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**‘THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION’  
SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LITERATURE  
IN BRITAIN’S LONG-NINETEENTH  
CENTURY  
1789-1914**

**A thesis  
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## ABSTRACT

In Britain's long-nineteenth century (1789-1914), religious explanations of the world were challenged with the rise of science, leading to the question of how religion survived. Both fiction and non-fiction explored this issue, offering 'thought experiments' regarding religion's role in society; where texts implicitly or explicitly raise a question, and test it through a hypothetical scenario or scenarios. In accordance with the Linguistic Turn, these thought experiments can be viewed as linguistic constructs, where language itself is held to construct the outcomes of these thought experiments. Yet at the same time, language is limited in how can describe the world; from the vastness of time and space to the quality of feelings and emotions. Thus it is not just language, but the limits of language – characterised here as the 'doors of perception' – that have effects on worldviews; effects that throw light on the capacities in which religion survived the rise of science, and which are the subject of this thesis.

Each chapter juxtaposes predominantly science-oriented non-fiction with religion-oriented creative works, dividing the thesis into the six scientific contexts that were the most important to the long-nineteenth century: natural theology, utilitarianism, geology, biology, anthropology, and psychology. Key figures investigated include Thomas Paine, William Paley, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, John Keats, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Charles Lyell, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Charles Darwin, Matthew Arnold, David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde.

One effect of the limits of language was on religious *belief* itself, specifically as pertains to intelligent design (independently of questions of whether the belief is correct). Here, because people found it difficult, if not impossible, to describe the vastness of time, they also found it difficult to describe the rise of complex natural phenomena in any terms that *require* the vastness of time. Instead, they described the rise of complexity in the comfortable terms in which it could rise within the timescale of a human life; i.e., a process analogous to human design. This was aided by the fact that fixed, essentialist distinctions, as given by words, names, and labels, were applied to natural phenomena on timescales that language *can* describe, and this influenced a belief that these

phenomena actually were fixed, essentialist, and *unchanging*; phenomena which could only have come into existence fully formed, rendering intelligent design the only explanation.

Another effect of the limits of language was that they assisted religious *experience*. Here, when people found it difficult to adequately describe time, space, emotions, beauty, etc., there was a sense that experience was transcending the essentialist words, names, and labels that otherwise differentiate and atomise the world into separate phenomena, including those differentiating ‘subject’ from ‘object’, ‘self’ from ‘other’ and ‘us’ from ‘them’. This characterised the religious experience of self-transcendent awe. Sometimes, this experience was itself described in terms of divine design; sometimes it was not. Sometimes, it also had the effect of making people believe that to reduce a phenomenon to the level of rational linguistic description was to, in some way, *devalue* it.

Both effects recurred consistently in scientific and religious literature of the long-nineteenth century, and explain how religion’s survival was effected.

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## INTRODUCTION

Where is God? I will tell you. We have killed him, you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving now? Where are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? ...God is dead... And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: Who will wipe this blood off us? ...Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?<sup>1</sup>

The crisis of faith invoked by these words, spoken by the hypothetical ‘madman’ of Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) creation in the late nineteenth century, speaks of what once seemed so impossible that it was indeed like drinking up the sea, wiping away the horizon, unchaining the earth from its sun; so impossible that the speaker must truly seem ‘mad’. He speaks of the loss of the rational basis for a literal God and for religion’s authority in the world, as science and philosophy began their inexorable march throughout the course of the long-nineteenth century. French mathematician Pierre-Simon de Laplace (1749-1827), when asked by the Emperor Napoleon why his descriptions of the universe made no mention of its creator, famously replied: ‘Sire, I had no need of that hypothesis’.<sup>2</sup> New discoveries such as vaccination appeared to work against a literal God’s natural order; geology pushed the age of the earth back much farther than a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible allowed; and nature increasingly came to be seen as ungoverned, with natural yet non-chance mechanisms like natural selection casting severe doubts upon the very ideas of design that many had believed it was the purpose of science to reveal. In Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) words: ‘The old argument from design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered’.<sup>3</sup> Scriptural claims were targeted by biblical critics, ideas of Original Sin gave way to nature and nurture as determinants in human behaviour,

and psychology probed the human mind for natural explanations. In 1879, Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) offered this summary: ‘A few years ago, Science endeavoured to show that it was not inconsistent with the Bible. The tables have been turned, and now, Religion is endeavouring to prove that the Bible is not inconsistent with Science’.<sup>4</sup> And finally, by 1910, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) wrote *God’s Funeral* (1910), a poem that can be read from the perspective of a mourner watching God slowly being lowered into the grave:

And, tricked by our own early dream  
 And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,  
 Our making soon our maker did we deem,  
 And what we had imagined we believed...

‘Till, in Time’s stayless stealthy swing,  
 Uncompromising rude reality  
 Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,  
 Who quavered, sank, and now has ceased to be.’<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite the wide and general acceptance of science and ‘uncompromising rude reality’ by the close of the nineteenth century, religions of all kinds, rather than declining, retain an authority which continues into the twenty-first century. According to Mark Knight and Emma Mason: ‘...the so-called secularisation of religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century...’ was merely ‘...a diminution of the power and reach of the Established Church rather than the decline of Christian ideas and culture’.<sup>6</sup> Even Nietzsche’s madman had to concede as much about the ‘death of God’ in his own time:

I have come too early... my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars - *and yet they have done it themselves.*<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche’s assertion, of course, leaves important questions unanswered. What was it about science and religion in long-nineteenth century Britain that enabled religion to persist, long after news of the ‘death of God’ had had time to have ‘reached the ears of men’? Indeed what *were* people doing when they ‘unchained this earth from its sun’?

This thesis is a contribution of intellectual history and literary criticism to this topic. The thesis certainly does not seek to answer questions about God's existence or religion's truth claims, but rather it investigates the cultural and historical reasons for the continuance of religion. It focuses on what Eric Hobsbawm termed the 'long-nineteenth century',<sup>8</sup> the period of British hegemony from the beginning of the French Revolution (1789) to the beginning of the First World War (1914). This period was an age of progress-oriented grand narratives, which sought to explain all of history – as well as the existence of other grand narratives – as leading irrevocably to one ideal society or another. The French Revolution was the most significant event to give new hope and drive to grand narratives; just as the First World War was the most significant event that began to undermine such notions of inevitable and indefinite progress. The period between these two conflicts saw the empowerment of the narrative that science was on the march and that God was 'dead'. Literature was written that wrestled with the implications of this view; and as this thesis argues, literature contained thought experiments that engaged with the intellectual territory related to the survival of religion.

