AKENSIDE'S THE PLEASURES OF IMAGINATION: PHILOSOPHIC

PSYCHOLOGY AND POETIC APHASIA

A Thesis

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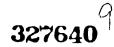
Master of Arts

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PREFACE

The Pleasures of Imagination by Mark Akenside has been traditionally considered a work of extended poetic incoherence. The purpose of the following study is to find the cause of this incoherence and to explain its effect upon the poem.

Since Akenside is at cross purposes in The Pleasures of Imagination, the resultant conflict is the reason for the poem's amorphous features, for each purpose presupposes a view of nature different from and inimical to that of the other.

Akenside's first purpose in writing The Pleasures of Imagination is didactic. He wishes to asseverate God's presence in the operations of nature and in the lives and sensations of man. This didactic intention presupposes the traditional objective, static view of nature which was still current in the cosmological thought of Akenside's day, and he takes such thought as the source for his homiletic referents. Akenside's second purpose in writing the poem is to explore the pleasures of man's imagination, an intention influenced by Lockean associational psychology, which sees nature from the viewpoint of man's subjective and dynamic response to phenomena. The poetic result of Akenside's combining idealism and empirical exploration is structural amorphousness and incoherence. These

are the consequences of his using Lockean associationism to guide his descriptive depiction of teleological truths.

Samuel Johnson was the first critic to call attention to the desultory complexities of The Pleasures of Imagination, and his assessment of the poem has remained virtually unchallenged through the years. However, some recent studies have attempted to find a basic structural device in The Pleasures of Imagination by calling it a dialectical argument. This study hopes to show that no such structure exists in the poem, that Akenside never meant for such a structure to exist, and that Johnson's initial evaluation of the poem is as timely now as it was when first printed.

There are two printed versions of The Pleasures of Imagination. When reference is made to the poem, the first Roman numeral indicates the edition, the second Roman numeral the book, and the Arabic numerals the respective line numbers.

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Charles E. Walton, Dr. Green D. Wyrick, Dr. Theodore C. Owen, and Dr. William B. Cogswell of the Department of English for their kindness during my course of study at Kansas State Teachers College.

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CHAPTER I

UNMEASURED GOODNESS

In every age, there is a work of literature that exemplifies its time
and milieu. Few have challenged the contention that for the British
Augustan age this specific work is The Pleasures of Imagination by
Dr. Mark Akenside. The poem reflects the common beliefs of mid-
eighteenth-century philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic thought. It is
also the one Augustan literary production that perhaps best typifies what
Paul Fussell has called the "anti-humanist" temper in Western thought
and culture, an attitude assigned to such leading proponents of the doc-
trine of progress as Bacon, Defoe, Franklin, Darwin, and Dewey, as
opposed to the attitudes of such "humanistic" figures as Hooker, Milton,
Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, and Eliot.[1]

Contrary to past critical assessments of The Pleasures of
Imagination, the poetic reputation of both the poem and its author have
gained a more sympathetic following in the twentieth century.[2] For

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[1] Paul Fussell, The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics
and Imagery from Swift to Burke, p. 23.

[2] The traditional antipathy for The Pleasures of Imagination may be
found in numerous sources. See Oliver Elton, A Survey of English
Literature: 1730-1780, II, 383; Frederick Green, Literary Ideas in
Eighteenth-Century France and England, p. 242; Sir A. W. Ward and
A. R. Waller, eds., The Cambridge History of English Literature, X, 152;
Iolo A. Williams, Seven Eighteenth-Century Bibliographies, pp. 75-83.

example, it has been described by Ricardo Quintana and Alvin Whitley as a work distinguishable for the "impelling force of ideas" which Akenside's "poetic skill" evinces, and one does not disagree with this general assessment.[3] At times, a certain "impelling force of ideas" is present, and Akenside's "poetic skill" is reflected in the regularity of the iambic pentameter and decasyllabic prosody.

The popularity of The Pleasures of Imagination is well documented in the eighteenth century. It was carried through several editions, reaching its thirteenth edition by 1795. Next to Pope's Essay On Man and Young's Night Thoughts, it was the most popular poem of the British reading public throughout the century.[4] Yet despite obvious poetic skill and force of ideas, it lists towards obscurity and incoherence. In fact, Akenside appears never completely to have been satisfied with the poem, and even while it went through its popular editions, he continued to revise large passages, which were never wholly incorporated into the poem, for he apparently believed that such changes would but interfere with the demand for continuous publication.[5]

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[3]Ricardo Quintana and Alvin Whitley (eds.), English Poetry of the Mid and Late Eighteenth Century: An Historical Anthology, p. 113.

[4]Raymond Dexter Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry, p. 386.

[5]With The Pleasures of Imagination at the height of its public acclaim, Akenside finally resolved to rewrite the entire work. He appears to have projected the length of his new version to four books. The first

Two major critical evaluations touch upon the poetical problems of

The Pleasures of Imagination. The first of these concerns itself more

strictly than the second with the poetry of the poem and represents the

traditional attitude of most readers who have read the work since the

eighteenth century. The initial major critical evaluation of The Pleasures

of Imagination and of Akenside's poetic capabilities was that rendered by

Samuel Johnson in his Lives of the English Poets. Johnson's dislike for

the work is revealing because he is commenting on a contemporaneous

fellow poet, and because he has a strong personal preference for the

Augustan poetic over the concordia discors of the seventeenth-century

poetic mode.[6] In relation to the nature of eighteenth-century criticism,

his hostility to The Pleasures of Imagination is classicist in its origin.

He stands alone in condemning Akenside's poetic delivery at a time when

The Pleasures of Imagination was considered to be a fine and memorable

work of poetry. As one reads his general remarks on Akenside and the poem,

Johnson's personal displeasure with both is obvious. He delivers a severe

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[5](continued) is dated 1757; the second 1765. The third and fourth
books are incomplete and dated 1770, the year of Akenside's death. See
Alexander Dyce, "Life of Akenside," in The Poetical Works of Mark
Akenside (The Aldine Edition of the British Poets, 1845 (1969)), 49-50.
The text of The Pleasures of Imagination which this study will follow is
from the Aldine Edition, pp. 83-210.

[6]George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody: From the
Twelfth Century to the Present Day, II, 556; Paul Fussell, Theory of
Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England, p. 43.

critical broadside which may be said to damage Akenside's reputation as a

poet if not sink it altogether. His first salvo removed Akenside's hope for

literary fame on the basis of his odes. Dismissing them in one sentence,

Johnson states that "nothing favorable can be said." He, then, rakes

Akenside's lyrical verse by asking how the poet could have ever "addicted"

himself to the form. The poet's hand is "ill-fated." His expression lacks

"luxuriance" and "variety of images." His "thoughts are cold and his

words inelegant."[7] However, Johnson's most volatile charges are

reserved for The Pleasures of Imagination. After expressing his belief

that the poem " . . . raised expectations that were not afterwards very

amply satisfied," Johnson attacks Akenside's use of images and versifica-

tion. Of the images Johnson writes

> The reader wanders through the gay diffusion sometimes amazed
> and sometimes delighted, but after many turnings in the flowery
> labyrinth comes out as he went in. He remarked little, and laid
> hold on nothing.[8]

Of the versification he states,

> the concatenation of his verse is commonly too long continued,
> and the full close does not recur with sufficient frequency. The
> sense is carried on through a long intertexture of complicated
> clauses, and as nothing is distinguished, nothing is remembered.[9]

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[7]Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck
Hill, III, 419.

[8]Ibid., p. 417.

[9]Loc. cit.

Such is the essence of two centuries's literary evaluation of The Pleasures

of Imagination. It is a piquant mixture of some admiration and much

bewilderment.

Only recently has there been an attempt to salvage Akenside's

poetic reputation from obscurity in the criticism of Robert Marsh, who has

been instrumental in instituting a new examination and re-evaluation of

The Pleasures of Imagination. In contrast to Johnson, Marsh focuses upon

neither Akenside's use of imagery nor upon his versification. Instead, he

has formulated a "dialectical" theory of neo-classic poetry and has

discovered that Akenside uses a "dialectic" in The Pleasures of Imagination

and practices it with great success. By such a theory, Marsh observes,

"Poetry is . . . discussed . . . in terms of the apprehension, expression,

or creation of some kind of supreme or transcendent reality and order."[10]

In terms somewhat confusing and vague, Marsh expands upon his concept

of a "dialectical" theory of neo-classic poetry:

> the poet and his performance are commonly defined and evaluated
> by reference (positive or negative--or paradoxical) to the nature
> and power of a special quasi-Platonic dialectician-lawgiver
> (human or divine), daimon, or demiurge--or all three. In any case,
> these have been the recurrent themes of dialectical poetics up to
> our own day: knowledge, or simply apprehension, of the "true"
> scheme of things (and the special social value of such knowledge
> or apprehension); inspiration or enthusiasm (particularly in relation
> to the "non-artistic" or unlearnable aspects of human poetic

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[10]Robert Marsh, Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry: An Aspect of
English Neoclassical Criticism, p. 12.

production); and resemblance to divine art or creativity. For these are the three principle ways in which human mind and action can be related to the substances and structure of <u>ultimate</u> reality.[11]

Such a theory presupposes a theorist who has some starting premise, or belief, upon which to examine poetry. Marsh continues:

> The dialectical theorist . . . . invokes transcendent or comprehensive values, patterns, and ideals for poetry that are said to reside in God himself, or to exist in a providential emanating system of spiritual essences, or to be embodied in nature, mind, language, or history--or some kind of combination or fusion of these. And, methodologically, he justifies the application of such criteria by his characteristic dialectical habit of perceiving the patterns of similitude, congeniality, or continuity between the "ultimate" and the "common."[12]

Marsh states that, in "dialectical" theories of poetry, "the tradition of Platonism . . . can scarcely be over-emphasized . . . ."[13] After examining the dialectical pattern as he finds it in <u>The Pleasures of Imagination</u>, he quotes at great length from the concluding lines of the final book in the first version of the poem (I.III.616-634). He then concludes:

> What nobler role could be given to the human poet than to awaken and "dispose" the minds of men to these "loveliest" features of the world by means of his own God-like, "charming" acts of expressive, creative, mimic artistry![14]

Although Marsh does not explicitly say so, his final remark implies a

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[11]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 13.

[12]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 11-12.

[13]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 12.

[14]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 86.

a favorable aesthetic evaluation of the work.

Marsh has travelled the same "flowery labyrinth" as Johnson two centuries before. Both have wandered through the "gay diffusion." But whereas Marsh is exhilarated, Johnson was displeased. Whereas Marsh is dialectically stimulated, Johnson "remarked little, and laid hold on nothing." The difference between the evaluation offered by Johnson and that offered by Marsh is not the result of the two having lived at different times, for Johnson's assessment of the poem has endured, regardless of any change in critical standards since his day. Hence, the contrast must be attributed to a difference in the general aesthetic standards to which Johnson and Marsh subscribe.

Marsh's examination of The Pleasures of Imagination is more lengthy than Johnson's, although it covers suprisingly less ground. The theory itself has drawn a sharp rebuttal from W. K. Wimsatt, who has found the critic's use of the word, "dialectical," to be but an "attempt at profundity," or a "superficial verbalism" imparting "stereotyped concepts to writers on central neo-classical criticism," or an attempt to establish "working classifications and analogies which have to be apologized for and then qualified out of existence." The term, "dialectic," Wimsatt states, has never had a precise and limited meaning, and, as Marsh uses it, "dialectic" is so full of "built-in safeties and hedges, anything can mean anything."[15]

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[15]W. K. Wimsatt, "Review of Robert Marsh, Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry," JEGP, LXV (1966), 723-729.

John Norton also finds Marsh's specific treatment of The Pleasures of

Imagination inadequate because the method restricts Marsh "to the diction

of the poem, and does not allow him sufficient license to deal with

referents."[16] Moreover, as crucial as he seems to find Akenside's reli-

ance upon Plato's divine trinity of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good

as a synthesizing agent which effects a unity between the mundane and

the divine in The Pleasures of Imagination, Marsh does not trace the

exact path of Akenside's dialectical relationship between the mundane

and the divine. In short, he stays away from the problem of referents

altogether. Marsh evidently does so, because there are no referents in

The Pleasures of Imagination. If there is any point in the poem in which

Akenside might possibly be called a "dialectician," it is at that point in

which he writes, "for Truth and Good are one, / And Beauty dwells in

them, and they in her, / With like participation" (I.I.373-375). At no

other place in either version does Akenside come as close to depicting

Marsh's "comprehensive values, patterns, and ideals" as he does in this

passage; and at no other point does he come so close to emphasizing the

"tradition of Platonism," whose importance to the dialectical theory of

neo-classic poetry, Marsh argues, "can scarcely be overemphasized."

