WAS SAMUEL BUTLER MAINLY RIGHT ABOUT EVOLUTION?

PART I: ON FRAMING A COSMOS OF HABITS MEMORIES, AND POWERS*

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ABSTRACT: Samuel Butler, a contemporary critic of Charles Darwin, proffered an alternative, vitalistic account of evolution. At the same time, he put into question all modern naturalistic treatments of this fundamental idea which presuppose that evolution is mainly a scientific problem. On the contrary, Butler in effect insists, this extremely vague idea calls for not an `explanation' but rather a fairly comprehensive, plausible story that helps elucidate an inherently complex idea. Butler can thus be read as outlining an anthropomorphic metaphorics that evokes a living Cosmos wherein it might be possible to do justice to the problem which Darwin left unresolved---the problem of heredity. In this picture of the Cosmos Butler links the fundamental notion of organization not to the allegedly universal and immutable `laws of nature,' as the moderns would have it, but rather to dynamically evolving relationships between only more or less stable habits. The variations in extant habits that emergence elicits are moreover the products of quasi-intelligent responses to new challenges from the environment. For Butler follows Lamarck in holding that all organisms possess powers capable of responding to felt needs and/or desires to make alterations in the habits (or instincts) that characterize their modes of existence. He thus in the end effectively bequeaths to his readers a challenge to extend and amplify, if possible, his outline of a promising metaphysical imaginary that can take into account some highly unorthodox conjectures.

Keywords: Evolution; experience; Samuel Butler; Darwinism; Lamarckism; vagueness; vitalism; variation; heredity; metaphysics; metaphorics

1. IS EVOLUTION REALLY A SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM?

There are numerous reasons for thinking that in order to make sense of the idea of evolution it is necessary to first map a broad avenue of escape from the tyranny of

neo-Darwinism.[1] This means, for one thing, finding a way around current tendencies to restrict the discussion of evolution to futile debates that pit Darwinism against Creationism. It is not, however, that adherents to either doctrine should be dismissed as completely wrong-headed, for who could deny that the drama of Nature is infused with struggles for survival in which the weaker tend to be displaced by the stronger? Nor can it be denied that chance is one of the more inescapable facts of life. Or that the existence of a certain creativity in Nature, for that matter, is indicated by the very desire to understand the existence of creative, questioning minds. The point is that it is highly doubtful whether any sort of justice can be done to the complexity inherent in the extremely vague idea of evolution (for it manifestly encapsulates a number of other very obscure ideas, such as emergence, variation, heredity, and so on) by clinging to a single-minded, self-restricting mode of thought.

The longevity of the neo-Darwinian paradigm, in other words, ought to prompt a general concern about what sort of cultural forces might explain a self-consciously rational society to institute what on the face of it is a highly simplistic approach to a very complex idea. One may suspect, in other words, that at the heart of the debate over evolution there dwells a highly questionable conception of what a truly rational explanation might look like. This has fostered a misguided belief about what role science actually plays in the advance of understanding. For if one grants that every culture has its own way of selecting and expressing what it takes to be Nature's principal characteristics, it is not hard to think that nature and culture are indissociable complementary notions. And that no allegedly scientific account of some aspect of the naturing of Nature can proceed very far without alluding, if only silently, to some perhaps questionable myths that may be undermining the `culturing' of that culture.'[2]

As for what sort of myth might account for the remarkable ascendancy of Darwinism, it does not seem incidental that those who stray from the straight and

[1] The term neo-Darwinian, as I shall use it, applies to those who hold that evolution can be accounted for in terms of two simple principles---chance and natural selection. This does not include Darwin himself, according to G. J. Romanes (in *Darwin, and After Darwin*) who holds that Darwin believed that although natural selection was the main means of modification, it needed to be augmented with other causes. Or as some `Darwinians' might put it, other mechanisms. Whether the word `other' requires a vitalistic or a mechanistic augmentation of the principle of natural selection is thus a central issue in the debate over whether a Darwinian approach to evolution is even reasonable.

[2] Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Following his lead, my references to `Nature' should, strictly speaking, be understood as referring to a certain nature-culture (chiefly that of the so-called West) since every culture evolves its own set of fundamental notions and discursive means for expressing what the authorities deem to be the most salient characteristics of natural events and acceptable ways of referring to them.

narrow channel marked `chance plus natural selection' are liable to be accused of being anti-science. Yet modern naturalists can themselves be charged with being anti-rational inasmuch as they have merely hi-jacked the name of naturalism by assuming that science is in the best position to reply to the perennial question `What is Nature?' For very few modern naturalists pay much attention to the over-arching problem of what meaning should be assigned to this pivotal idea, never mind attempting to trace the provenance of the insights and intuitions which inform this culture's preferred choice of fundamental ideas about it.

Maintaining that no claim relating to the question of what is really going on in the natural world ought to be accepted as sound or reasonable if it cannot be backed up by `hard' science, modern naturalists thus blithely conflate the idea of natural philosophy with science, thereby leaving themselves free to conflate evolution with Darwinism.[3] Hence the very popularity of the neo-Darwinian view of evolution can be cited as evidence of a self-deceptive collective mentality that in the name of rigorous `hard-headed' thinking perpetuates, ironically enough, the apparently widespread myth of scientific super-rationality.[4] For this myth allows would-be rational inquirers to avoid completely the need to confront the extreme vagueness of such fundamental ideas as evolution, which surely refers in the first instance to one of the more salient characteristics of Nature.

That is to say, in brief, the situation warrants a suspicion to the effect that the alleged special capacity of scientists to think with open, disinterested, and self-critical minds is not to be trusted, especially whenever what is at issue concerns the meanings of fundamental ideas. Put another way, the ascendancy of neo-Darwinism may have long since prefigured a degenerate collective mentality that has allowed itself to become mesmerized by the undoubted `progress' of modern techno-science. For the

[3] See, e.g., Sahotra Sarkar, *Doubting Darwin?: Creationist Designs on Evolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). Sarker, speaking in the name of methodological naturalism, is primarily intent on defending evolutionary biology from what he calls ID creationism which he thinks is generally an attempt to introduce `the divine' into accounts of evolution. As for the meaning of naturalism, Sarkar defines it as the claim that `all that exists in the universe is processes and entities knowable to us through scientific methods, that is through logic and our senses, with no recourse to entities and processes entirely inaccessible to these methods' (p. 4).

[4] Consider, for instance, the concerted aim to overcome the ubiquity of vagueness by logicistic methods. This project has been one of the more influential contributions to twentieth century philosophy of self-consciously rational, positivistic thinkers who betray an acritical, unspoken faith in the myth of scientific superrationality. See my *Myths of Reason: Vagueness, Rationality, and the Lure of Logic* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1995), passim.

upshot has been a tendency to conflate this specialized form of practical inquiry with metaphysics itself.[5]

This situation may even bear witness to a deep-rooted, debilitating fear of the vagueness that is characteristic of most (all?) of our fundamental ideas about Nature. This fear is perhaps most in evidence in the reception accorded to those who dare to stray from what is essentially a quasi-religious orthodoxy. For the fervid defenders of the Darwinian approach too evolution have very little patience for dissenters.[6] Perhaps this fear also betrays a subconscious awareness of size of the upheaval that may result from taking too close a look at the metaphysical problems presented by vague fundamental ideas. That the consequences might even be revolutionary from a cultural point of view is in fact not too hard to see. For the principle of natural selection, when couched in the form of the doctrine of the `survival of the fittest,' underwrites (as many socially concerned thinkers have pointed out) a callous social Darwinism which appears to underwrite a destructive and imperialistic, globalizing form of capitalism.

