Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook.

\[(BL, 1, 124)\]

(i) **Head and heart**

Coleridge was the most introspective of English writers. We have abundant evidence of his self-questioning in his notebooks, letters and philosophical writings. There is a myriad of links between his thought experiments and his poetry and therefore it is tempting to suggest that his poetry is dependent on his philosophical insights, rather than that his thought emerges from a poetic life in which he deliberately courted areas of experience where analytical thought gives way to obscure and unstructured motives, drawing upon the spontaneous recovery of what he calls ‘a gay & motley chaos of facts & forms, & thousand-fold experience, the origin of which lies beyond memory, traceless as life itself & finally passing into a part of our life more naked than would have been compatible with distinct consciousness’ \[(Logic, 8)\].

Hume’s remarkable insight is that: ‘We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.’\(^2\) Coleridge perceived a more complex relationship between thought and feeling – arguing that there are vast areas or phases of experience in which thought and feeling cannot be separated from each other: ‘I feel strongly, and I think strongly; but I seldom feel without thinking, or think without
feeling...My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my feelings: & this, I think, peculiarizes my style of Writing' (Letters, 1, 279); ‘A Poet's Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified' (Letters, 2, 459); ‘An endless activity of Thought, in all the possible associations of Thought with Thought, Thought with Feeling, or with words, or of Feelings with Feelings, & words with words’ (CN, 3, 3246).

But can we discuss ‘feelings’ – our own or Coleridge's – without becoming subjective to the point of anarchy? There is a sense in which we cannot – the ‘feelings’ of others may only be deduced, so any discussion of them must take place in a fuzzy area confined by linguistic convention and metaphor. Those experiences which philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists call ‘qualia’ – the perceived colour of a sunset, the taste of a vintage wine, the scent of a rose – remain unknowable for anyone except the perceiver. Many psychologists and philosophers have argued that this is an insurmountable barrier to any materialist explanation of human consciousness. The thoroughgoing materialist could argue that all our experiences are fundamentally incommunicable. Empathy is, strictly speaking, not feeling with, or in, or together, it is being competent or at least plausible in the kind of guesses which humans make about the perceptions of others. That is not to reduce its value – empathy is a vital part of human interaction and consequently of human being.

The alternative to the materialist view is to propose that consciousness is an immaterial witness and agent within a material body and brain. This is a natural solution to the problem of consciousness that has evolved in the deep past of our species, a working model which seems to explain our roles within the world and which permits, urges, requires that consciousness, soul, spirit, exist within a metaphysical universe with gods, ghosts, ancestors, angels, daemons and the like. It is natural to believe in such things. As Lewis Wolpert argues, activities such as science are not in that way natural.

‘Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious.’ Fodor’s remark is unanswerable and raises unanswerable questions about the meaning of the word conscious. However, scientific research has gone some way in exploring the way in which ‘feelings’ – whether we mean by that word sense-data, basic emotional drives such as fear, lust, love, hatred, or more complex affective states, inherent or acquired – are related to material events in the brain and in the body, the electrochemical traffic in the neurons and the complex activity of hormonal secretions, matters which are to some degree capable of measurement and demonstration.