

HOW RIGHT WAS SAMUEL BUTLER ABOUT EVOLUTION?

PART II: WHY EVOLUTION IS REALLY A PROBLEM FOR THE HUMANITIES

Murray Code

'We have now sunk to a depth at which the re-statement
of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.' George Orwell

ABSTRACT: Samuel Butler begins to sketch a non-Darwinian story about evolution which indicates that the first task of the would-be naturalist is to decide how natural philosophy ought to be done. In attempting to give a plausible Lamarckian account of the very vague idea of evolution, he brings out the need for an adequate figurative language capable of doing justice to a primary assumption---that organisms are dynamically organized psycho-physical wholes. Thus interpreting the order in Nature not in modern terms of universal and immutable 'laws of Nature' but rather in terms of more or less fixed habits, Butler suggests that the trope of a living self infused with habits, powers, and unconscious memory holds the key to understanding the evolving macro-cosmos. The factor of emergence can thus be interpreted in terms of selective operations of natural powers which are capable of breaking extant habits by responding 'intelligently' to certain feelings of need or want. A way is thus opened up to take into account the basic consideration that evolution alludes in the first instance to the creation of novel forms of organization. For if one interprets the trope of powers in terms of the faculties that Deleuze insists are indispensable to natural philosophy, one can think of faculties or powers as also capable of evolution. It is then possible to do justice to the fact that human experiencing involves a constant struggle to reconcile immaterial and material concerns. For if both types of concern refer to faculties that have emerged from more primitive concerns, as A. N. Whitehead intimates, it is possible to 'naturalize' the moral and/or ethical (as well as aesthetic and religious) concerns that Butler elicits when he suggests that evolution implies a vague cosmic aim to produce ever deeper and more profound forms of sensibility. Indeed, with the help of Coleridge his story can be extended to a truly vitalistic naturalism which depicts the naturing of Nature as generally guided by a hidden *Logos* of the sort that Heraclitus long ago

elicited---one that resonates with Butler's presupposition that the notion of self alludes to an embodied soul. For Heraclitus also indicates that a proper understanding of the fundamental notion of experience calls for a wise soul---which Coleridge intimates is one in charge of a well-cultivated faculty of imagination.

KEYWORDS: Evolution; emergence; variation; habit; power; faculty; Butler; Darwin; Lamarck; Whitehead; Coleridge; Deleuze; heredity; soul; imagination.

1. ON TELLING NATURALISTIC STORIES

Consider a thoughtful layperson who in contemplating his/her inexplicable existence begins to wonder whether the orthodox Darwinian account of evolution even makes good sense. This feeling may also prompt the question whether and if so how a capacity for wonder could possibly arise out of a series of mere accidents. Or whether claims to the effect that this feeling owes its existence to the principle of natural selection are anything more than verbal sleights of hand.¹ Being neither scientist nor philosopher, and perhaps repelled by the acrimonious and futile debate between Creationism and Darwinism, this person might also wonder how one might go about framing a more plausible story about evolution---one that at the very least does not explain away what it purports to illuminate.

Such a person might find the unorthodox approach to evolution of Samuel Butler intriguing. For Butler clearly recognizes the complexity of a topic that sooner or later gives rise to the irrepressible question of the meaning of Life. However, while recognizing the need for a more nuanced treatment of evolution, which does not immediately throw everything into the lap of either science or an omnipotent and omniscient Creator, Butler disclaims any special knowledge or expertise. He proposes only to fashion an accessible account of evolution based on the promptings of his intuitions and interests, no matter in what direction they might point him.²

¹ Not being previously disposed to question an officially certified story, this thoughtful layperson might also be intrigued by Gregory Bateson's gloss on the principle of natural selection: 'what lasts longer among the ripples of the random must last longer than those ripples that last not so long.' He/she might then go on to doubt that the 'quicknesses' of Life and Thought could possibly stem from fortuitous physico-chemical interactions of dead and mindless chemicals in a primeval soup.

² Introducing his account of evolution, Butler remarks that he is writing for 'the numerous class of people who, like myself, know nothing of science, but who enjoy speculating and reflecting (not too deeply) upon the phenomena around them. I have therefore allowed myself a loose rein, to run on with whatever came uppermost, without regard to whether it was new or old; feeling sure that if true, it must be very old or it never could have occurred to one so little versed in science as myself; and knowing that it is sometimes pleasanter to meet the old under slightly changed conditions, than to go through the formalities and uncertainties of making new acquaintance.' *Life and Habit*. (Butler's writings on evolution can be found online, in ebook editions, at Project Gutenberg: <www.gutenberg.org>).

The trouble is, these commonly accepted but usually ignored aspects of mentality engender no end of difficulties for would-be rational modern investigators. They encourage the sort of open-ended speculations that no doubt caused many of Butler's contemporaries to dismiss his writings on evolution as nonsensical. Yet his speculative boldness is not self-evidently irrational since the very idea of a rational account of natural phenomena is anything but clear, as Butler in fact helps show. One reason for this is that many, if not all, so-called fundamental ideas which refer to the most salient aspects of Nature, such as evolution, are extremely vague. This idea comes attached moreover to a whole raft of equally vague ideas, such as emergence, variation, heredity, and so on, which floats on an apparently bottomless sea called Nature--which is an even vaguer idea.

Hence it might be more advisable to speak of evolution as alluding to one of the most important themes in the topic of the naturing of Nature--assuming that scientists have gathered ample evidence showing that the world is evolutionary through and through.³ Butler is of course confirming this dynamic feature of the cosmos since he maintains that no form of organization is immune from variation. His account of evolution is thus in one sense an indirect criticism of a collective mode of thought that has, in the name of an enlightened reason, endorsed a highly dubious interpretation of this vague idea. Indeed, the remarkable imperviousness of Darwinism to criticism betokens a widespread tendency among self-styled naturalists to over-estimate the wisdom of scientific experts. Some very influential branches of modern philosophy have, for instance, encouraged a kind of superstitious awe of precision and certainty that bears witness to an induced fear of vagueness and ambiguity. One need only consider, for instance, the great amount of energy and time expended by influential analytic philosophers on logicistic assaults upon vagueness. It is as though this common trait of natural languages were the chief enemy of rational thought.⁴

In sharp contrast to this attitude of mind, Butler boldly sets out to throw some light on what may turn out to be a mystery. Proffering a number of bold and possibly unresolvable conjectures he evokes a living cosmos suffused with an 'inner' creative restlessness. Endorsing the Lamarckian interpretation of variation, he presumes that an organism is not a machine, that all organisms can feel want or desire for change. He thus brings forward a burning question that is not often tackled, whether a

³ This phrase alludes to the pre-scientific notion of *natura naturans* which connotes a pervasive cosmic movement (in contrast to *natura naturata*--i.e., that which is precipitated during this movement).

⁴ The names of Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege stand out in this company, which includes self-consciously rigorous reasoners who can nonetheless be charged with perpetuating a bad myth, the myth of scientific superrationality (a topic that I explore in my *Myths of Reason: Vagueness, Rationality, and the Lure of Logic* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1995).

thoroughly evolutionary cosmos bespeaks a living creature imbued with a vague *telos*, as is suggested by the emergence of increasingly sophisticated forms of sensibility.⁵

In any case, Butler's account points up what deserves to be counted as a primary metaphysical fact, that Becoming supervenes over Being. He can be regarded, in other words, as an exception to Nietzsche's sweeping condemnation (in *Twilight of the Idols*) of the thinking of the moderns, whom he accuses of 'Egyptianism.' That is, they

hate even the idea of becoming.... They think they are doing a thing honour when they dehistoricise it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they make a mummy of it. All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped their hands alive.⁶

Thus indicating an urgent need for a close scrutiny of the predominant conception of serious thinking, Nietzsche denounces in particular the regnant 'conceptual idolatry' which has covered over the interplay in ordinary thinking between the imaginal and the conceptual.