In any case, the required readjustment that the collective mentality of this culture might find it has to undergo would certainly put at risk the great investment in time, effort, and reputation that has led to the ascendancy of Darwinism. Indeed, the upheaval might be so radical as to force thinkers all kinds of to take seriously the apparently heretical notion that Nature is not only inherently sentient but also self-creative. Worse still, it might bring out the urgency of the need to come to terms with an even more unsettling possibility---that the term `reality' refers not to a solid material universe but rather to a fluid moral Cosmos.

There are a number of discomfiting reasons, in short, for thinking that it is high time to take a closer look at creationism (with a small "c"). As for how one might best

[5] Sarkar, for example, is not atypical in wanting to have his cake and eat it, since he grounds his defence of Darwinism in a `metaphysical naturalism'---where metaphysics, he says, can be understood as consisting `of a set of fundamental assumptions supposed to be respected by all admissible scientific theories' (p. 152). The point is that metaphysics is more fairly characterized as an inquiry into the fundamental assumptions themselves.

[6] Consider, for instance, the passionate and acerbic denunciations of Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life* which was described in a review in the prestigious journal *Nature* as fit only for burning. But Sheldrake is putting forward a closely argued alternative to the neo-Darwinian association of variation with chance which is based on the ideas of morphogenetic fields and morphic resonance. This quite detailed theory promises to throw some light on that aspect of inheritance which involves the creation and transmission of characteristic but changeable patterns and rhythms from generation to generation. It is worth noting that Sheldrake recognizes the looming presence of metaphysics whenever the discussion of evolution touches on the issue of emergence. He believes, however, that a proper theory of evolution ought to be causally based; that is, it ought to allow for the sort of testing that a supposedly genuine scientfic theory needs to undergo before it can be recognized as properly scientific.

do this, it seems the non-scientistic naturalist would be wise to approach the idea of evolution with some fairly uncontroversial observations, such as that whatever else might be entailed, evolution is concerned with the central themes of Life and Thought. And these evidently point to the existence of certain `quicknesses' in the `naturing of Nature.' That the latter phrase is both unorthodox and extremely vague need trouble only those who have difficulty acknowledging the essentially dynamic nature of evolution, that it alludes to a world in process of continually making and re-making itself.

However, it is just at this point that one might begin to suspect that the topic of evolution should not even be on science's explanatory agenda. Indeed, why think that scientists can tell us much more than that evolution is a virtual certainty on account of the great mass of evidence that it has gathered in many different fields of specialized inquiry? In any event, the would-be nonmodern naturalist might well want to begin again from scratch with the rough idea that evolution generally alludes to a complex network of synchronically and diachronically changing relationships within and between organized forms of matter. Or better perhaps, shifting relationships between the `matterings of matter' and the `mindings of mind.' For it is no small thing that the moderns are wont to use the well-worn notions of matter and mind, which are almost as vague as the idea of Nature, as though everyone understood perfectly well what they mean.

But to begin thus with a certain skepticism concerning the aims and illusions of modern naturalism is to begin by contemplating a cosmic activity that might well be called the `naturing of Nature.' Objections to this sort of beginning only strengthen the suspicion that the moderns have instituted a self-serving conception of rationality which, as Nietzsche pointed out long ago, betrays a desire to constrain `serious' thinking to narrow perspectives. He in fact goes further and accuses the moderns of making thought itself subservient to a form of `conceptual idolatry.' Having thus articulated what I am claiming is a matter of considerable urgency, he also confirms that the problem of nature is bound up with the problem of culture. For he diagnoses a sick culture that has over-estimated the scope of capacity to understand the world. Since this attitude of mind threatens to hasten the demise of this so-called enlightened civilization, a remedy is urgently needed, one that can cure a degenerate form of thought that protects and promotes itself by instituting an endemic self-deception. Nietzsche's recommendation is that philosophers ought to learn to become cultural physicians. To this end, he proposes that they become conversant with the imaginal thinking of artists. For the only way to overcome the deeply entrenched assumption that perpetuates the myth that truly `serious' thinking means a sober, rigorous, and

systematic scientific quest for `the truth,' is to frankly acknowledge that no quest for enlightenment can rely upon anything much more substantial than a `movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms.'[7]

2. WHY PAY ATTENTION TO SAMUEL BUTLER?

That the above remarks bear directly on the too-often begged question of how to tell an adequate and reasonably plausible story about evolution is nicely illustrated by Samuel Butler. While being a contemporary and erstwhile admirer of Darwin, he became one of his most severe and unrelenting critics. It is thus worth stressing that Butler was not, and never had any desire to be regarded as, a recognized member of some accredited scientific discipline with a detailed knowledge of the relevant `facts.' But neither did he have a hard-won reputation to protect. The value of his writings on evolution, in other words, stem from his sensitivity to cultural forces that work to restrict the freedom of thinkers to explore an extremely vague idea that he believed was being unjustly dealt with by the acknowledged scientific experts.

Recorded in no less than four exploratory books, Butler's wide-ranging reflections on the topic of evolution thus put into question not only the basic assumptions of the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution.[8] Even more importantly, all his writings raise crucial questions that bear directly on how best to think about the relations between Life and Thought. So although he was on the whole ignored by most of his scientific contemporaries, Butler can at least be praised for introducing his non-scientific readers to a number of highly relevant considerations that ought to be of interest to everyone.

On the face of it, then, Butler's intent is only partly to show that the Darwinian approach to evolution is seriously inadequate. For it is worth stressing that he has no quarrel with the main tenets of neo-Darwinian theory. He is not rejecting the basic

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[7] See his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*, ed. & trans. Daniel Breazeale (N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979, p. 84. I discuss this pivotal topic (of what constitutes a truly rational explanation) at greater length in my *Process, Reality, and the Power of Symbols: Thinking with A. N. Whitehead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). (Hereafter referred to as PRPS). My conclusion here is that the best that philosophy can hope to achieve is a life-enhancing addition to what Gilles Deleuze suggestively likens to a growing *collage* in painting. What follows can therefore be regarded as an attempt to illustrate this view of philosophy.

[8] The titles of these books are *Life and Habit* (1878); *Evolution, Old and New* (1879); *Unconscious Memory* (1880); and *Luck, or Cunning?* (1887). While copies of these books are not readily available, they can all be found online, in ebook editions, at Project Gutenberg: <www.gutenberg.org>.

claims that chance and natural selection play significant roles in evolution.[9] Indeed, who could deny that the unpredictable course of life is buffeted on all sides by unexpected contingencies? Nor is it hard to believe that life *tout court* is at the mercy of `weeding-out' processes that tend to eliminate the weak, the unprepared, and the maladapted.

Yet `there is a fallacy running through almost all Mr. Darwin's work,' says Butler; namely, that ` "natural selection" is a theory (if, indeed, it can be a theory at all), in some way accounting for the origin of variation, and so of species' (*Life and Habit)*. Indeed, it certainly seems undeniable that if something happens to survive in the struggles for life, it has managed to slip, as it were, through the sieve of natural selection. Therefore it has not been `selected out.' The punctilious logical thinker might therefore be inclined to say that it has been `selected in.' Thus natural selection is manifestly an essentially scientific principle.

The skeptic, however, might at this point protest that it is also a remarkably convenient one. There appear to be few so-called `emergent properties' of evolved organisms that lie outside its purview. Even consciousness has been described as an emergent property of the brain. The principle of natural selection has moreover been enlisted to explain the emergence of those `immaterial' concerns that fill human thought with such ethereal notions as `morality' or `aesthetics.' That is, with concerns that extend well beyond the practical or material ones that pertain to the physical struggle for survival.[10]

On this particular score, then, Butler is quite clear: anyone who trumpets the sufficiency of the principle of natural selection is only covering over the real difficulties. These involve showing how to give a just and honest account of the phenomenon of inheritance, the central core of which is the fact of variation.

