

Recentering Blake's Marginalia

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Over the past two decades, scholarship on William Blake has turned decidedly toward issues of materiality and textuality. Online projects such as the William Blake Archive and the Blake Digital Text Project, as well as the publication of Blake's major illuminated works by the William Blake Trust and Princeton University Press, have made Blake's work available in forms that capture a great deal more of both the visual and verbal dimensions of the originals than any typeset version could do.

The same cannot be said, however, for William Blake's marginalia, which are chiefly available in typeset editions such as David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1988) or Sir Geoffrey Keynes's *Complete Writings of William Blake* (1966). Scholars wishing to get a sense of the visual and verbal dimensions of Blake's marginalia must study the originals or photographs of them. Although facsimiles of Blake's annotated copies of John Caspar Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (1788) and Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1797) have been produced by R. J. Shroyer and G. Ingle James, respectively, neither is of good quality.¹ Because of the limitations of the typeset format, issues of materiality and textuality—the look of the text on the page, now so important in Blake studies generally—have not emerged in relation to Blake's annotations. There is a vicious circle something like: Blake's marginalia are assumed to be unimportant and so are not published in facsimile format (that is, the cost of publication is assumed to outweigh any scholarly benefit); the non-facsimile printing of the marginalia submerges issues otherwise central to Blake studies; the marginalia are treated as secondary since there appears to be little of (textual) importance in them; as studied in typeset editions, the marginalia confirm the assumption that they are not of much interest.

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1. Jenijoy La Belle, reviewing the Lavater facsimile, wrote, "the facsimile itself is a distinct disappointment. . . a disturbing number of Blake's pen strokes are lost or fragmented into vague rows of dots and dashes. The problem here is not merely aesthetic, but textual"; review of *Aphorisms on Man: A Facsimile Reproduction*, in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 16 (1989): 126–28.

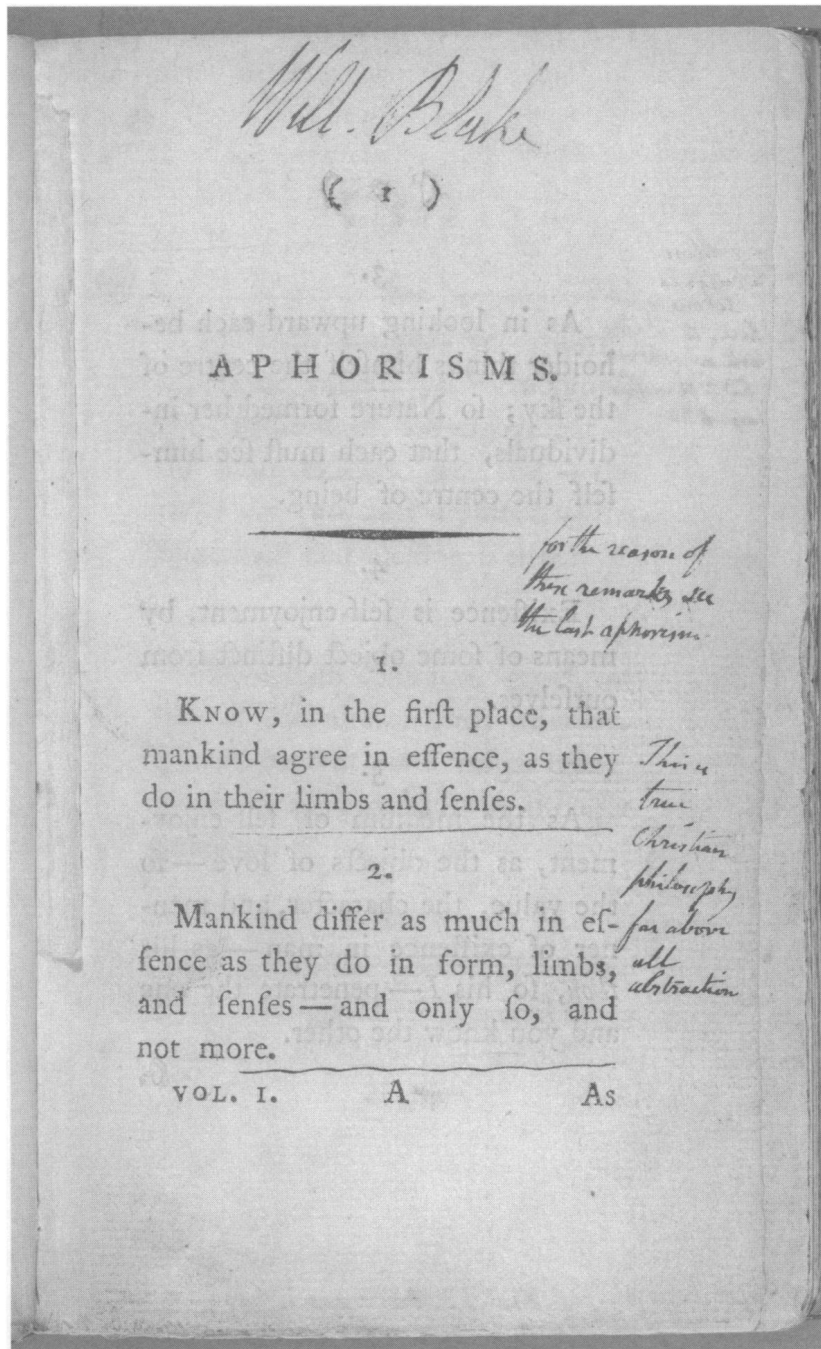


Figure 1. Blake's annotations to John Caspar Lavatar's *Aphorisms on Man* (1788), p. 1 (Huntington Library copy, accession no. RB 57431).