In terms of Marsh's own theory of neo-classic poetry, it is Akenside's

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[16]John Norton, "Akenside's The Pleasures of Imagination: An
Exercise in Poetics," Eighteenth-Century Studies, III (1970), 380.

reference to beauty that provides the bridge between the "ultimate" and the "common," although Marsh, however, seems to underemphasize the importance of beauty in The Pleasures of Imagination:

Although it is difficult to know how deliberately planned it was, this double character of beauty may be viewed as a convenient rhetorical aid in effecting the transition from the mere external objects of good taste (beauty) to the higher moral and religious excellencies of life (Beauty).[17]

This passing attention that Marsh gives the only crucial personification in The Pleasures of Imagination is revealing in a number of ways.

In the first place, Marsh's belief that Akenside uses beauty as a simple rhetorical "convenience" connotes his own lack of regard for the problems one faces in examining the rhetorical complexities in The Pleasures of Imagination, particularly that of Akenside's use of personification. One is led to wonder how Marsh determines which words in a neo-classic poem should be regarded simply as rhetorical conveniences and which words should be assigned indispensable dialectical importance.

In the second place, Marsh credits Akenside with but the slightest deliberation, or poetic sagacity. That Akenside should use the personification "Beauty" in only the most "convenient" sense seems incredulous considering his familiarity with Hellenic philosophy and classical literature.[18]

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[17]Marsh, op. cit., p. 57.

[18]Dyce, op. cit., pp. 58 ff.; Stephen A. Larrabee, English Bards and Grecian Marbles: The Relationship Between Sculpture and Poetry, Especially in the Romantic Period, p. 84; Bernard Herbert Stern, The Rise of Romantic Hellenism in English Literature: 1732-1786, p. 16.

The importance to Akenside of "Beauty" as the link between man's perception of the world about him and his perception of the higher "moral excellencies" reflected in nature is evident in the fact that he retains it in the second version of the poem while he deletes many other personifications which are of lesser importance.

In the third place, Marsh's finding it "difficult" to know if Akenside uses beauty as an intentional agent to effect a transition "from the mere external objects of good taste . . . to the higher moral and religious excellencies of life . . ." tends to undermine a "dialectical" theory of poetry, which, presumedly, should provide the basis for locating the major terms of a dialectical progression in a poem.

Finally, since Marsh finds Akenside's use of beauty to be simply a "convenient rhetorical aid," and quite possibly an unimportant one, and since beauty is the only possible synthetic element available to Akenside in The Pleasures of Imagination, if such a synthetic element exists at all, Marsh's plain admission of its convenience casts suspicion on his hypothesis that a dialectic is an important criteria by which to gauge the final success of Akenside's "expressive, creative, mimic artistry." Marsh's admission that beauty in The Pleasures of Imagination is a "convenient rhetorical aid" causes one to wonder further if there is even a dialectic present in the poem. This question involves two problems: what Marsh means by "dialectic" and what Akenside's purpose is in writing The Pleasures of Imagination.

Part of what is problematic about Marsh's theory is his belief that
The Pleasures of Imagination can be discussed in "terms of the apprehen-
sion, expression, or creation of some kind of supreme or transcendent
reality and order." Also problematic is his insistence on the general
importance of Platonism to dialectical theory, at least in neo-classic
poetry. He appears to find Platonic idealism a species, at least, of a
"transcendent reality and order"; and he claims that a poet's evocation of
a "transcendent reality and order" is essential to a dialectical poem.
However, idealism--particularly Platonic idealism--and dialectic have
no necessary relation to one another. When one refers commonly to
Platonic idealism, he means Plato's world of ideal forms and his ideals of
the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, which are a priori. However, the
dialectic, as Plato uses it, particularly in the Socratic dialogues, means
a conversation, or a dialogue; and, although the purpose of the dialogue
might be to arrive at truth either through an examination of differences in
search of underlying identities, or through an examination of identities in
search of underlying differences, no prescription of truth is a priori and
necessarily presumed. Even the assumptions of a truth are subjected to
the argumentative process of the dialogue, or "dialectic." Thus, the
Platonic dialectic is a dialogue and argument; it accepts no truth a priori.
The Pleasures of Imagination, Akenside notes in The Design prefixed to
the poem, is not directly an "argumentative" poem. One may see that the
poem is not structured as a dialogue. And, Akenside accepts a number of

truths before the poem ever begins.

However, there is another kind of dialectical method in addition to that of the strict Platonic dialogue, and one must finally assume that, when Marsh refers to a "dialectic" in The Pleasures of Imagination, he has this latter type in mind. Phillip Wheelwright describes this form of argument as a "contextual amplification," meaning that ideas are here examined in terms of a larger idea previously established. Whatever one's contextual amplification may happen to be, it must show both intellectual and vitalistic consistency if it is to be a valid dialectic. Intellectual consistency involves the principle of non-contradiction. If a proposition or a premise is inconsistent within the frame of a certain contextual amplification, it must either be renounced or reconciled to the main context of an established truth. Vitalistic consistency involves the law of plenitude which declares that all aspects of reality are potentially infinite and are "always more than any theory can specify."[19]

In The Pleasures of Imagination, there is no evidence of intellectual consistency because Akenside does not renounce his static teleological propositions, even though he makes concurrent use of Locke's theory of subjective association. Nor does he reconcile man's sensations with any reality beyond subjective responses much less with any moral order manifest in that reality. Moreover, there is no evidence of vitalistic

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[19]Phillip Wheelwright, The Way of Philosophy, pp. 58-61.

consistency in The Pleasures of Imagination. The eighteenth-century

concept of plenitude forces Akenside, again, either to renounce some, or

reconcile all, teleological propositions. He fails to do so. He must

either include all propositions and, thus, admit possible teleological

inconsistencies--which the eighteenth-century doctrine of plenitude does

not permit--or exclude some propositions for the sake of consistency,

which is to deny true plenitude. Akenside does not renounce his teleology;

neither does he reconcile in the poem his two variant views of nature--the

one external, objective, static, a fulfilled plenitude; the other internal,

subjective, dynamic, an unfulfilled plenitude. Hence, dialectical argu-

mentation seems an unwarranted sole criteria for the aesthetic success

of The Pleasures of Imagination.

The standards of aesthetic evaluation that Johnson uses in examin-

ing The Pleasures of Imagination seem more clearly established and deal

more directly with the poem itself. Admittedly, Johnson's criticism of

Akenside's versification may seem narrow because of his own preference

for the heroic couplet. However, his remarks regarding the imagery of

the poem have never been questioned. The issue of poetic imagery

involves not only the images of a poem but also its diction and overall

form. Johnson finds The Pleasures of Imagination to be a labyrinth of

verse "concatenations" and "complicated clauses" in which all patterns

of meaning tend toward obscurity. Since "nothing is distinguished,

nothing is remembered." This is a serious charge against a poem, for it

presumes to have examined a work in terms of the poet's craft and his felicitous choice of words. Johnson finds The Pleasures of Imagination a highly unreadable poem primarily because of the imagery in the work. In order to amplify upon Johnson's remarks, Akenside's use of imagery may be divided into three categories for purposes of investigation: his use of oratorical descriptions, his use of allegory, and his use of personifications. Each of these amounts to a main poetic vehicle in The Pleasures of Imagination and an examination of the three reveals how loosely organized and incoherent the poem, as a whole, is.

In The Design, Akenside pays respect to both Virgil and Horace. That he should do so is not unusual, for both deeply influenced the Augustan poetic generally by presenting it with a stock vocabulary and a phrasal prosody conducive to elevating language towards a certain oratorical magnifence.[20] Yet, while such words as resplendent, pensile, tincture, crown (verb), propitious, and loquacious heighten Akenside's aureate oratory and serve to form periphrases and epithets, much of the effect of Akenside's oratory is lost in a confluence of latinized-adjective images which have no zenith of emphasis. The following passage may serve as an example. It has been called Akenside's encomium to science

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[20]Dwight Durling, Georgic Tradition in English Poetry, p. 112; Geoffrey N. Leech, A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry, p. 15; James Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth-Century Poetry, p. 132.

in the eighteenth-century.[21] What is noticeable in this passage, as in

most of The Pleasures of Imagination, is the precise but undifferentiated

description, the latinisms, and the phrasal drift of the pentameters which

enjamb and lead one onward through the lines.

> For man loves knowledge, and the beams of Truth
> More welcome touch his understanding's eye,
> Than all the blandishments of sound his ear,
> Than all of taste his tongue. Nor ever yet
> The melting rainbow's vernal-tinctur'd hues
> To me have shown so pleasing, as when first
> The hand of Science pointed out the path
> In which the sunbeams gleaming from the west
> Fall on the watery cloud, whose darksome veil
> Involves the orient; and that trickling shower
> Piercing through every crystalline convex
> Of clustering dewdrops to their flight oppos'd,
> Recoil at length where concave all behind
> The internal surface of each glassy orb
> Repels their forward passage into air;
> That thence direct they seek the radiant goal
> From which their course began; and, as they strike
> In different lines the gazer's obvious eye,
> Assume a different lustre, through the brede
> Of colours changing from the splendid rose
> To the pale violet's dejected hue. (I.II.100-120)

Beyond the tribute to science, one feels something poetic is

absent. Thomas Quayle touches on the nature of the absence by noting

that few poems in the eighteenth century

> convey, either in themselves or in virtue of their context, any
> of that mysterious power of association which constitutes the
> poetic value of words and enables the writer, whether in prose

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[21]William Powell Jones, The Rhetoric of Science: A Study of
Scientific Ideas and Imagery in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry, p. 152.

or verse, to convey to his reader delicate shades of meaning, and suggestion which are immediately recognized and appreciated.[22]

In the passage just quoted, Akenside conveys no "shades of meaning." No line could be said to be either more or less important in poetic function. In a literal sense, the passage can lead the reader into an infinite number of new descriptive realms. Out of all those realms, Akenside chooses one, but for what reason he favors it from a multitude of other realms is anyone's guess. The passage continues:

> Or shall we touch that kind access of joy,
> That springs to each fair object, while we trace
> Through all its fabric, Wisdom's artful aim
> Disposing every part, and gaining still
> By means proportion'd her benignant end? (I.II.121-125)

Akenside cannot be entirely blamed for the levelling of word distinctions in The Pleasures of Imagination or for his pursuing any point that he wishes to cover. As Bonamy Dobree has explained, the language of poetry in Britain through the eighteenth century has no symbolic value, no hierarchy of meanings, no discrimination of thought essences. Images lack reference beyond themselves. That which is described is itself the symbol, the "actuality of purpose, of order, of divine necessitarianism."[23] Throughout The Pleasures of Imagination, hierarchy of word meanings is nonexistent.

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[22]Thomas Quayle, Poetic Diction: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Verse, p. 79.

[23]Bonamy Dobree, The Broken Cistern: The Clark Lectures: 1952-1953, p. 82.

Akenside can do no more than describe the effects of nature upon man. The more minute the description of nature, the more valid becomes his presentation. Thus, his range of vocabulary is wide, for he seeks the precise adjective to describe the precise object.[24]

One cannot underestimate the effect of Locke's associative theory upon Akenside. Locke's emphasis upon precise description, his chagrin over poetic fabrications, and his antipathy for metaphor haunt every passage of The Pleasures of Imagination for the theory demolishes all need for subtilty of language and obviates the need for metaphor.[25] In large measure, the theory of association becomes a guiding poetic principle in The Pleasures of Imagination which allows Akenside an infinite amount of freedom to proclaim oratorialy, through description, the moral nature of any object or thought which he feels a desire to describe. The following is Akenside's description of the theory of association. The passive phrase "By chance combin'd" implies a lack of pattern, or concept of pattern, a lack which characterizes the poetic structure of The Pleasures of Imagination:

> For when the different images of things,
> By chance combin'd, have struck the attentive soul
> With deeper impulse, or connected long,
> Have drawn her frequent eye; howe'er distinct
> The external scenes, yet oft the ideas gain

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[24]Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Newton Demands the Muse, p. 40.