More specifically, the principle of natural selection cannot, Butler insists, `induce variability,' for it is `only able to accumulate what - on the occasion of each successive variation, and so during the whole process - must have been originated by something else.' Thus identifying what is surely the central enigma around which the idea of evolution revolves, for Darwin himself at times alludes to the need to take into

[9] Although highly critical of Darwin's philosophical observations, Butler is full of praise for his diligent gathering of evidence for evolution: `...to the end of time, if the question be asked, "Who taught people to believe in evolution?" there can only be one answer - that it was Mr. Darwin.' *Life and Habit.*

[10] Consider, for instance, those attempts to account for the emergence in the human organism of aesthetic, religious, ethical, and moral concerns. Many neo-Darwinians attempt to `explain' their existence in terms of the alleged adaptive advantage they lend to this particular organism in its struggles to survive.

account this obscure `something else,' Butler explicitly refers to those aspects of evolution which every thinking layperson sooner or later pauses to contemplate:

> When we see organs, or living tools—for there is no well-developed organ of any living being which is not used by its possessor as an instrument or tool for the effecting of some purpose which he considers or has considered for his advantage—when we see living tools which are as admirably fitted for the work required of them, ….Shall we hold that they must have been designed or contrived, not perhaps by mental processes indistinguishable from those by which the carpenter's saw or the watch has been designed, but still by processes so closely resembling these that no word can be found to express the facts of the case so nearly as the word "design"? That is to say, shall we imagine that they were arrived at by a living mind as the result of scheming and contriving, and thinking (not without occasional mistakes) which of the courses open to it seemed best fitted for the occasion, or are we to regard the apparent connection between such an organ, we will say, as the eye, and the sight which is affected by it, as in no way due to the design or plan of a living intelligent being, but as caused simply by the accumulation, one upon another, of an almost infinite series of small pieces of good fortune? *Evolution, Old and New*.

Butler is highly sympathetic, in short, to the feelings of wonder or awe that most thoughtful people experience from time to time, until their efforts to think the matter through are swamped by doctrinaire pronouncements. Yet it is not all that hard to believe that all organisms are infused with quasi-conscious, quasi-intelligent, purposeful aims that at bottom may account for the development of such wonderful organs as eyes; organs which, in their various guises, turn out to be just what is needed in order for an organism to cope with its own special living-conditions.

3. ON BUTLER'S NON-MODERN NATURALISM

At this point we come close to the center of the puzzle that Butler thinks presents the would-be naturalist with his/her greatest challenge. Among the few who have risen to this challenge, there is one figure who stands out with special prominence:

> According to Lamarck there is a broad principle which underlies variation generally, and this principle is the power which all living beings possess of slightly varying their actions in accordance with varying needs, coupled with the fact observable throughout nature that use develops, and disuse enfeebles an organ, and that the effects, whether of use or disuse, become hereditary after many generations.[11]

[11] *Evolution, Old and New*. Butler notes that Lamarck aims only to give an outline of the general situation, one that is based on the principle that `sense of need is the main direct cause of variation, and ...that the

However, Butler's endorsement of what he takes to be Lamarck's principal assumption appears to have made little impression on Darwin and his followers, for reasons that are perhaps not too surprising, given the range of difficulties that are involved. Having the writings of Erasmus Darwin, Buffon, Geoffroy, as well as Lamarck in mind, he observes:

> It is easy to understand the difficulty felt by the fathers of evolution when we remember how much had to be seen before the facts could lie well before them. It was necessary to attain, firstly, to a perception of the unity of person between parents and offspring in successive generations; secondly, it must be seen that an organism's memory goes back for generations beyond its birth, to the first beginnings in fact, of which we know anything whatever; thirdly, the latency of that memory, as of memory generally till the associated ideas are reproduced, must be brought to bear upon the facts of heredity; and lastly, the unconsciousness with which habitual actions come to be performed, must be assigned as the explanation of the unconsciousness with which we grow and discharge most of our natural functions. *Evolution, Old and New*.

However, as I have earlier indicated, the range of difficulties is considerably broader than the above remarks suggest. Although scientists have succeeded in establishing evolution as a virtual `fact' of Nature, self-styled naturalists have notably refused to acknowledge that the problem of evolution needs to be viewed within a cosmic perspective. Butler appears to recognize this since his story-telling indicates that he can be regarded as aiming to become a `true naturalist' in the sense outlined by another systematically ignored thinker, the philosopher-poet, S. T. Coleridge. Likewise repelled by what he took to be a pseudo-naturalistic mode of thought (which presupposes that the `naturing of Nature' can be properly and justly explicated under the aegis of the de-vitalizing metaphysics of mechanistic materialism), Coleridge set out to show that the modern presumption that reasoning that ought to move in accordance with scientific norms which provide the model for good reasoning *tout court* is a false and morally pernicious belief. As a remedial measure he explicitly urges the adoption of a highly unorthodox principle of rationality---one that generally decrees that reason ought never to ontologically divide what can only be conceptually distinguished.

Coleridge can therefore be counted as a leader in that tiny company of philosophical therapists that Nietzsche invokes and among whom, I am suggesting, Butler deserves to be counted. Coleridge envisages the emergence of a more just and

variations thus engendered are inherited, so that divergences accumulate and result in species and genera...'. Acknowledging that there is much left to be done, Butler adds that Lamarck himself was `indifferent to further details.'

honest collective mentality which will strive toward framing a truly rational form of reasoning capable of fostering a `true realism.'[12] As for what the little word `true' might signify, it is not just a little ironic that in respect to the crucial question of what is or is not reasonable in philosophizing about Nature, Coleridge has since received important support from advances in modern physics. Quantum physics, in particular, has shown that the vague term `matter' refers not to a sort of `universal stuff' but rather to a great variety of forms of substantial activity. The upshot is, as I have already indicated, that one might better speak of the `matterings of matter.' A similar caveat applies to thinking since quantum physics also reveals that it is an egregious error to assume that knowers can be sharply divided from what they know.

In short, then, Coleridge has been vindicated in his insistence that thinking is an activity (which I have referred to above as minding) and that `subjects' should never be radically separated from their perceived `objects.' Thus both he and Butler elicit a rough image of the cosmos in which the `naturing of Nature' refers to a dynamic interweaving of inter-connected processes of minding-mattering.[13] For Butler not only suggests that he is a true naturalist in Coleridge's sense in that he assumes that life itself is somehow a primordial characteristic of the Cosmos, he holds that the organic should not be radically divorced from the inorganic:

> The only thing of which I am sure is, that the distinction between the organic and inorganic is arbitrary; that it is more coherent with our other ideas, and therefore more acceptable, to start with every molecule as a living thing, and then deduce death as the breaking up of an association or corporation, than to start with inanimate molecules and smuggle life into them; and that, therefore, what we call the inorganic world must be regarded as up to a certain point living, and instinct, within certain limits, with consciousness, volition, and power of concerted action. *Unconscious Memory*.

Although he adds that `[i]t is only of late...that I have come to this opinion,' this general assumption nonetheless appears to silently inform a good deal of his inquiries into the meaning of evolution. So it is worth stressing that Butler never denies the *usefulness* of distinguishing between the organic and the inorganic for the sake of exposition---the expression `up to a certain point' signals only his refusal to endorse

[12] See Chapter 5 of my *Process, Reality, and the Power of Symbols: Thinking with A. N. Whitehead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

[13] Coleridge explicitly endorses the distinction made by the premoderns between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, where the latter term alludes to what is actually produced during the ongoing `naturing of Nature.' This is the province of science, which faces backward to the past; which in Coleridge's view means that its proper field of study is the dead.

the modern faith that it is possible to draw a sharp line separating these two fundamental characteristics of Nature.

In this one crucial respect, then, Butler's reflections on evolution can be described as quintessentially nonmodern since they can be viewed as running parallel to Coleridge's quest for a `true naturalism.' This quest is moreover founded upon the belief that the chief guide for reason should not be Aristotelian logic but rather a `polar logic.' That is, a non-orthodox type of reasoning which amounts essentially to an artful dialectic marked by a principled refusal to violate the indissociability of certain fundamental conceptual contrasts.