The concept of the thought experiment, of course, is ancient in moral philosophy. It is a central device in Plato's *Dialogues* for thinking about problems that are impossible, unethical, or unnecessary to test in reality.<sup>9</sup> Roy A. Sorenson defines 'thought experiment' as: 'A procedure for answering or raising a question about the relationship between variables by varying one (or more) of them and tracking any response by the other or others'.<sup>10</sup> Thought experiments work to assist individuals to determine questions of values, by showing them the consequences of the things that they value. James W. McAllister adds that: '...significance is attributed to thought experiments of particular sorts by particular decisions, which should be placed centre-stage in any modern account of them'.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, conclusions derived from a hypothetical scenario will depend on other values, assumptions, and information that the individual already holds. But McAllister maintains that thought experiments can acquire 'evidential significance'.<sup>12</sup> Here, Jeanne Peijnenburg and David Atkinson make the distinction that a thought experiment is only a 'good' one when the conclusion derived is near-unanimous,<sup>13</sup> and this is true if the aim of the thought experiment is to attain 'evidential significance'. But the value of a thought experiment is

determined by its stated purpose, and the purpose could well simply be to provoke individuals to think in a different way, whatever their conclusion.

For the purpose of this thesis, a literary text will be regarded as thought experiment if it meets Sorenson's criteria of implicitly or explicitly raising a question regarding an issue, and tests possible responses to that question through a hypothetical scenario. Texts which primarily seek to entertain, shock or titillate readers do not fall into this category, such as Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) which triggered an outpouring of sensation fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century. Likewise, many of the social problem novels so popular during the Victorian period do not fit the thought experiment parameters. These novels of social protest do not seek to test a hypothesis from a number of different angles, but rather critique an aspect of society from a particular position. Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1849), which exposes the injustices and hardships confronted by both workers in clothing factories and the agricultural labourers, is an example of this, reflecting as it does Kingsley's Charist sympathies.

The fiction of Charles Dickens is useful in determining what is, and is not, a fictional thought experiment. His *Hard Times* is most certainly a thought experiment, and will be discussed as such in this thesis, examining as it does utilitarian philosophies from a range of perspectives. However, *Hard Times* is unique in this regard when compared with Dickens' other fiction. The comedic *joie de vivre* of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), the journey of self-discovery at the heart of *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and the social protest against an archaic legal system in *Bleak House* (1852-53) or the Poor Law in *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), in contrast, cannot be described as 'answering or raising a question about the relationship between variables by varying one (or more) of them and tracking any response by the other or others'.

Others have certainly applied the concept of the thought experiment to literature and story-telling before. In fact, Martin Levinson argues that this was the prehistoric use of myth:

Myths have always been used to help people accept their mortality and to provide courage to change and grow. In the Paleolithic Age, myths were used to help hunters go beyond their guilt of having to kill living creatures like themselves. In the Neolithic Era, myths became associated with climate and soil conditions. When early civilizations

developed, and cities formed, myths helped people to structure meaningful existences in new social circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

The notion that the role of the thought experiment in story-telling has not changed in the transition from oral traditions to the written word is even borne out by current neuroscientific research:

The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated.... Fiction, Dr. Oatley notes, 'is a particularly useful simulation because negotiating the social world effectively is extremely tricky, requiring us to weigh up myriad interacting instances of cause and effect'.<sup>15</sup>

Every day, individuals must imagine thought experiments in order to negotiate the world, and creative works facilitate this.

Ursula K. Le Guin offered the concept of literature as thought experiment in 1969,<sup>16</sup> which Patricia Kerslake has recently adapted in her work also.<sup>17</sup> While Le Guin and Kerslake alike view literary thought experiments as extensions of science, where scientific tests are not yet possible in practice, this mode of analysis is arguably even more appropriate to questions of moral and existential value; where scientific tests are impossible in *principle*. It is the purpose of this thesis to extend upon this particular use of thought experiments through literature, but it must be acknowledged that it is at least arguably implicit in what David Perkins calls his 'grand claim' regarding poetry:

[I] make a grand claim for it, which is, that poetry imagines and presents a sensibility, often a new sensibility, that shows readers what their sensibility might be. All art does this. For art isn't just what Freud rightly said it was, an illusory satisfying of desires we cannot satisfy in reality. Art has to do also with the directing of desire and the forming of ideals.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Carroll has even advanced a similar view of literature as part of his 'Literary Darwinism'. Carroll contends that humanity's disposition for simulating reality through story-telling is an evolutionary adaptation, and that the shape and character of story-telling will be constrained by the evolutionary history of the human mind, as well as by culture; affirming a concept of 'human nature' and permitting a biocultural critique of literature.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, Denis Dutton adds that:

“Reproduction and survival” is the evolutionary slogan, which in fiction is translated straight into the eternal themes of love and death for tragedy, and love and marriage for comedy.<sup>20</sup>

Literary thought experiments will be viewed as linguistic constructs, in accordance with the structuralist Linguistic Turn. Even if there are biologically determined aspects of the mind composing something that can be called ‘human nature’, humans are still cultural and linguistic beings. The Linguistic Turn was begun by Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857-1913) inversion of the traditional view that concepts are always formed first and then words are attached to them. Whether or not this pattern is true in regard to the individual recounting their own direct experience, knowledge from others is accessible only through the filter of language and text; where it is the *word* that is encountered first, and then concepts are formed as linguistic constructs.<sup>21</sup> It follows that language does not simply represent the world as it ‘really’ is, but rather constructs the world; so that a way of speaking is also a way of thinking, with such a way of thinking/speaking being called a ‘discourse’. For Michel Foucault (1926-1984), all texts are thus ideological, for every discourse develops its own internal criteria for interpreting importance and unimportance, truth and falsehood, reason and madness, right and wrong; constraining *what* can be said, *how* it can be said, and *who* speaks with authority. The task of the literary critic becomes that of deconstructing discourse in order to liberate the silenced or suppressed voice.<sup>22</sup> According to Poststructuralism, each individual’s ‘reading history’ amid varying discourses is unique, and so ‘truth’ and ‘meaning’ can never be stable and absolute; instead, they are forever unstable and open to interpretation. However, Richard Rorty’s synthesis of the Linguistic Turn with the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1942), preserves the validity of knowledge; contending that while beliefs are not objective mirrors of reality as it ‘really’ is, beliefs can nevertheless be regarded as socially and discursively constructed tools that have proven their utility.<sup>23</sup> Some, including Thomas Nagel, still hold such ideas to be anathema for appearing to erase the distinction between fact and value.<sup>24</sup> But this distinction remains useful (in Rorty’s sense) at distinguishing between how to describe in terms of empirical ‘is’ and how to prescribe in terms of intuitive ‘ought’.

Such approaches to discourse and power certainly have an effect on how literary thought experiments position readers to view the world in particular ways. However, the effects of language itself, as studied through philology, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, this thesis will focus upon the effects of the *limits* of language. Language is limited in how it can describe the world; for example, the limit to describing the vastness of time, the limit to describing the infinite expanse of space, the limit to describing emotions like love, and so forth. Thus contemporary knowledge of nineteenth century discourses of science and religion would greatly benefit not only from an analysis of the surrounding literature as thought experiments, but also from a study of the effects of the ‘limits of language’ on those discourses.