[25]Ernest Lee Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace, pp. 75-76.

> From that conjunction an eternal tie,
> And sympathy unbroken. Let the mind
> Recall one partner of the various league,
> Immediate, lo! the firm confederates rise,
> And each his former station straight resumes:
> One movement governs the consenting throng,
> And all at once with rosy pleasure shine,
> Or all are sadden'd with the glooms of care. (I.III.312-324)

For a poet himself to leave too much to "chance" invites disaster for his

efforts, even if he intends to illustrate a teleological principle by means

of description as does Akenside. Description without pattern constitutes

a "flowery labyrinth." Johnson's remark that nothing distinguished is

nothing remembered seems particularly germane. The union of poetic

description and theological justification attempted in The Pleasures of

Imagination costs the poem a basic coherence. The poem is unintelligible,

not because Akenside's purpose is too vague, but because his purpose is

too clear. His description is so all encompassing as to leave the mind

without referent or orientation. At the same time, the phrasal oratorical

quality of the lines in the poem is so heightened and unvaried throughout

that one's ability to comprehend what is said is hampered. How important,

or functional, Akenside's descriptive passages are is betrayed by his life-

long struggle to revise the poem into some sort of coherent work of art.

The fact that he tried to revise the poem and that such a revision entailed

a massive rewriting of the original poem indicates that as a poet, he was

apprehensive over the artistic, as well as the philosophic, success of the

work. Beside the long descriptive passages which are sheared from the

poem in the second version, two other poetic devices seem, initially, to
have some importance to the structure and content of The Pleasures of
Imagination. However, their removal or emendation in the second version
of the poem spells no serious loss.

The first of these devices is the allegory. In Marsh's view,
Akenside's numerous references in the poem to dieties is largely a case
of following convention; he gives them little attention. They "may or may
not have any real theoretical significance."[26] Whether or not dieties have
a place in a dialectical theory, The Pleasures of Imagination is literally
studded with them; and a large portion of the first version is comprised of
the allegory of Harmodius which Akenside uses to account for the appear-
ance of "Genius" among the human race. In the second version of the
poem, he drops the allegory. If Akenside did not find the allegory "dialec-
tically" useless, he appears at least to have found it to be a rhetorical
obstacle. His problem in employing allegory also resides in the vague
nature of the truths he wishes to present. To evoke an interest both in
the characters in the allegory and in the ideas which they represent is an
effect necessary to allegory in which a certain structure of ideas which
exist beyond the confines of the story must be presented. Akenside offers
only a vague structure of such ideas. He works in a vacuum when employ-
ing allegory, for by the eighteenth-century the metaphysical essence of

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[26]Marsh, op. cit., p. 139.

allegory and the compact forms of personified abstractions are but pale resemblances of their forerunners in Piers Plowman, The Faerie Queene, or The Pilgrim's Progress. Michael Murrin remarks that, by the eighteenth century, allegory had moved

> . . . from a prophetic mode into the orator's normal mode. Poetry no longer stirred man's memories and recalled to them their true nature's; it pleased their minds. It did not change men's lives and create new thought-modes, it informed one's manners and morals.[27]

Akenside wants the Harmodius allegory to "inform" one's manners and morals; but since anything can "inform" one's manners and morals in The Pleasures of Imagination, its allegory has no distinctive function and is no more essential than many of its descriptive passages. What the allegory of Harmodius represents is not established within any clear context. In the second book of the first version of The Pleasures of Imagination where it appears, Akenside discusses a number of topics. He presents them in the "argument" affixed to the book; he presents these topics as elements in a poetic presentation of the problems which have arisen as a result of a separation between "the works of imagination from Philosophy." He then wishes to make an "enumeration of accidental pleasures," the "pleasures of sense," the "discovery of truth," the "perception of contrivance and design," and then, following all of this, present an

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[27]Michael Murrin, The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance, p. 176; David Herbert Rix, Rhetoric in Spenser's Poetry, pp. 8-11, makes a similar point.

"allegorical vision" to illustrate how "natural passions partake of a pleasing sensation." How essential Akenside finds the Harmodius allegory is indicated by its conspicuous, though fortunate, absence from the second version of The Pleasures of Imagination.

The personification is the other major poetic device in The Pleasures of Imagination. Akenside gives certain characteristics to such figures as Beauty, Fancy, Fiction, Harmony, Nature, Truth, Virtue, and Wisdom. As characters, they move through the poem, but there is no direction or pattern to their movements. Akenside also alludes frequently to a number of mythical and religious figures, such as Euphrosyne, Lucifer, Memnon, Mithra, the Muses, Nemesis, Phoebus, and Zephyr. What characteristic each of these is to represent is often unclear and each of them moves also through the poem with little direction or pattern of movement. A large portion of The Pleasures of Imagination is a retinue of these abstractions and mythical religious figures which attend to Akenside's numerous didactic demands. Quayle remarks, "on the whole it is clear that Akenside's abstractions and personifications are used simply and solely for moral and didactic purposes, and not because of any perception of their potential artistic value.[28] Nevertheless one should not conclude that Akenside was oblivious of the artistic value of personification. In reality, he is trapped into using it because it is the only poetic vehicle

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[28]Quayle, op. cit., p. 139.

for his teleology. It is also the only structural element which can possibly

unify the myriad of descriptive detail in the poem.[29]

Yet, Akenside must have felt uncomfortable using personifications.

Perhaps they were too general in nature; perhaps he could not believe in

them. Whatever the case, Sir Leslie Stephen notes that in the second ver-

sion of the poem such personifications as "Genius of the Human Race,"

"Happiness," "Virtue," and "Remorse" are "swept away" so that Akenside

can "philosophize at his ease."[30] Other personified figures, such as

"Wisdom's artful aim," and "Fancy's dazzling optics," have little meta-

phorical impact as Akenside uses them, because they fail to evoke images

and are more descriptive of thought processes. He can afford to drop many

personifications from the second version of The Pleasures of Imagination

because they are little more than literal descriptions. One of the ironies

of The Pleasures of Imagination is his use of personification: in principle,

it is indispensable to his didactic purposes, in poetic practice, however,

it is quite dispensable.

Norton believes that Akenside is "trapped by his diction" in The

Pleasures of Imagination, because his language tends to be "metaphorical

in describing both the natural event and its effect" on man. Norton, then,

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[29]John Arthos, The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth-
Century Poetry, p. 17.

[30]Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the
Eighteenth Century, II, 364-365.

points to the example of "breath divine of nameless joy" (I.III.76) as an

illustration of how it is often hard to know whether Akenside speaks des-

criptively or metaphorically. He continues to observe that "the result can

be . . . some kind of circularity and if the speaker remains unawares, he

might well conclude that he has described something real."[31] Norton's

criticism is general, but he helps to explain why The Pleasures of

Imagination is such a difficult poem to follow. Expansion of meaning

(metaphor) and limitation of meaning (description) pull against each other.

Although Norton might tend to read many of Akenside's descriptions as

possible metaphors, one could argue that Akenside does not intentionally

wish to describe metaphorically, but simply to describe, for ultimately,

there is no referent in The Pleasures of Imagination except God's "unmeas-

ured goodness," and the poet's desire to "paint the finest features of the

mind," that is, to describe poetically as many natural "prospects" as

necessary to illustrate an ethical and benignant divinity. If one believes

that the presence of such a God is to be noted everywhere, proof of his

existence is limitless.

The following passage is the one referred to by Norton. It is the

quintessential example of bewildering explication in The Pleasures of

Imagination:

> By what fine ties hath God connected things
> When present in the mind, which in themselves

31Norton, op. cit., pp. 373-374.

Have no connection? Sure the rising sun
O'er the cerulean convex of the sea,
With equal brightness and with equal warmth
Might roll his fiery orb; not yet the soul
Thus feel her frame expanded, and her powers
Exulting in the splendor she beholds;
Like a young conqueror moving through the pomp
Of some triumphal day. When join'd at eve,
Soft murmuring streams and gales of gentlest breath
Melodius Philomela's wakeful strain
Attemper, could not man's discerning ear
Through all its tones the sympathy pursue:
Nor yet this breath divine of nameless joy
Steal thro' his veins and fan the awaken'd heart,
Mild as the breeze, yet rapturous as the song.
   But were not Nature still endow'd at large
With all which life requires, tho' unadorn'd
With such enchantment? Wherefore then her form
So exquisitely fair? her breath perfum'd
With such ethereal sweetness? Whence her voice
Inform'd at will to raise or to depress
The impassion'd soul? and whence the robes of light
Which thus invest her with more lovely pomp
Than Fancy can describe? Whence but from Thee,
O source divine of ever-flowing love,
And thy unmeasur'd goodness? (I.III.462-489)

This passage heralds Akenside's poetic abdication. He is unable to con-

nect "things." There is no referent in the passage, save God's "unmeas-

ur'd goodness." Metaphor is virtually extinct, for divine necessity,

order, and purpose are explicitly described, and thus there is no need for

symbol which radiates connotations and organizes experience. That

described is that which is. Images need not coordinate. The moon could

rise as well as the sun. "Rising" could be a present participle indicating

the static nature of the sun or a phase of its activity, perhaps both. It

could shine as well upon cerulean peaks of distant mountains as on the

convex of the sea. The soul "expands," but the swell is insignificant in proportion to the divine expansion described. Philomela makes a cameo appearance, then disappears. Reference to light and breath are ubiquitous, and prescient of the limits of literal description in The Pleasures of Imagination.

Akenside's use and facile removal of descriptive passages, allegory, and numerous personifications in The Pleasures of Imagination indicates the near-amorphous structure of his poem and reflects the paralysis of the Augustan poetic during the mid-eighteenth century. Yet, the poem is revelatory in a number of other more general and important ways. For example, the inquiry which he chooses to make into the source of man's pleasurable sensations only unmasks the philosophical dilemmas of eighteenth-century thought, reveals the ambiguous nature of the Augustan world picture and the moral assumptions derived from this view, and exposes the widening cleavage between man's sense perception of the universe and his intellectual capacity to define, categorize, and order the effects of his sensations. Above all, the poem makes brutally clear the incapacity of the Augustan poetic diction, as Akenside uses it, to convey thought through connotation and symbol.

The Pleasures of Imagination is an example of poetic language approaching the point of non-expression. It is no small paradox that the poem, in revealing so little, reveals so much. It seems to distend from its own rhetoric, turning and twisting against its own moral and poetic

fiber. So much goes on in the work that one finds it difficult to know exactly where to begin an examination of the poem. It is traditionally a veritable will-o-the-wisp to any full literary analysis. Yet, although one may discover the source of an enigma, one may yet marvel at the sheer presence, the very performance of that enigma. The Pleasures of Imagination does exist, and if the poem is not a very charming work of art, it is an interesting one. The source of this interest may be traced to Akenside's paradoxical concept of nature and his near unswerving allegiance to John Locke. Both are responsible for the paradoxical formless certitude of Akenside's ideas and the ultimate incoherence of the poem itself.

CHAPTER II

TO DELINEATE NATURE'S FORM

It is difficult to isolate one intellectual aspect of a poet's mind in

the eighteenth century, for nearly all poets are governed by theologic,

moral, aesthetic, and scientific principles. Few observe any divisions of

the intellect.[32] The Augustan poetic is not "simply 'poetic diction'; it is

also 'physico-theological' nomenclature."[33] The eighteenth-century

"physico-theological nomenclature" as presented in The Pleasures of

Imagination should seem to be not at odds, but in compliance with its

poetic vehicle. However, the opposite is true. Thought and expression

are not in comfortable compliance, but in sharp antagonism. Akenside's

poem is implicitly an epistemological inquiry; for him, poetic expression

is, perhaps unintentionally, relegated to an auxiliary role in The Pleasures

of Imagination. The primacy of philosophical investigation in the poem

is an example of the waning influence of literature as a sovereign human-

istic enterprise during the eighteenth century. Implicitly, the symbolic

intention of the previous Western cosmologies which registered universal

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[32]Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse, p. 42.