But before becoming more deeply immersed in the implications of this crucial point, it is worth stressing that Butler is by no means denying that `exact' science can tell us many important things about evolution. It is just that one of the main implications of the Lamarckian approach is that the contributions that science can make to the debate are strictly limited. That is to say, science may well speak with authority about the implications of, for instance, certain experimental results pertaining to the inorganic or immaterial side of evolutionary processes, but they have no special authority to speak about the `quickened' side of the `naturing of Nature.'

In respect, then, to the question of how Butler needs to be read, I am claiming that it is of utmost importance to keep in mind that he is attempting in general to steer an inevitably uncertain and risky course between the Scylla of Darwinism and the Charybdis of natural theology.[14] To this end, he takes as his chief guide the extremely vague image of a living Cosmos in which `Nature' alludes to a complex, ever-changing assemblage of inter-related and interacting organisms which exhibit varying degrees of sentience. There is therefore no easy way to assess the worth of his many conjecturings, or even to say which ones are most central to his story about evolution. Everything hinges on whether or not his response to the crucial methodological question---how to go about telling a truly naturalistic story about evolution---is in fact a reasonable and an adequate one.

Such a story, he declares in effect, can only be `grounded' in certain insights and/or intuitions that are available to everyone. As for how to go about trying to tell a

[14] `It may well be we shall find we have escaped from one set of taskmasters to fall into the hands of others far more ruthless. The tyranny of the Church is light in comparison with that which future generations may have to undergo at the hands of the doctrinaires....The so-called man of science...seems now generally inclined to make light of all knowledge, save of the pioneer character. His ideal is in self-conscious knowledge....He is but medicine-man, augur, priest, in its latest development; useful it may be, but requiring to be well watched by those who value freedom. Wait till he has become more powerful, and note the vagaries which his conceit of knowledge will indulge in.' *Life and Habit.*

plausible and adequate story about inheritance, he evidently believes that this calls for an adventurous exploration of the complicated relationships that tie certain key tropes together. So the question of what exactly Butler's story amounts to is not at all easy to answer. Nor does it seem worth trying. But this is not to say that he rejects the common belief that an aim to give a satisfactory account of some aspect of the naturing of Nature ought to observe the chief characteristics or touchstones of would-be rational discourse; namely, coherence and consistency.

The important point is, in respect to the question of adequacy, that this touches not only upon upon the `rightness' of his initial choice of a metaphorical basis for his reasonings. It also raises the more general question of the extent to which his general approach can resolve some of the more profound puzzles locked up in the idea of evolution. Hence I shall initially proceed as though Butler is mainly bent on overcoming the most pernicious assumptions that are propagated by most Darwinians who evidently believe that the living can be conjured out of the dead and that minding can be derived from mindlessness.

So it also needs to be stressed that there is nothing in my discussion that is meant to throw doubt on the manifest usefulness of the abstract tools of logic and mathematics in detailed investigations of the spatio-temporal aspects of the `naturing of Nature.' Since mathematics can be defined as the science of rhythms and patterns, it may well be capable of throwing important light on the significant differences that exist between the types of structuring and modes of behaviour that living organisms manifestly illustrate. It is just that Butler indicates quite clearly that a mathematical approach to evolution is very likely strictly limited in so far as Life itself vaguely alludes to an ineffable `quickness' that will forever elude capture in some formal or conceptual net.

In what follows, then, I shall assume in particular that Butler is best read as showing the primacy of the need to renounce the modern temptation to endorse common dichotomies, such as body and mind, organic and inorganic, material and immaterial, and so on. Indeed, he quotes with apparent approval one of Lamarck's observations concerning the mutual interaction of bodies and minds:

> The effect of the body upon the mind has been already sufficiently recognized; not so that of the mind upon the body itself. The two, one in the outset though they were, interact upon each other more and more the more they present the appearance of having become widely sundered, and it can be shown that each is continually modifying the other and causing it to vary. *Evolution, Old and New.*[15]

[15] Butler thus appears to anticipate recent developments in molecular genetics which belie, for instance, Weismann's claim that acquired habits cannot affect germ plasma. Marcus Hartog, for instance, while

That this statement has great significance for Butler (whose attempt to account for heredity is bound up closely with the trope of memory) is indicated by one of his concluding remarks:

> I can conceive of no matter which is not able to remember a little, and which is not living in respect of what it can remember. I do not see how action of any kind is conceivable without the supposition that every atom retains a memory of certain antecedents. *Unconscious Memory*.

4. ON BUTLER'S ENTANGLED METAPHORICS

Butler's writings on evolution evidence, in short, an acute awareness of some ancient philosophical problems that ultimately show that it is far from clear how best to understand the relations between apparent contraries---which is a question that Heraclitus long ago raised and famously linked to the idea a world in flux whose proper understanding calls for well-cultivated souls. Pending a closer look at the problem of how to reconcile immaterial considerations with material ones, it is first worth noting that Butler is far from casting doubt on the early moderns assumption that there is a certain order in Nature. That is to say, he is merely denying that all forms of ordering or organization in Nature are governed by the universal, eternal, and immutable `laws of Nature.'

Indeed, if one assumes that the general idea of evolution elicits a cosmic movement whereby all forms of organization (in the guise of living organisms) are capable of undergoing significant alterations, the first question the would-be naturalist needs to address is: `Changes in what exactly?' Butler's response is unequivocal: changes in the extant habits of organization (or species-typical forms of structuring and behaving) that characterize the differences between the various species of organisms that actually populate the world.

The trope of habit is a principal keystone, in other words, in Butler's constructive account of variation, for a habit that cannot be varied is not a habit. But like all foundation stones, it is not the only or most important one. Without it, however, it

noting that this is a problem for Butler's account of evolution (in an introduction to *Unconscious Memory)* asks: `How can we...speak of "memory" in a germ-cell which has been screened from the experiences of the organism, which is too simple in structure to realise them if it were exposed to them?' For an informed response to this particular objection, see, e.g., Mae-Wan Ho's article "Evolution," in Comparative Psychology, a Handbook, G. Greenberg and M. M. Haraway, eds. (Garland Publishing, 1998, pp. 107-19). Or see, "Epigenetic Inheritance through Sperm Cells, the Lamarckian Dimension in Evolution," Dr. Mae-Wan Ho, ISIS: `New findings on the molecular mechanisms whereby epigenetic changes acquired during development can be transmitted to the next generation via sperm cells are vindicating Lamarck's theory of evolution that had been completely eclipsed by Darwin's followers for over a century.'

would not be possible to begin a Lamarckian train of thought in which significant variations bespeak a hidden power or powers to effect changes in extant organizational habits in response to felt needs and/or challenges from the environment. This description of the situation implies, however, that the trope of habit is bound up tightly with the equally key notion of power. That is to say, a process of variation alludes to a power or powers that introduce inheritable alterations or augmentations in chains of species-typical habits, or species-typical memories.

One can thus say that the standard question (and objection) that is usually prompted by the mere mention of the name of Lamarck---whether acquired characteristics can be inherited---becomes, in Butler's hands, simply otiose. For what else could an acquired characteristic be except an augmentation of a given chain of species-typical habits that invite the use of the trope of memory? But inasmuch as Butler's account of the role that memory plays in heredity tends to raise more questions than it answers, this aspect of his story is not easy to recount. For it is not clear how to approach the task of elucidating the intricate connections that tie the notions of habit and power tightly to the obscure idea of `unconscious memory.' The adjective itself indicates that there may be no way to avoid the arresting consideration that Butler is eliciting at this point an intrinsically occult idea.