Ironically, though, there is a sense in which the marginalia have not been entirely marginal to Blake studies. They are often removed from their contexts and taken as representative of Blake's so-called "true beliefs" (or his "philosophy"), attributable to a static belief-set that operates consistently and without contradiction. But the marginalia are usually highly context sensitive, reactions to a particular place in a text and clearly generated by reading on a particular occasion. Blake will often specify which lines he is commenting on, as in his annotations to Swedenborg's *Wisdom of Angels, concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, where he has written "Note this" or "Mark this" next to brackets "collecting" lines (sections 410 and 411, and 421). In other cases, the indicated context may be broader, and the annotations need to be considered in relation to one another within a given volume. In one of his first marginal notes in Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, for example, Blake warns that "the Reader must expect to Read in all my Remarks on these Books Nothing but Indignation and Resentment."² (Interestingly, not all of his "Remarks" are indignant; some express outright agreement.) But both specific and general contexts like these often go unacknowledged.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, for example, Edward Said quotes one of Blake's annotations to Reynolds's *Discourses*: "William Blake is unrestrained on this point: "'The Foundation of Empire,' [Blake] says in his annotations to Reynolds' *Discourses*, 'is Art and Science. Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is No More. Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose.'³" The reader might take into account Blake's warning about "Indignation and Resentment," and perhaps should hesitate before claiming that Blake is "unrestrained" on any point. In the case of the marginalia, not only are his comments in these contexts thematically "restrained" (that is, addressed to) the material he is reading, but they are also materially contained by the space available on the page. Blake's "unrestrained" comment on Empire, Art, and Science is written on the contents page of the Reynolds volume: What if there had been more blank space on this particular page? Or less?

In "'To Defend the Bible in This Year 1798 Would Cost a Man His Life,'"⁴ Morton D. Paley examines the marginalia to Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, duly noting in one instance that "Blake carefully links his marginal note to three words of text" (sidenote, p. 3, line 36). From such observations, however, Paley attempts to derive Blake's position on religion and antinomianism in 1798. Without rehearsing Paley's argument, I wish simply to point to the way in which bits of

2. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 2d ed., corrected, 3 vols. (London, 1798), vol. 1; British Library shelfmark C45e18.
3. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), 12.
4. *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 32 (1998): 32–42.

marginalia are used as evidence of Blake's ideas, philosophies, and positions. Certainly there is a degree to which Blake's marginal comments share themes in common, not only with one another but also with his other work. However, inattention to immediate textual or material matters has often led to the privileging and over-generalization of the content of marginalia. Consider Blake's annotation on pages 2 and 3 in of Watson's *Apology* (figure 2), where he has linked marginalia with many specific points in the original. Blake produced a text to rival the original for any reader's attention—almost all available space has been used.

The marginalia are thus important as evidence of Blake's material encounter with books. Books in general appear in Blake's poetic works as symbols for authority and oppression (along with correlate activities such as reading, tracing, and writing). Urizen's book, in *The Book of Urizen*, for example, contains "the secrets of wisdom" and "Laws of peace, of love, of unity . . . One King, one God, one Law."⁵ Consistently, however, such authority is undermined by alternative perspectives. (In fact, fewer than half of the extant copies of *The Book of Urizen* contain the plate in which the contents of Urizen's books are said to be "the secrets of wisdom.") Blake may not have identified Watson as "Urizenic" per se; however, Blake's treatment of the page as a site of contestable authority is evident in his surrounding the original with new, marginal text. The marginalia need to be considered in view of their role in that contest rather than subjected to thematic, content-driven analysis.

Because of the belief that the annotations give us unproblematic access to a "real" Blake, however, they have been treated as if their content was of sole importance. Harold Bloom has written, for example, that "of all Blake's annotations . . . this [volume of Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*] seems to me the most profound, and the most central for a reader's understanding of Blake himself."⁶ It is this sense of Blake speaking as "himself" in the annotations—that is, more truthfully, more directly, more plainly—that continues to inform scholarly use of the marginalia. However, even brief study of the original volumes reveals that faith in the marginalia as unproblematic statements is misguided. In many of the marginal notes Blake addresses a "Reader," suggesting that he is well aware of annotation as a public performance with potential auditors. In the note on the title page of Reynolds's *Discourses* quoted above, for example, Blake addresses the expectations of the reader. In his annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, Blake anticipates the nature of a future

5. *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York, 1988), 72; further page references in the text.

6. Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (Garden City, N.Y., 1963), 84–85.