[33]Geoffrey Tillotson, Augustan Studies, p. 45.

truths in the human consciousness are called into question in The Pleasures

of Imagination, though the uncomfortable inquiry is hidden behind a veneer

of typical eighteenth-century optimism. Akenside's very concern with the

imaginative powers of man and the source of their existence reveals a

major cleavage in eighteenth-century thought. The Pleasures of Imagination

illustrates the effect of this cleavage upon the Augustan poetic.

John Arthos describes the period of time in which Akenside writes

The Pleasures of Imagination as a time when synthetic philosophies, or

ontological speculations, are giving ground before the analytical sciences.

He compares the passing of synthetic philosophies in the eighteenth

century to a similar change in an earlier time in Western thought when the

synthetic Athenian philosophies declined before the analytical sciences

of the Alexandrians. In both periods of time, he notes, the specializa-

tions of the analytical sciences

> . . . signified more than a disinclination to work in the interest
> of philosophical synthesis; it also meant that such effort was to
> some degree impossible. For both periods in history the orthodox
> synthesis had broken down, and there was a failure of belief in
> an innate purpose governing the processes of nature.[34]

In the eighteenth century, the growing failure of belief in teleological pur-

pose embroils Akenside in the major philosophical issue between the time

of Descartes and the time of Locke.[35] The issue concerns the nature of

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[34]Arthos, op. cit., p. 82.

[35]Earl R. Wasserman, The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of
Neo-Classic and Romantic Poems, p. 11.

the relationship between matter and the immaterial mind and whether the mind can have any valid knowledge of matter by way of ideas.[36] Western thought has never untangled this epistemological knot, and some philosophers have resigned all hope in resolving the issue.[37] Akenside, however, is living in a time remote from the advent of innumerable philosophical "isms." He cannot deny the reality of matter because to do so is synonymous with denying the reality of nature, which, in the eighteenth century, is tantamount to intellectual suicide. As a philosopher, he cannot deny the dualism arising from Cartesian rationalism and the British empirical speculations of the century; nor can he turn his back upon the impact which the findings of Galileo, Newton, and Harvey have for the classical cosmological schemes of the medieval and Elizabethan ages. As a poet, however, Akenside is conscious, also, of traditional classicism, its ontological heritage, and its eighteenth-century neo-classic aesthetic scion. To discard a deeply seated literary heritage is also intellectual suicide for this heritage provides the symbolic forms by which Western man had previously identified his individual and collective self as well as the whole of universal existence.[38]

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[36]W. von Leyden, _Seventeenth-Century_ Metaphysics: _An Examination_ of _Some_ _Main_ _Concepts_ _and_ _Theories_, p. 52.

[37]Bertrand Russell, _A_ _History_ _of_ _Western_ Thought, p. 611.

[38]E. M. W. Tillyard, _The_ _Elizabethan_ World Picture, p. 99.

Incipient with the general decline of ontological speculations in the eighteenth century is the simultaneous ascendency of the psychology of inner responses to external nature and the "discovery," as G. S. Rousseau has explained, of the imagination. He notes that the imagination was discovered

> . . . at that moment in history when Aristotelian scholasticism could no longer hold water and when the new science, particularly the new corpuscular physiology of Harvey, Boyle, Willis, and Newton, created a revolution in scientific thought. This revolution was not so much a methodological one as it was an awareness that psychology was of paramount importance in the realm of ethics; and that moral conduct was ultimately predicated upon the passions and not the innate ideas of men.[39]

Akenside's major poem is an illustration of Rousseau's observation, as the title of the work denotes.

In the first edition of The Pleasures of Imagination (1744), imagination is the primary object of Akenside's philosophic and aesthetic inquiry. The poem is symptomatic of the search for a new referent for order, a search that begins under the pervasive mantle of John Locke's theory of association which largely internalizes man's concept of external phenomenon; yet it holds forth, in the eighteenth century, the hope that man might be able to put his world back together again. W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks have traced the evolution of Locke's theory of association and have

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[39]G. S. Rousseau, "Science and the Discovery of the Imagination in Enlightened England," Eighteenth-Century Studies, III (1969), 110.

revealed how it comes to provide a basis of ultimate theories of imagination:

> . . . association was a potent faculty for making combinations, for seeing objects, not thin and meagre as they are rendered by abstraction, but in the whole richness of their concrete given situation. Association under this aspect might be a way of putting back together the world which had been fragmented into atoms . . . . It might be that we ought to set less store by reason and logic, our rationalist abstractive powers, and a great deal more by our entire mental and emotional workings, our total minds, even our instincts. These might give us a world of solid and extremely valuable reality. Under this aspect the name "association" gave way to the name "imagination."[40]

The Pleasures of Imagination is initial in a series of imaginative "pleasure" poems in the eighteenth century, reflecting the shift of poetic taste in the mid century in Britain.[41] Poets themselves are suddenly conscious of a new vista of aesthetic speculation--the imaginative response and the psychology of the creative act.[42] The focus on the "pleasures" of an inward response to art has been called one of the "reiterated paradoxes" of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory.[43] The reason for it lies in the simultaneous existence of two concepts of nature in the minds of most thinkers of the century.[44] Because Akenside cannot reject his philosophical

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[40]William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, p. 304.

[41]Havens, op. cit., p. 393.

[42]John Butt, The Augustan Age, p. 135.

[43]Wimsatt and Brooks, op. cit., p. 297.

[44]Emile Brehier, The Eighteenth-Century, p. 7; Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, pp. 83-95; Arthur O. Lovejoy, "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," MLN, XLII (1927), 444.

awareness or his poetic heritage, he begins to explore man's subjective being while simultaneously reverting to classical tradition and a jaded cosmology in order to objectify the reality of the subjective impulse. His position is peculiar, but not untypical. Stephen remarks that poets of the eighteenth century have somehow to

> . . . make bricks without straw; to turn a philosophical system into poetry without the help of any symbolic imagery except a few hollow abstractions such as the Genius of the Human Race, Happiness, Virtue, and Remorse.[45]

It is too convenient for one in the twentieth century to say that had Akenside realized, as Shelley later did, that ultimate meaning is inextricably bound to language, he would have sought for a new poetic rather than a synthetic philosophy.[46] Had he attempted to develop a new poetic, he might truly have been a precursor of the British romantic tradition; but it is only in the trend of general speculation on the imaginative process of the mind that Akenside can be said to presage the romantics.[47]

Akenside's concern with knowing the operations of the mind and how the mind comes to perceive the external world is directed to the same problem which many British poets of the seventeenth century brooded over while man's geocentric cosmology slowly became a vast, fantastic dream--

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[45]Stephen, op. cit., p. 364.

[46]Wasserman, op. cit., pp. 8-12.

[47]For arguments favoring Akenside's definite influence upon British Romantic poetry, see John L. Mahoney, "Akenside and Shaftesbury: The Influence of Philosophy on English Romantic Poetry," Discourse, IV (1961), 242.

beautiful, but unreal. The problem could be reduced to the questions,

"What is real, and if anything is real, where is it to be found?"[48]

Implicitly, then, Akenside is attempting to unify two conflicting

philosophical traditions dominant in the eighteenth century--rationalism

and empiricism. His need to unify these antagonistic philosophies implies

his own awareness of the ominous implication that nature _qua_ reality can

quite possibly be perceived and conceptualized in as many ways as there

are human beings. The relativity of nature, or reality, is a discomforting

thought to an age that bases its cosmology, ethical code, and aesthetic

standard upon the premise of some objective teleological referent.[49]

Suddenly, no longer does the mind perceive cosmologies rationally; no

longer does the mind act in moral accordance to an eternally historical

power who may grant atonement or salvation; no longer can the mind formu-

late laws of beauty or rationalize mimesis, for the reality behind the

mimesis has disappeared. The mind has no ontology, only its sovereignty.

This conclusion can only jeopardize the significance of the fountainhead

of Augustan art and aesthetics--e.g., literature. The practice itself

becomes little more than a "stimuli to a private chain of associations."[50]

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[48]Emerson R. Marks, _The Poetics of Reason: English Neo-Classical Criticism_, pp. 29-30.

[49]Wimsatt and Brooks, _op. cit._, p. 319.

[50]Wasserman, _op. cit._, p. 185.

In the first edition of The Pleasures of Imagination, Akenside con-
ceals all gloomy cogitation with an optimistic moral idealism that may be
traced back to, or rationalized out of, Shaftesbury, Plato, Marcus
Aurelius, Epictetus, and the neo-Platonic idealism of the Cambridge
Platonists--Cherbury, Smith, Cudworth, and More.[51] However, Akenside's
expressed purpose, to examine the pleasures of imagination, and his moral
optimism, pervading his speculative inquiry, do not conceal the dilemma
he must face if he is ever to begin his poem. He must find some coherent
philosophy of nature. The contemporaneousness of his tenacious accept-
ance of nature as an objective phenomenon which can be known by the
intellect and his zealous exploration of the subjective sensational impulses
of the imagination are expressive of what Emile Brehier has called the
definite separation, in the eighteenth century, of philosophy of nature from
the philosophy of the mind.[52] Clearly, the most acute symptom of this
cleavage during the century is the rise of psychology and the decline of
ontological speculation, or the deducing of cosmologies from a first
principle. Akenside's view of nature and his emphasis upon the psycho-
logical powers of imagination bear close study. In The Pleasures of

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[51]Louis I. Bredvold, "The Literature of the Restoration and the
Eighteenth-Century," in A History of English Literature, ed. Hardin
Craig, p. 399; Ernst Cassier, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment,
pp. 313-315.

[52]Brehier, op. cit., p. 7.

Imagination, the poet holds two conflicting views of nature. These may be called his external and internal views of nature. Both will be examined in turn.

As observed previously, most poets of the eighteenth century are natural theologians. As most poets of the day, Akenside wishes to justify the ways of God to man, much as his predecessors, Milton and Pope. Akenside's external view of nature is that of a religious philosophical idealist. Although deism was never an established religion in the eighteenth century, it was a spiritual scion from the Cartesian analogy of an intelligent author of the universe who had somehow created a mechanism of existence, that since eternity had been functioning in accordance to laws intelligible to man.[53] Akenside implies his deistic tendencies by accepting the premise that there is an intelligent author of the universe. Concurrent to this faithful assumption is his rationalistic belief that the universe can be objectively known to man's understanding. He accepts, also, the Cartesian notion that knowledge is the result of intellectual intuition, and that all concepts of nature and God are distinct and innate and may be related to universal principles. One may note in passing how close these premises of philosophical rationalism are to Platonic idealism, an association which could not have escaped Akenside's attention. The

[53]Leyden, op. cit., p. 10.

aesthetic conclusions that he draws from his religious idealism have been

described by Hunter Mead, although not specifically mentioning Akenside:

> The beauties of nature are regarded as particularly pleasing
> parts of the divine creation, intended for the instruction,
> edification, and delection of man, reminding us of their Author
> and inspiring us to a better life. Hence for religion, the
> ideational values in nature become primarily _inspirational_ or
> _moral_.[54]

When Mead's description of religious idealism is joined with B. H. Stern's

belief that The Pleasures of Imagination is a versified rendering of

Shaftesbury's ethical doctrine, one has a clear view of the subject matter,

theme, and tone of the poem in its entirety.[55]

Akenside has three cosmological referents toward which he directs

his religious idealism. They are the three main cosmological referents of

the eighteenth century: the chain of being, the planes of correspondences,

and man as the microcosm who constitutes the central point of the planes

of correspondences. Akenside's general view of external nature is, in

summary, characterized by his reference to the popular cosmological con-

cepts of the day. These referents are philosophically and theologically

justified through rationalism and deism.[56]

His other view of nature is in sharp contrast to his external view

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[54]Hunter Mead, An Introduction to Aesthetics, p. 133.

[55]Stern, op. cit., p. 133.

[56]Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background, pp. 14-18.