Because this thesis explores the social, cultural and historical circumstances in which the discourses of science and religion arose, each chapter juxtaposes predominantly science-oriented non-fiction texts (or at least texts alleging to be scientific non-fiction) that engage with the scientific history raising the issues, with religion-oriented creative works that establish religious responses to those issues. Non-fiction texts are not to be regarded simply as background context. In the contention that non-fiction texts are embedded in social discourse, these texts are also interrogated as sources of literary thought experiments regarding the issues. This approach, combined with the close-reading method of literary criticism – implicitly deconstructing discourses around science and religion – can further research how religion survived the advance of science.

Before turning to the literature, it is necessary to define several key terms. Terms like ‘God’, ‘faith’, ‘religion’ and even ‘science’ and ‘philosophy’ are used so variously that it is sometimes difficult to interpret an individual’s meaning when they use them, and to use them in every sense that they are used is to risk rendering them meaningless. There is no simple dichotomy, as in two sides of a debate, but instead a complex spectrum of views. As John Hedley Brooke asserts: ‘There is no such thing as *the* relationship between science and religion. It is what different individuals and communities have made of it in a plethora of different contexts’.<sup>25</sup> I will explore some of the key ways in which the above terms have been defined in the past, during coverage of the current literature concerning why religion survives and in what forms.

### ***'The Relationship between Science and Religion':***

In recent decades, the debate about the relationship between science and religion, and hence the survival of religion, has been inseparable from the debate about what was occurring in the nineteenth century, i.e., did Darwin kill God? Historically, what is really meant by 'science'? What is really meant by 'religion'? Without pretending to be resolving the debate, this thesis is offered as a contribution to it; and therefore an exploration of the contours of the debate about nineteenth century science and religion is required in order to understand the contexts and issues upon which this thesis extends. The literature on this debate is, of course, vast; so by necessity this coverage is selective, and here writers have been chosen on the basis of those who best exemplify the issues. There are several key discourses concerning the relationship between science and religion, and each includes attempts to explain why religion has survived, according to their narrative. Here, the discourses are organised under the groupings of 'syncretism', 'conflict', and 'cooperation'.

There have been many attempts, past and present, to explain why religion survives in *spite* of the rise of nineteenth century science, usually in terms of why religion exists in the first place. Religion has long been explained by a need for explanations for the unknown, as Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) suggested: 'If the ignorance of nature gave birth to... gods, the knowledge of nature is calculated to destroy them'<sup>26</sup>. In this account, invocations of a literal God commit what theologians have derisively termed a 'God of the Gaps' fallacy, whereby any gap in scientific knowledge is immediately filled in with a literal God. In the nineteenth century, this was indeed a source of conflict as science fills those gaps and forces such a God into retreat, eventually with nowhere left to hide. But if God is only valued for His explanatory power, then how to explain the need expressed by so many for religion to provide consolation in the face of their own mortality, their fear of death, in the form of an afterlife? Mortality seems an obvious candidate for an over-arching explanation of religion, but then how to account for the fact that not all varieties of religion provide a desirable afterlife (such as ancient Greek religion) or even any afterlife at all (such as Judaism)?

Michael Shermer argues that the near universality of religion attests to religion simply being innate to human nature, a by-product of an evolutionary

adaptation, which explains the prevalence of nineteenth century Arguments from Design: ‘Humans evolved to find meaningful causal patterns in nature to make sense of the world, and infuse many of those patterns with intentional agency’.<sup>27</sup> This pattern-seeking ability is crucial to all science, philosophy, and art; yet according to this argument, when the evolution of pattern-seeking is combined with the evolution of a ‘theory of mind’ – the very useful ability to know that another’s thoughts and intentions differ from our own – it has the by-product of extending the theory of mind beyond the existence of actual minds to phenomena that have no minds. Mountains, seas, rivers, forests, the weather, the seasons, and even abstractions like wisdom and war, all become imbued with intentional minds which, like human minds, can be angered or appeased. From here it is only too natural to see intentional agency in random events, and to engage in sacrifice, intercessory prayer and other ritualistic behaviours in the hope of influencing these intentional agents. In this view, the impulse to impute intentional agency is simply innate, and will arise as long as human individuals retain a theory of mind.

However, Gregory Paul argues that strong correlations have also been made between the degree of religious belief and the socio-economic conditions of societies: ‘Faith is proving unable to thrive in well-run democracies, and its abandonment can occur with startling speed when conditions become good enough’.<sup>28</sup> Socio-economic conditions should make no difference if religious belief simply arises because of the need for explanation, or because of mortality or human theory of mind. In this view, religion, as the product of poor socio-economic conditions, is as Karl Marx (1818-1883) observed in regard to nineteenth century conditions surrounding the Industrial Revolution: ‘the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the spirit of spiritless conditions... the opium of the people’.<sup>29</sup> Sacrifice, intercessory prayer, and ritualistic behaviour is explained by the need for a sense of security in a world spinning out of control. As such, the impulse to impute intentional agency is either not innate at all, or is innate only as a common human response to suffering.

Another potent explanation is that a literal God is widely believed to be necessary for morality. This is often accompanied by the corollary argument that nineteenth century ideologies replacing God with ‘Man’ (reminiscent of Nietzsche’s question in response to the death of God: ‘must we ourselves not

become gods simply to appear worthy of it?') created the *weltanschauung* out of which twentieth century tyrants Hitler, Stalin, and Mao emerged. It is an argument often delivered with the maxim most famously feared by Fyodor Dostoevsky: 'If God is not, everything is permitted'.<sup>30</sup> Alister McGrath alleges that: 'While some continue to argue that Auschwitz disproves the existence of God, many more would argue that it demonstrates the depths to which humanity, unrestrained by any thought or fear of God, will sink'.<sup>31</sup> Whether there is an alternative motivation for morality, a motivation of which Hitler, Stalin and Mao were simply ignorant, remains hotly disputed. Yet the belief that no such alternative exists would certainly explain why there is not just continued support for belief in a literal God by believers, but also by unbelievers who exhibit what Daniel Dennett has termed 'belief in belief'.<sup>32</sup>

Any of these theories may explain why religion survived the nineteenth century, but the question of how religion survived nineteenth century *engagement* with science remains. Perhaps the oldest means of reconciling science and religion has been a syncretist model, whereby the two merge almost into one; either by science empirically demonstrating religious belief to be true, or by science being dependent on religious belief. The beginning of the nineteenth century certainly saw this model in ascendency. Isaac Newton's (1642-1727) vision of an orderly universe running upon fixed laws had already long been indicative of design to the eighteenth century deists, and William Paley's (1743-1805) work reinforced that belief in the early nineteenth century. Paley epitomised the attempt to empirically demonstrate God's existence, using the evidence of improbable complex organization in organisms to disprove the notion that they could have arisen by chance, thereby supporting intelligent design as the only imaginable alternative at the time.<sup>33</sup> As Colin Jager comments, this was a forceful argument in the early nineteenth century:

Natural theology provided the most stable and effective way for organised religion to accommodate the social and intellectual events that occupied the period from Isaac Newton to Charles Darwin. By referring the intricacy and efficiency of creation to a divine designer – a move frequently termed the 'argument from design' – it offered a synthetic means of gathering into a coherent whole the increasingly diverse material of the natural world.<sup>34</sup>

Darwin's theory of natural selection, by virtue of its basic non-randomness, is held by Neo-Darwinians to have refuted the traditional Argument from Design in nature. But it must be said that this was not the end of the syncretist model or the Argument from Design, with many arguing for theistic or God-guided evolution, and/or pointing out that cosmology is another field in which the argument may be pressed. Bede Rundle, for example, uses the evidence of the improbable complex organization of the universe's physical constants in similar manner to Paley.<sup>35</sup> The proposed alternatives to design in regard to cosmology include a 'multiverse theory' or a 'theory of everything', which continue to be debated.<sup>36</sup> Nineteenth century developments did not entail the end of the syncretist model.

But another version of the syncretist model asserts that science itself cannot exist without religion. Alvin Plantinga is representative of views contending that any coherent epistemology – including that of science – has always been dependent on belief in a literal God in the first place, and that Darwinism only proves this point; therefore, nineteenth century science made *atheism* impossible, not theism. Plantinga contends that if minds are solely the result of natural evolutionary processes, then there is no foundation for a correspondence theory of knowledge whereby the mind's beliefs can be said to mirror the world the way it 'really' is. Natural selection can only select for that which was *useful* to humanity's ancestors' survival and reproduction, not for that which is true. Michael Ruse characterises Plantinga's position:

It is quite compatible with success that we are totally mistaken about everything, including evolutionary theory itself obviously. Hence, everything degenerates into paradox. Of course, we think that our senses and powers of reason as produced by natural selection lead us to the right order of things. But we would think that, wouldn't we...<sup>37</sup>

Plantinga himself writes: 'Under this possibility... beliefs wouldn't have (or needn't have) any purpose or function, they would be more like unintended by-products, and the likelihood that they would be mostly true would be low'.<sup>38</sup> Ruse disagrees with Plantinga's view:

There is nothing in evolutionary theory suggesting that such a radically mistaken notion as thinking you are at a high table in Oxford when you are really in the jungle under threat of your life could possibly have an adaptive

value, and it is so counter-productive that it is hardly possible that it could be a by-product of something that was working to our benefit.<sup>39</sup>

Evolution could not select for minds that correspond to the world so falsely; there would be far greater survival advantage in evolution selecting for minds that correspond to their environment reasonably accurately.

This logic is certainly circular, whereby evolution is supposed to confirm the mind's competence, but the mind's competence is supposed to confirm evolution; however, Ruse contends that Plantinga is in no better position:

And as a *tu quoque*, most naturalists would argue that someone like Plantinga is no better off. If he would appeal to God as a guarantee of his beliefs, then he is caught in the circle of Descartes' *Meditations*. How can we be certain that an evil demon is not deceiving us about God? We need God to guarantee our thoughts but cannot get to God to do this.<sup>40</sup>

God is supposed to confirm the mind's competence, but the mind's competence is supposed to confirm God. Not even God, it seems, can save humanity from the epistemological black hole of circular logic.

The challenge of Darwinism to natural theology and the syncretist model appears to characterise much of the infamous conflict model of science and religion, whereby the nineteenth century is characterised as the period when the principles of science emerged intellectually triumphant over those of religion. This was in spite of David Hume (1711-1776), who had concisely pointed out the problems with the principle of induction whereby generalities are inferred from particulars; for example, the notion that nature's laws will always be what they are today, simply because they take that form today. It is an assumption, even a leap of faith; but it is one upon which all science depends in order to work at all. Yet even so, the principles of science were seen by some as antithetical to religion. The process of induction would, in time, come to be characterised by what Karl Popper (1902-1994) called 'falsifiability'; which, for Popper, was also to be a check against ideological dogmas that threatened the open society.<sup>41</sup> This principle insists that inductively inferred generalities or theories purporting to be contingent truth must contain within themselves the seed of their own destruction. They must offer predictions that are testable and falsifiable in principle; and if that

theory is instead consistent with all possible worlds, with all possible evidence and with none – if the theory is held to be true no matter what – then it is little more than dogma.<sup>42</sup> This leads to the maxim: ‘A theory that explains everything explains nothing’.<sup>43</sup>

Equally important was the principle of abduction, exemplified by William of Ockham’s (c.1288- c.1348) parsimony (commonly known as Ockham’s Razor). Here, the best explanation is held to be the simplest one that fits the available evidence so as to minimize assumption and guesswork, and it was originally posed as: ‘Do not multiply entities beyond necessity’.<sup>44</sup> Hume, a significant influence on nineteenth century science, elaborated on parsimony by explicitly applying it to claims about miracles and revelation; arguing that when an individual claims to have experienced such phenomena, the simplest and most probable explanation is that they are under a misapprehension rather than correct.<sup>45</sup> As Carl Sagan would later put it, ‘extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence’.<sup>46</sup>

The extent to which these principles applied to religion remains debatable; certainly they do not apply to arguments that theism and dualism are *deductive* or necessary truths – true in all possible worlds – which need not be scientifically testable. A.N. Wilson suggests that the success of the conflict model is simply the result of its appeal to the popular imagination: ‘The old Victorian Big Fight, first popularised by Thomas Huxley, with God in the Blue Corner and Science waiting in the Red Corner to punch His teeth out, still has the capacity to draw the crowds’.<sup>47</sup> However, even Wilson suggests that the nineteenth century attempts to reconcile religion with science were increasingly futile:

The sceptical inferences so wittily sketched by David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* do not merely make us doubt the God of the eighteenth century Deists; they kill him stone dead. And if anyone should turn around and say, ‘We do not believe in the God of the Deists, we believe in the revealed God of Scripture’, then the German biblical critics destroyed *Him*. And in case anyone should turn from the God of the Bible and say that there is still some mileage in the Argument from Design, and in a nature-mysticism which claims a knowledge of God from the shape and pattern of Nature, Darwinism removes not merely the necessity of supposing a Designer, but its very plausibility.<sup>48</sup>

Wilson's description of the nineteenth century – capturing the 'death of God' thesis – suggests validity to the conflict model. Disputes remain on the details; Gregory W. Dawes disagrees that Hume's criticisms refuted the Argument from Design, for it was still an inference to the best explanation at the time, even if Darwinism eventually superseded it.<sup>49</sup> But there is a consensus that although there have certainly been elements of conflict, the conflict model has been oversimplified, as Wilson acknowledges:

How do we derive the impression that the Victorian age was a battleground between science and religion? The answer must partly lie in the brilliance of anti-religious propaganda put out by the materialists; and partly, it must be said, in the boneheaded response to scientific development on the part of the louder Christian apologists.<sup>50</sup>

Certainly, there have always been those for whom any and all evidence contradicting their beliefs is surely nothing less than a trick of the Devil, and the more persuasive the evidence the more clever the trick; yet others have found it possible to accommodate their beliefs with science, leaving open the question of how this was achieved in the nineteenth century.