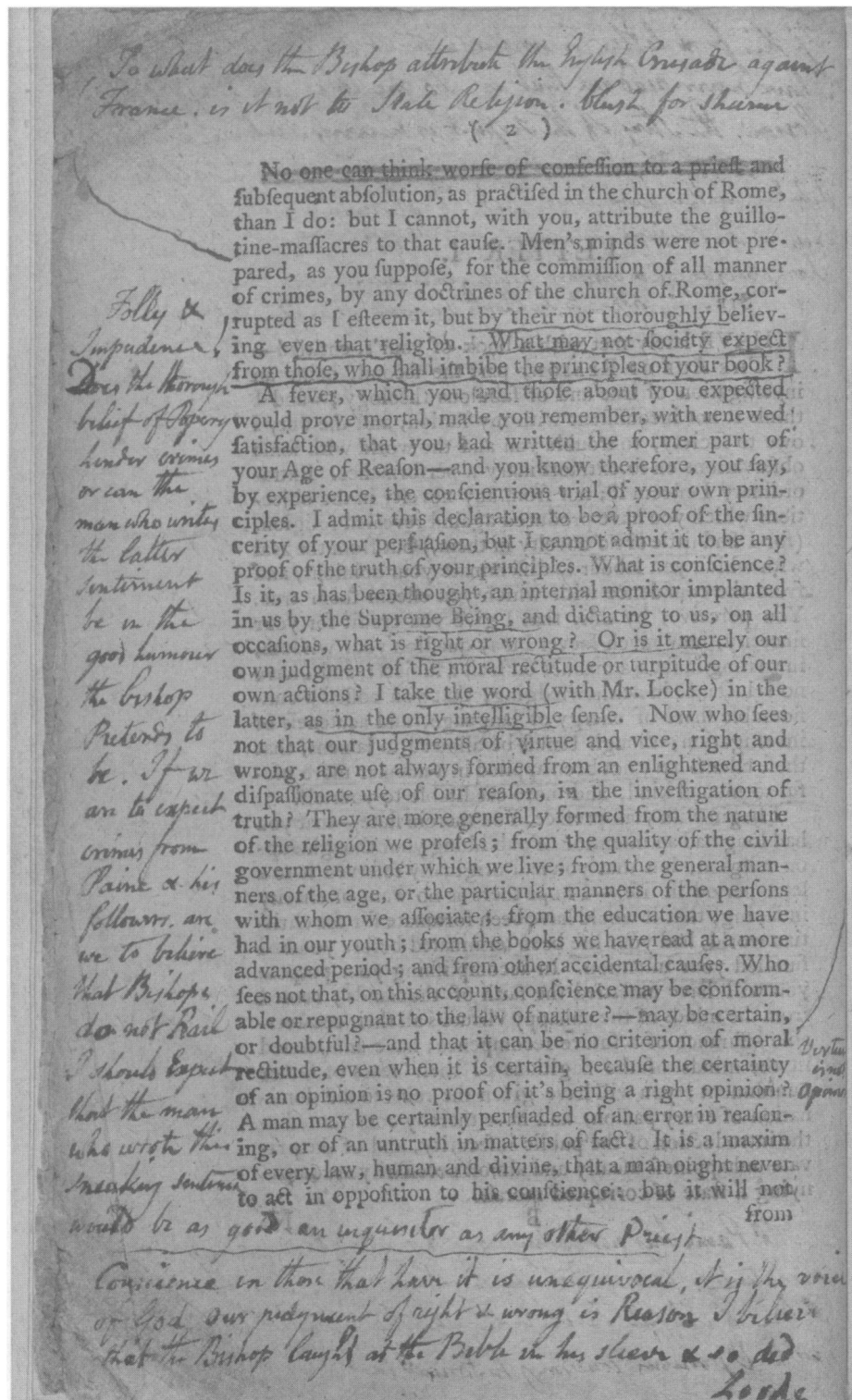


Figure 2 (above and right). Blake's annotations in Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (1797), pp. 2–3 (Huntington Library copy, accession no. RB 110260).

*If Conscience is not a Criterion of Moral Rectitude What is it?
 He who thinks that Honesty is changeable knows nothing about it*

(3)

from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty:—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction” the worst of their transgressions, and experience, without dismay, “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established? You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents)—you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.”—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—“that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolish—

Always, or the Bible is false

Contemptible Falshood & Weakness

Virtue & honesty or the dictates of Conscience are of no doubtful signification to any one

Opinion is on every Principle another. No Man can change his Principles Every Man change his opinions. He who supposes that his Principles are to be changed is a Dispicable who follows his Principles & calls that change

Serpentine Disimulation

Pain is either a Devil or an Inspired man. Men who give themselves to their Inevitable Enemies in the manner that Pain does are no ~~wise~~ ^{examined} ~~foolish~~ If they are not determinately wrong they must be Right or the Bible

response: "I hope no one will call what I have written cavilling because he may think my remarks of small consequence."⁷ Access to "Blake himself" is perhaps no less complicated in the marginalia than it is in other of his works. The notion of "Blake himself" is itself problematic.

Here I concentrate specifically on the annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, now in the collection of the Huntington Library, partly because it is this volume that Bloom contends is central to readers' discovery of "Blake himself." Also, there seems to be considerable disagreement among the editors of Blake's work regarding which of the annotations in the book are in Blake's hand. It would seem crucial to consider the various hands apparently at work in the volume to understand how (or whether) Blake might have shared the annotated text. In the next section section I chiefly consider marks that seem likely to have been Blake's while taking into account the possibility that others made some of them, and in the subsequent section I consider the evidence of the handwriting in more detail. Some of the textual issues involved with the Lavater volume may be intractable, but their very intractability bears directly on the findings of some previous readers of the marginalia.



Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* was translated by Henry Fuseli, and Blake engraved the frontispiece; the volume was published in 1788 and Blake appears to have annotated his copy, unbound and unfolded, immediately.⁸ Lavater had been rather generous to Fuseli, inviting him to "make improvements [and] to omit what you think false or unimportant."⁹ In addition, Lavater's final aphorism invites readers to "interline such of these aphorisms as affected you agreeably in reading, and set a mark to such as left a sense of uneasiness with you; and then shew your copy to whom you please" (Aphorism 643).¹⁰ Blake may have been particularly drawn to such a book, as it explicitly invited readers to mark the

7. John Caspar Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man, from the Original Manuscript*, trans. [Henry Fuseli] (London, 1788), Huntington Library copy, accession no. RB 57431; annotation on p. 224 (referred to henceforth in the text by aphorism number).
8. Blake and Fuseli were close friends and collaborators; the book was likely given to Blake before binding. As G. E. Bentley Jr. notes in *Blake Books* (London, 1977), only some of the offset caused by the annotation is on facing pages, so annotation must have taken place before binding (p. 690); Bob Essick has commented (personal communication) that this evidence indicates that the sheets must have been unfolded as well as unbound. The offset from the annotation deserves careful study for what it may reveal about Blake's reading and annotation of the volume. Because the offset suggests that the annotation occurred in at least two stages of the book's production, it at least confirms that the annotation was undertaken in more than one session.
9. Quotation from Lavater's dedicatory letter to Fuseli.
10. "Interline" is defined by the *OED*: "To add interlinear glosses to" and "to interpolate or extend (a narrative, etc.) with new matter." Interlining is thus much more textually intrusive than underlining, which Blake also does.

text and to circulate it with those marks. He wrote on the first page, before Aphorism 1, “for the reason of these remarks see the last aphorism” (figure 1, p. 134). This also indicates that he did not simply annotate as he read through for the first time; at some point he went back to the first page after having read the last. Blake appears to have followed Lavater’s directions closely. He (or someone) has marked certain passages with an “X” and has written “uneasy” beside some. And it does seem likely that Blake shared the volume with others, and/or perhaps reread and annotated it at different times.

Next to Aphorism 503 (which reads “No wheedler loves.”) someone has written “No fumbler kisses” (figure 3). And next to Aphorism 20, someone has written “Admirable!” vertically in the left margin, and also “Regeneration,” in ink, horizontally in the left margin. The “No fumbler kisses” and the “Admirable!” are both in pencil, but the hand and the quality of the pencil are entirely different in each note (figure 4). The annotation to Aphorism 503 is in dark pencil, the script somewhat cramped and jagged. The annotation to Aphorism 20 is written neatly, in light pencil strokes. The style of “Regeneration” is quite different from the annotation next to it (the “Admirable!”), which in turn is different from the annotation to Aphorism 503. The “Regeneration” is almost certainly Blake’s comment. It was written in dark ink, as are most of the annotations throughout the volume; thematically it intersects with Blake’s use of the term “Regeneration” elsewhere in his work; and the handwriting style is close to examples of Blake’s hand in other volumes, letters, and the Blake notebook (particularly identifiable is the “R”).