His internal view sees nature not as objective but subjective. It exists in man's mind and is dynamic, whereas the cosmological schemes just presented are static. Nature within man is difficult to know and yet is capable of perception by some minds in varying degrees of intensity. The imagination, Akenside writes, may be found here, within the mind of man. One may see the empirical challenge to the philosophical rationalism of Akenside's external view of nature expressed in the poet's decision to discuss this realm of man's subjective impulses. Empiricism contends that _any_ reflection on man's existence, _any_ reflection on man's knowledge, is based only on man's own sensations; and sensations themselves are provoked by particular stimuli. Any acquired knowledge, then, is knowledge of particulars, not universals. Acquisition of knowledge, particularly knowledge of nature, is sensational in origin, not ideational, and certainly particular, not universal, because it is based on numerous responses of innumerable humans. Locke's theory of association contains the essence of the empirical challenge to any philosophical idealism; and the result in the eighteenth century of the theory of associative impulses is to break the microcosmic center of any possible universal cosmological referent by excusing such a scheme of existence as a penchant originating in man's subjective, and sensational, impulses.

The consequences of Locke's theory are too numerous to explore, but the greatest challenge it presents to literature in the eighteenth century is its undermining of the general belief in the integrative act of

literature, an act which is supposed to mirror immutable truths while simultaneously maintaining a certain identity and dignity of its own through a set of established patterns of discourse, or genres. Incipient also in the theory of association is the implication that any attempt to establish an objective base for an ordered ethical system or a prescription for aesthetic standards is a fruitless endeavor.

Akenside's acceptance in The Pleasures of Imagination of Locke's theory of association and his simultaneous adherence in the work to his own religious and philosophical rationalism reveal a mind divided between a philosophy of nature that recognizes reality as an external phenomenon and one that recognizes the reality of nature as an internal response to external phenomena. These two different philosophies represent, at least in the eighteenth century, the same thing as two different concepts of nature, one extending outward, the other compressed inward. Akenside's two views of nature are not simply distinct notions that can be divorced from The Pleasures of Imagination and analytically regarded. Rather, these two views of nature are explainable in terms of the very task the poet has imposed upon himself: to justify the common eighteenth-century theodicy. Akenside's justification is not, however, so much responsible for the methodological direction of the poem as it is for the attitude that pervades the work. Akenside's method of argument is analytical; and as such it conflicts with his expressed synthetic purpose. Moreover it involves him in a detailed examination of man's subjective

imaginative impulses. What is remarkable about The Pleasures of Imagination is that Akenside's two intentions are in such marked contrast that they call attention to their own discord and thus reveal the poet's contradictory views of nature.

Before examining Akenside's internal view of nature that provides the structure of The Pleasures of Imagination, one needs to observe the attitude expressed in the poem. As mentioned earlier, Akenside's external view of nature is colored by his philosophical rationalism, his Shaftes-burian optimism, and his deism. These, in turn, are directed towards the commonly accepted eighteenth-century cosmology. One must search hard to find any remaining vestiges of the seventeenth-century debate over a coming Apocalypse in The Pleasures of Imagination.[57] Akenside's accept-ance of the Cartesian analogy and his subsequent deism which justify belief in an intelligent author of the universe place God in nature rather than in history. His benignity emanates from the sensational phenomenon of all nature rather than from some historical determination. This rationalistic theology is conducive to many thinkers of the eighteenth century to the optimistic absolution of man from sin, disgrace, and destiny.[58] Akenside reflects his belief in man's innate moral rectitude

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[57]Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone: A Study of the Seventeenth-Century Controversy Over Disorder and Decay in the Universe, pp. 2-5.

[58]Brehier, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

in The Pleasures of Imagination. He sees also the cosmological views of

the Augustan age as evidence, not of man's moral limitations, but of man's

moral magnitude. He finds man's innate ethical nature demonstrated first

in the self-evident fact of the chain of existence. E. M. W. Tillyard

describes, as follows, the history of the chain of being in Western thought

up to the approximate time of Akenside's inheritance of the concept:

> The idea began with Plato's Timaeus, was developed by
> Aristotle, was adopted by the Alexandrian Jews . . . was
> spread by the Neo-Platonists, and from the Middle Ages till the
> eighteenth century was one of those accepted commonplaces,
> more often hinted at or taken for granted than set forth. The
> allegorisers interpreted the golden chain let down by Zeus from
> heaven in Homer as this chain of being. The eighteenth century
> inherited the idea of the chain of being, but, crassly trying to
> rationalise a glorious product of the imagination, ended up by
> making it ridiculous and hence unacceptable in any form.[59]

Most thinkers of the eighteenth century continued to believe that the chain

of being represented a completion of forms and a realization of God's pur-

pose. Man was the middle link in the chain, the transition point between

the mere sentient and the ultimate intellectual forms of being. His

superiority over other creatures was one of degree, and he was reminded

to walk humbly among his fellow man and the lower creatures on the scale

of existence. Yet one could reason that man was at his position on the

scale of being as a result of the divine necessity to realize all forms in

the universe rather than as a consequence of any Edenic fall.

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[59]Tillyard, op. cit., p. 26.

Although the chain of being found its greatest height of popularity in the eighteenth century, it was also during this century that it underwent its most devastating attacks, even though the challenges to it were rarely passed on to the reading public at large.[60] The chain became conceptually "ridiculous" in the eighteenth century, because the known facts of nature were found to be irreconcilable with the two principles coexistent with the notion of the chain: the principle of plenitude and the principle of continuity.

Samuel Johnson, rather than any philosopher of the Enlightenment, presented the most damaging argument against the concept of the chain, by attacking it on the premise that all forms might not be realized in actuality. If so, plenitude was a false assertion. In similar fashion, continuity suffered under Johnson's scrutiny. He noted that the highest being not infinite would have to be at an infinite distance below infinity. All along the chain, Johnson reasoned, there were immense vacuities between forms. Plenitude and continuity suggested not only a fullness of forms but a fullness of numbers as well; but Johnson found these not to be, at least not from the viewpoint of the human race.[61]

The obvious discrepancies between scientific discoveries and the

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[60]Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea, pp. 183, 256-262.

[61]Ibid., pp. 253-256.

premises of the chain itself were apparent not only to Johnson. Recognition of the discrepancy led even Leibniz to formulate two separate philosophical systems. One, concurring with conventional thought, supported the chain through the principle of sufficient reason, and was based on the stasis of nature. The other admitted the possibility of dynamism in nature, although this philosophy was not printed in the eighteenth century.[62]

In all, however, the breakdown of the chain in the eighteenth century resulted because of the inacceptability of the moral conclusions that could be postulated from its static constitution. It led to a too easy optimism, which came to accept all manifestations of existence, even manifest evil. The acceptance of evil as necessary to the existence of the chain became reprehensible to many who were unwilling to be convinced that the creation was "morally monstrous."[63]

In the first version of The Pleasures of Imagination, Akenside opens up his description of the chain of existence by writing:

> It now remains,
> Through various being's fair proportion'd scale,
> To trace the rising lustre of her charms,
> From their first twilight, shining forth at length
> To full meridian splendor. (I.442-446)

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[62] Ibid., pp. 259-260. The dynamistic theory of natural evolution is not confined to Leibniz's philosophical speculations. Akenside's familiarity with eighteenth-century biology is evident in his medical treatises presented before The Royal Society. See George Reuben Potter, "Mark Akenside, Prophet of Evolution," MP, XXIV (1926), 56-62.

[63] Lovejoy, Great Chain of Being, p. 243.

He then, in his famous "chain of Beauty" passage (I.446-486), proceeds to "delineate Nature's form." Through six main stages of being, Akenside traces its "rising lustre." The first stage is color; the second stage is geometric form--circle cube, sphere; the third is the union of this "symmetry of parts / With colour's bland allurement"; the fourth is plant life; the fifth is animal life; the last is mind. "Mind, mind alone, (bear witness earth and heaven!) / The living fountains in itself contains / Of beauteous and sublime: here hand in hand, / Sit paramount the Graces . . ." (I.481-484). Thus, Akenside emphasizes that the ultimate and highest reality in nature is mental. What follows represents an aspect of the "reiterated paradox" to which Wimsatt and Brooks give reference. Akenside begins a description of the flight of the imagination into the sublime: "Break through time's barrier, and o'ertake the hour / That saw the heavens created: then declare / If aught were found in those external scenes / To move thy wonder now" (I.523-526). Akenside is referring to what he sees as the ability of the mind to extend its thought--to defy time itself and conjure up even the unseen wonders of the very beginning of creation. In other words, the scenes of external nature have been internalized within the mind's own evocative nature. What occurs in The Pleasures of Imagination between l. 438, when Akenside begins to "delineate nature's form," and l. 566, by which time's barrier has been breeched and the hour has been overtaken, represents the jumping from one philosophy of nature to another, if not a full scale collision of the

two. Akenside ceases tracing nature's form on the scale of being and,

instead, becomes involved in a reflection upon the psychological effects

of sublimity upon the mind. The problem that he faces in his analytical

examination of the imagination is to describe the effects of sublimity, or

any other stimuli, upon the mind.

Akenside's shift from ontological to psychological speculation

internalizes as well the other two ontological views of nature that he has

inherited from the past: the analogous planes of existence and man as

microcosm representing the center of these correspondences. His inter-

nalizing of nature should not be confused with the general modern concept

of internalizing concepts, or whole philosophies, or syntaxes, into the

human psyche in hopes of establishing new cosmic or human referents for

intellectual reflection. In the eighteenth century, the internalizing of

nature qua reality effected just the opposite reaction. Internalization

hastened the breakdown of cosmological referents for human experience;

for prior to the eighteenth century, and before the seventeenth century,

the medieval and Elizabethan cosmologies had provided the source of inte-

grative referents for human activity. [64]

To this point, it has been shown that Akenside embraces two contra-

dictory views of nature in The Pleasures of Imagination. These views, the

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[64]Harry Prosch, The Genesis of Twentieth-Century Philosophy:
The Evolution of Thought from Copernicus to the Present, pp. 108-111.

one referring to the familiar ontological cosmology of the time and the other

referring to the dynamic processes of the imaginative faculty in man, are

ultimately contradictory, for the latter negates the former by reducing

ontology to psychology. One may now turn to Akenside's internal view of

nature and examine it specifically, for this view is ultimately the true struc-

ture of the poem.

CHAPTER III

MIND ALONE

Akenside has two purposes in writing The Pleasures of Imagination.
First, he wishes to compliment his theodicy in poetical terms, a practice
or aspiration prevalent among eighteenth-century poets. Secondly, he
wishes to examine the "pleasures" of imagination, or the nature of
aesthetic responses in general.

As has been noted previously, Akenside's theodicy envisions a
static cosmology that embodies immutable truths reflected in external
phenomena. Yet his method of inquiry into the nature and source of
imaginative "pleasures" is based largely upon the philosophical and
aesthetic speculations of Locke and Addison, who both tend to see the
reality of nature manifested in one's subjective, or internal, response,
to sensations.

The Design prefixed to the poem contains an outline of the work
and expresses Akenside's intentions in writing it. He begins by noting
the existence of "certain powers" in human nature which "seem" to hold
a place between man's physical sensations and his mental perception of
a moral order in nature. He recalls the popular notion of the time that
these "powers" have been called the powers of imagination; they relate

externally to matter and motion, and internally to man's mind.   The

imagination and its "powers" give the mind ideas analogous to "those of

moral approbation and dislike."

Akenside, then, asserts that men have sought to recall by use of

their imaginative powers "pleasures" from past experience. The wish to

recollect "pleasurable" sensations has given rise to the "imitative" arts

of painting and sculpture, which directly copy nature, and music and

poetry, which evoke "rememberances" by way of signs universally "estab-

lished and understood." Akenside generalizes about art, and poetry in

particular, that although it may become more "correct and deliberate" with

the passage of time, its initial and overall intention, regardless of its

state of development, is to excite the "pleasures" of imagination.

A. O. Aldridge has observed that, when Akenside speaks of

"pleasures" of imagination, he means a physiological process that occurs

between sense perception and intellectual understanding. Conversely,

when Akenside speaks of "powers" of imagination he means the capability

of the mind to perceive the moral posture of an objective reality. Akenside

considers both the "pleasures" and "powers" of imagination to be "inher-

ent avenues of approach" to the Platonic realm of the Beautiful, the True,

and the Good. [65] Precisely how the "pleasures" and the "powers" of

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[65]Alfred Owen Aldridge, "Akenside and Imagination," SP, XLII
(1945), 771.

imagination interact, however, is something Akenside does not explain.