Briefly, then, Nietzsche suggests that a tendency to subsume rational thought under a static and sovereign concept of a monolithic Being is a sign that this supposedly rational culture is shot through with dishonesty and self-deception. This suspicion has since been reinforced by one of his most important admirers, Gilles Deleuze, who accuses the moderns of making would-be rational thought conform to what he calls the 'dogmatic image of thought'—which confines the movements of thought to a static 'world of representation.' Maintaining that serious inquiry, on the contrary, does not exemplify an 'upright' reason infused by a 'good will,' Deleuze reinforces Nietzsche's claim that a primary aim of philosophy should be to produce cultural physicians.⁷ This is a task that Butler appears to be attempting. Although he does not see himself as a philosopher, his refusal to take sides in what he takes to be a pseudo-debate between scientism and creationism suggests he is engaged in a search for a more reasonable way to approach problems in natural philosophy. That he believes this might result in a healthier culture is perhaps most evident in his early, satirical novel *Erewhon* wherein he depicts a society that has attempted to isolate itself geographically from the pernicious effects of a burgeoning technology.

⁵ This by no means implies that evolution is necessarily progressive, for Butler is well aware that *homo sapiens* may have complacently misnamed itself.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the effects of this pervasive attitude of mind, see Arran Gare, 'Mathematics, Explanation and Reductionism: Exposing the Roots of the Egyptianism of European Civilization,' in <www.cosmosandhistory.org> vol. 1, no. 1.

⁷ In Nietzsche's view, the nature of the therapeutic task is to be 'untimely'; that is, to act 'counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.'

The Erewhonians are convinced that a culture which allows itself to become enslaved by the ingenious devices produced by techno-science is bound to betray its own humanity. They have therefore banned even such simple machines as pocket watches, for every machine is potentially capable of evolving into a tyrant that will enslave its 'owners.' That time has vindicated their suspicions of technology is indicated, Butler suggests, by the popularity of Darwinism whose principal tenet is that Life and Thought once upon a time emerged spontaneously from insentient bits of lifeless matter. So what might appear to be only a harmless mechanical instrument can evolve into a tyrant that can turn its 'owners' into slaves.

Butler's suspicions appear to have been amply borne out by developments in some of the most prestigious universities in the 'enlightened' West. New academic disciplines have sprung up with names like 'neurohumanities' where the ostensible aim is to rescue the traditional humanities from irrelevance. Presumably bent upon enhancing our understanding of the human condition, researchers in this new and presumably evolved discipline employ the brain-imaging techniques of computer science to illuminate, ironically enough, the enspiriting and revitalizing powers of art and literature.⁸

Thus indicating how deeply entrenched is the reductive tendency of modern naturalisms, such developments justify Butler's refusal to follow the lead of experts who possess detailed technical knowledge of organisms. So it is important to note that although his writings evince a deep suspicion of the wisdom of highly trained scientists, he is far from rejecting the common ideals of rational thought--which are coherence and consistency. It is just that he believes that when it comes to clarifying a vague fundamental concept like evolution, it would be wiser to put one's trust in the soft and malleable humanistic tools of language (e.g., certain figures of speech) than in the precise language and methods of modern science.

Once again Butler can look for support from Nietzsche who remarks (in *Twilight of the Idols*): '[o]nce and for all there is a great deal I do not want to know. - Wisdom sets bounds even to knowledge.' That is to say, an evaluation of the worth of Butler's speculations must take into account a crucial consideration that Nietzsche traces to the modern tendency to teach a narrowing of perspectives and hence a kind of stupidity. This is quite different from the dullness of mind exhibited by the so-called 'lower' animals, who as Deleuze points out evidence a kind of wisdom, thus evincing what may be one of the more valuable aspects of Butler's story of evolution. For he

⁸ It is as though it were self-evident that the non-material aspects of experiencing can be reduced to material elements with no remainder. For an overview of some current consequences of this anomalous belief, see, for instance, Alissa Quart's article "Adventures in Neurohumanities" in *The Nation*, May 27, 2013.

interprets emergence as growth in natural knowledge which attests to an evolving wisdom in Nature.⁹

In sum, then, Butler can be read as foreshadowing Deleuze's attack on the unwisdom instilled in much modern philosophy by Descartes who initiated a systematic betrayal of what it means to think. Calling for a 'new style' in philosophy, Deleuze indicates that a natural philosopher ought to strive to be a bold adventurer at the frontiers of knowledge (for 'how else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly?'). He thus opens up the possibility that Butler's unorthodox 'method' of story-telling at least begins with a wise rejection of a conception of good reasoning that betrays reason itself.

2. ON FIRST LOOKING INTO THE SELF

If the history of philosophy is like a *collage* in painting, as Deleuze maintains, Butler can be likened to an unconventional artist who is attempting to add something of value to a growing *collage*--by introducing new intuitions, or a more illuminating way of expressing old intuitions and insights. More specifically, Butler's 'method' of story-telling involves an exploration of the relationships that connect three key tropes: habit, memory, and power. It can therefore be described as anthropotropic since this trio presupposes a supervening fourth trope; namely that of a self--which must surely have been silently present from the outset. For Butler's 'method' suggests that a 'ground' for good reasoning in natural philosophy can only be constructed out of a set of primary intuitions.

Thus Butler begins by throwing down a gauntlet at the feet of all modern naturalists who deny, for one thing, the possibility that the naturing of Nature is imbued with a vague *telos*. But perhaps Butler offends against modernist beliefs even more radically in his denial of the dogma that all would-be rational investigations ought to subsume their reasonings under the universal, eternal, and immutable 'laws of nature.' Rejecting this allegedly indispensable backbone of naturalistic inquiry, Butler holds that the trope of habit best expresses the orderliness of those forms of organization that actually perdure, at least for a while, in this dynamically changing cosmos.

Upholding the importance of Butler's writings for natural philosophy, Deleuze is particularly impressed by the stress that Butler puts on the notion of a self governed for

⁹Butler notes that the organisms which actually survive are not merely winners in a cosmic lottery: 'Animals that have been wise and lucky 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*.

the most part by habits.¹⁰ Although this approach flies in the face of modern philosophy (where 'everyone knows,' says Deleuze, 'independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking and being') Butler is rightly maintaining that we know precious little about our inner selves.¹¹ But if this is so, it is not at all clear where and how to begin to evaluate Butler's story. When he brings in the notion of a self, he also brings in the equally obscure ideas of person, personality, persona, personal identity, and last but far from least, soul. To evoke selves with souls is moreover to violate a strict taboo that is observed not only by self-consciously rational thinkers but also by all those who cling to the modern myth that the despiritualized conception of rationality promoted by modern science is the best and last word on the subject.

It is thus not too surprising that most modern naturalists ignore Butler's musings on evolution. It therefore seems wise to approach the question of the worth of his story circumspectly, by focusing initially on his attempts to show that his guiding metaphors is capable of illuminating Life itself.

In respect to the trope of unconscious memory Butler observes, for instance, that

[a] living creature bereft of all memory dies. If bereft of a great part of memory, it swoons or sleeps; and when its memory returns, we say it has returned to life.

Life and death, then, should be memory and forgetfulness, for we are dead to all that we have forgotten.

Life is that property of matter whereby it can remember. Matter which can remember is living; matter which cannot remember is dead.

Life, then, is memory. The life of a creature is the memory of a creature. We are all the same stuff to start with, but we remember different things, and if we did not remember different things we should be absolutely like each other. As for the stuff itself of which we are made, we know nothing save only that it is "such as dreams are made of." *Life and Habit.*

However, to refer to life as a 'property of matter' is surely to beg the most important question while at the same time conjuring up the specter of 'conceptual idolatry' from which Butler is surely trying to escape. Furthermore, to claim that matter, or perhaps better, the mattering of matter, is in some sense bound up with

¹⁰ Deleuze declares, for instance, that 'no one has shown better than Samuel Butler that there is no continuity apart from that of habit, and we have no other continuities apart from those of thousands of component habits, which form within us so many superstitious and contemplative selves, so many claimants and satisfactions.' See *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia Un. Press, 1994, p. 75, hereafter referred to as DR).

¹¹ Evidently inspired in part by Butler's *Erewhon*, Deleuze speaks about a knowing self not in terms of an isolated knower but rather of a 'dissolved self'---while implying that Butler was aware that there is no way to precisely locate a self in some definite 'here-and-now.' See DR, xxi.

memory is to bring the trope of habit to the foreground, for signs of permanence signify well-remembered habits. Then there is the very tricky question, assuming that a habit alludes to a power that has created it, of whether Nature is just an abbreviation for a certain compendium of active powers.

