify?). The boy’s conclusions, set down in the first stanza in a series of negations (characteristic of the Reasoning Negative), are that thought can know nothing greater than thought and, since this is so, he, as a boy-thought, can love and venerate nothing more than he loves his own First Principle or “father,” particularly as he conceives of this Thought as a holy Mystery of Nothing conceivable. As a particular thought derived from this Universal Form, the little boy is a “little bird” (we must read the Proverbs to find out what kinds of bird-thoughts there are) that picks up “crumbs”—fragments of Truth—around the “door” (archê) of his Father.

But the boy’s God of Thought is a double-edged sword—both a still perfect Whole and a fiery black Hole—and He destroys him, through the agency of His priest, for trying to formulate Him, and doing so erroneously: the boy’s statements imply, after all, that nothing greater than thought can be known. This is a mistake: even though Blake’s One Thought is the first principle of the organized and living body of knowledge he derives from it, that is only the face of it. Its back side or shadow, shrouded in darkness and silence but no less primary, is the Not-Thought that it is not possible for thought to know. And so the boy-thought, an error, must be burnt, sacrificed on the altar by the priest of the infinite version of the same God the boy worships and uses, but in its finite form. The priest’s “zeal” and “care” are—ironically—not as ironic as and far more admirable than they seem: such things are done, and ought to be done, on Albion’s shore.

In defense of the “great Gothic figure” of Eckhart, “this soul that seeks God with rage” (198), Otto observes that
The reproach is often made against Eckhart and against mysticism in general, that the full, vital, individual life of religion, of personal faith, love, confidence and fear and a richly colored emotional life and conscience, is finally submerged in pale abstractions, in the void and empty formulas of systematized nonentities: to become one with the One, with Being, with that which is robbed of all ideas and all positive content; a game with abstractions like finite and infinite—dissolution into the rare atmosphere of ghostly metaphysical forms; the "nought," which even if it is perhaps not completely a zero made absolute, yet stands very near to it, and is at least entirely indefinite and therefore without purport. (185)

Such reproaches, says Otto, are "misunderstandings of the experiential content" of mysticism, and "applied to Eckhart they are simply monstrous" (185). This, it must be said, is no less true of Blake, whose flaming "Living Forms" and opaque "Unnam'd forms" (MHH15; E40) need no one to defend them, in their code or out of it. For "the rest," as the "dying voice" of Hamlet says, "is silence"—but "a mild & pleasant Rest" (M30:14; E129).
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—. “Re-Visioning The Four Zoas.” Hilton and Vogler, Unnam’d Forms 105-39.