After establishing the existence of imaginative powers and pleas-
ures, Akenside outlines the method he intends to follow in examining his
subject. He wishes to depict the pleasures of imagination and explain
the constitution of the mind that allows for, first, the "feeling" of "agree-
able appearances" resulting from natural external stimuli and, secondly,
for the entertainments one meets in poetry, painting, music, or any of
the "elegant arts."

Akenside's main interest is in the psychology of human feelings
as manifested in aesthetic responses. This interest implies what Wimsatt
and Brooks have noticed as a reversal in the eighteenth century of the
classical notion of catharsis. They explain that this classical concept
was originally anti-emotional in that, according to it, such emotions as
pity and fear were to be moderated. Akenside, however, like other
eighteenth-century aestheticians, believes that such emotions should be
heightened in order to allay less desirable passions. Wimsatt and Brooks
observe, further, that it is but a matter of time in the eighteenth century
before such a development evolves into sentimentality.[66]

Akenside further explains in The Design that in making his analytic
examination of the "pleasures" and the "powers" of the imagination, he

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[66]Wimsatt and Brooks, op. cit., pp. 291-292.

must, first, distinguish the "imagination from other faculties" and, then, characterize the original forms and properties of being which are as familiar to the imagination "as light is to the eyes, or truth to the understanding."

Akenside's distinguishing between the imagination and the other faculties of the mind shows traces of Locke's method of establishing categories on the basis of an analysis of parts. Locke's general influence upon the aesthetic speculations of the eighteenth century, particularly in his belief that the imagination should be considered as distinct from other faculties of man's reason, turned attention, from the work to the mind of the reader or audience, which in turn led to an increasingly articulate distinction between imaginative and the rational faculties.[67]

There is, however, an additional noticeable trend in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory reflected in Akenside's distinction of the imagination from the rest of the mind in general. For example, he contends that the imagination, which is part of the mind, acts as a powerful extension of the mind that somehow unites the mind's perception to the external forms and properties of objective reality. He also attaches a certain dynamic, vital quality to the mind and its perception of nature. Martin Price has noted the following characterics of the mind's vitality as conceived in the eighteenth century, observing that the "divinely sanctioned

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[67]Marks, op. cit., p. 37.

powers" of the mind

> . . . makes its traffic with the world a constant process of self-
> discovery, as the inadequacy of the senses leads to their eclipse
> and to the sublime transcendence of them by the mind that feels
> infinity within itself.[68]

Akenside tends to emphasize the "divinely sanctioned powers" of the mind

throughout each book in both versions of The Pleasures of Imagination.

He feels compelled to rationalize the existence of the mind's divine powers

because man has "thoughts" that somehow slip beyond the limits of neural

sensations to contemplate pure external forms and properties (I.I.151-158).

Next, in The Design, Akenside discusses the original forms and

properties of being with which the imagination "converses" and categor-

izes these on the basis of an understanding of how one responds to their

external stimuli. His first category, termed greatness, includes all

responses to those external objects which excite a feeling of "vastness."

His second category, termed beauty, includes all responses to those

external objects which induce a feeling of "calmness." His third cate-

gory, termed novelty, or "wonderfulness," includes all responses to those

external objects which evoke a feeling of surprise. In addition, he

contends that an object that falls within the spatial categories of the

great, the beautiful, and the novel may contain yet other sources of

pleasure that stimulate the imagination. Although these sources are quite

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[68]Martin Price, To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and
Energy from Dryden to Blake, p. 364.

"foreign" to the imagination, they, nontheless, reinforce imaginative

pleasure when added to the three primary spatial categories. Akenside,

however, does not explain what he means by sources "foreign" to the

imagination, yet he wishes to distinguish them from the major spatial

categories in order to note what they are. Neither does he explain how

these "foreign" sources interact, or combine, with the major categories.

Nonetheless, he finds these sources to be the following: ideas drawn

from the external senses; truths discovered by the understanding; illus-

trations of contrivance and final causes; and "circumstances proper" to

"awaken and engage the passions." Of these four sources, he considers

the last to be the most powerful; but what "circumstances" he has in

mind and what "passions" are to be awakened he does not specifically

outline in The Design.

What Akenside says in both The Design and The Pleasures of

Imagination is based mostly on the contents of Addison's papers on the

imagination (Spectator 411-421). In these papers, Addison introduces the

following four problems of general aesthetic inquiry: the nature of one's

sentiments regarding beauty and other aesthetic feelings; the material

causes of these feelings; the function of aesthetic response; and the

mechanism through which aesthetic responses are generated.[69] Akenside,

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[69]Walter John Hipple, Jr., The Beautiful, The Sublime, and The
Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory, p. 24.

in turn, addresses himself to these same problems of aesthetic inquiry.

One's response to that which stimulates imaginative pleasures is the

basis of the aesthetic systems of both Addison and Akenside. Walter

Hipple notes, of the general movement of aesthetic criticism in the

eighteenth century, that the aestheticians find their subject to be psycho-

logical:

> The central problem for them was not some aspect of the cosmos
> or of particular substances, nor was it found among the charac-
> teristics of human activity or of the modes of symbolic representa-
> tion; one and all, they found their problem to be the specification
> and discrimination of certain kinds of feelings, the determination
> of the mental powers and susceptibilities which yielded those
> feelings, and of the impressions and ideas which excited them.[70]

The stimulus-response aesthetic systems of Addison and Akenside may be

traced to Locke, who believed that one's observation of either external

objects or the internal operations of the mind is that which supplies one's

understanding with the materials of thinking. Observation and, above all,

visual observation of all phenomena are the most important faculty for man's

understanding.[71]

In Spectator 411, Addison argues that visual observation is the

source for the most intense pleasures of the imagination, and that the

pleasures of imagination are pleasurable sensations which are stimulated

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[70]Ibid., p. 305.

[71]Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language: The Primary
Language of Poetry, 1540's-1940's, p. 255.

in man either " . . . directly by external causes or indirectly by reasonably close imitations or substitutes for such causes."[72] Akenside accepts Locke's primacy of visual responses as the best source of knowledge; he also accepts Addison's categorical division of spatial qualities into the great, the beautiful, and the wonderful, as well as a depiction of the responses upon which these categories are based. However, he is oriented more toward idealism than is either Locke or Addison, the nature of which is best determined by examining his own interpretation of Addison's primary spatial qualities.

Akenside's emphasis upon the interaction between the imagination and the greatness of external objects has a traditional foundation in Longinus's On the Sublime. The evolution of the eighteenth-century concept of greatness from that of the sublime may be attributed to the influence of theologic and philosophic readjustments in cosmological speculations after the Copernican revolution.[73] Following Longinus, Akenside sees in man's perception of the sublime the basis for faith in the soul's immortality. Samuel Monk remarks of Akenside's concept of the sublime in The Pleasures of Imagination that the poet finds a propinquity between man's spirit and the vastness of space. For the eighteenth-century in general, the sublime is "awe-inspiring in its magnitude, its

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[72]Wimsatt and Brooks, op. cit., p. 257.

[73]Hipple, op. cit., p. 18.

energy, its terror."[74] Following is a description of the sublime by

Akenside, in which because the "high-born soul" is weary of the mundane,

> . . . she springs aloft
> Through fields of air; pursues the flying storm;
> Rides on the vollied lightning through the heavens;
> Or, yok'd with whirlwinds and the northern blast,
> Sweeps the long tract of day. Then high she soars
> The blue profound, and hovering round the sun
> Beholds him pouring the redundant stream
> Of light; beholds his unrelenting sway
> Bend the reluctant planets to absolve
> The fated rounds of Time. Thence far effus'd
> She darts her swiftness up the long career
> Of devious comets; through its burning signs
> Exulting measures the perennial wheel
> Of nature, and looks back on all the stars,
> Whose blended light, as with a milky zone,
> Invests the orient. Now amaz'd she views
> The empyreal waste, where happy spirits hold
> Beyond this concave heaven, their calm abode;
> And fields of radiance, whose unfading light
> Has travell'd the profound six-thousand years,
> Nor yet arrives in sight of mortal things.
> Even on the barriers of the world untir'd
> She meditates the eternal depth below;
> Till half-recoiling, down the headlong steep
> She plunges; soon o'erwhelmed and swallowed up
> In that immense of being. (I.I.183-211)

Monk believes that Akenside may be credited for keeping the Longinian

concept of the vastness of the sublime and the vastness of the soul of man

before popular attention of the eighteenth century, and the analogous

nature of the two subsequently plays a "considerable part" in Kant's

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[74]Samuel Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in
Eighteenth-Century England, p. 72.

The second of Akenside's spatial categories is the beautiful. The

infusion of his philosophical idealism into this category is largely

responsible for the ensuing philosophical and poetic perplexities which

haunt The Pleasures of Imagination. In the poem, beauty is personified,

and a large portion of the poem reflects the Platonic premises that beauty

exists independent of the mind and that one's perception of it is intellec-

tual, not neural. [76] In the previous chapter, it was noted that, after

tracing the manifestations of beauty on the scale of being, Akenside

locates its highest realm of being within the mind:

> Mind, mind alone, (bear witness earth and heaven!)
> The living fountains in itself contains
> Of beauteous and sublime; here hand and hand
> Sit paramount the Graces; here enthron'd
> Celestial Venus, with divinest airs,
> Invites the soul to never fading joy. (I.I.481-486)

The mind is the domicile for the spatial categories of both the sublime and

the beautiful. However, there is a revision of this passage in the first

book of the second version of the poem:

> He, God most high (bear witness, Earth and Heaven)
> The living fountains in himself contains
> Of beauteous and sublime: with him enthron'd
> Ere days or years trod their etherial way,
> In his supreme intelligence enthron'd

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[75]Loc. cit.

[76]Alfred Owen Aldridge, "Akenside and the Hierarchy of Beauty,"
MLQ, VIII (1947), 67.

>The queen of love holds her unclouded state,
>Urania. (II.I.563-569)

Akenside's alteration might seem slight; yet it may be of great significance.

Both passages are vague in defining the precise nature of that amorphous,

inexplicable specter called "mind"; but in the second version of The

Pleasures of Imagination Akenside leaves no doubt as to where exactly

ultimate sublimity and beauty abide--namely, within the mind of God.

Akenside apparently believed that his initial locating of sublimity and

beauty in the mind of man was not quite what he meant to say. Hence,

his explicit revision.

An additional revision indicates that Akenside wished to clear

away some ambiguities regarding beauty's abode. For example, in the

first version of the poem, several lines before the passage beginning

"Mind, mind alone," Akenside writes that beauty dwells " . . . most

conspicuous, even in outward shape, / Where dawns the high expres-

sion of a mind . . . ." (I.I.474-475). Presumedly, since he has not

used the superlative "highest," he means the "high expression" of man's

mind. In the second version, he writes that beauty--which still, pre-

sumedly, exists within man's mind--is a power that can guide one into

the realm of the divine. However, in this version, the description of the

constitution of the mind is more vague than in the original passage.

Here, beauty lends a most "conspicuous praise to matter" where " . . .

most conspicuous through that shadowy veil / Breaks forth the bright

expression of a mind . . ." (II.I.554-556). In this revision, Akenside

appears to attempt a precise description of process rather than form.

"Outward shape" in the first version is revised in the second into the

more concrete "matter." But "dawn" in the first version becomes sugges-

tively cloaked in the second behind "shadowy veil." Then, the connota-

tion of a gradual revelation which "dawn" imparts is replaced by the

suddenness, the forcefulness, and the rending implied by the verb,

"Breaks."

The ultimate importance of beauty to Akenside is evident in the

following lines:

> Thus was Beauty sent from heaven,
> The lovely ministress of Truth and Good
> In this dark world: for Truth and Good are one,
> And Beauty dwells in them, and they in her,
> With like participation. Wherefore then,
> O sons of earth! would ye dissolve the tie? (I.I.372-377)

He makes no substantial change of this passage in the second version of

the poem (II.I.432-437).