To evoke a power of remembering, in any case, is also to evoke a power of forgetting, for not everything that has ever come to pass need be remembered in those processes of variation which involve selections and rejections of what may possibly enhance the chances of survival of the species. The number as well as the obscurity of relevant problems and questions threaten, in short, to multiply without limit. If all the powers mentioned above as well as those involved in processes of variation include a power or powers of selection and/or decision, would not such powers elicit a lot of 'little wills' to launch them, perhaps only under certain conditions? Then there may be an essentially overarching Will whose creative power comes into play on those occasions when an organism is moved by spontaneous wants or desires to radically alter extant characteristic habits, or instincts, and generate an entirely new species.

Perhaps considerations such as these were in Butler's mind when he reflected upon some of Darwin's musings on the problem of heredity. He even inserts an amendment (which he puts into parentheses) into Darwin's suggestion that organisms have a power to recall erstwhile useful habits. For Darwin states that

“[i]n every living being we may rest assured that a host of long-lost characters lie ready to be evolved under proper conditions (does not one almost long to substitute the word “memories” for the word “characters?”). How can we make intelligible, and connect with other facts, this wonderful and common capacity of reversion - this power of calling back to life long-lost characters?” *Life and Habit*.

'Surely the answer may be hazarded,' Butler interjects, 'that we shall be able to do so when we can make intelligible the power of calling back to life long-lost memories. But I grant that this answer holds out no immediate prospect of a clear understanding.'

Yet it is not hard to think that a power that can alter or create a habit evinces the idea of an agent or agency capable of selecting and/or deciding *which* habits need changing. So at this point it may be wise to pause to reflect upon Butler's decision to make unconscious memory one of his key tropes. It is evident from the quasi-instinctive or near automatic behaviour of skilled musicians, he argues, that learning involves much repetition. Frequent practice appears to have the effect of driving whatever is being learned deeper and deeper into the unconscious. For Butler was evidently much impressed by the ability of some musicians to absorb and literally incorporate into their bodies the complex series of actions required to play an intricate piece of music without needing to read the score note by note.

On the other hand, this uncanny ability appears not unlike the skills exhibited by, for instance, web-spinning spiders. But then does not Life in general bear witness to many kinds of relatively mindless capacities to execute complicated series of actions that are akin to those illustrated by musicians who, for instance, can carry on a conversation while playing an intricate piece of music almost automatically? There is good reason, in short, for Butler to hold that the power of unconscious memory is a central factor in heredity.¹² The phenomenon of inheritance, in short, must be bound up with a capacity to retain or repeat learned habits while changing some only a little. However, the transmission from generation to generation of forms of quickened organization does not get very close to the heart of the issue. In other words, it may be far more fruitful to concentrate on his passing allusion in the quotation given above to the 'stuff' of which 'quickened' lives are made. This is not to say, however, that memory is not closely bound up with this 'stuff,' for whatever its role is in the preservation of quickness, its presence is surely undeniable. However Butler himself links the 'smallness of effort' that he associates with unconscious memory to

the deepest mystery of organic life - the power to originate, to err, to sport, the power which differentiates the living organism from the machine, however complicated. The action and working of this power is found to be like the action of any other mental and, therefore, physical power (for all physical action of living beings is but the expression of a mental action), but I can throw no light upon its origin any more than upon the origin of life (*Life and Habit*).

Why not think, then, that the most appropriate place to begin to think about Life is just here---with the vague notion of a 'quickness' that bespeaks a power to originate?

3. WHAT SHOULD COME FIRST?

Evoking the image of a living cosmos whose restlessness may well bear witness to a cosmic Need and/or Desire for novelty, Butler brings out a crucial consideration---one that Nietzsche also indicates has a direct bearing on the problem of how to properly pursue natural philosophy. For he charges the moderns with blithely inverting the proper order of explanation. That is, they tend to put 'first' what ought to come 'last.' This fault seems well illustrated, as it happens, by all those Darwinian evolutionists who presume that Life can, in principle, be explained by scientific means.

Butler evidently rejects the modern faith in system since he is aiming to tell a vitalistic story about evolution that gives the lie, in particular, to recent developments

¹² [A]ll hereditary traits, whether of mind or body, are inherited in virtue of, and as a manifestation of, the same power whereby we are able to remember intelligently what we did half an hour, yesterday, or a twelvemonth since, and this in no figurative but in a perfectly real sense.' *Luck, or Cunning?*

in cosmogony that presuppose an adequate understanding of Life, the Universe, and Everything can be gleaned from a system of mathematical equations. For in so far as the proponents of the so-called Big Bang theory of the Universe assume that a rigorous, systematic account can be given not only of the physical structure of the cosmos but also of its vital or quickened contents, they endorse a kind of mathematical mysticism. It takes a considerable leap of faith to believe that you can derive the quicknesses of Life from the dead structures of abstract mathematics.

Hence Butler can be said to have begun at least wisely with the vague assumption that evolution alludes to a certain cosmic restlessness, which is an assumption that recalls the wisdom of Heraclitus who famously declared that 'all things flow.' But perhaps it is even more significant that Heraclitus, when asked how he came by his insights, replied that he had 'looked into himself.' Butler must have done something of the sort when he chose to make his story of evolution revolve about the trope of self. But it may be even more significant that Heraclitus also problematizes the very act of looking, for he observes that 'eyes and ears are poor witnesses if we do not have souls that understand their language.'¹³ Thus suggesting that not only is it wise to bring selves with souls to the forefront of natural philosophy, it would be wise not to ignore the very tricky question of how to fit such ephemeral entities into Nature. That is to say, perhaps the first step in the getting of wisdom in philosophy is to become clear about the relations between selves and souls.

In any case, Heraclitus suggests that the first and perhaps the most important step in natural philosophy is to try to become clear about the fundamental notion of experience. This requires, for one thing, first distinguishing between looking and seeing. In respect to the ordinary business of looking, the dominant or instinctive side of this activity, according to Butler's view of inheritance, elicits constellations of relevant habits that have been learned in prior stages of the organism's development. For inheritance generally refers to a sort of quasi-continuity in the naturing of Nature whereby the various types of successful structuring and/or behaving of living organisms are passed on from generation to generation. The activity of seeing, by contrast, can be viewed more broadly as alluding to those disruptive moments when something entirely new or hitherto unnoticed enters the world.

All told, then, when Butler brings in selves with souls, his story about evolution may find its most important supporters in process philosophy, that branch of philosophy which owes its *raison d'être* to Heraclitus. Among the most important proponents of this type of philosophy is arguably A. N. Whitehead who is neither

¹³ For a good account of Heraclitus's philosophical wisdom, see Richard Geldard, *Remembering Heraclitus* (Lindisfarne Books, 2000).

loathe to speak about souls nor inclined to deny that philosophy is essentially a search for wisdom. He explicitly holds in fact that philosophy not only begins in wonder, it is also bound to end in wonder. The philosopher can only hope produce something that might lead to a 'purification of emotion by understanding.' But since this sort of purification does not promise a final resolution of the problem of understanding itself, what else could it mean but the emergence of a wiser soul more capable of reconciling the affective and the intellectual sides of experiencing?¹⁴

Whitehead promises, in any case, a means to show that a Lamarckian view of variation, which presumes that organisms are sentient creatures, is at least on the right track. More specifically, Whitehead promises a justification for Butler's method of story-telling inasmuch as he is primarily bent on rescuing Nature from the devitalizing and despiritualizing hands of Darwinian naturalists. For one of Whitehead's more serious charges against modern naturalists is that they perpetrate what amounts to a metaphysical crime: they legitimate a 'sharp division between nature and life [that] has poisoned all subsequent philosophy' (MT, 150).

So one can also read Butler as taking up, if only unconsciously, one of the most pressing challenges of natural philosophy---which is to show, as Whitehead puts it, how to 'fuse' Life with Nature. Beginning with the vague idea that evolution elicits an indefinitely long history of changes in psycho-physical wholes, Butler sets the stage for a depiction of a living cosmos in which the kind and degree of quickness exemplified by a living organism (which may conceivably be a whole culture or amalgam of cultures; or, for that matter, the entire cosmos) bespeaks a more or less happy cooperation of many conjoined 'lesser' kinds and degrees of quickness. An individual living organism, in other words, can be conceived as a complex amalgam of adjustments and integrations of a variety of contributions from a great many different kinds of sentient creatures (e.g., specialized cells and organs). Butler even conjectures that

each cell in the human body is a person with an intelligent soul, of a low class, perhaps, but still differing from our own more complex soul in degree, and not in kind; and, like ourselves, being born, living, and dying.' (*Life and Habit*).