It is conceivable, for one thing, that the power or powers which initiate variations may be capable of envisaging new and better structures or patterns of behaviour that may lead to improvements in chances for survival. Yet Butler's interpretation of unconscious memory seems essentially static, as it were, since he accounts for this idea in terms of the kind of memory exemplified by an accomplished pianist, say, who in performing a complicated piece of music (which does not leave enough time for a note-by-note reading) that the music itself has been somehow bodily incorporated by means of frequent practice.[16] That is to say, unconscious memory alludes to the fact that frequent repetition tends to drive complicated actions deeper and deeper into the unconscious.

But Butler's preferred interpretation of unconscious memory may need to be supplemented by other considerations that bespeak a multi-pronged activity which

[16] Butler declares, for instance, that `we grow our limbs as we do, and possess the instincts we possess, because we remember having grown our limbs in this way, and having had these instincts in past generations when we were in the persons of our forefathers - each individual life adding a small (but so small, in any one lifetime, as to be hardly appreciable) amount of new experience to the general store of memory; that we have thus got into certain habits which we can now rarely break; and that we do much of what we do unconsciously on the same principle as that (whatever it is) on which we do all other habitual actions, with the greater ease and unconsciousness the more often we repeat them.' *Unconscious Memory*.

includes, but does not reduce to, automatic recollections that are prompted by sequences of cues. That is to say, variation may result from a power or powers capable of satisfying felt needs and/or desires which may be forward- as well as backward-looking. Indeed, why not think there may be a whole complex of powers which are set in motion by a will to achieve a better attunement of the organism to the changing conditions of its environment?

Inasmuch as we are speaking of an unconscious will to activate just and only those powers that can effect desirable changes, whatever satisfactions might ensue thus suggest the importance of another consideration---the possibility that evolution alludes in general to an evolving natural knowledge. For local desires to alter extant habits may bear witness to a will to deploy available powers with the vague aim of approaching ever closer to a Heraclitean *Logos*. Indeed, the Lamarckian view of evolution infuses the Cosmos with a *telos*, albeit a very vague one, inasmuch as inheritable alterations in extant habits generally imply an aim to improve upon existing natural knowledge. For Butler can be read as conjecturing that evolution is bound up with a vague aim to expand a reservoir of wisdom whose roots perhaps extend backwards to the very origins of life, assuming this last idea makes sense.

A further consideration is that unconscious memory may, in accordance with a polar logic, allude to intimately connected powers of remembering and forgetting. If this means there exists a power to remember selectively, for not everything that belongs to the species-typical chain of habits need to be relevant, so the power that the notion of unconscious memory elicits, the power of remembering may be much more complex than a power of automatic recollection of formerly established habits.[17]

Perhaps the most one can say is that each viable organism can be regarded as a potential carrier, if not creator, of a specific kind of natural wisdom, a wisdom that may or may not be evolving since there is no guarantee that variations will always prove to be in the long run happy or lucky ones.[18] Furthermore, since any changes in

[17] Here he perhaps opens up a promising line of inquiry that may profit from Sheldrake's speculations concerning the nature of morphogenesis in the creation of new habits, for Butler seems to be suggesting that once definite forms of organization come into existence, they become potential sources of influence on the becoming of similar systems. From the point of view of Butler's story-plan, however, it may be more fruitful to think about memory in terms of a reverse `formative causation'---that is, of having the power to render `present' aspects of the `past' through reenacting old habits, etc. a power that does not reside `outside' an organism but rather acts from `within'; that is, upon the store of unconscious memories to which every organism perhaps has access.

[18] The matter seems closely related to the true meaning of "natural selection"---which, according to Butler, `operates on what it finds, and not on what it has made. Animals that have been wise and lucky

habits that prove viable and inheritable arise out of `localized' felt needs and/or desires, this knowledge may be best regarded as evolving under the aegis of an over-arching polarity of immanence-transcendence. Such a knowledge is only provisionally `objective' in a world which is forever `moving on.' Which is to say that the wisdom that Butler speaks of may be evolving or devolving.

But be that as it may, the point is that by hanging a good deal of his story of evolution on the hook of unconscious memory, Butler opens up a number of tricky questions that are, some of them anyway, not entirely devoid of empirical support. He cites, for instance, the findings of embryologists who inform us that an embryo reenacts a long history of evolutionary changes during the course of its individual development. He opines, for instance, that

> the small, structureless, impregnate ovum from which we have each one of us sprung, has a potential recollection of all that has happened to each one of its ancestors prior to the period at which any such ancestor has issued from the bodies of its progenitors - provided, that is to say, a sufficiently deep, or sufficiently often-repeated, impression has been made to admit of its being remembered at all. Each step of normal development will lead the impregnate ovum up to, and remind it of, its next ordinary course of action, in the same way as we, when we recite a well-known passage, are led up to each successive sentence by the sentence which has immediately preceded it.' *Life and Habit.*

However, this conjecture, which seems to invest each cell of an embryo with a power of memory that I am suggesting is not self-evidently akin to a capacity for total recall, invites an even deeper exploration of the implications of Butler's metaphorics. For insofar as the power of remembering is intimately bound up with many other closely related powers, such as powers of selection and/or decision, a power of remembering may be not only capable of sifting and weighing the reservoir of habits `stored' in unconscious memory for whatever might still be relevant for present purposes. It might even be partly creative. Indeed, Butler goes so far as to suggest that

> [A person's] past selves are living in him at this moment with the accumulated life of centuries. 'Do this, this, this, which we too have done, and found out profit in it,' cry the souls of his forefathers within him. Faint are the far ones, coming and going as the sound of bells wafted on to a high mountain; loud and clear are the near ones, urgent as an alarm of fire. *Unconscious Memory*.

But apart from this evocation of a critical-creative power, Butler is conceivably quite justified in holding that a good deal of the `content' of unconscious memory

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live longer and breed more than others less wise and lucky. Assuredly. The wise and lucky animals transmit their wisdom and luck...'. *Life and Habit.*

alludes to established, semi-continuous chains of characteristic instincts, which for him represent the best sort of knowledge.[19] That is, a kind of knowledge that is incorporated into the very members of the species and so exhibited everywhere in the performance of the most ordinary activities, such as digesting and breathing. Or in species-typical skills such as those evidenced by a spider spinning a web, or by a growing embryo of a chick which recognizes that the time has come to peck its way out of its shell although noone as shown it how to do this. For we are speaking of performances that are least prone to err. This kind of knowledge is manifestly uncriticizable, for it refers to habits that have once been learned so well and have become so fixed that they can be unthinkingly and automatically acted upon, as well as having somehow become capable of being transmitted to the next generation.

In sum, then, although an unconscious memory may well be the key to understanding inheritance, as Butler maintains, it is possible that it alludes to creative-critical powers that work beneath the surface, so to speak, of the processes of variation with the aim to augment and/or alter the overt habits that constitute the living body of the existing Cosmos.[20] Such powers are perhaps even capable of altering the direction of development or evolution of a species of organisms, which is a possibility that is in accord with the intrinsic openness entailed in the Lamarckian view of variation which elicits only a vague cosmic *telos*.

Butler is essentially launching, in other words, an adventure in story-telling which in the end invites his readers to contemplate what appears to be the question of all questions: whether there must be some immaterial cosmic principle that induces living organisms to exercise their powers selectively in order to further their interests and thus perhaps the interests of an entire species. Put another way, the notion of variation in a truly vitalized cosmic setting may ultimately evoke a lot of `little wills' that launch into operation various `inner' powers that may belong as much to Nature as to the individual organism. All these individualized `little wills' may reflect in turn an overarching Will or cosmic Spirit that has, for reasons unknown, willed into

[19] An instinct, as Butler puts it, refers to `knowledge or habit acquired in past generations.' Again: `On the one hand, Instinct may be regarded as a kind of organised memory; on the other hand, Memory may be regarded as a kind of incipient instinct.' *Luck, or Cunning?*

[20] The point is that Butler's idea of `unconscious memory' calls for a much deeper investigation. This kind of memory evidently needs to be clearly distinguished from ordinary, human conscious memory in so far as the latter refers to repeated reconstructions, or re-representations, of past events. That is, instead of mainly (always?) arising out of frequent repetitions, as Butler maintains, unconscious memory could also refer to a hidden power or powers that can be likened to acts of direct intuiting---or perhaps better, intuitive imaginings of the sort that Coleridge alludes to when he posits a reality-producing power of `primary imagination.'

existence a World comprised of a great variety of evolving, self-limiting forms of more or less intelligent assemblages of mattering-mindings.