Akenside's concept of beauty is an amalgam of Addison's,

Hutcheson's, and Shaftesbury's views on beauty. Addison sees the

mind's response to the beauty of an object as a physiological process,

which is an allurement to human procreation as well as a fulfillment of

God's will through the creation of delightful forms. Hutcheson finds the

mind to be an indistinct form that responds to the perception of beauty

in color, sweetness, and solidity.[77] But above all, Akenside's concept

of beauty is heavily influenced by Shaftesbury's idealism. Shaftesbury's

aesthetics flow easily from his doctrine of nature and ethics, which was

originally a rebuttal to Hobbes's pessimistic view of human nature.

Following Plato in claiming that the mind perceives beauty in light of an

idea of perfection existing beyond the realm of the physical, Shaftesbury

stresses the dynamic process of thought which must act in order to know

ultimate truths. His treatment of beauty is concerned with the dynamism

of the artistic process of the creative act, not with a finished work of

art. In speaking of Shaftesbury and the English Platonists, Cassirer has

observed that the British aesthetics in the eighteenth century is a direct

outgrowth of certain preconceived centuries-old views of man and the

universe. He argues that the time's more fashionable school of thought,

the tradition of philosophical empiricism, could not have possibly stimu-

lated aesthetic speculation:

> Aesthetics is not a product of the general trend in English
> empiricism, but of English Platonism. The underlying reason
> for this is that the psychology of empiricism, with all its exact-
> ness of observation and subtility of analysis, does not go
> beyond the sphere of receptivity, and that it possesses the
> tendency throughout to transform all psychic spontaniety into
> receptivity.[78]

The empirical tradition of Hobbes, which reached its zenith in Hume,

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[77]_Loc. cit._

[78]Ernst Cassirer, _The Platonic Renaissance in England_, p. 197.

could not help but see the Platonic philosophical rationalism of Shaftesbury as antithetical to a philosophy of simple receptivity. Akenside's idealism has its source in Shaftesbury; like Shaftesbury, he sees beauty in two ways: as existent, a static Platonic ideal, and as existing, a dynamic intellectual process; and like Shaftesbury's, his dual view of beauty stems from a dual view of nature. Marsh believes that Akenside's concept of beauty is dialectic and, as such, instrumental in guiding the "argument" presented in The Pleasures of Imagination. Beauty, he says, is dialectical

> . . . in the sense that it functions positively and flexibly in a complicated analogical hierarchy of being and value which is divided nevertheless into two basic parts or "realms."[79]

What Marsh means by "positively" and "flexibly" is left to the reader to determine. His mention of "realms" is a reference to Akenside's belief that beauty exists within the realm of the divine mind as well as within the realm of man's mind. However, Akenside's expressed belief in an ultimate mind wherein an ideal beauty resides does not mean that the method of the argument in The Pleasures of Imagination is "dialectical." He does accept the Platonic categories of the ideal Beautiful, True, and Good. He accepts, also, the idea that beauty is a divine personification which pervades spatial objects along the scale of being and has its highest mundane manifestation in the mind of man; but his acceptance of ideal

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[79]Robert Marsh, "Akenside and Addison: The Problem of Ideational Debt," MP, LIX (1961), 43.

forms and values is a premise not to be explored, but to be exploited. His

"argument" is not a dialectical exploration in the true Platonic sense, but

an assertion simply affirmed by a wealth of descriptive phrases.[80]

Shaftesbury's Platonism provides Akenside with the rationale for the

teleological truth and goodness which he believes pervade the universe,

and Hutcheson provides him with the argument that the mind may perceive

beauty in color, sweetness, and form, even though the mind evades one's

attempt to describe its own exact nature. There is little tracing of an

"analogical hierarchy" in The Pleasures of Imagination through argumenta-

tion, for all of Akenside's descriptive details of nature are themselves

affirmations of "being and value." As stated above, Akenside has two

purposes in The Pleasures of Imagination: to affirm his theodicy and to

examine aesthetic responses. What Marsh terms Akenside's "complicated

analogical hierarchy of being" is the poet's premise. Akenside is not

exploring questions of "being" in the poem; instead, he is exploring man's

responses to aesthetic and natural stimuli. His inquiry leads him into a

vicious epistimological circle. The circuitous nature of his discussion

is what Marsh seems to mistake for a dialectic.

Time after time, Akenside describes the effects of the beautiful

and the sublime upon the mind of man. Yet, while he focuses on the

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[80]Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Poetry of Vision: Five Eighteenth-
Century Poets, p. 217.

mind's responses to the sublime and the beautiful, he at the same time

conjures up the very scenes to which he says man's mind responds.

Jeffrey Hart remarks of the conflict implicit in Akenside's seeing the mind

as both a passive and a dynamic agent that the poet is reaching out for a

new epistimology.[81] But Akenside leaves too much unsaid to be success-

ful in such a search. He does not explain how the mind's innate dynamic

"powers" perceive the existence of an external order of nature. He only

contends that they do. There is little else he can do. He wishes to

write a poem that reflects the existence of an external moral and aesthetic

order and the "powers" of man's imagination to perceive this order. His

premise that nature reflects an external moral and aesthetic order guides

the direction of the poetic presentation of his "argument" within The

Pleasures of Imagination itself. Consequently, the poem becomes a

massive description of nature. The problem of how the mind's dynamic

"powers" perceive a moral and aesthetic order remains a puzzle in The

Pleasures of Imagination because it is not the function of the Augustan

poetic as Akenside uses it to resolve the dilemma. He presumes the issue

settled. His intention is to describe the beauties of an established truth.

Akenside's world view exists precariously between the limits of

Plato's ultimate world of forms and that of Hume's subjective empiricism,

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[81]Jeffrey Hart, "Akenside's Revision of The Pleasures of Imagination,
PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 74.

which holds that ontological speculations are based on subjective asso-

ciations established by one's customary way of perceiving existence.

Akenside offers no dialectical or argumentative response to either of these

extreme positions. Philosophically, he does not try to offer one; poetically,

he is unable to do so in The Pleasures of Imagination. His third category

of spatial perception is that of novelty, or Addison's category of the

wonderful. In the second version of The Pleasures of Imagination, he

abandons this category entirely, for he finds the novelty of an object to

be but an extention of the greater category of the beautiful (II.I.661-682).

He does, however, retain the major categories of the sublime and the

beautiful.

Akenside proceeds in The Design to examine the supplementary

sources of imaginative pleasures mentioned above, which, added to the

categories of the sublime, the beautiful, and the novel (later the sublime

and the beautiful only), intensify the pleasures derived from viewing the

primary spatial categories. Akenside notes that the imitative arts--i.e.,

painting, sculpture, music, and poetry, which he includes under the

Addisonian categories of spatial stimuli--owe many of their effects to

stimuli described in typical tenets of neo-classic aesthetic theory, which

presumes an objective reality. These stimuli include three of the four

"foreign" sources of pleasure mentioned above: ideas drawn from external

nature, truths revealed to the understanding, and illustrations of divine

contrivance and final causes.

Akenside's incorporation of Addison's spatial categories with such

mimetic aesthetics represents a partial departure from strict neo-classicism.

His tacking away from the course of neo-classic theory implies that he

may have questioned the whole doctrine of mimetic reproduction of nature.

The problem of this doctrine as seen in the eighteenth century centered on

what precisely the artist was to imitate. Marks explains that poets who

subscribed to classical norms in the century " . . . did not feel bound to

reproduce with unselective fidelity the perceptions of eye and ear."[82]

And Wimsatt and Brooks observe that, under the influence of the neo-

classic theory of general truth presupposing a reality whereon mimesis

was possible, the artist " . . . professed to render reality through a trick

of presenting something better or more significant than reality. But the

trick obviously and quite often involved the unreal."[83] The unreal, here,

is any deviation from material reality and involves the problem of artistic

vision. Clearly, how the artist imitated something depended upon his

own view of it. This view might reflect an objective reality or it might

reflect but a subjective response to external stimuli. Akenside effects a

fusion of the "unreal" and the "real" by means of the Platonic-Shaftes-

burian "trick" of positing all reality within the mind. As used in The

Pleasures of Imagination, "mind" refers to both man's mind as perceptor

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[82]Marks, op. cit., p. 27.

[83]Wimsatt and Brooks, op. cit., p. 334.

and God's mind as the realizer of all forms. By sub-categorizing tenets

of neo-classic mimetic theory under the major spatial categories of the

sublime and the beautiful, which reside in the "mind," Akenside can

retain his Platonic idealism of ultimate forms and expound the neo-classic

Aristotelian principle of imitating a true external reality. Yet the Lockean

and Addisonian empirical element in his thought leaves the problem of

knowing what exactly is to be imitated--an objective reality, or a subjec-

tive response? Furthermore, a question exists that the mind in fact can

perceive an objective reality. To these difficulties, Akenside fails to

offer an adequate solution.

After presenting his categories of aesthetic responses and stimu-

lants to imaginative pleasures, Akenside feels that he may then "enliven

the didactic turn" of the poem by introducing an allegory of the figure of

Harmodius to account for the appearance of genius in the human race. As

noted earlier, it is not unusual for Akenside to turn to the Hellenic

tradition to account for the mind's dynamic nature. Harmodius represents

a high intelligence visited by the personification, "Genius." Akenside,

then, wishes to examine another pleasure of the imagination, the pleasure

that rises from ridicule. His examination begins in Book III of the first

version of The Pleasures of Imagination and continues for one-hundred

eighty-one lines. In the second version of the poem, the passage on

ridicule is reduced to forty-seven lines and occurs in Book II.[84] The

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[84]Hart, op. cit., p. 73.

reason for the reduction seems to have been Thomas Warburton's anger over what he considered to be a personal affront in the notes appended to the third book of the first version of the poem. The reduction permitted the deletion of the offending note.[85]

What is interesting about Akenside's decision to add the "pleasure" of ridicule to the general categories of "pleasurable" external stimuli is his subsequent concern over the variety of styles in which he might depict the pleasures of imagination. Ridicule, he believes, as did Shaftesbury, is the foundation of the comic arts and is the "manner" of the comic arts. Akenside states that, because the pleasure of ridicule has been "imperfectly" treated by previous writers, he will give "particular illustration" of it and distinguish its source. To do so, he feels he should adopt a style that befits ridicule; yet he desires that this new style remain as consistent as possible with the general seriousness of The Pleasures of Imagination as a whole. He is cognizant, he states, of the " . . . difficulty in giving tolerable force to images" in a satiric "vein of diction" without running into mock-heroic expression or "poetic raillery of professed satire." Neither extreme would be "consistent" with the diction level of the rest of the poem. Subsequently, in Book III there appears what might be called a little Dunciad, bearing a vague and limpid resemblance to its immortal forebearer. It is oratorical and ineffective, lacking the satirical

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[85]Dyce, op. cit., p. 19.

force of either the mock-heroic or "professed satire."

After he has drawn up the categories of natural and aesthetic stimuli, Akenside claims that, as a result, "the materials of imitation are open," meaning or implying that they are apparent and established. He intends, next, to "illustrate" particular pleasures of imagination. The first illustrations he will take from the "various and complicated resemblances" existing between the material and immaterial worlds. Such resemblances are the foundation of metaphor and wit. With other illustrations, he will depict the nature of imitation. At this point in The Design, he retains the premise that, though it perceives, the mind does not have any creative power of its own. Yet he comes precariously close to reversing his premise; and in the poem itself, he does. In part, this reversal may be attributed to his beliefs regarding "resemblances" and the "association of ideas." These beliefs are strongly disposed to the intellectual climate of the day. Wasserman explains:

> . . . during the eighteenth century the disintegration of cosmic orders widely felt as true was finally completed. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the literate had shared a constellation of synthesizing myths by means of which man could grasp relationships that gave significant patterns to otherwise discrete things and experiences. These systems transformed man and his world into a lexicon of symbols and integrated the symbols by meaningful cross-references. But by the end of the eighteenth century these communally accepted patterns had almost completely disappeared--each man now rode his own hobby-horse.[86]

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[86]Wasserman, op. cit., p. 170.