Did Blake take the final aphorism (which directs the reader to share the volume) seriously, or did he return to the volume himself at different times, without circulating it? While the consequences of these possibilities may not seem immediately substantial, they do in fact bear on how we think of Blake, not just as a reader and writer but also as a poet, for the “book” and associated activities (reading, tracing, writing) play a significant role in his poetry. As mentioned above, the character of Urizen, as he appears throughout Blake’s work, is often associated with books and with the imposition of authority and power through the book, or books, into which he has written his laws. Blake’s activities as an engraver and bookmaker often seem to parallel those of Urizen. Urizen says of his books, “Here alone I in books formd of metals / Have written the secrets of wisdom” (*Book of Urizen*, plate 4, lines 24–25).¹¹ If Blake did share his volume with others to read and annotate (and to read his annotations), this suggests a very different kind of

11. In the copies that contain plate 4, the line in fact breaks at “me-” (not shown in the Erdman edition, p. 72); the line thus reads: “Here alone I in books formed of me-,” suggesting the profoundly subjective basis for the universalizing claim that follows on the next line.

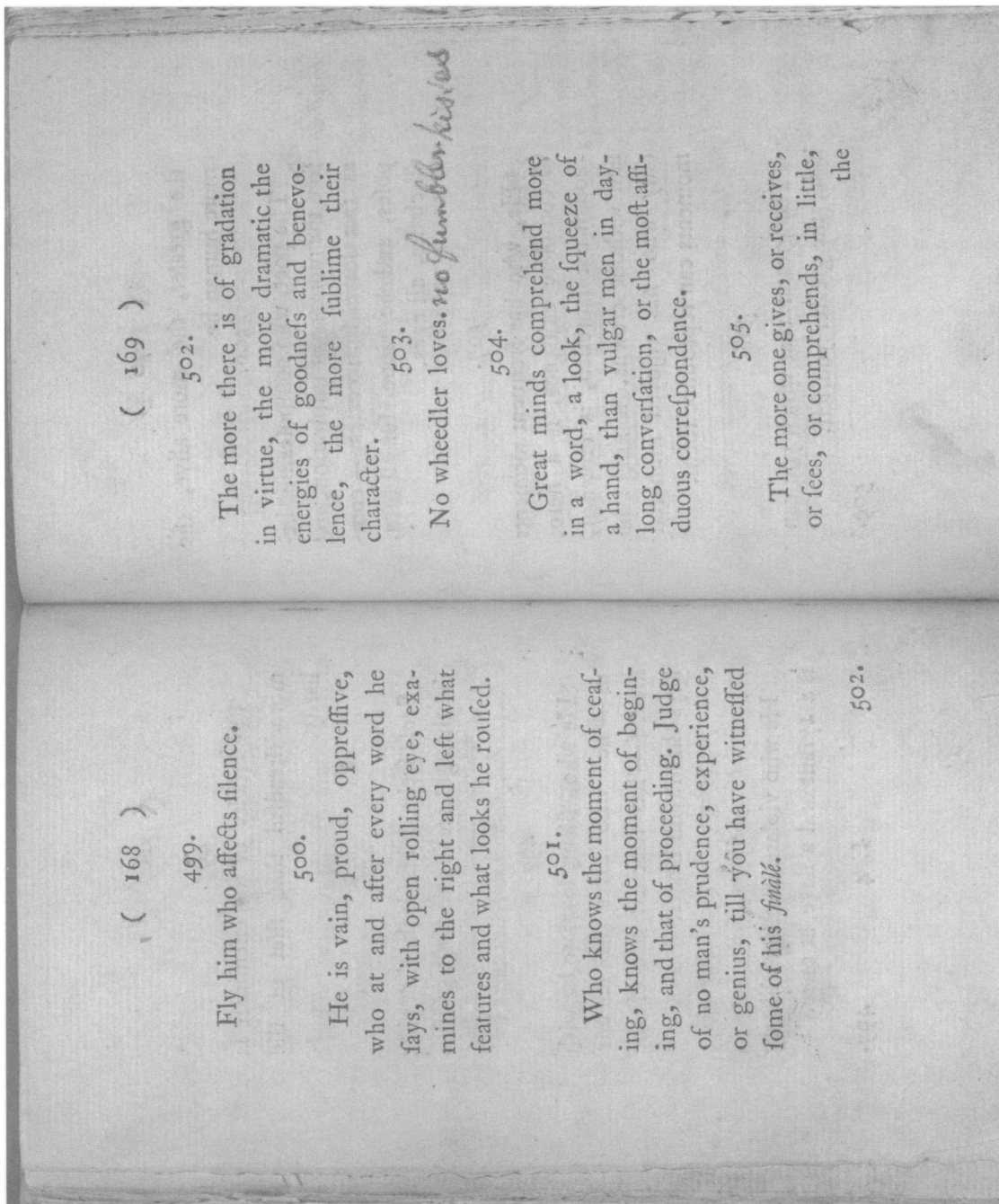


Figure 3. Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, pp. 168–69 (Huntington Library copy).