To decide to follow Butler in his intrepid explorations of the `naturing of Nature,' is thus eventually to find oneself needing to decide not whether but rather how to use such taboo words as `soul' or `spirit.' For he indicates that one cannot rule out of order the possibility that the inherent vagueness of the *telos* of the `naturing of Nature' indicates a grand cosmic purpose which, however one interprets it, is conceivably an essentially spiritual one. For the very idea of quasi-intelligent organisms capable of assessing critically the viability of extant habits and creatively envisaging better ones, if only dimly, ultimately bespeaks a meaningful world informed by immaterial aims or values that are probably impossible to identify clearly and definitively.[21]

5. ON THE MODERN 'SOLUTION' TO THE PROBLEM OF INHERITANCE

So a long pause for reflection seems in order---one that might usefully attempt to take into account whatever might be of significance to Butler of recent advances in modern biology. Indeed, many moderns might want to say that these developments have rendered Butler's speculations otiose. But this may be too swift a dismissal given the modern tendency to erect technical barriers that serve to block the sort of informal inquiry into the `naturing of Nature' that Butler illustrates. Indeed, a good many workers in the life sciences seem inclined to think that detailed studies in the field of genetics can resolve the problem of inheritance. Some even go so far as to claim that the discovery of the central role that the self-replicating molecule DNA plays in heredity means that modern science is on the threshold of discovering the secret of Life itself.

But why think that the intricate details of molecular genetics could tell us much of importance about matters related to the meaning of Life and/or Thought? It seems to be one of the more entrenched and least challenged assumptions of the moderns that `explanations' should proceed from the bottom up, as it were. That is, in a manner

[21] These remarks touch on the question of how closely Butler actually follows Lamarck, for he himself observes that `the theory on which I had been insisting in *Life and Habit* was in reality an easy corollary [of Lamarck's] system, though one which he does not appear to have caught sight of. I saw also that his denial of design was only, so to speak, skin deep, and that his system was in reality teleological, inasmuch as, to use Isidore Geoffroy's words, it makes the organism design itself. In making variations depend on changed actions, and these, again, on changed views of life, efforts, and designs, in consequence of changed conditions of life, he in effect makes effort, intention, will, all of which involve design (or at any rate which taken together involve it), underlie progress in organic development. True, he did not know he was a teleologist, but he was none the less a teleologist for this. He was an unconscious teleologist. *Luck, or Cunning?*

analogous to those detailed investigations into the structurings of `matter' that are pursued in high energy physics wherein ever more violent interventions at the level of atomic organization coupled with sophisticated applications of mathematics are assumed to be capable of revealing the secrets of the entire universe. The situation in the life sciences may merely reflect, in short, a continuation of the practice introduced by the early moderns---of silently and repeatedly chanting to themselves that concrete existents can be derived from abstract entities.

This is not to suggest, however, that the remarkable properties of DNA have no bearing at all on the quest to understand heredity. For this molecule can, in the first and perhaps last instance, be regarded as Nature's way of dealing with the problem of `how to go on'----that is, how to transmit from parent to offspring some, if not all, of the knowledge that the species has accumulated over perhaps countless generations.

Yet on the face of it, DNA seems to refer only to highly detailed instructions about how to construct the intricately related protein-based elements of the material bodies of the next generation of the species. So while the discovery of DNA undoubtedly has great significance for understanding certain details of the processes involved in heredity, it is hardly obvious that this molecule can take into account, for instance, that aspect of continuity in heredity that induces Butler to speak of `the unity of person between parents and offspring in successive generations.' Indeed, the mere mention of `person' gives rise to some very sticky questions, as we shall see later.

At the very least, then, DNA perhaps refers only to an ingenious device that evidently relieves Nature of the bother of having to reinvent the wheel, as it were, over and over again. One might thus say that DNA `works' just because it is a fairly reliable (but evidently not perfect) mechanism for storing and transmitting a great deal of relevant and/or possibly useful information in the form of a flexible, and no doubt remarkably efficient, symbolism. Perhaps DNA is therefore best imaged as a kind of miniature but well-stocked library of instructions for creating the material bodies of new organisms. However, the trope of the library is also a timely reminder that not every page of every book in a given library is relevant to whatever building project is currently being undertaken. Some books may have long since lost their usefulness. Or perhaps they and their contents need to be shuffled about since they could be repositories of mistaken or misleading information that might be well lost altogether. Or at least interpreted in different ways in order to achieve different ends.[22]

[22] See, e.g., Mae-Won Ho's discussion of the `genetic paradigm,' which she describes of having collapsed `under the weight of its own momentum,' since research on the `reverse information flow' from the biosocial and physicochemical environment indicates that heredity involves non-random, directed

In other words, libraries call for critical-creative `readers' capable of interpreting a wealth of perhaps irrelevant and/or not necessarily clear and unambiguous symbolisms. So it is conceivable that DNA is only a skeletal part of a living memory system that is evidently designed to do more than merely physically connect one generation of a species of organism to the next generation. So the question arises: what can the workings of DNA tell us about the non-physical, or immaterial, side of the possibly vital needs or desires that may lie close to the heart of the phenomenon of inheritance?

This last question leads into an even more difficult question, such as whether new techniques/methods of building new organisms do not at times require the enlistment of a creative power or powers capable of inventing new forms `on the fly,' as it were. For even if the mechanism of DNA `works' in the sense of providing a reservoir of information that can be tapped into as occasion demands, the question still remains, who or what decides what parts, if any, of the available information is really relevant to current aims? All that seems clear is that it would be quite futile to ask modern naturalists for answers to questions that most of them evidently prefer not even to entertain.

6. AN ORGANISM IS A PSYCHO-PHYSICAL WHOLE

I have suggested that it is to Butler's great credit that he in effect forces his readers to gradually confront a number of discomfiting (for the moderns anyway) possibilities that indicate that no attempt to account for evolution can do without presupposing a rough picture of a living Cosmos. He himself indicates that a primary consideration when tackling evolution is that this idea refers first and foremost to ongoing changes in what Owen Barfield usefully refers to as `psycho-physical wholes'.

Being particularly interested in the evolution of consciousness, Barfield is especially critical of the tendency of the moderns to promote a conception of evolution wherein changes mainly take place in somatic units that are bereft of psychic components. Although the moderns have of late come round to acknowledging that experience refers to constructive activities that involve a subject capable of psychic activity, or a community of such subjects, they are regularly prone to forget this central factor of construction. The upshot is that standard interpretations of evolution may be suspected of perpetuating a stubborn bad sense

genetic changes---which at least suggests that biology is gradually revealing the rationality of Lamarck's basic propositions.

about sense-making itself which has resulted in, as Barfield puts it, `a morass of self-deception that is paralyzing our wills.'[23]

For it makes no sense to suppose that evolution refers to the development of increasingly complex but essentially insentient somatic units. That is, until the sudden appearance on the cosmic scene of *homo sapiens* whereby all of a sudden a kind of super-animal appears in Nature, one that happens to be gifted with a special `property' called consciousness. On the contrary, Barfield claims, this self-limiting view of evolution betrays a mental paralysis, for consciousness is more coherently viewed as a late development in an ongoing evolution of psycho-physical wholes. Or perhaps better still, as a gradual development in respect to both kind and degree of increasingly complex sensibilities which are at bottom dynamic assemblages of living forms of organized mattering-mindings.