Locke's response to the disintegration during the seventeenth century of the old cosmic vision was to conclude that man receives all his ideas through sensations and reflections. These, he found, did not substantiate the traditional way of seeing things.[87] His subsequent theory of language reflected a skeptical view towards the older teleology. Language, he believed, should serve three purposes: to make thoughts known; to convey knowledge of things; and to convey thought with as much ease and quickness as possible.[88] He came, thus, to find the poet's use of language--to express wit, or the facile uniting of frequently disparate images and ideas--to be inferior to what he felt was the true purpose of language: to discriminate and separate categories of thought so as to avoid syntactical confusions. For Locke, poetic wit was irresponsible and had no bearing on what he saw as the true nature of things and man's need to analyze phenomena, that is, his need to exercise his judgment to determine the "real."[89]

The paradox of Akenside's attempt within a poem to fuse Locke's associational psychology with Platonic idealism and Shaftesburian moral optimism illustrates the perplexing contradictions which faced many thinkers of the day. Ultimately, he fails to effect a philosophical synthesis

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[87]B. A. G. Fuller, A History of Philosophy, II, 124-125.

[88]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, II, 142.

[89]Spacks, op. cit., pp. 67; Willey, Seventeenth-Century Background, pp. 287-288.

between the disparate philosophies.[90] Akenside continues in The Design

to give a general account of the production of the "elegant arts," and of

the secondary pleasures which arise from this "resemblance" to original

appearances in nature. He, then, states that The Pleasures of Imagination

will conclude on some reflections regarding the general conduct of the

"powers of imagination" and their "natural and moral usefulness in life."

His moral recommendation is a common device among eighteenth-century

poets, for most felt that poetry should indicate how the world was

organized and persuade readers to act in a moral fashion.[91] The Design,

then, concludes with a general description of the poem. Here, Akenside's

adherence to general neo-classical principles is noticeable. He remarks

that he has two models, Virgil's Georgics because of its "refined" style,

and Horace's works in general because of their epistolary style. He finds

Horace's style advantageous in that it allows a great variety of expression,

which "engages the generality of the reader." Because the subject with

which he is concerned "tends to constant admiration and enthusiasm," he

feels that an "open, pathetic, and figured" style is appropriate. He

believes that his views on this matter are correct, for it is not his inten-

tion in his work to give formal precepts or enter into "direct argumentation."

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[90]Martin Kallich, "The Association of Ideas and Akenside's The Pleasures of Imagination," MLN, LXII (1947), 170; Aldridge, "Akenside and Imagination," p. 771.

[91]Norton, op. cit., p. 380.

Instead, he proposes in The Pleasures of Imagination to exhibit the " . . .

most engaging prospects of nature, to enlarge and harmonize the imagina-

tion, and by that means insensibly dispose the minds of men to a similar

taste and habit of thinking in religion, morals, and civil life." He con-

tinues to explain how circumspect he has been to point out divine casuistry

in every principle he uses. Echoing Shaftesbury in closing The Design,

Akenside wishes to unite the "moral excellencies" of life to "external

objects of good taste." Then, he feels he may recommend these "excel-

lencies" and "objects" to all men, who, he claims, have a "natural

propensity for admiring what is beautiful and lovely." The Design, then,

closes with his acknowledgment that he makes "no apology" for the

"sentiments" expressed in the poem. The Pleasures of Imagination is an

interesting example of descriptive preciseness and oratorical abstruseness.

Akenside's purpose throughout the poem is to affirm his theodicy, but his

manner of justification is based on Locke's theory of association. Each

view encompasses a different view of nature, one seeing it as a reflection

of an ideal objective order, the other as simply a subjective response.

Akenside wishes to steer a course somewhere between these polarizations

of thought. To affirm the existence of an ideal "moral excellency" reflected

in nature, he must, as a poet, make use of language which, unfortunately

for his purposes, is more subjective that objective in nature. He wants

to assume that that which is described is, but the subjective nature of

empiricism tends to imply otherwise. He wants to assume that God has

created an objective reality which He has made comprehensible to man;
then, he can be assured that a literal description of God's creation func-
tions as a guiding rule of poetic expression for rendering the truth and
moral excellency of the "Sire Omnipotent." Akenside cannot unequivocally
accept the implications of Locke's empiricism, e. g., that man's knowl-
edge is purely subjective and that his language conveys only subjective
responses. Yet, if he does not explicitly accept the philosophical conse-
quences of Locke's associational psychology, Akenside's implicit
adherence to associationism as a method of conveying the objective truth
of God results in poetic amorphousness and incoherence.

CHAPTER IV

MEMNON'S IMAGE LONG RENOWNED

The Pleasures of Imagination, as a whole, suffers from Akenside's failure to provide an adequate structural base for the poem. The theory of association, as previously stated, fails to provide a reference for poetic coherence. There are a number of mythical referents throughout the poem, and they denote Akenside's familiarity with Hellenic philosophy and religion. However, their poetic functions are vague, and they serve merely as rhetorical figures which reflect Akenside's general teleological premise that from nature emanates the excellence of God's creation. The general inclusiveness of Akenside's teleological premise renders such figures poetically useless, and they add little of significance to his general descriptions.

In noting the reduction of the Augustan poetic to a purely descriptive state, Wasserman explains that the problems of eighteenth-century poets were multiplied because of the poets' inability to make analogies. Wasserman observes that the Augustan poetic was used mostly for didactic purposes, and he makes a distinction between an analogy used "poetically" as opposed to one used sententiously. The practice of most eighteenth-century poets was

. . . not to use the analogy poetically by imposing the patterns of
external nature or of the poet's experience with the scene upon
merely linguistic syntax and thereby releasing the constitutive possi-
bilities of an extraordinary syntactical system. The syntax of the
description remains distinct from the syntax of the moralizing, and
the failure to bring them together is the failure to generate a new
syntax, without which there is no poem, and no need for one.[92]

Wasserman's observations are applicable to Akenside because the language

of The Pleasures of Imagination is essentially denotative; in attempting to

describe a world view which to him is clear and distinct, Akenside has

little need for analogy or metaphor. An illustration from the poem empha-

sizing Wasserman's points is continued in Akenside's allusion to the

statue of Memnon, which stood before the ancient temple of Thebes. Zeus

conferred immortality upon Memnon after his death at the hand of Achilles.

When the sun rose, the first rays would strike the statue, and a musical

chord would ring forth.[93] The passage continues:

> For as old Memnon's image long renown'd
> Through fabling Egypt, at the genial touch
> Of morning, from its inmost fame sent forth
> Spontaneous music; so doth Nature's hand,
> To certain attributes which matter claims,
> Adapt the finer organs of the mind:
> So the glad impulse of those kindred powers
> (Of form, of colour's cheerful pomp, of sound
> Melodious, or of motion aptly sped)
> Detains the enliven'd sense; till soon the soul
> Feels the deep concord and assents through all

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[92]Wasserman, op. cit., p. 184.

[93]Harry Thurston Peck, ed., Harper's Dictionary of Classical
Literature and Antiquities, pp. 1027-1028.

        Her functions. Then the charm by fate prepar'd
        Diffuseth its enchantment. (II.I.150-162)

Marjorie Hope Nicolson has interpreted the tale of Memnon as Akenside's

illustration of the relationship between the light of day and the "soul of

nature," as well as the mysterious relationship between man's mind and

external phenomenon.[94]

It is significant that Akenside resorts to myth to explain the myste-

rious relationship between mind and matter; and it is also significant that

he retains the Memnon allusion in both versions of The Pleasures of

Imagination. Yet the allusion carries for only four lines; the remaining

nine return to describing as denotatively as possible the effects of

nature's phenomena upon the "finer organs of the mind." In the quoted

passage, Akenside is working with a mythical analogy, but the analogy

is immediately engulfed in a tide of descriptive statements, which are

more vague than the initial reference to the myth. In the first four lines,

the "genial touch of morning" on the stone image of Memnon causes

"spontaneous music." The remainder of the passage appears to equate

matter (nature) to "Morning" and the mind of "Memnon's image." The

result of matter's stimuli (form, color, sound, motion) "touching" the mind

(analogous to touching the stone image) results in a detention of "the

enliven'd sense" and an arousal of a "deep concord" (analogous to the

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[94]Nicolson, op. cit., p. 86.

setting forth of spontaneous music). Clearly, the mind is a receptor of

touch (the touch of matter qua morning). Subsequent to its receptivity, the

soul feels the "deep concord" it has with nature (matter) and "assents

through all / Her functions" to the ways of nature. Whether or not the

soul has any functions other than responding to external stimuli and

whether or not the soul itself is in any way distinct from the mind is not

described in the passage. Presumedly, the Memnon image has some

teleological significance, but the significance refers only to Akenside's

premise that from nature emanates the excellence of God's creation.

Akenside moves quickly from the Memnon image to a renewed description

of the effects that "Nature's hand" has caused matter to have upon the

mind of man. In this passage, any connotative suggestions evoked by

the reference to Memnon's image and the "genial touch of morning" are

obfuscated in the subsequent attempt to describe the stimulus-response

relationship among "Nature," "mind," "matter," and "motion." Akenside

must try to describe the vital force inhering in these phenomena of God's

creation. His own teleological premise that all nature is infused with

God's immanence and benignancy necessitates his doing so. Yet, even

Newton, whose influence may be seen in the passage through Akenside's

very choice of a statue as an analogical figure, had implied the limits of

descriptive language by providing no cosmological speculations because

the data presented to analytical treatment--motion and the attraction of

elements--were beyond mechanical explanation.[95] Akenside, however, is committed to describing a force or a power beyond denotative language, a power that can be known only linguistically through metaphor. He reverts to a mythical allusion that no one could seriously consider as a true illustration of fact in order to affirm the teleological truths of the new science which is determined to remove all barriers to clear thought, including Hellenic myths and outdated cosmologies.

Akenside's teleology, as mentioned earlier, is based on the chain of being, the corresponding planes of existence, and man as microcosm centrally located within these planes of being. Yet his implicit contradictory views of the actual composition of the chain and his adherence to Lockean associationism, which reduces the corresponding planes of existence to little more than chimeras of the mind, negate the practicality of his teleology, and together they undermine any reason for analogies between nature and "moral excellencies." Akenside's cosmology is confused and clearly fails to support his sententious purposes. Moreover, in The Pleasures of Imagination, metaphor is reduced to descriptive psychological associations, and myth becomes little more than decorative figure.

Albert William Levi has remarked that, throughout Western intellectual history, there has been a continuous confrontation between two types of languages which represent two different modes of human thought. Both

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[95]Brehier, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

are expressive of two different needs within the realm of human cognition.
The language of man's understanding is the language of science. Its
characteristics are influenced by man's need to be objective and factual
in recording the data of his experience. It is descriptive, denotative, and
analytical. The language of man's imagination is the language of metaphor.
Its characteristics are reflected in men's need to find a sense of drama
and purpose in human existence. It is metaphorical, connotative, and
synthetic. One language is the realm of material objects and data, the
realm of the scientist. The other is the realm of human relationships, the
realm of the artist. There is no compromise between these two different
languages, or modes of thought. Science must surrender its objectivity
or man his purpose. Human purpose, Levi avers, is inclusive of objectivity;
but man has a mysterious way of idealizing objectivity to the exclusion of
purpose, or even rationalizing purpose from objectivity, thus reversing
the language of the imagination against itself and negating an entire mode
of thought by speaking of it, literally, in terms of the other. Poets in
particular are sensitive to such a reversal: the human conflict of reality
and appearance become true and false propositions; the human illusion
becomes cognitive error; human destiny and purpose become causality and
scientific law; human fate and fortune become prediction and change;
human dramatic fact becomes matter of fact; human tragedy becomes

competition; human peace becomes systematic equilibrium.[96] When the language of the imagination surrenders to the language of the understanding, human meaning is levelled, and human value is demolished.

When Samuel Johnson wrote of The Pleasures of Imagination that, since "nothing is distinguished, nothing is remembered," he was speaking of Akenside's imagery and versification. But the lack of distinctive words and phrases implies more than a lack of distinctive images and versification, e. g., it implies what Levi has called a loss of "teleological imagination," or "the economy of human belief."[97] Akenside's omniscient premise becomes omnivorous, swallowing both language and "spontaneous music" into a great "immense of being" (I.I.211). Akenside writes of this great "being" at one point in the poem, "What needs words / To paint its power?" (I.I.244-245). What need, then, of a poem? Memnon, perhaps once vital, becomes a mute stone, standing silent and insignificant inside The Pleasures of Imagination and the sublime infinitude the poem seeks to portray.

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[96]Albert William Levi, Literature, Philosophy and the Imagination, p. 47.

[97]Ibid., p. 8.

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