The most widely accepted framework appears to be a cooperationist model of science and religion, epitomised by Stephen Jay Gould's 'non-overlapping magisteria', or NOMA. Although a popularising work, it represents a consensus in academic literature, as Gould admits: 'I present nothing original in stating the basic thesis... for my argument follows a strong consensus accepted for decades by leading scientific and religious thinkers alike'.<sup>51</sup> The basic concept of NOMA, therefore, has a long pedigree in the science/religion debate, and I include it here precisely because it is the most common formulation of the 'strong consensus' about the relationship between science and religion in the nineteenth century and beyond. Gould's thesis argues that science and religion emerged as separate but cooperating magisteria (teaching authorities):

The... magisterium of science covers the empirical realm: what is the universe made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry... To cite the old clichés, science gets the age of rocks, and religion the rock of ages.<sup>52</sup>

This thesis follows from the Naturalistic Fallacy, whereby ‘ought’ cannot be derived from ‘is’ alone, entailing that values cannot be discovered in facts by the scientific method, but can only be *created* as judgements by intuition; which, without the possibility of full factual support, might well be called ‘faith’, the religious method.<sup>53</sup> Yet the two magisteria do not lack contact, rather they ‘interdigitate’,<sup>54</sup> whereby if an individual is doing science when discovering a fact, they are doing ‘religion’ when creating the moral, existential, and metaphysical value of that fact. Therefore, religion survived the nineteenth century simply because it was not possible in principle for legitimate science and legitimate religion to conflict.

Gould further contends that the conflict model of science and religion emerged in the nineteenth century due to now discredited historical works, particularly those of John William Draper (1811-1882)<sup>55</sup> and Andrew Dickenson White (1832-1918).<sup>56</sup> He even quotes Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), who was one of the nineteenth century’s most infamous opponents of religion, and yet who used the word ‘religion’ simply as a synonym for transcendent experience: ‘...a deep sense of religion [is] compatible with the entire absence of theology’.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Gould argues that even when people like Huxley make value-judgments against a given religious doctrine, they are still working within the magisterium of religion, not against it: ‘Huxley, the supposed scourge of God, is evidently quite content to base his rejection of a rote Christian doctrine on a higher principle that he accepts as religious in essential nature’.<sup>58</sup> This illuminates the fact that there is an important distinction to be made between ‘doctrinal religion’, which includes religious belief, and ‘practical religion’, which focuses just on religious practice. Religion, according to Gould’s schema, seems synonymous with existentialist philosophy, epitomised by Soren Kirkegaard (1813-1855)<sup>59</sup> and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980).<sup>60</sup> Existence precedes essence; life comes into being and then creates the purpose of their being, as opposed to coming into being as the consequence of an externally given purpose.

Apophatic or ‘negative’ theology, in its lack of positive belief, is a form of practical religion that is certainly in line with NOMA. Catholic theologian Karen Armstrong argues, in response to the nineteenth century ‘death of God’ thesis, that it is only the concept of a literal God which has ‘died’, which in her view allows

for the more evolved, apophatic conception of deity to be born. Or, rather, *reborn*; as Armstrong argues that the concept of describing God in positive terms as a literal being, and describing scripture as literal history, only became dominant in the Enlightenment after Newton, when demonstrating propositions to be positively true allegedly first came into ascendancy.

Armstrong argues that the history of God is the history of human beings attempting to describe their knowledge of transcendent experience;<sup>61</sup> and in this she is inspired by the Linguistic Turn and Poststructuralism. According to Armstrong, the intuitive sense of the transcendent, being indescribable through words and therefore beyond differentiation into concepts, can only be spoken of in negative terms of what it is *not*: i.e., it is ‘boundless’, ‘infinite’, ‘unlimited’, ‘uncreated’, and undifferentiated from the individual. This can be viewed in opposition to cataphatic or ‘positive’ theology, a form of doctrinal religion which attempts to grasp the transcendent with words and differentiate it into concepts by describing it in positive terms, or in terms of what it *is*: i.e., (in the case of monotheism) it is ‘omnipotent’, ‘omniscient’, ‘omnibenevolent’, and ‘existent’, differentiated from the individual as something ‘other’. Described in positive terms, transcendent experience inspires the Argument from Personal Experience for the existence of a literal God; yet according to Armstrong, this simply limits, objectifies, and anthropomorphises the transcendent into a person-like figure, a larger version of the individual themselves. As Maryanne Traylen puts it:

She [Armstrong] seems to imply that if there is a place left for God in the future, despite the current rise in fundamentalism and retreat from God, it lies with the inner God of the Mystics, as opposed to the God of the Philosophers who sought God through purely rational means.<sup>62</sup>

Anglican theologian Don Cupitt also disavows any conception of God as a literal entity existing outside the individual, almost espousing a conflict thesis in regard to traditional religion’s encounter with science in recent centuries:<sup>63</sup>

Our old religious and moral traditions have faded away, and nothing can resuscitate them. That is why a tiny handful of us are not liberal, but radical, theologians... Unfortunately, the new style of religious thinking that we are trying to introduce is so queer and so new that most

people have great difficulty in recognising it as religion at all.<sup>64</sup>

However, this style of religion is not so ‘new’. Although it is debatable whether apophatic religion was ever dominant (at least in the West), it certainly does have a pedigree far older than Darwin and Nietzsche, existing in most religions across the world and throughout history. In the nineteenth century, the tradition included such luminaries as Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who, long before Darwin, opposed theologians who sought to positively demonstrate the existence of a literal God – like Paley – and for whom Darwinism could have posed no threat whatsoever.<sup>65</sup>

The issue of how accurately NOMA applies to religion’s survival of the nineteenth century rise of science is disputed. Although the model allows cataphatic, metaphysical value-judgements which contend that theism and dualism are necessary truths, it disallows doctrinal claims of miracles, revelation, design, and scripture-as-history; for these are claims to contingent truth that supervene upon nature, and which therefore ought to be testable and belong to science. Because of this, Russell Blackford contends that NOMA is more hostile to many kinds of religion than science could ever be:

He [Gould] does not attack religious beliefs in a relatively young Earth merely on the basis that it is irrational to maintain them in the light of well-established scientific knowledge. Instead, he argues that it is illegitimate in principle to have any religious beliefs with empirical consequences.<sup>66</sup>

Stephen Pope highlights the impossibility of applying NOMA universally:

For him [Gould], the term [‘religion’] includes not Mayan witchdoctors, Iranian Imams or Appalachian snake handlers, but only bourgeois Westerners who embrace the liberal values of compassion, tolerance and equality. There is, however, no such thing as generic ‘religion’, only Lutheranism and Syrian Orthodoxy, Reform Judaism and Jainism, and so forth. It is, therefore, exceedingly difficult for anyone to formulate substantive global generalisations about the relation between ‘science’ and ‘religion’...<sup>67</sup>

Gould does appear to realise the problem with naively treating religion as a ‘monolith’.<sup>68</sup> Certainly it must be conceded that the differences among religions

are legion, even if NOMA is, today, the ‘strong consensus’ among ‘leading’ thinkers in both science and religion.<sup>69</sup>

Historically, the positions of ‘leading’ thinkers on the cooperation model between science and cataphatic religion have varied widely across the spectrum: ‘In America Charles Hodge may have concluded that Darwinism was effectively atheistic, but his Presbyterian colleague at Princeton James McCosh wrote reams reconciling evolution’.<sup>70</sup> Poets Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) initially despaired at the consequences of science for belief in a literal, benevolent God, but Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) supposed that Darwinism could enrich Christianity by illuminating just how God intervened in the world.<sup>71</sup> Brooke, like Wilson and Gould, claims that the conflict model of science and religion appears to have been exaggerated, as the conflict depended on whose views were being discussed at the time; religion survived because the conflict model only applies to movements like creationism.

Today, there are certainly many religious scientists, like Kenneth Miller, who not only defend the compatibility of a literal God and non-designed evolution, but claim that Darwin did a service to theology in the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> Miller asserts that believers ought to be grateful that God does not involve Himself in the process via miraculous interventions, in line with the analogy of Thomas Burnet’s (c.1635-1715) that was certainly pertinent to the nineteenth century:

We think him a better artist that makes a clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the springs and wheels which puts in the work, than he that so made his clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike.<sup>73</sup>

A God who creates nature to be able to create itself is superior to a God who creates nature in such a manner that it requires His constant miraculous intervention. John F. Haught notes another perceived insult to divine integrity inflicted by Arguments from Design, which have left some theologians pleased to see the ‘apparent death’ of them in the nineteenth century:

Should [we] comment in passing that evolutionary materialists are not alone in celebrating the apparent death of design arguments for God’s existence? Some mainstream religious thinkers... want nothing to do with natural theology either. They view the design arguments

that have been central to natural theology as idolatrous attempts on the part of finite humans to grasp the infinite and incomprehensible God in rational terms. Rational arguments always run the risk of diminishing the mystery of God, seeking to bring it under the human mind's control. For religious reasons, they argue, we should be grateful to Darwinians for helping to destroy the pretentiousness of natural theology.<sup>74</sup>

Antipathy toward the Argument from Design was never confined to theological sceptics like Hume.

Yet while it is simple to say that God used evolution by natural selection, it is less easy to answer why He would use a slow process that guarantees suffering; and it is in answering this that Francis Collins and Karl Giberson join ranks with Miller and Barth. Collins and Giberson argue that in distancing God from nature, Darwin actually ameliorated the Argument from Evil, making God easier to believe in after the nineteenth century, not less.<sup>75</sup> For if God is involved in the evolutionary process, then He is to blame for evolution's less desirable outcomes; but by placing the blame for killer viruses and zero-sum predator-versus-prey scenarios on natural selection, God is excused. This, in turn, has invited rebuttals that even if God sets a process in motion He is still morally responsible for it, as Michael Behe argues in response to similar arguments that have been offered before:

If God designed a slipshod process that results in natural evil – in fact, one that depends on natural evil – why could not a mother who lost a child to malaria justifiably complain that God should have set up a better process?<sup>76</sup>

This has led to counter-rebuttals that God had to bestow nature with freedom and that this freedom gets abused, which leads to counter-rebuttals exploring the nature of free will and/or whether an all-powerful God could have done better than natural selection while preserving freedom.

Most of the debates covered in this thesis are ongoing. Various sides give their arguments, which are met with counter-arguments, which run into counter-counter arguments, *ad infinitum*. The debate about science, religion, and the ramifications of the nineteenth century will likely persist as long as science and religion persist; and perhaps the reason for that is precisely because the logical arguments are beside the point, as Daniel Dennett believes:

Philosophers have spent two millennia and more concocting and criticising arguments for the existence of God... But not I. I decided some time ago that diminishing returns had set in on the arguments about God's existence, and I doubt that any breakthroughs are in the offing, from either side. Besides, many deeply religious people insist that all those arguments – on both sides – simply miss the whole point of religion, and their demonstrated lack of interest in the arguments persuades me of their sincerity... So what, then, *is* the point of religion?<sup>77</sup>

It may well be that there is no one explanation that constitutes the 'point' of all religion. But while it is known that the current debate can be traced back directly to the nineteenth century debate, there has never been a sustained study of how that nineteenth century debate was shaped by the limits of language affecting the thought experiments in literature. And if theologian Clifford L. Stanley (1998) is right to contend that '...any God that can be killed ought to be killed'<sup>78</sup> then no one should fear the inquest.

### ***Shape of the Thesis:***

This thesis identifies six major scientific contexts in which the long-nineteenth century debate about science and religion was based, and thus investigates them through six chapters exploring works that best exhibit thought experiments regarding each context. The thesis begins with the dawn of the French Revolution (1789), the event that marks the beginning of the long-nineteenth century and its ongoing debates about politics, science, and religion.

Chapter One, 'All Nature Cries Out to Us', investigates British Enlightenment and Romantic thought in regard to God and the role of religion. This chapter explores debates about design and the various theological, philosophical and literary thought-experiments that articulated the complex and evolving views of the period. I will juxtapose an examination of the Enlightenment views of those texts which sought to scientifically demonstrate or dispute the existence of a literal God – Thomas Paine's (1736-1809) *The Age of Reason* (1794), Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), and Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) – with an analysis of the Romantic views that sought God through religiously intuitive means, namely, Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) *Emile* (1762), William Blake's (1757-1827) 'Auguries of

Innocence' (1803), and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1802) and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807), Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Percy Shelley's (1792-1822) *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), and John Keats' (1795-1821) *Lamia* (1819). Close attention will be paid to the language underlying the philosophical premises – whether conscious and unconscious – of these views, in order to determine the dominant discourses and modes of thought forming the foundation for nineteenth century debate about science and religion.

Chapter Two, 'All that is Solid Melts into Air', considers the effects of language in early Victorian reactions against the science and technology of the Industrial Revolution, which extend on Romantic ideas regarding the natural and positive versus the artificial and negative, and describe nature as benevolent and divine. This chapter compares an examination of Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) as an attempt to extend science's domain into the realm of moral and existential value in the form of utilitarian consequentialism, and a critique of this attempt in the form of Thomas Carlyle's (1795-1881) *Signs of the Times* (1829), with an analysis of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) *Hard Times* (1854), which associates attempts like Bentham's with the reduction of human beings to numbers and industrial means of production, and offers religion as the alternative.