In which case, it is not too hard to imagine that the vague idea of consciousness is applicable at all levels of sentience---from the lowest or most primitive level of psycho-physical habits (where a low-grade form of consciousness exists in a state of latency) to the emergence of human organisms at the highest level of extant sensibilities (wherein an advanced form of sentience is manifested in self-consciousness).

Thus when he insists that `the whole of nature is psychophysical,'[24] Barfield proffers an especially important form of support for Butler's rough image of a living Cosmos. This idea is in fact consonant with the even more suggestive conjecture that there is a critical-creative side to variation which is bound up with the polarity of remembering and forgetting.[25] Furthermore, by framing a story about evolution in terms of psycho-physical wholes, one can think of evolution as an intrinsically slow cosmic process. That is, it can be likened to a tentative and cautious cosmic experiment wherein organisms bent on making changes in their forms of life strive to achieve harmonious assemblages of new equilibriums which are not too disruptive of closely related, neighbouring equilibriums. For the vague *telos* that Butler elicits may

[23] See "Self and Reality," in Owen Barfield, *The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays (*Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), pp. 155-75, esp. p. 162. Lending support to one of Butler's main ideas, Barfield observes that `if a memory is not an "acquired characteristic," it would be difficult to say what it is!' (p. 166).

[24] Ibid. p. 163.

[25] That a power of remembering goes hand in hand with a power of forgetting is consonant with the idea that creativity is central to processes of variation, as Barfield indicates when he notes that a faculty of forgetting is necessary in order to have genuine creativity. See "Self and Reality," pp. 173-75.

well be, as he in places indicates, as much critical as it is conservative; that is, aware that willed powers are inherently prone to err. Indeed, Butler observes that

> [s]lowly, step by step, the many blunders and mischances which have worked together for good to those that have persevered in elasticity. They have travelled as man has travelled, with but little perception of a want till there was also some perception of a power, and with but little perception of a power till there was a dim sense of want; want stimulating power, and power stimulating want; and both so based upon each other that no one can say which is the true foundation, but rather that they must be both baseless and, as it were, meteoric in mid air. They have seen very little ahead of a present power or need, and have been then most moral, when most inclined to pierce a little into futurity, but also when most obstinately declining to pierce too far, and busy mainly with the present. They have been so far blindfolded that they could see but for a few steps in front of them, yet so far free to see that those steps were taken with aim and definitely, and not in the dark. *Life and Habit.*

One is thus led to wonder if current thinking in ecology is another confirmation of an incipient wisdom in Nature which fosters a sub-conscious awareness in, alas, only some organisms that too abrupt a change `here' can have disastrous consequences `there.' Slight variations, by the same token, may also bespeak an essentially moral concern not to put too many of Nature's already established equilibriums into jeopardy.[26] Such a possibility is moreover also in keeping with the view that the human organism may indeed be worthy of the adjective `higher' on account of its having the at least latent capacity to be moved by `immaterial concerns'--- such as those exemplified by all the moral, ethical, aesthetic, and religious conundrums that make human life so complicated.

The point seems implicit in another of Barfield's observations. For he claims that `after the appearance of *homo sapiens* [evolution] became also the story of a changing reciprocal relation between the psychic and physical components.'[27] Thus by stressing the importance of paying special attention to the evolution of human consciousness, which he holds is best studied in the history of changes in the use and meanings of words, Barfield indicates that the material side of evolution becomes less important than the mental side as one moves higher in the scale of sensibility. This indicates that Butler is indeed on the right track inasmuch as he holds that the ascendancy of the Darwinian view of evolution betokens a degenerate form of thinking that is marked by

[26] `Wherever there is life there is a moral government of rewards and punishments understood by the amœba neither better nor worse than by man. The history of organic development is the history of a moral struggle.' *Evolution, Old and New.*

[27] "Self and Reality," p. 167.

dishonesty and self-deception. Which is to say that the evolution of human consciousness ought to stand near the top of the list of the concerns of any would-be cultural physician who worries about the mental health of the culture he/she lives in.

7. SELVES AND SOULS

Assuming, then, that the evolution of degrees of sensibility has led to the emergence of self-consciousness, it is perhaps just at this point that one arrives at what may be the most significant of Butler's bold speculations. In his exploration of the relationships that connect his initial trio of tropes (habit, power, and memory), he eventually makes explicit reference to another, perhaps even more important trope---namely, that of a self. This trope can even be said to supervene over the other three. It elicits the image of a `quickened' body comprised of more or less fixed habits and invested with certain powers for changing them, a situation that surely evokes a vitally concerned embodied self. While being a thoroughly familiar notion, the trope of self, however, embraces a number of very slippery ideas, such as person, personality, personal identity, and, last but perhaps far from least, a unique soul.

Indeed, Butler asks whether it is possible

> to avoid imagining that if we have within us so many tributary souls, so utterly different from the soul which they unite to form, that they neither can perceive us, nor we them, though it is in us that they live and move and have their being, and though we are what we are, solely as the result of their co-operation - is it possible to avoid imagining that we may be ourselves atoms, undesignedly combining to form some vaster being, though we are utterly incapable of perceiving that any such being exists, or of realising the scheme or scope of our own combination? *Life and Habit.*

But he also presents his readers with the puzzle of whether there is a difference, and if so how one might distinguish, between the idea of a personality and that of a soul. He gestures here toward an even more profound question---such as whether or not the would-be naturalist needs to find a way to fit a great variety of kinds of souls into Nature. For he observes that

> we are in the habit of considering that our personality, or soul, no matter where it begins or ends, and no matter what it comprises, is nevertheless a single thing, uncompounded of other souls. Yet there is nothing more certain than that this is not at all the case, but that every individual person is a compound creature, being made up of an infinite number of distinct centres of sensation and will, each one of which is personal, and has a soul and individual existence, a reproductive system, intelligence, and memory of its own, with probably its

> hopes and fears, its times of scarcity and repletion, and a strong conviction that it is itself the centre of the universe. *Life and Habit.*

Given the anthropomorphic nature of Butler's metaphorics, there is no problem in linking the notion of a self to a living person, and thus a peculiar personality. The latter notion is, however, probably impossible to define and/or clarify with systematic precision, as Butler in fact maintains. It is thus necessary to approach this obscure matter on the slant, as it were---by first noting, for instance, that a personality alludes to the individual `selfhoodness' of some particular person. But then this move only elicits the even more elusive idea of personal identity. For a person bespeaks a certain continuity, but of what? Here the idea of personal identity, which Butler favours, threatens to be highly misleading inasmuch as what is being referenced is not absolute sameness (as Butler in fact holds) but rather only a certain continuity of character that can vary widely over a lifetime as well as between individuals of a particular species.

Indeed, it is just this elusive factor of continuity that seems to make the very idea of inheritance so difficult to elucidate. So instead of concentrating on the `exterior' manifestations of a personality, it may be better to contemplate the hidden source or seat of the powers that are responsible for the nature of these manifestations. That is to say, a certain type of personality can be conceived as the peculiar expression of an undefinable and hidden `inner something' that might as well be called a soul. There may be nothing for it, in other words, but to emulate Butler's boldness and hazard the conjecture that whatever happens to be expressed in the guise of a certain personality depends on the nature and quality of the `inner' powers to which the expression bears witness, powers whose seat of operation elicits the idea of a more or less well-cultivated soul.