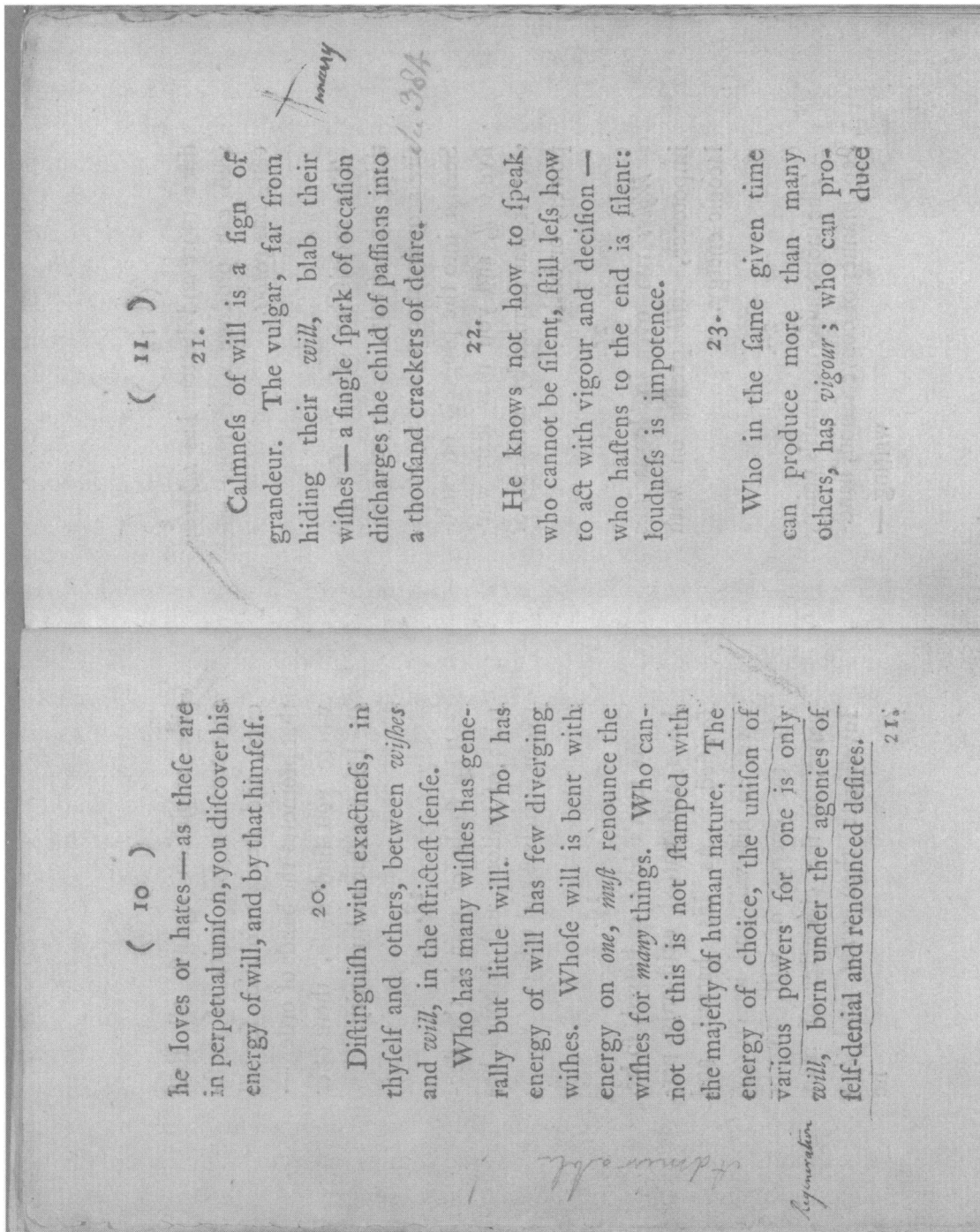


Figure 4. Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, pp. 10–11 (Huntington Library copy).

treatment of “the book.” Elsewhere, in *The Four Zoas*, Urizen commands Orc to “Read my Books” (Night the Seventh, p. 79, line 20; Erdman, p. 355)—a very different injunction from Lavater’s invitation to others to read his book. Whereas Urizen’s command reflects his intention to control the reader of his book, Lavater’s final aphorism invites both a reading and a writing. This distinction suggests two contrasting sets of roles to be played by author, book, and reader.

It is hard to understand Blake’s own experience as a reader and annotator without some attention to whether he did circulate his volume of Lavater’s *Aphorisms*, and just how widely.¹² If Blake himself returned to the volume at various times to annotate it, this presents an interesting parallel to Urizen’s activity as represented in a later poem, *The Four Zoas*. In this poem, Urizen compulsively returns to his book to rewrite and to trace what he has already written. In Night the Seventh, for example, Orc describes Urizen: “thou dost fixd obdurate brooding sit / Writing thy books. . . thy pen obdurate / Traces the wonders of Futurity in horrible fear of the future” (p. 79, lines 10–16; Erdman, p. 354). Later, Urizen “tracd his Verses / In the dark deep” (p. 81, lines 10–11; Erdman, p. 356). Did Blake have the same kind of solitary engagement with his books as did Urizen; or did Blake, in circulating the Lavater volume, attempt to constitute a kind of author-reader-book relationship decidedly (perhaps deliberately) *unlike* that of Urizen (as author and orator of his own books)? Did Blake develop Urizen as a character whose relationship with books would reflect or undermine—or some combination of both—Blake’s own encounters with books? Blake, as a book-maker himself, was conscious of their potential both to communicate and to constrain imaginative vision. Urizen’s books are created in part as instruments of control that depend upon stable, singular interpretations as provided by their author. (Urizen’s search for a “solid without fluctuation” in *The Book of Urizen*, for example, provides the context in which he writes his “books formd of metals”; plate 4, lines 10–24). Lavater’s forthright invitation to readers in the final aphorism to annotate actively while reading, and then to share the annotated volume with other readers (and annotators) perhaps struck Blake, reading in 1788, as evocative of the kind of relationship that could exist among author, reader, and book, for it was a relationship that encouraged involvement with the text, not one that depended on authorial control or textual stability and finality.

Such involvement with the text is also suggested by the inter- and intra-textual referentiality that develops among “sets” of linked annotations, such as the notes to Aphorisms 20, 21, and 384. Next to Aphorism 21 Blake has written “un-easy” along with an “X” or dagger-shape. These are both in dark ink. Also written next to Aphorism 21 is the note, “See 384.” However, the ink is a light

12. It is of course possible that other hands contributed to the book after it left Blake’s ownership.

brown/ochre color. Next to 384 is the note "See 20 & 21," also in the light brown/ochre ink (figure 5). There are no annotations in black ink next to 384. Returning to 20, we find, as I've mentioned above, "Regeneration," written in the left margin in black ink in small script. Also in the left margin is the word "Admirable!" written vertically in neat pencil. Part of Lavater's text is underlined in black ink: "The energy of choice, the unison of various powers for one is only WILL, born under the agonies of self-denial and renounced desires." Again, the "Regeneration" is most likely Blake's since it is in the same ink as most other annotations in the volume, it closely resembles Blake's hand, and it is a word that occurs throughout Blake's work. The "Admirable!" is very likely not by Blake. The hand does not look like other examples of Blake's writing; in particular, the "A" is a capital "A" but Blake's usual practice is to use what looks more like a large cursive "a" (for example, see "always" in figure 3). The word "See" and the numbers written in light brown/ochre could possibly be Blake's. He often used a similar capitalized "S," and the numbers, while not of course identical, are similar in pen stroke and curvature to others in the volume. The "3" of "384," for example, is similar to the "3" in "533" and "630," both in the bottom tail and in the relative proportion of the top curve to the bottom curve. Also noteworthy is that in "See 384" (light brown/ochre) there is no reference to "N" or to "Aphorism." However, in other cases, in black ink, Blake writes "See N 124" (to Aphorism 39), "contrary to N 39" (to Aphorism 124), or "aphorism 533" (to Aphorism 3). I think it unreasonable, however, to assume that such an inconsistency alone is proof of another annotator at work. It is as likely that Blake himself returned to the volume at a later time, using a different color of ink, and referred to the aphorisms by number only.