He thus elicits a picture of the cosmos as an indefinitely extended and inconceivably complicated web of quickened bodies which evidence spiritual 'forces' that are responsible for investing each body with its own peculiar character and way of

¹⁴ Hence Whitehead's last book might well be called a Book of Wisdom. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968, p. 169, hereafter referred to as MT).

contributing to the vitality of the whole.¹⁵ This suggests that the vague notion of vitality differs widely in respect to degree as well as to kind. The factor of quickness becomes more and more attenuated as one moves downward in the hierarchy of organisms. At the lowest levels of worldly organization---that is, as one approaches the level of so-called dead or inorganic matter--- one can nonetheless continue to think in terms of indissociable, more or less quickened psycho-physical wholes---which means that the notion of a soul is still relevant since the character of vitality can allude to a latent quickness---that is, a potentiality for Life that is merely biding its time until appropriate conditions for actualization appear.¹⁶

Briefly, then, Butler's story elicits the image of an enspirited super-organism comprised of myriad inter-acting, ensouled organisms whose specific characters reflect the kind and quality of sense-making that is currently possible in the world. At the level of the human organism, then, we are perhaps speaking of a more or less sensitive soul that is capable, at least in principle, of approaching the *Logos* ---'according to which,' says Heraclitus, 'all things happen.' The fact that the *Logos* is difficult to conceive, let alone actually grasp, is not at all surprising if it indeed the case, as Heraclitus claims, that much human thinking is akin to sleep-walking. Butler would surely concur with this claim since he holds that living organisms are governed mainly by habits and instincts which, however 'fixed and definite,' are nonetheless always amenable to alteration.

This latter consideration is far from being incidental if Heraclitus is also right and a good many people act as though they had a 'private understanding.' Such people, he implies, have unwise souls that render them incapable of seeing anything new, or perhaps even well, on account of having never properly developed all the inner powers

¹⁵ 'It would appear...as though "we," "our souls," or "selves," or "personalities," or by whatever name we may prefer to be called, are but the consensus and full flowing stream of countless sensations and impulses on the part of our tributary souls or "selves," who probably know no more that we exist, and that they exist as part of us, than a microscopic water-flea knows the results of spectrum analysis, or than an agricultural labourer knows the working of the British constitution: and of whom we know no more, until some misconduct on our part, or some confusion of ideas on theirs, has driven them into insurrection, than we do of the habits and feelings of some class widely separated from our own. These component souls are of many and very different natures, living in territories which are to them vast continents, and rivers, and seas, but which are yet only the bodies of our other component souls; coral reefs and sponge-beds within us; the animal itself being a kind of mean proportional between its house and its soul, and none being able to say where house ends and animal begins, more than they can say where animal ends and soul begins.' *Life and Habit*.

¹⁶ Referring to the 'patterns of activity studied by the physicists and chemists,' Whitehead notes that mentality at this so-called inorganic level of nature is merely latent, where the inheritance of physical pattern 'involves the faint direction of emphasis by unconscious ideal aim' (MT, 167-8). So I shall come back to the key notion of 'activity' later.

with which they have been endowed by Nature. This situation may even explain why so many modern naturalists have so willingly and blithely covered over, if not erased, the complex multi-dimensionality of their everyday experiences. It is as though they would prefer to accuse their very sensibility of lying rather than admit that a good deal of thinking bears witness to a non-sensual interplay of ideas and notions that cannot be traced to material causes. Which is to say that a good many self-styled modern rationalists may be suspected of possessing very unwise souls.

4. ARRIVING AT THE BRINK OF AN ABYSS

I have been suggesting that Butler leads his readers to the brink of an abyss that is concealed behind the ordinary notion of understanding---whose meaning most people appear to believe they understand very well. That is, until they venture into the interior of the vast and open problematic of sense where they may soon come to realize how easy it is to get lost.¹⁷ I shall therefore only attempt a rough sketch of what is probably but one of many ways in which Butler's incomplete story can be criticized and/or augmented. I shall in particular draw upon certain intuitions of thinkers who in one way or another have thrown some light on the profound puzzle of what is going on when sense is actually being made.

However, since there is no reason why sense-making should not produce a muddle of good, bad, and non-sense, it is worth keeping Heraclitus's warnings foremost in mind. He indicates that whatever is ultimately responsible for the kind of sense that is actually produced may be just as likely to err as to get things right. So let us just accept that every organism illustrates species-specific ways of experiencing the world. Thus experiencing can generally be viewed as bearing witness to the operations of various species-specific constellations of faculties.¹⁸ Since Heraclitus is reminding that the operations of faculties need not be infallible, a faculty can be regarded as latent power in Nature that may or may not be properly developed.

To attempt to judge the quality of any act of sense-making is thus to undertake a complicated, if not impossible, task. If a faculty is given in a state of latency, its proper functioning presupposes a prior period of good learning. At the human level of sense-

¹⁷ What follows is drawn from a more extensive exploration of this unbounded problematic at whose center stands the vexed question of how sense is actually made. For more on this matter, see my *Process, Reality, and the Power of Symbols: Thinking with A. N. Whitehead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, hereafter referred to as PRPS).

¹⁸ My references to faculties allude to what is arguably one of Deleuze's most important contributions to natural philosophy, which is a doctrine of faculties that he believes is essential to understanding the complexities of sense-making. In his view a faculty roughly refers to a world of feelings since it elicits a passion to make a kind sense of a certain kind. I explore this line of thought in Chapter 7 of my PRPS.

making, most learning evidently goes on beneath the surface of consciousness, as every infant reminds us. Furthermore, if evolution implies that consciousness has emerged from unconsciousness, one must ultimately face up to the question of how characteristic habits have been learned in the first place. Thus for all its centrality, the question of what good learning means is very likely unresolvable.

In short, if the operations of faculties presuppose prior periods of learning that bring in both natural and cultural influences, the actual production of sense can be regarded as inherently problematical. If an act of experiencing is not governed solely by rigid habits, in the manner of a programmed machine, one can only presume that an unknown number of faculties are involved, faculties whose contributions require coordination and integration. There is no reason to think that the faculty in charge of this last and crucial stage of integration is not, like all the other faculties, only more or less well-developed. Hence the integrative power of the coordinating faculty also depends on prior stages of learning. One thus arrives at a very sticky question: what kind of power could this be, one that is as liable to produce bad as well as good sense?

Here it may once again be helpful to recall Nietzsche's criticism of the moderns' propensity to adopt narrow perspectives. This has induced in self-consciously critical thinkers a tendency to invest all their faith in the realm of the conceptual. But this tendency may only bear witness to the tenacity of the long-standing but delusory modern dream of perfect rigor, objectivity, and certainty in reasoning. It would not be surprising, therefore, if there existed a widespread reluctance to recognize the importance of the faculty of imagination in reasoning. Yet what else but such a power could properly account for the sophisticated form of sensibility that human thinking illustrates inasmuch as ordinary experiencing is shot through with an interplay of elements drawn from the realms of both the imaginal and the conceptual?

So let us digress at this point to consider the reflections of the poet-philosopher S. T. Coleridge who explicitly linked the idea of good reasoning to certain powers of imagination. In his revolt against the predominant logicistic conception of good reasoning, he set out to frame a truly vitalistic account of Life (for he maintains that one can only give an account, not provide an explanation, of this natural phenomenon) which would be based in a 'true naturalism' informed by a 'true realism.' For a joint radical rethinking of both the nature of good reasoning and the hoary notion of reality is needed in order to liberate would-be naturalists from the 'dogmatism of the eye'---the doctrine that good reasoning can be 'grounded' in the deliverances of the senses alone. This doctrine, more specifically, fosters the Cartesian tendency to radically separate polar contrasts, such as subjects and objects, on the assumption that they can be treated separately as disjoint natural entities.

Thus urging what amounts to a nonmodern principle of rationality based on what he calls a 'polar logic,' Coleridge holds that while it is quite legitimate to distinguish between polar contrasts when analyzing experience events, it is an error to radically divide them. Hence the principal challenge facing the would-be 'true naturalist' is to show how to conceive a form of reasoning that can preserve the essential unity of a concrete act of experiencing. His solution is a reality-producing power of imagination, which he calls 'primary' or 'esemplastic' since it is a 'shaping' power in the sense that its functioning underpins the topography of the world that we actually live in. Or more precisely, provides the raw or unconscious makings of the phenomena that actually furnish the world in which we live and move and have our being. For the work of primary imagination requires supplementation by a closely related secondary, or poetic, power of imagination whose job is to 'lift,' as it were, the hidden products of primary imagination up to the surface of consciousness as the phenomena that underwrite whatever is identified as the 'really real.'