Following this is an exploration of the effects of language in the context of the emerging geological and biological challenges to the view of nature as benevolent and divine. Chapter Three, 'Scarped Cliff and Quarried Stone' explores Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) *The Principles of Geology* (1830-1833) as the exemplar of developments in geology that laid the foundation for the undermining of natural theology, and compares it to an analysis of Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809-1892) *In Memoriam* (1851), which wrestles with questions of how to preserve moral and existential value in a world without design.

Chapter Four, 'A Strange Inversion of Reasoning', investigates the effects of language not only in reference to the debates surrounding Darwinism and religion, but also to debates surrounding Darwinism and moral and existential value. The chapter will investigate Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and his *Autobiography* (1887) examining further the question of how, or whether,

moral and existential value can be preserved without a description of the world in terms of design, alongside an analysis of Matthew Arnold's (1822-1888) 'Dover Beach' (1867) as a poem that epitomises Victorian despair for a world without design.

An exploration of the effects of language on debates and tensions between Established Churches and the concept of a 'Religion of Humanity, is the focus of Chapter Five, 'The Iscariotism of Our Days'. The chapter examines Mary Ann Evans' (George Eliot, 1819-1880) translations of David Friedrich Strauss' (1808-1874) *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836, translated 1846) and Ludwig Feuerbach's (1804-1872) *The Essence of Christianity* (1841, translated 1855), as attempts at an anthropological science of religion. These works will be compared with an analysis of how these ideas translated into British literature in the form of Eliot's own work, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (1861), which is emblematic of her views on religion. In so doing, I will analyse how attempts at reinventing religion interacted or conflicted with traditional religious belief, in order to investigate more deeply why design was still believed to be a necessity in spite of such attempts.

Chapter Six, 'All the World's a Stage', investigates the effects of language in reference to the debates surrounding psychology and determinism in relation to religious beliefs regarding dualism and libertarianism. I will juxtapose an examination of Walter Pater's (1839-1894) Conclusion to *The Renaissance: Studies in the History in Art and Poetry* (1873), and contemporary reactions to it, as an attempt at psychology, with an analysis of Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) as an assessment of how contemporary opposition to Pater's ideas led to belief in the moral and intellectual necessity of dualism and libertarianism. This analysis will demonstrate the caveats held against a 'Religion of Humanity' that attempts to eschew the language of design, which assisted the survival of cataphatic religion.

I will end the thesis with the discovery of Special and General Relativity, which occurred at the dawn of the First World War in 1914. This discovery marks the point of departure from the long-nineteenth century's Newtonian, absolute conception of space and time, to the current era's Einsteinian, relative conception of space and time; a change of cosmology symbolic of the shift from modernity to postmodernity, and the changes of science and religion. In the context of this shift,

I will synthesis the thesis' findings and relate them to science and religion beyond the long-nineteenth century.

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**NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION**

- <sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1881-1887, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 181-182.
- <sup>2</sup> Pierre-Simon de Laplace, in *A History of God*, by Karen Armstrong (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 396.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, 1887, ed. by Nora Barlow (London: Collins, 1958), p. 87.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Ingersoll, *Some Mistakes of Moses*, 1879 (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 242.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'God's Funeral', 1910, in *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems*, ed. by James Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 327.
- <sup>6</sup> Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth Century Religion and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, pp. 181-182.
- <sup>8</sup> The term 'long-nineteenth century' was applied to the time span of Eric Hobsbawm's trilogy on that century: *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*, 1962 (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*, 1975 (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, 1987 (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).
- <sup>9</sup> Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
- <sup>10</sup> Roy A. Sorensen, *Thought Experiments* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 186.
- <sup>11</sup> James W. McAllister, 'Thought Experiments', *Mind*, 102 (1993), 686.
- <sup>12</sup> James W. McAllister, 'Thought Experiments and the Belief in Phenomena', *Philosophy of Science*, 71.5 (2004), 1164-1175.
- <sup>13</sup> Jeanne Peijnenburg and David Atkinson, 'When Are Thought Experiments Poor Ones?', *Journal for General Philosophy of Science*, 34.2 (2003), 305-322.
- <sup>14</sup> Martin Levinson, 'A Short History of Myth', *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 64.2 (2007), 177.
- <sup>15</sup> Annie Murphy Paul, 'Your Brain on Fiction', *The New York Times Sunday Review*, 17 March 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html>> [accessed 18 March 2012], pp. 1-2.
- <sup>16</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1976).
- <sup>17</sup> Patricia Kerslake, *Science Fiction and Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).
- <sup>18</sup> David Perkins, 'Sympathy with Nature: Our Romantic Dilemma', *Harvard Review*, 9 (1995), 69-82.
- <sup>19</sup> Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), pp. 2-3.
- <sup>20</sup> Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 132.
- <sup>21</sup> Anna Green and Kathleen Troop, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 300.
- <sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York, Toronto: Random House, 1965).
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- <sup>25</sup> John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 321.
- <sup>26</sup> Baron d'Holbach, *The System of Nature*, 2, 1770 (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 22.
- <sup>27</sup> Michael Shermer, 'Why Belief in God is Innate', *The Wall Street Journal* (2010), <<http://online.wsj.com/article/.html>> [accessed 10 March 2010].
- <sup>28</sup> Gregory Paul, 'Why Belief in God is Not Innate', *The Wall Street Journal*, updated 2010, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/.html>> [accessed 10 March 2010].
- <sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, trans. by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 115-124.
- <sup>30</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> McGrath, p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 221. The idea that the moral standard must derive from a literal God was made problematic as long ago as Socrates, with the very well-known Euthyphro's Dilemma. The Dilemma (in its modern form) suggests that if the morally good is commanded by God *because it is morally good*, then the moral standard itself is necessarily independent of God, and so He is not necessary to know what is good. Alternatively, if the morally good is morally good *because it is commanded by God* (Divine Command Theory), then because there is no independent standard for God to prefer that one action be good over any other, God's moral commands are arbitrary. - Plato, 'Euthyphro' (c.399 BCE), in Cooper, pp. 1-16. Nevertheless, none of this resolves the question of why individuals *ought* to be moral in the first place.

<sup>33</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, 1802 (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).

<sup>34</sup> Colin Jager, 'Mansfield Park and the End of Natural Theology', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 63.1 (2002), 31.

<sup>35</sup> Bede Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2010), p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Ruse, 'Atheism, Naturalism and Science: Three in One?', in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. by Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> Ruse, p. 237.

<sup>39</sup> Ruse, p. 237-238.