Erdman, in the textual notes to his *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, contends that "afterthoughts were written in pencil: those on Nos. 287 and 384 probably by Blake" (p. 883). The note to 287 reads, "unsophisticated," and does not look at all like the penciled "Admirable!" to 21, likely confirming that "Admirable!" was not written by Blake. The note on 384, which Erdman contends is Blake's, is not in pencil, and so it is unclear what Erdman is referring to. Erdman further asserts that the notes to 20 and 503 were written "by two different writers, probably friends to whom Blake showed his marked copy" (p. 883). Erdman does include in his transcript the note "See 384," although there is no indication that the note is in a different ink color. The note to 384, in the same ink color, which refers back to 20 and 21, is also included in Erdman's transcription, though again no mention is made of its being in ochre ink. Robert Essick, in *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collections*, writes that "there are notes written in brown ink [what I've called light brown/ochre] in an

unidentified hand next to aphorisms 21, 280, and 384.” (Erdman identified notes to 21 and 384 as by Blake.) Essick proposes that the annotation to 503, which Erdman contends is written by someone other than Blake, looks “like Blake’s later handwriting.”¹³ Essick also comments that “Blake annotated the book on more than one occasion.” G. E. Bentley Jr. concurs, in his *Blake Books*, that “Blake went through the book making comments several times” (see n. 8, above). However, Bentley asserts that the pencil annotations to 20 (“Admirable!”) and to 503 (“no fumbler kisses”) “are by Blake.” The notes that Bentley describes as “written in a yellowed ink [that is, those to 21 and 384 that I have identified as light brown/ochre],” though, are listed with his “Notes by Others,” indicating that Bentley does not believe them to have been written by Blake.¹⁴ Finally, Geoffrey Keynes, in his 1966 *Complete Writings of William Blake*, asserts that the “Admirable” to 20 (Keynes omits the exclamation point) is “probably written by another hand.” Keynes does not transcribe the notes to 21 and 384 (in light brown/ochre) but does include the “Admirable!” (accompanied by Keynes’s own note, as quoted above: “[*probably written by another hand*]” (brackets and italics are Keynes’s)).¹⁵ The pencil note to 503 is not included in Keynes’s transcription. No mention is made by Keynes of the annotations that are in the Lavater volume but not included in his transcription. Clearly he does not believe them to have been written by Blake, though he gives no reason. Ink color would be no reason to discount them, since, as both Essick and Bentley suggest, Blake likely returned to the volume at different times.

What are the alternatives that arise when we attribute certain of the annotations to Blake or to those with whom he may have shared the Lavater volume? The issue is not necessarily one of judging value—that is, determining what is valuable in the book based on whether or not Blake himself wrote it; but rather, to consider the kind of inter- and intratextualizing possible when annotations are added. If all the annotations in the Lavater that enhance intratextuality—those that refer to other numbers in the book—are not Blake’s, then it is possible that whoever annotated in the light brown/ochre ink actually had a chance to read Blake’s annotations first and then took up the same kind of approach. Alternatively, if Blake is responsible for most of the annotations in the volume, we get an even clearer sense of his approach to annotation and to books—that is, one that looks to un-finish otherwise finished texts by creating new referential networks that resonate both inside and outside of the volume.¹⁶

13. Robert N. Essick, *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection* (San Marino, Calif., 1985), 182.
14. Bentley, *Blake Books*, 690–91.
15. Keynes, *Complete Writings of Blake*, 66.
16. Further analysis may suggest who else annotated the book, and whether the volume circulated during Blake’s lifetime.

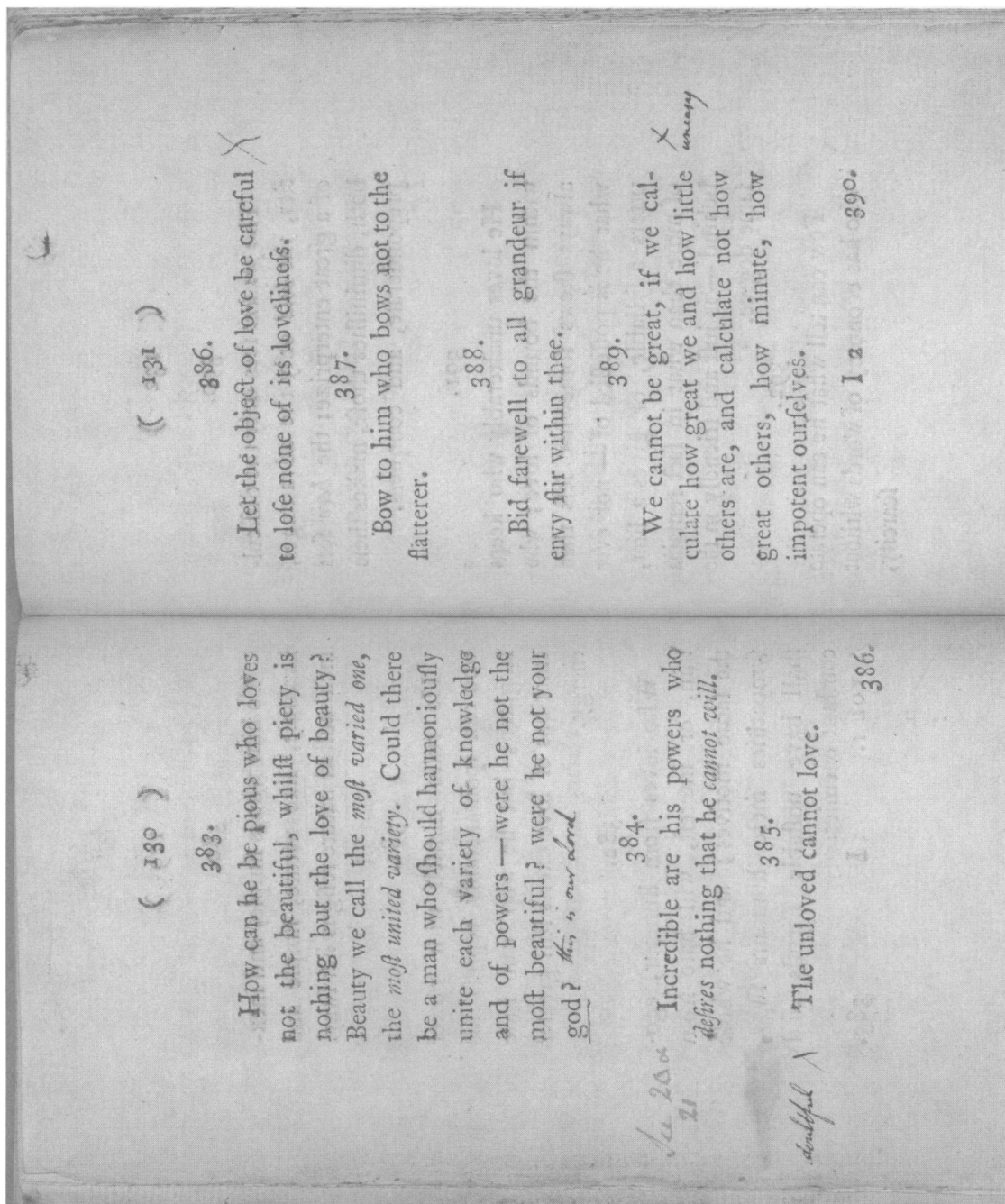


Figure 5. Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, pp. 130–31 (Huntington Library copy).