Coleridge thus indicates, in short, that a true Reason, of which the common conception of reason is but a shadow, alludes to hidden, unconscious powers of imagination that can draw meanings from the enveloping world. The loci of primary acts of perception, in other words, have a firm foot-hold in the realm of the imaginal which is the home of primary imagination. But since the reality-producing powers of imagination involve a dynamic participation of the secondary, or poetic, power of imagination, it would be better to speak of a reason as alluding to an inherently fallible power that operates tentatively and provisionally in a fluent 'reality of symbols' rather than in a fixed 'external reality.'

If this brief sketch comes anywhere near a fair representation of the implications of Coleridge's theory of imagination, it reveals that the abyss that separates the subjective reasoner from the 'really real' is an artificial obstacle created by a distorted and distorting conception of reason that effectively denatures Nature. Coleridge's 'true naturalism' allows, on the other hand, a more inclusive form of reasoning which allows for the multi-dimensionality of experiencing. This is an activity that can be conceived as involving ongoing negotiations between two complementary but indissociable types of faculties---which he calls the 'organs of sense' and the 'organs of spirit.' He thus opens up a way to deal with the tensions that manifestly exist in ordinary experiencing between material (sensual) and immaterial (nonsensual) considerations. More specifically, he elicits the image of experiencing as a complicated process (in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*) in which

all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit:

tho' the latter organs are not developed in all alike. But they exist in all, and their first appearance discloses itself in the moral being.

Coleridge thus indicates that the nonmodern naturalist can at least hope to do justice to the everyday fact that experiencing in general involves a complex intermixing of psychical and physical elements--for he suggests that *only* a well-cultivated poetic imagination is capable of achieving just balancings between the material and immaterial concerns that typically infuse human experiencing *tout court*. So I will return to this tricky matter a little later. Before leaving this brief sketch of how Coleridge can be enlisted to help support Butler's story of evolution, it is worth noting that like Butler he too points toward the overweening importance of the notion of self in natural philosophy. More specifically, he maintains that self-consciousness is the highest principle of knowing.¹⁹ This claim implies that those selves who cannot or will not look carefully and critically into themselves are unlikely to possess souls wise enough to achieve just balancings between the organs of sense and the organs of spirit. In other words, those naturalists who stubbornly cling to the despiritualizing metaphysics of materialism have not only enlisted in the cause of Death, they will remain enemies of Life for as long as they deny the need to cultivate their powers of imagination.

5. IMAGINATION AND ACTUALITY

Being in a sense the keystone of his vision of a 'true naturalism,' Coleridge at first believed his theory of imagination required a systematic demonstration of its truth. But he then discovered that he was unable to provide such a demonstration and thus was obliged to give a non-systematic (i.e., auto-biographical) account of the theory in *Biographia Literaria* wherein he also links the fundamental idea of matter to the Leibnizian idea of *coagulum spiritus*.²⁰ Hence in his search for a 'true realism,' Coleridge arrived at a metaphysical crisis not unlike that of Butler whose story ends with a tacit plea for metaphysical support. Nothing stands in the way, in other words, of Butler taking seriously Coleridge's claims that we owe much, if not everything, to the reality-producing powers of imagination. This claim he perhaps alludes to himself when he cites Prospero's hint as to the nature of the stuff of which we are made---stuff of which 'we know nothing save only that it is "such as dreams are made of."' It is a common

¹⁹ For instance, he declares (in Thesis X of *Biographia Literaria*) that '[t]he principle of our knowing ... [must be] sought within the sphere of our knowing....[and] the act of self-consciousness is for us the source and principle of all our possible knowledge.'

²⁰ In his invaluable study of Coleridge's inquiries into the nature of thinking, Owen Barfield notes that Coleridge's theory of imagination ultimately elicits a cosmic Will 'which...underlies all creation.' See *What Coleridge Thought* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1971, p. 164).

experience, after all, that our dreams bear witness not only to a free imagination but also at times to a vivid sense of reality.

In any case, and inasmuch as Butler is warranted in insisting that souls be given their proper due, he can be read as indicating that the powers of imagination do indeed play an important part in telling a story about the naturing of Nature. He poses, for instance, the following rhetorical question, 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*).

Indeed, it is not that hard to think that the connections that come to be established between sentient beings has something to do with the imaginative powers of an overarching creative Spirit.²¹ For if the naturing of Nature does indeed bear witness to a vague *telos*, it must be bent upon...what, if not seeing what it can do in creating interconnected occasions of sensibility linked by complicated webs of symbols?²¹ The non-determinate nature of this essentially poetic activity is consonant with the fact that adventurous artists usually cannot say what they are aiming to achieve until they have actually produced it.²² Perhaps the naturing of Nature can be likened to a vast artistic experiment involving innumerable lesser experimenters who bespeak a vast company of more or less cooperative minor artists intuitively bent on achieving a vague goal that may be a possible enhancement of Life itself.

If this so, it would not be a minor consideration that Butler speculates that the notion of a self endowed with a certain personality can be applied to an overarching cosmic Self, for he even goes so far as to personify Life thus:

[W]e are only component atoms of a single compound creature, LIFE, which has probably a distinct conception of its own personality though none whatever of ours, more than we of our own units. I wish also to show reason for thinking that this creature, LIFE, has only come to be what it is, by the same sort of process as that by which any human art or manufacture is developed, *i.e.*, through constantly doing the same thing over and over again, beginning from something

²¹ Encapsulating the complexity of the connections that come to be established between minds and Nature, Deleuze employs the trope of complicity to evoke the double-sidedness of the relationship.

²² T.S. Eliot, for instance, observes (quoting Gottfried Benn) that the poet 'cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words.'

which is barely recognisable as faith, or as the desire to know, or do, or live at all, and as to the origin of which we are in utter darkness, - and growing till it is first conscious of effort, then conscious of power, then powerful with but little consciousness, and finally, so powerful and so charged with memory as to be absolutely without all self-consciousness whatever, except as regards its latest phases in each of its many differentiations, or when placed in such new circumstances as compel it to choose between death and a reconsideration of its position (*Life and Habit*).

This image of a cosmic personality belonging to an overarching creature called Life bespeaks a cosmic desire which might well envisage an evolution of increasingly sophisticated forms of sensibility, such as that exhibited by human creatures with a desire to understand the mystery of their own existence. This possibility in fact resonates with another of Heraclitus's cryptic hints, that 'character is the divine force.' Perhaps the Self that is the current cosmos (for as Whitehead points out there may be an infinite series of 'cosmic epochs') is akin to the character of an adventurous artist who is constructing 'on the fly,' as it were, just the kind of world we actually live in, for better or for worse. For Whitehead maintains that Creativity is the category of the Ultimate, thus indicating that the personality of the person of Life evoked by Butler is best understood as an expression of the principal character of an overarching (or underlying) creative Soul-Spirit.

Although Butler is at times tempted to conflate souls and personalities, he himself indicates that the latter notion is better conceived in terms of 'a certain 'expressivity.' The notion of a personal identity will not suffice in this situation since the notion of identity is at odds with the notion of a universe of interlocked sensibilities that are forever moving on.²³ In any case, although a personality may well remain stubbornly unaltered over the lifetime of a particular self, it may nonetheless be only one of a number of false or misleading characters that are each evocative of a semi-divine force. In other words, since the 'being' of a personality is a certain power of 'expressivity,' it can only gesture towards a distinctive underwriting source---for it is like a suit of clothes that conveys hints as to the character of the wearer.

That it may not be possible to specify the meanings elicited by the notion of a self and all its paraphernalia more precisely is indicated by Butler himself, since the word 'personality' in the following passage could just as well be replaced by either 'self' or 'soul':

²³If one holds with Whitehead that an actual entity is a process in which every becoming leads to a new beginning, an actual entity can be modelled as an embodied and ensouled self that is always in process of making and remaking itself. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Chapter 6 of my PRPS.

we can apprehend neither the beginning nor the end of our personality, which comes up out of infinity as an island out of the sea, so gently, that none can say when it is first visible on our mental horizon, and fades away in the case of those who leave offspring, so imperceptibly that none can say when it is out of sight. But, like the island, whether we can see it or no, it is always there. Not only are we infinite as regards time, but we are so also as regards extension, being so linked on to the external world that we cannot say where we either begin or end. *Life and Habit*.