For this very obscure notion may be required in the end to account for the factor of continuity which cannot be supplied by either the notion of a personality or the idea of personal identity. This factor of continuity may wax and wane, but it need not come and go like a light that can be switched on and off. For a certain continuity can be ascribed to a perduring soul which remains vital throughout sleep, or periods of unconsciousness, even though it need not remain constant from the cradle to the grave. It may even, who knows, persist after death, for this consideration too poses a problem for anyone who contemplates personal identity.[28]

[28] In a long discussion of the matter of continuity, Butler remarks on `how difficult is it to say where identity begins or ends, or again where death begins or ends, or where reproduction begins or ends.' Or again, `Assuredly, there is more birth and death in the world than is dreamt of by the greater part of us; but it is so masked, and on the whole, so little to our purpose, that we fail to see it. Yet radical and sweeping as the changes of organism above described must be, we do not feel them to be more a bar to

Hence the question arises whether Butler's picture of a living Cosmos is particularly valuable just because it exposes the need to take a long view of the worlding of the world which gives as much weight to the immaterial side of experience as to the material side. Perhaps the quality of the former depends on the condition of the more or less vital souls that are evoked by the very idea of power. For different personalities may bespeak different degrees of vitality according to the degree of cultivation of `inner' powers which may be only partly developed inasmuch as they are endowments from Nature that are given only in a state of latency.

8. ON FRAMING A TRULY VITALISTIC STORY ABOUT EVOLUTION

But whether or not this line of thought is capable of being rendered more cogent, the main point here is that Butler opens up the important, albeit very difficult, problematic of what it means to live and think well. That is to say, in choosing to tie the idea of variation to a Lamarckian view of the organic world, which imbues the Cosmos with a vague *telos*, Butler in the end obliges the aspiring nonmodern naturalist to entertain that question of all philosophical questions---whether the idea of `goodness' in thinking *tout court* ought to be understood in the first instance as referring to the more or less cooperative actions of responsible, healthy souls.

Or to put this another way, Butler's aim to give a vitalistic account of Evolution shows there is no avoiding such difficult and controversial cosmic questions as `What is the relationship, if any, between Nature and Spirit?' At the same time, he indicates that the price for refusing to stray beyond the borders mapped by science to seek for insights into the `naturing of Nature' is bound to be very high indeed. It may in fact be as high as Bernard Shaw prophesized in his defence of Butler's writings on evolution. For in expanding upon certain aspects of Butler's critique of the Darwinian approach, Shaw presciently noted (in 1921) that the Darwinian doctrine has fostered `a European catastrophe of a magnitude so appalling...that it is still far from certain whether our civilization will survive it.'[29]

All told, then, by tacitly hinging his story on an exploration of a bevy of tropes over which it would seem that of a self supervenes, Butler proffers a sketch of the Cosmos as a vast stage upon which a great variety of actors exhibiting greater or lesser degrees of sensibility come and go---for reasons unknown and very likely unknowable. Yet one can nonetheless image the Cosmos as a vast dance wherein it is not possible

personal identity than the considerable changes which take place in the structure of our own bodies between youth and old age.' *Life and Habit.*

[29] There are few more eloquent critiques of the cultural damage that has stemmed from the doctrine of neo-Darwinism than Bernard Shaw's preface to his *Back to Methuselah.*

to clearly tell the dancers from the dance, for this depicts an undirected and often violent interplay of occasions of sensibility that are only infrequently wise, benevolent, or generous. Yet although all this activity may appear at times to amount to nothing more than a pointless farce played out on a `great stage of fools,' the drama of the Cosmos is not necessarily pointless, or even tragic. That is, if Butler is right and the general character of the naturing of Nature bespeaks a potentially evolving wisdom.

So it would be well to note that Butler is by no means suggesting that his Lamarckian interpretation of emergence entails a steady progress in the evolution of Nature:

> Lamarck's wonderful conception was hampered by an unnecessary adjunct, namely, a belief in an inherent tendency towards progressive development in every low organism. He was thus driven to account for the presence of many very low and very ancient organisms at the present day, and fell back upon the theory, which is not yet supported by evidence, that such low forms are still continually coming into existence from inorganic matter. But there seems no necessity to suppose that all low forms should possess an inherent tendency towards progression. It would be enough that there should occasionally arise somewhat more gifted specimens of one or more original forms. These would vary, and the ball would be thus set rolling, while the less gifted would remain in status quo, provided they were sufficiently gifted to escape extinction. *Life and Habit.*

And to be sure, whatever light Butler's kind of story-telling can throw on certain fundamental aspects of the `naturing of Nature is bound to be somewhat dimmed by the vexed question of the meaning of `rightness' in respect to acts of metaphoring. Yet he shows that the first and and perhaps most important lesson that the would-be naturalist needs to learn is that there is no way to avoid venturing into a vast and trackless domain where the most reliable guide can only be a perspicacious choice of guiding imagery. However, by suggesting that the best sort of imagery must be anthropomorphic in character, Butler appears to have been only intuitively aware that what is needed in natural philosophy is an essentially poetical metaphysics. Indeed, he observes that

> We know nothing as yet about the origin of a creature able to feel want and power, nor yet what want and power spring from. It does not seem worth while to go into these questions until an understanding has been come to as to whether the interaction of want and power in some low form or forms of life which could assimilate matter, reproduce themselves, vary their actions, and be capable of remembering, will or will not suffice to explain the development of the varied organs and desires which we see in the higher vertebrates and man. When this

> question has been settled, then it will be time to push our inquiries farther back. *Evolution, Old and New.*

Yet Butler has actually taken great strides, I have been maintaining, in this `pushing back' since he proffers the outlines of a highly promising anthropomorphic imaginary that is capable of doing at least some justice to Lamarck's best insights, if such they be. Expressing these insights in terms of certain attributes of a sentient self, Barfield indicates that each living organism needs to be conceived in the end as invested with at least a modicum of spirit. Or perhaps one should say that he sets the stage for viewing living bodies as assemblages of enspirited forms of mattering-minding. Or then again, it might be better to refer to the various forms of mattering-mindings intrinsic to the `naturing of Nature' as imbued with more or less inspirited souls.[30]

To attempt to settle such a questions, Butler also indicates, is inevitably to be obliged to engage in the sort of poetic activity that Nietzsche alludes to when he indicates that the would-be nonmodern naturalist has much to learn from creative poets. It is therefore small wonder that Butler has remained virtually invisible in debates about the meaning of evolution, even to those thinkers who are prepared to acknowledge that the human organism's immaterial concerns are just as relevant to philosophy of nature as its material concerns.

As I indicated at the outset, a protest against a pervasive delusory faith in the unlimited scope of science is behind Butler's contrarian insistence that professional thinkers are very unlikely to be the most reliable metaphysical thinkers. Underscoring this general criticism, Butler ultimately demonstrates the need for a thorough overhaul, if not rejection, of the modern faith in logic.[31] He leaves his readers therefore with a problem that is closely related to his decision to attempt to elucidate evolution using a particular choice of metaphorics, or metaphysical imaginary. Whether or not his choice can be justified and/or amplified is therefore a major

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[30] Butler asks, for instance: `Shall we see God henceforth as embodied in all living forms; as dwelling in them; as being that power in them whereby they have learnt to fashion themselves, each one according to its ideas of its own convenience, and to make itself not only a microcosm, or little world, but a little unwritten history of the universe from its own point of view into the bargain?' *Evolution, Old and New.*

[31] `[I]f we are to think fluently and harmoniously upon any subject into which change enters (and there is no conceivable subject into which it does not), we must begin by flying in the face of every rule that professors of the art of thinking have drawn up for our instruction. These rules may be good enough as servants, but we have let them become the worst of masters, forgetting that philosophy is made for man, not man for philosophy. Logic has been the true Tower of Babel, which we have thought to build so that we might climb up into the heavens, and have no more miracle, but see God and live - nor has confusion of tongues failed to follow on our presumption.' *Luck, or Cunning?*

challenge to those who might be inclined to think that he represents a fond but ultimately foolish hope to think that a better story about evolution might result in some improvement in Life and Thought. But the only firm conclusion that can be maintained here is that Butler's many hints to this effect provide reason enough to think that his line of thought is well worth pursuing further, and this I shall attempt in a subsequent essay.

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* The second part of this paper will be publishing in a later edition of *Cosmos & History*.