Through marginal commentary Blake creates, from the existing text, a text that is intertextual but also (and especially) intratextual, self-referential. Again, parallels can be drawn with Blake's other works, which is not to suggest that he consciously tried to integrate his "annotating" with his other artistic endeavors but rather that annotating was never separate from other activities that he engaged in. The marginalia are not the product of a discrete activity, divorced from the reading, writing, drawing, painting, and engraving that occupied Blake during so much of his life.

Writing on *The Four Zoas*, Donald Ault describes the poem's "internal self-contextualizations" and the way in which "its assumption that reading is a primary location of human being can perpetually open up new narrative possibilities." Close attention to text of *The Four Zoas* produces, according to Ault, "a reading that is perpetually revising itself, opening from and onto itself."¹⁷ While *The Four Zoas* is likely an extreme case of intratextuality (since revisionary layers in the unfinished manuscript poem make self-referentiality—even between the "same" lines, though at different revisionary stages—a perpetual possibility), the Lavater annotations represent a text opened up in new directions by the literal writing of those new directions into the margins. For example, the ink note by Blake to Aphorism 3 reads, "let me refer here. to a remark on aphorism 533 & another on. 630." Blake has also underlined portions of the aphorism. Simply transcribing the underlined words, however, would not yield immediate semantic sense; Erdman has therefore provided a filled-in version. Blake has actually underlined something like "looking upward / thinks himself / sky; so Nature formed / that each must see / centre of being." Erdman's version is: "As in looking upward each beholder thinks himself the centre of the sky; so Nature formed her individuals, that each must see himself the centre of being" (p. 584). This is a particularly clear instance of the effect that editorializing may have in typeset presentation of the marginalia.

The annotation points readers in different directions. While the text's material, numerical layout of course invites sequential reading of the aphorisms,¹⁸ the annotation suggests two other options. The annotation to 533 reads:

man is the / ark of God / the mercy / seat is above / upon the ark
/ cherubims / guard it on / either side / & in the / midst is / the holy

17. Donald Ault, *Narrative Unbound* (Barrytown, N.Y., 1987), xxiii.

18. As the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group has noted, "Our ability to read has been conditioned by our familiarity with traditional linear text forms"; "What Type of Blake?" in Nelson Hilton, ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake* (Hamden, Conn., 1986), 310.

/ law. man / is either the / ark of God / or a phantom / of the earth
 & / of the water / if thou seek / -est by human policy to guide / this
 ark. remember Uzzah / II Sam¹ VI : Ch .:

These lines fill the left margin, breaking approximately every three words. This actually makes the semantic sense clearer at some points, while the concatenated version Erdman provides makes the annotation read like a series of run-on sentences.

Particularly important is the way in which this aphorism and annotation—now an intratextual feature of the text by virtue of Blake's linking Aphorism 3 to Aphorism 533—is also intertextual, referring to Second Samuel: "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand." Blake's annotation warns against guiding the ark by "human policy." The immediately relevant passage in 2 Samuel is likely verses 6 to 8:

And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.¹⁹

An additional marginal note, this one in the right margin, reads "knaveries / are no / human / nature / knaveries / are / knaveries / See N554 / this aphorism / seems to me / to want / discrimination."

If we follow the direction to Aphorism 554, we find that Blake has written (in ink, in the left margin), "human / nature / is the image / of God." In addition, he has underlined part of Lavater's text. Aphorism 554 reads: "The enemy of art is the enemy of nature; art is nothing but the highest sagacity and exertion of human nature; [Blake underlines the following] and what nature will he honour who honours not the human?"

Aphorism 533 reads:

I have often, too often, been tempted, at the daily relation of new knaveries, to despise human nature in every individual, till, on minute anatomy of each trick. I found that the knave was only an enthusiast or momentary fool This discovery of momentary folly, symptoms of which assail the wisest an the best, has thrown a great consolatory light on my inquiries into man's moral nature; by this the theorist is enabled to assign to each class and each individual its own peculiar fit of vice or folly; and, by the same, he has it in his power to contrast the ludicrous or dismal catalogue

19. Quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version.

with the more pleasing one of sentiment and virtue, more properly their own. (P. 596)

Taken together, Aphorism 3, the annotation to Aphorism 3, Aphorism 533, the annotation to 533 (which refers to 2 Samuel), Aphorism 554, and the annotation to 554 provide a fairly complex web of both inter- and intratextuality, one that invites the active participation of the reader. This particular group of aphorisms and annotations represents, to put it generally, Blake's comment on Lavater's approach to human nature. Blake's comment that "man is the ark of God" is perhaps somewhat "illuminated" (to pick up a word Blake himself used to describe his books) by the note to Aphorism 554 (to which our attention is directed by the right-margin annotation to 533). It may well be that "human nature is the image of God" (note to Aphorism 554) is the metaphysical statement that Blake particularizes in "man is the ark of God" (note to Aphorism 533). If we integrate the reference to 2 Samuel and to Uzzah, it appears that Blake's response to Lavater's attempts to systematize human nature (and further to justify "knaveries," for example, as part of certain human natures), is to warn that human nature is the image of God, and thus that to tamper with human nature is to tamper with the ark of God, as Uzzah does with fatal results in 2 Samuel 6.

This by no means exhausts the interpretive possibilities opened by Blake's style of annotation. The note to Aphorism 3 did not call attention only to Aphorism 533 but also to Aphorism 630 (or more particularly to "remarks" on these aphorisms, as though annotations could begin to refer at a distance, to one another as well as to aphorisms, if readers moved in nonlinear fashion through the text).