The notion of a soul may therefore be as indispensable as it is ineffable. Or should one say that it betokens an insubstantial 'something' that like a fleeting personality comes up 'out of infinity as an island out of the sea.' But although selves and their souls are destined to sink out of sight, this ineluctable fate is not necessarily equivalent to a disappearance into a total void. For Butler can always say that a soul is an insubstantial 'something' which as an evolving (or devolving) representative of Spirit is as much part of the universe as the implicated self. And thus no more dispensable than the notion of a self having certain powers whose overall effectiveness perhaps depends on the state of cultivation of the powers of imagination.

6. METAPHYSICS AND IMAGINATION

Indicating that the bane of modern philosophy is its failure to do justice to the role of imagination in the naturing of Nature, Whitehead introduces his *magnum opus*, *Process and Reality*, with a defence of speculative metaphysics. Describing the chief task of the metaphysician as that of recovering some of the wisdom that lies concealed in ordinary words, he advocates a 'method' of 'imaginative generalization' wherein

words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap.

Thus placing imagination at the very heart of metaphysics, Whitehead declares in effect that a perspicacious imagination can create 'good' metaphors, for these figures of speech are not merely decorative additions to serious discourse; nor are they merely word-symbols capable of connecting hitherto disjoint meanings. Some of them have special cognitive powers that are capable of capturing aspects of important meanings. One need only look to the work of gifted poets to remind oneself that some metaphors are capable of bringing into the light new meanings through an imaginative 'stretching' of established meanings. Thus when Whitehead claims in effect that to tell an adequate story about evolution requires first choosing an appropriate figurative language, he provides Butler with the means to support his decision to pursue his reasonings using a figurative language based on a certain choice of key tropes. That his

story-telling is based on what can be called an anthropotropic metaphoric implies, in short, that he is maintaining that the macrocosmos can be best understood through studying the microcosmos of world-making that is illustrated by the meaning-making of a human self.

In this respect, then, Butler can be said to be plumbing the depths of his own wisdom in order to understand that which is generally evolving in Nature. What else, then, but an imaginative exploration of the powers of certain words could achieve such a goal given the immense complexity of human experiencing? Suggesting that there is indeed a close connection between the quickening powers of certain words and the condition of the souls that deploy them, Whitehead observes that 'the mentality of mankind and the language of mankind created each other.' At the same time he notes that 'the souls of men are the gift from language to mankind (MT, 41). But perhaps it might be better to say that the evolution of language marches in tandem with potentially perspicacious but only slowly awakening souls of men who have only gradually developed the means to express their emergent powers that enable them to apprehend the deeper meanings that human beings are capable of enjoying. That these meanings must remain dormant until the means of expression have been properly developed is not hard to believe in so far as this must await the emergence of poetic imaginative powers that are capable of bring into the light intuitions that pertain to the immaterial (nonsensual) side of experiencing.

While no doubt highly convoluted, this line of thought is compatible with Butler's view of evolution which I am claiming revolves about selves conceived as psycho-physical wholes whose souls may or may not be moving in the direction of increasing wisdom. The important point here is that Whitehead can be enlisted to help Butler with a much-needed justification for his bold conjecturings that point to the existence of many kinds of souls in Nature.

It is however very likely that there are no end of possible speculative paths that one might follow when trying to circumvent the abyss to which Butler leads his readers. As Whitehead more generally frames this problem of how to traverse the vast problematic of sense, I have already noted that what is at issue is a reasonable way to conceive the fundamental idea of matter itself. In this crucial respect, Whitehead is especially careful to give science its just due. More specifically, he notes that

[p]hysical science has reduced nature to activity, and has discovered abstract mathematical formulae which are illustrated in these activities of nature' (MT,166).

Thus identifying 'energetic activity' as one of the most fundamental concepts of the naturing of Nature, Whitehead tacitly indicates that it would be better to speak of the mattering of matter, a view that implicitly denies the tendency to speak of 'matter' as

though it were a kind of 'energy-stuff,' for energy is better conceived as a measure of the quantity of energy exhibited by a certain representative of the pure activity which the mattering of matter elicits.²⁴ This tendency betrays a failure to take note of the important difference between science and metaphysics, a difference that is simply ignored by those fervid champions of modern science who commit the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'---which renders into concrete entities what are merely abstract aspects of natural events.

It is more reasonable to believe, Butler is in effect maintaining, that evolution alludes to a living cosmos in which Life alludes to an evolving 'something' that cannot be dealt with separately from Nature. Or as Whitehead puts a similar point, the common belief that there exists a 'sharp division between mentality and nature has no ground in our fundamental observation' (MT, 156).²⁵ As for what such an observation might be, he maintains that the 'dominating insight' of a human experiencing self is that 'we presuppose ourselves as an actuality within a world of actualities' (MT, 107).

Indeed, Butler might want to ask: what self-conscious self would want to claim it is not an actual entity? In any event, both he and Whitehead are well aware that no actual self is capable of standing back far enough to catch him/herself in the act of making a fundamental observation. It is not even possible to determine exactly where one's self leaves off and other selves begin. In other words, the first thing one is bound to find when trying to follow Heraclitus's advice, Whitehead maintains, is an indissociable triad: "The Whole," "That Other," and "This-My-Self" (MT, 110). He thereby conjures up a very rough picture of the cosmos in which the notion of self-conscious awareness elicits only a 'dim foundation' of sensibility that that belongs to a vast inter-connected web of vague intimations of significance. For

no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right....Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe (MT, p. 111).

If one should now ask what is meant by 'signification,' a possible response is also provided by Heraclitus who alludes to 'the divine one whose oracle is in Delphi [and who] speaks neither directly or obscurely, but rather gives a sign.' That is to say, all the meaning-making that is going on in the world involves acts of sign- or symbol- interpreting. Hence when Whitehead speaks of the 'content' that needs to be added to 'bare activity' in fleshing out a theory of actuality, he evokes a picture of the mattering

²⁴ The notion of 'energetic activity' also applies to mind---or better, the minding of mind, for it can be used in reference to, as Whitehead puts it, 'the emotional intensity entertained in life' (MT, 168).

²⁵ Ordinary observation does not provide a sound basis for reasoning about Life because, says Whitehead, it deals only with 'the superficial variability in our clear consciousness of qualitative detail' (MT, 108). Or to speak more plainly, it merely skates over the surfaces of the world.

of matter that has more in common with the production of the `stuff' of dreams than with, say, the dead and inert `stuff' that the early moderns dreamed of. As for the trope of fusing itself, it is worth noting that Coleridge also appeals to this metaphor when he singles out primary imagination as the unifying power which accounts for the unities of experience-events. It is perhaps also worth noting that the trope of a fusing or coordinating power is compatible with the various aspects of the sort of connectivity that Butler elicits in his story of a living cosmos replete with `substances' composed of such non-material entities as habits, memories and powers---all of which appear to be close cousins to dreams.

At this point, it is at least clear that an adequate theory of actuality will hardly be as simple as that envisioned by common sense. Yet Whitehead's formal treatment (in *Process and Reality*) of the notion of an actual entity can nonetheless be modelled anthropomorphically in terms of familiar experience-events, which involves a choice of imagery that is compatible with his Butler's beginnings. For an organism can be imaged as a participant in an immense, never-ending and unchoreographed cosmic dance which betokens a variegated drama of spontaneous meaning-making. The quality of the meaning making that is going on always and everywhere reflects and is reflected by the quality and/or health of whatever it is that `moves' the only more or less creative participants in the cosmic dance. Since the artistic quality of any given dance reflects upon the `quicknesses' of the souls of the dancers involved, one is thus led in the end to wonder whether and if so how souls relate to the various types of connectivity that are being exhibited in the cosmic dance. It is therefore highly significant that, in Whitehead's view, connectivity in general elicits the trope of concern for each occasion of sensibility can be regarded as

an activity of concern, in the Quaker sense of that term. It is the conjunction of transcendence and immanence. The occasion is concerned, in the way of feeling and aim, with things that in their own essence lie beyond it....Thus each occasion, although engaged in its own immediate self-realization, is concerned with the universe (MT, 167).

