Chapter III is the first extant chapter of the Opus Maximum (OM), which begins VCL MS 29, vol. iii, McFarland’s Fragment 1. At the end of this chapter, Coleridge defines his first assumption or “postulate” for the whole argument of OM as “the Existence of the Will” (Op Max 11). To understand Will is a prerequisite for understanding OM. But the definition of Will at the end of Chapter III is not very clear; and the whole chapter leading up to the definition can be a nightmare for any reader with ambitions to read through OM. The content is challenging enough, but the rhetoric of Coleridge’s argument complicates the matter. Part of the problem is what Heather Jackson acutely describes as Coleridge’s “art of suppressed or concealed transition”: his freer adaptation of the rhetorical figure transistio “that explicitly signals the passing from one subject to another.” Jackson believes that scholars’ neglect of transition is serious, since it is the technique that manifests Coleridge’s “method.” She suggests that his transitions “belong not to the literal content of a text but to its conceptual structure, not to its diction but to its syntax, not to its parts but to the unarticulated relationship between the parts” (Jackson 217, 214, 218–20).

My chapter 1, therefore, has a dual purpose. First, as a foundation for understanding Coleridge’s argument throughout OM, the chapter presents the Will, Coleridge’s primary assumption or “postulate” for all his themes. Second, I focus on the rhetoric of Coleridge’s presentation of Will. Understanding his use of devices of repetition and transition is necessary for understanding all Coleridge’s themes, since
he uses these devices throughout *OM*. Chapter 1 therefore functions as a primer for reading *OM* at large.²

**Coleridge’s Postulate of the Will**

Coleridge concludes the first extant chapter of Fragment 1 with an important definition of Will:

> But the one assumption, the one postulate, in which all the rest may assume a scientific form, and which granted we may coercively deduce even those which we might allowably have assumed, is the Existence of the Will, which a moment’s reflexion will convince us is the same as Moral Responsibility, and that again with the reality and essential difference of moral Good and Evil. *(Op Max 11)*

As if to emphasize the importance of this definition, two chapters later he refers back to this chapter and paraphrases his definition as “the actual being of a responsible Will” (17). One aspect of this definition in Chapter III is clear: “the Existence of the Will” is for Coleridge “the foundation of everything else” (11 n. 14). McFarland calls the definition an “initial complex” that “will bear the burden of the entire elaboration of the *Op Max,*” because Will is intrinsic to Coleridge’s reasoned rejection of pantheism and “goes hand in hand with the doctrine of the Trinity, which the progress of the *Op Max* is also moving to extricate” (n. 15). The term complex applies to the definition in another sense, given the compression of the passage. How, for example, can “a moment’s reflexion…convince us” of the equivalence of Will with “Moral Responsibility” and “moral Good and Evil”? The passage needs unpacking. Readers can also hope that the chapter preceding the definition prepares them better for understanding the conclusion. Some background on postulates in Coleridge’s period and an examination of the argument of Chapter III will begin to resolve the difficulties of this definition of Will.

Elinor Shaffer argues that Coleridge, covertly in Chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria* and more openly in *OM*, adapts the idea of the “postulate of philosophy.” This is a key term in late eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy, which attempts to construct philosophy from primary intuitions. Kant believed only mathematicians could make such constructions, but Schelling thought otherwise. For example, mathematicians cannot prove the preexistence of a circle in the mind from experience, but they can demonstrate that preexistence in experience by drawing the circle. Just so, humans can demonstrate the validity of moral axioms, in “a kind of practical proof,” by fulfilling them in action. Furthermore, for Schelling, philosophy