Aphorism 630 reads:

A GOD, an ANIMAL, a PLANT, are not companions of man; nor is the FAULTLESS—then judge with lenity of all; the coolest, wisest, best, all without exception, have their points, their moments of enthusiasm, fanaticism, absence of mind, faint-heartedness, stupidity—if you allow not for these, your criticisms on man will be a mass of accusations or caricatures

To which Blake has responded (I have not recorded the original line breaks here):

It is the God in all that is our companion & friend, for our God himself says, you are my brother my sister & my mother; & S^t. John. Whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in God & God in him. & such an one cannot judge of any but in love. & his feelings will be attractions or repulses See Aphorisms 549 & 554

Continuing down the left and then right margins, Blake writes:

God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak. [and then in the right margin] For let it be remembered that creation is. God descending according to the weakness of man for our Lord is the word of God & everything on earth is the word of God & in its presence is God.

It is possible that the reader has arrived at Aphorism 630 having been directed from Aphorism 3—a substantial diversion or “revision,” moving from one of the very first aphorisms (on page 2) to one of the very last (on page 219). But of course 630 itself participates in the same inter- and intratextuality I’ve explored above. Blake refers again to the Bible, though this time to the New Testament (somewhat less overtly than his earlier direct reference to 2 Samuel). The reference to St. John echoes numerous moments in the Gospel and in the First Letter of John. For example, Blake refers to “our Lord” as the “word of God,” echoing the opening lines of John’s Gospel. Additionally, Blake’s remark, “Who so dwelleth in love dwelleth in God & God in him,” echoes 1 John 4:15–17:

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Christ’s commandment to his disciples to “love one another” (John 15:12) is reiterated in the First Letter of John: “let us love one another: for love is of God. . . . He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8). Blake’s references to God as love, and to God’s presence in “all” things (a word he underlined in his own annotation) likely reflects his reaction to Lavater’s insistence on dividing and classifying human (and animal and plant) nature, perhaps in part suggesting that the reader gauge how much love a knave, for example, or a plant, should receive.

In addition to the intertextual reference to the New Testament, the marginal note to Aphorism 630 also directs the reader to “Aphorisms 549 & 554.” Most striking from an intratextual standpoint is the direction to Aphorism 554, which readers could also arrive at by following the direction from Aphorism 3 to Aphorism 533, and then from 533 to 554. It is interesting to note that in the annotation to 3, Blake directs the reader to “a remark on aphorism 533 & another

on. 630,” yet the note to 533 directs the reader to “N 554,” not necessarily to a remark on the aphorism. The direction from 630 to 554 is again to “Aphorisms 549 & 554,” not to remarks on those aphorisms. Despite this difference, however, each of the aphorisms in this textual web has been annotated, so directions to “remarks” or to the aphorism number have the same general effect of producing a new reading pathway through the text.

That Aphorism 554 is referred to twice stresses the importance of the comment Blake has attached to it, “human nature is the image of God.” This metaphysical point seems to undergird Blake’s general reaction to Lavater’s attempts to divide and classify, whether among forms of life (human, plant, or animal) or among what Lavater calls “each class” of humankind (Aphorism 533). Aphorism 549—the endpoint of intratextual links created by Blake’s annotations between Aphorism 3 and Aphorism 630—reads, “He, who hates the wisest and best of men, hates the Father of men; for, where is the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children.” Blake’s annotation, in ink, is in the left margin: “this is true worship.” However, the aphorism itself has been altered by Blake. He has crossed out, with double strokes, both instances of the word “hates” in Lavater’s first sentence, though the word remains readable, as if Blake wanted to retain it to some degree. Directly above each crossing-out he inked in “loves.” With the alteration the aphorism reads, “He, who loves the wisest and best of men, loves the Father of men; for, where is the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children.” Further, Blake has underlined “the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children?” It is thus impossible to say whether the marginal note, “this is true worship,” refers to the original aphorism, to the altered aphorism, to both, to the underlined portion of the aphorism, or indeed to each of these possibilities in varying degrees.

What is certain, however, is the degree to which this series of annotations (including those to Aphorisms 3, 533, 630, 554, and 549) develop a text with inter- and intratextual dimensions, not unlike those that Ault identifies, for example, in *The Four Zoas*. At stake, I think, is the importance that such inter- and intratextual features had for Blake in his own poetry and art, and the significance of such features as annotated into a volume like Lavater’s. Annotation always, to some degree, creates a new kind of text. But in this case, the kind of “new” text that Blake is able to create resonates deeply with the other texts he was creating as an artist and engraver. Of particular importance is the way in which Blake’s illuminated work (or indeed a work like *The Four Zoas*) tends toward the inter- and intratextual as a consequence of Blake’s attempts to forge a radical kind of relationship between text and reader—that is, a relationship in which readerly acts could constitute, or reconstitute, certain kinds of textual moments or narrative

"facts." Ault writes of his reading of *The Four Zoas*, for example, as "a process of interpretation that require[d] constant retroactive reconstitution of 'facts' or reader 'events'; whenever I have looked back over my interpretive journey, the landscape has significantly altered."²⁰ What *The Four Zoas* required of Ault is quite akin to what the annotated volume of Lavater requires of its reader, despite the lesser extent of the inter- and intratextuality, as compelled by annotation in an otherwise completed book. The parallel is also significant, in part because it has not been addressed by Blake criticism, which, as I suggested above, usually turns to the marginalia to extract "truthful" Blakean utterances. As the annotations to this copy of the *Aphorisms* show quite clearly, there is an extensive inter- and intratextual web that develops among the annotations, suggesting that ultimately the marginal notes are not mere glosses of the original text but are in fact glossing each other. Context is thus no less important in the marginalia than it is anywhere else in Blake's work.

What I have tried to show here is the degree to which textual and material issues pervade the marginalia and, further, the degree to which issues at stake in the marginalia have particular resonance with similar issues that arise in other of Blake's more "central" works. Not least of these is the degree to which annotation forces an otherwise finished text into a state of unstable openness. Where the original text presented a linear sequence of aphorisms, the annotated volume involves a multiplicity of potential paths through the book, some of which force new relationships between aphorisms, between annotation and aphorism, or between annotations. These paths also lead to texts outside the one being annotated, suggesting yet further perspectives and a complicated relationship between text and reader, one that may have informed how Blake imagined authors, readers, and books through his poetry and art.

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20. Ault, *Narrative Unbound*, xi.