Put another way, then, the getting of wisdom in the dance of occasions of sensibility depends at bottom on how and whether a proper balancing of concerns can be achieved in the ongoing worlding of the world. That is to say, if Butler's bold conjecturings evoke all kinds of selves with souls whose wisdom affects the quality of the production of a great variety of occasions of sensibility, the degree of wisdom in Nature may ultimately depend on those ensouled selves who are most capable of feeling many kinds of concern. That is to say, it is now quite conceivable that the vague *telos* that Butler speaks of refers to a world that is generally concerned with

evolving ever more complex, inter-related forms of sensibility that have resulted in the emergence of a creature which is more or less capable of moral feelings of significance, as Coleridge seems to be hinting when he notes that the organs of spirit exist in all, although they are not developed in all alike.

7. A COSMOLOGY OF RESPONSIBLE SELVES?

While Whitehead's formal term for the communications that link actual events in his categoreal system is 'prehension,' this fundamental activity of perception can be more informally conceived as an essentially Janus-faced activity which faces backwards and forwards at once.²⁶ Whitehead moreover associates acts of perception with acts of valuing, for he defines experience in general as 'a value experience....[which is] a vague sense of maintenance or discard' (MT,110) It is thus noteworthy that this factor of double-sidedness in the connectivities that ultimately hold the world together is in accord with the etymology of the word 'concern'---which evinces the activities of sifting and/or sorting of what may or may not be significant. The implication is that an act of perception includes the exercise of powers of judgment and/or evaluation that are essentially tentative and provisional in view of the (ontological and epistemological) ubiquity of vagueness.²⁷

Hence Whitehead has good reason to image each occasion of sensibility as an extended act of becoming that takes place in a 'specious present' that is simply not reducible, as so many modern thinkers would like to believe, to dimensionless mathematical point-events. To speak of an experience-event is to allude to an essentially indeterminate process of negotiation that may refer to what *might* have happened in the past as well as what *might* take place in the future. Thus in invoking an evolutionary world that is governed, although not completely, by constellations of habits of structuring and behaving, Butler is warranted to suggest that evolution can involve a growth of wisdom in Nature. That this evolution need not be progressive, however, also follows from the ubiquity of vagueness.

There is therefore no escape from the especially tricky question of what might be the most appropriate figurative language that could do the most justice to the intrinsically convoluted nature of experiencing itself. All one can hope to achieve, however, is an appropriate figurative language that may positively influence the collective mentality of the relevant culture. For a culture can be 'quickened' in its heart

²⁶ An actual entity is an act of becoming that is poised between past and future. Looking to the past means that the notion of causality refers to the immanence of the past in current acts of becoming while looking to the future means venturing into the transcendental realm of what might be but has not yet become.

²⁷ That Whitehead believes there is an intimate connection between perception and the notion of significance is evident from his earliest works in the philosophy of science, such as *Concept of Nature*.

and soul in a manner similar to the effects that good poetry can produce. That is to say, in short, we are now not all that far from the conclusion that there is not a great distance between philosophy and poetry. Perhaps the most important difference involves the factor of responsibility that is evoked not only by the trope of concern but also by the phrase 'words of power.'

Thus when Whitehead's trope of concern is added to Butler's anthropotropic metaphors to yield a story of a living cosmos comprised of concerned, ensouled selves linked by feelings of significance, the doors of natural philosophy are thrown open to the possibility that we live and move and have our being in a moral universe. One may claim, in other words, that in order to do justice to the degree of sophistication that has emerged with human forms of sensibility, an adequate conception of human experiencing must allow for the existence of immaterial (non-sensual) faculties which are just as respectable as material (sensual) ones, if not far more important when it comes to the overarching question of what may be the best way to live and think in an evolving but totally unsentimental Nature. That is, a Nature more concerned with spawning and proliferating Life than preserving it. The human animal, in other words, does have a little job in life, and it is a moral one.

It is therefore no small thing that when Whitehead expands upon his theory of perception he is led to tie good reasoning to primordial acts of 'symbolic referencing' that ties images to concepts or ideas, and vice versa. Furthermore, the very 'quickening' effects of the symbolic referencing illustrated by good poets whose peculiar choices of 'words of power' bear witness to perspicacious poetic imaginations indicate that seeing, as opposed to mere looking, bespeaks a responsibility to find just balances in the complex interplay of images, ideas, concepts, and feelings that thinking involves.²⁸

Hence there can be no over-estimating the complexity of the picture that Butler points us toward once one allows that Whitehead can provide him with invaluable support. Butler's story does indeed promise an advance of understanding of evolution. This is because if an advance of understanding amounts to a 'purification of emotions,' the importance that Whitehead accords to feelings in his metaphysics means that a fruitful story in natural philosophy implies that good thinking in philosophy is at bottom akin to a similar activity in poetry since both activities are based on insightful acts of intuitive imagining, or perhaps better, imaginative intuiting. The main difficulty in illuminating the hoary notion of truth, in other words, concerns the fact that sense-

²⁸Whitehead's theory of perception wherein primordial images become linked to ideas or concepts, and vice versa, in a process he calls 'symbolic referencing' (which is not exposure so much as discovery of meanings) indicates that poetic imagination is the principal power in cognition.

making in both philosophy and poetry generally takes place in a foggy atmosphere where even the most imaginative and/or intuitive thinker seems bound to go astray, and not only because of a want of clear sign-posts. The plain truth is that 'feelings of rightness' are not unproblematically reliable. For as Coleridge helps make clear, no exercise in thinking that enlists the powers of imagination is infallible.²⁹ There never has been nor ever will be absolutely wise souls capable of navigating without mishap the troubled waters of sense-making.

Although Whitehead does not refer explicitly to the ways in which souls participate in what is an inevitably adventurous and risky activity, his enlistment of the trope of concern indicates that selective judgments of worth or value mainly involve what only *appears* to be significant. So it is worth stressing that although he provides numerous indications that the notion of soul is indispensable in natural philosophy, he never suggests it is amenable to inclusion in a categorical scheme such as that which he puts forward in *Process and Reality*. On the contrary, he declares, for instance, that the experienced world, 'which lies at the base of the soul's existence,' involves 'the exhibition of the soul itself as one of components within the world' (MT, 163). This claim, which is in keeping with Butler's vision of a living cosmos, is also in accord with the view that evolution refers in general to changes in psycho-physical wholes; which is to say that bodies, minds, and souls come and go together in this evolving world.

Thus Whitehead sums up the mystery involved in trying to think about how souls fit into the naturing of Nature when he notes that

We are in the world and the world is in us. Our immediate occasion is in the society of occasions forming the soul, and our soul is in the present occasion. The body is ours, and we are an activity within our body (MT, 165).

So the support Whitehead provides Butler is more moral than practical: those would-be naturalists who seek to improve their understanding of the naturing of Nature (i.e., enhance the wisdom of at least their own occasions of sensibility) would be wise to follow Heraclitus's advice and first look to the state of health of their own souls. Superficial, ordinary looking will not be of much help in this respect since ordinary acts of looking involve gazing into a bottomless well of ossified ignorance, as it were; that is, into that comfortable pool of familiar, automatically deployed habits and prejudices that guide ordinary thinking. Yet this pit of ignorance is not the same thing as a total void since the habits that looking presupposes do not arise out of nothing.

Looking into oneself is thus a good way to contemplate the mystery which is elicited by the very idea of good learning. Part of this mystery involves the the

²⁹Coleridge posits a third form of imagination, which he calls fancy, which only 'plays' with the 'fixities and definites' that have come to be accepted, for better or for worse, as significant.

interplay of emotions in acts of experiencing. While it may be true that a well-cultivated imagination is first and last the *sine qua non* for doing natural philosophy, it also seems true, as Whitehead maintains (in *Adventures of Ideas*), that it is an 'axiom of empiricism' that 'all knowledge is derived from, and verified by, direct intuitive observation.' However, according to his own lights, this claim elicits the ultimate puzzle of the significance of those evanescent 'feelings of rightness' that are elicited (it can only be hoped) by genuine insights, or better 'veridical seeings-into.'

One seems bound to arrive in the end at the ever-burning question that Heraclitus adumbrated long ago: what else but a wise soul could judge the quality of a 'feeling of rightness' that may or may not confirm the propriety of some movement of mind that is intrinsically hidden? When Heraclitus links more understanding of ones own sense experiences to more or less wise souls, he is at the same time also spelling out a cultural condition for the making of good sense. The sad history of the culture of the West indicates that every culture is at risk of being taken over by a perhaps unconscious conspiracy of unwise souls who have acquired the secular power to institute, say, toxic belief-habits and customs. That which is generally taken to be normal in thinking may therefore represent one or all of those pernicious 'misadventures of thought' which Deleuze identifies as the 'terrible Trinity of madness, malevolence, and stupidity.'³⁰ The last member of this trio may in fact present the greatest threat to the health of a given culture. I have already noted Nietzsche's warning in regard to the 'misadventure' of stupidity that stems from an unwise embrace of narrow perspectives. There is in fact plenty of reasons to think that a very sick culture can ensue if predominant educational system have failed to fulfill what I am suggesting is education's chief responsibility: to cultivate the powers of imagination with the aim of ensuring wise negotiations between the organs of sense and the organs of spirit.³¹

8. WISE SOULS AND SICK SOULS

It is now possible to hazard a rough estimate of Butler's achievement. He proposes to tell a story about evolution that stands somewhere between Darwinism and natural theology. Since both doctrines in his view are enemies of freedom and good sense, his aims can be regarded as partly therapeutic. His prophetic warning of a culture in danger of undermining itself through an uncritical adoption of clever technologies has

³⁰See DR, 149.

³¹The point can be illustrated by the example of the unimaginative Adolf Eichmann who, as Hannah Arendt describes him, was especially lacking in the inability to imagine what it might be like to stand in someone else's shoes. In this he was not alone, for he bore witness to a failed educational system that had engendered a collective mode of thought that rendered many of its members capable of perpetrating all kinds of evil.

in fact proved to be prescient. For this supposedly enlightened culture has since become addicted to a conception of economic growth that flourishes with every advance in technology. An attitude of mind has taken hold which has become addicted to mindless consumption which betrays an irresistible attraction to all the comforts and conveniences that flow from a burgeoning technology.

But the cultural malaise that Butler foreshadows in *Erewhon* may not chiefly concern the temptations hidden in the ingenious devices spawned by techno-science. It is the souls of the addicts of technology, Butler seems to suggest, that are in the greatest danger from the relentless march of techno-science. For this appears to have fostered an aversion to thinking itself--which is no doubt a frequently uncomfortable and unrewarding activity. This dislike of the hard work of thinking is allied to an acritical endorsement of the false myth that the the predominant scientific interpretation of rationality is superior to all others. Yet this myth has manifestly not fostered a deeper understanding of our selves and the world we actually live in, as seems evident in the very popularity of the Darwinian account of evolution.

Butler had good reason, in short, to issue a dire warning:

the man of science....is but medicine-man, augur, priest...requiring to be well-watched by those who value freedom. *Life and Habit*.

Consider, for instance, the restrictions on freedom that attend the global ascendancy of an essentially imperialistic reason that has enabled a predacious form of corporate capitalism to acquire ever more control of both Life and Thought over the entire globe. A small but powerful company of short-sighted techno-crats, whose ideal goal in life appears to be control over ever larger personal empires, threatens to install everywhere a new form of totalitarianism. Its leaders propagate a thoughtless callousness that bespeaks dead souls who are informed by a deep conviction that they have a natural right to enslave the souls of weaker or 'less developed' cultures. Hence it is far from incidental that the leaders of the so-called enlightened culture of the West draw a good deal of comfort from the neo-Darwinian mantra 'survival of the fittest.'³²

Thus Butler can at the very least be credited with forcing into the open the possibility that the popular doctrine of Darwinism is a symptom of a culture that appears to be sick unto death.³³ This putatively scientific doctrine encourages the view,

³²Besides stupidity, this doctrine illustrates the other two 'misadventures of thought' that Deleuze identifies. A certain malevolence (which is akin to what Arendt calls the 'banality of evil') infuses the kind of sensibility that holds that the human propensity to seek to profit by enslaving less powerful human beings is a virtue. And a kind of madness is surely manifested in the pursuit of ever more wealth, a pursuit that is akin to the mindless self-destructiveness of a greedy parasite.

³³For a discussion of the extent of the problem of culture to which Darwinism has contributed, see Jacques Barzun, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage* (Boston, Little Brown and Co., 1941). Barzun holds that an acritical faith in the metaphysical doctrine of mechanistic materialism has been propagated not only by

at any rate, that the immaterial concerns that are so typical of human daily living and thinking are merely delusions that can be explained away by means of two simplistic principles. It may therefore not be going too far to say that Butler's dire warnings allude to a schizophrenic collective mentality that is bent on concealing a debilitating irrationality behind a false conception of rationality.

But whether one agrees with the above diagnosis or not, Butler can at least be credited with revealing, albeit perhaps only inadvertently, some of the faults of an essentially imperialistic culture that heralds the decline of the civilization of the West. He underscores the urgency of the need to rethink the relations between the material (sensual) and non-material or spiritual side of good reasoning, a question that the moderns simply cover over by silently embracing a materialistic dogma that suppresses the latter side. In this vitally important respect, then, Whitehead can be enlisted as one of Butler's most promising supporters. He proffers a metaphysical imaginary that not only confirms the wisdom of Butler's choice of an anthropotropic basis for his storytelling. He indicates that there is probably no better way to try to do justice to the idea of a living, evolving cosmos than that which Butler illustrates.

This is no small thing if what is ultimately at stake is how human selves might best live and think on a shrinking planet whose future evolution is now largely in their own hands. However, when Butler centers his story on the notion of a self he reveals at the same time that it is hardly a simple exercise to decide on the relative worth of rival metaphysical imaginaries. That the difficulties are more likely to increase with every attempt to criticize and/or augment Butler's imaginary is evident from one of his initial presumptions---that the vague idea of evolution implies a gradual and not necessarily progressive development of increasingly sophisticated modes of thought. As for the hitherto unexamined meaning of 'sophisticated,' I have in effect been arguing that this adjective can be elucidated with the help of Whitehead's notion of concern; that is, it can be understood as an allusion to the fact that human life and thought bear witness to the emergence in the world of moral/ethical feelings of responsibility. While no doubt complicating Butler's story immensely, the addition of the trope of concern to Butler's metaphors is at least consonant with the fact that different cultures attest to different concerns in the ways they relate to nature, some of which may be more sensible than others. That this is not a minor consideration follows if there can be no reference to nature that does not at the same time allude to the primary values promoted by some culture, and vice versa.

scientists but also by many of the leading cultural lights of the second half of the 19th century. (My thanks to Ken McClure for this reference)

One upshot of Butler's Lamarckian approach to variation is a recognition that feelings belong as much to Nature as to its enculturated sentient creatures, which corrects one of the more serious faults of the Darwinian story of evolution that perpetuates a devivifying metaphysical imaginary that is incapable of doing justice to the affective side of experiencing. This consideration must surely become a major one in so far as this techno-culture has allowed itself to become enamoured of the idea of a completely independent and self-sufficient self, an idea that, as Whitehead indicates, is as ontologically poverty-stricken as it is epistemologically indefensible.

Perhaps the most valuable upshot of Butler's approach is therefore to point up the extent of certain problems that relate to the down-grading of the role of feelings and emotions, not to mention imagination, in serious thinking. On this count alone Butler's initial decision to abandon Darwinism and adopt a Lamarckian interpretation of variation bears witness to a superior wisdom. For inasmuch as Darwinism helps entrench the devitalising metaphysics of materialism, it also blocks recognition of the possibility that the ultimate guarantors of genuine significance in knowledge-making can only be certain intuitions or insights backed up by feelings of 'rightness.'

Butler's own intuitions tell him that it would be wise to begin a story about evolution with a recognition of the possibility that the naturing of Nature involves a growth of wisdom. That he does not believe this growth is necessarily progressive is implicit in his initial assumptions. But by the same token, Butler encourages a sort of optimism. There may yet emerge potentially wise souls who can learn to live and think in harmony with the naturing of Nature. There appear to have been, after all, many indigenous cultures that have learned to do just this. That these cultures have been no match for an invasive and ruthlessly imperialistic techno-culture only reinforces the suspicion that informs Butler's prophesy: that technological ingenuity is as compatible with the inevitable downfall as with the uprise of civilizations.

Thus the main lesson that Butler teaches us is that the topic of evolution is far too important to be left to techno-science. He has good reason, in other words, to suggest that an essentially materialistic culture in love with narrow perspectives betokens an hegemony of dead souls. But it must here remain an open question whether *homo sapiens* is just another of Nature's failed experiments. An even more pressing practical question would seem to be whether there is world enough and time for the education of wiser souls that might be able to rescue this earthly experiment in evolution from the desecrations and depredations of its allegedly most sapient creature.

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