<sup>40</sup> Ruse, p. 238.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

<sup>42</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London, New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Thornton, 'Karl Popper', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, updated 2011 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives>> [accessed 3 March 2011]. In practice, a given theory is only falsifiable via the falsification of its auxiliary assumptions (i.e. 'if *this*, then *that*'); and the auxiliary assumptions themselves can only be determined via debate and consensus.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Vincent Spade and Claude Panaccio, 'William of Ockham', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, updated 2011 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives>> [accessed 3 March 2011].

<sup>45</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748 (La Salle: Open Court Classic, 1985).

<sup>46</sup> Carl Sagan, in *Cosmos*, dir. by Adrian Malone, (PBS, 1980).

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, p. 224.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson, p. 403.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory W. Dawes, 'What Is Wrong With Intelligent Design?', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 61.2 (2007), 69-81.

<sup>50</sup> Wilson, p. 246.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Gould, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> The Naturalistic Fallacy (at least as it exists today) is attributed to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), and G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005). Yet while modern philosophers tend to agree with Hume that an 'ought' conclusion cannot be derived from 'is' premises alone, they disagree with Moore (who coined the term 'Naturalistic Fallacy') that it cannot be derived at all. As Elliott Sober writes, an 'ought' conclusion can be derived if there is at least one 'ought' premise; i.e., the conclusion 'torturing babies is wrong' does not derive from the premise 'torturing babies causes suffering', but if the suppressed premise is 'causing suffering is wrong', then the conclusion can be derived. Sober uses John Searle's term 'Naturalistic Fallacy Fallacy' for the belief that because an 'ought' cannot be *synonymous* with an 'is', it cannot be *identified* with an 'is' via an auxiliary 'ought' premise. Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), p. 394.

<sup>54</sup> Gould, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (Charleston, Nabu Press, 2010).

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- <sup>56</sup> Andrew Dickenson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993).
- <sup>57</sup> Gould, p. 61.
- <sup>58</sup> Gould, p. 62.
- <sup>59</sup> Soren Kirkegaard, *The Essential Kirkegaard*, ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995).
- <sup>60</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, 1938, trans. by Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Books, 2007).
- <sup>61</sup> Armstrong, *A History of God*; Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).
- <sup>62</sup> Maryanne Traylen, 'A History of God from Abraham to the Present: The 4000 Year Quest for God', *Contemporary Review*, 263 (1993), 50.
- <sup>63</sup> Don Cupitt, *Above Us Only Sky: The Religion of Ordinary Life* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2008).
- <sup>64</sup> Don Cupitt, *The Great Questions of Life* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2005), p. 11.
- <sup>65</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works, Volume 9: Aids to Reflection*, 1825, ed. by John Beer (London; Princeton: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993), pp. 405-406.
- <sup>66</sup> Russell Blackford, 'Stephen Jay Gould on Science and Religion', *Quadrant*, 44.4 (2000), 8-14.
- <sup>67</sup> Stephen Pope, 'Review of Rocks of Ages', *Christian Century* (1999), 622-627.
- <sup>68</sup> Gould, p. 108.
- <sup>69</sup> Gould is fairly consistent in not referring to NOMA as 'the' relationship between science and religion, but as the 'proper' relationship between science and religion, making NOMA a prescriptive value-judgement.
- <sup>70</sup> Brooke, p. 310.
- <sup>71</sup> Brooke, p. 313.
- <sup>72</sup> Kenneth Miller, 'Faulty Design', *Commonweal*, 134.17 (2007), p. 31.
- <sup>73</sup> Thomas Burnet, in Gould, p. 23.
- <sup>74</sup> John F. Hought, 'Evolution and God's Humility: How Theology can Embrace Darwin', *Commonweal*, 127.2 (2000), p. 12.
- <sup>75</sup> Francis Collins and Karl Giberson, *The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011).
- <sup>76</sup> Michael Behe, 'Letting God off the Hook?', *Commonweal*, 134.20 (2007), 4.
- <sup>77</sup> Dennett, p. 27.
- <sup>78</sup> Clifford L. Stanley, in John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), p. xix.

## CHAPTER 1

### ‘ALL NATURE CRIES OUT TO US’

The rays of the sun  
Drive away the night;  
Destroyed is the hypocrite’s  
Surreptitious power.  
Hail to the initiates!  
You have penetrated the night.<sup>1</sup>

Mozart’s (1756-1791) *The Magic Flute* (1791) is applicable to the fall of the Bastille fortress on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1789. It was an event that ignited the French Revolution (1789-1799) against the absolute authority of the feudal aristocracy and the Established Church, and marked the beginning of the long-nineteenth century through which its effects would reverberate. In the tradition of grand narratives, Mozart presents the epic of human history in terms of the Enlightenment’s narrative of human progress through reason. This narrative repudiates earlier Hellenistic conceptions of time as cyclical and eternal, as based upon nature’s cycles of days and seasons, and where societies are held to move through cycles of barbarism and civilisation. Instead, it embraces the Judeo-Christian conception of time as linear and progressive – as if to symbolise human mastery over nature – creating the ideal of progress that would dominate Britain’s long-nineteenth century. Night yields to day, but the day is here to stay; as from the Temple of Sun the just ruler Sarastro, embodiment of reason and enlightenment, declares his triumph over the Queen of the Night, who had long shadowed the world in ignorance, superstition, and fear.

Jonathan Irvine Israel asserts that the term ‘revolution’ itself conveys the sense of: ‘...a massive intellectual break with the past, importing a whole new interpretative paradigm’.<sup>2</sup> And, indeed, many social, political, and religious traditions were radically changed in revolutionary France, such that Israel criticises those critics who brand the Enlightenment as ‘eurocentric’, ‘imperialistic’, and ‘over-optimistic’,<sup>3</sup> maintaining that the Enlightenment is the ‘...most positive factor...’ that shaped ‘...those strands of “modernity” anyone wishing to live in accord with reason would want to support...’.<sup>4</sup> There were many varied and complex causes of the French Revolution, but Israel’s contention that: ‘If one is not talking “Radical Enlightenment” one fails to grasp what the intellectual wars of the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth century

were really about',<sup>5</sup> can be conceded, even if more material concerns had also motivated French revolutionaries. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) had sowed the seeds of the new 'interpretative paradigm' by outlining a scientific method, and by contending that knowledge is power: '...those two goals of man, knowledge and power... really come to the same thing'.<sup>6</sup> But Bacon also separated knowledge into 'two truths'<sup>7</sup>: factual truth, covered by natural philosophy; and moral and existential truth, covered by religion and moral philosophy. This idea had its precursors, but it demonstrates that the door was opening for the rise of science as an enterprise separate from religion; while also, as Patrick J. Callahan (1972) points out, raising concerns that if knowledge is power, then the division of practical knowledge from moral knowledge could have destructive consequences.<sup>8</sup> However, at this time the Baconian Enlightenment grand narrative was one of optimism. It drew upon John Locke's (1632-1704) doctrine of the blank slate, whereby the individual is conceived of as being born akin to: '...white paper, void of all characters',<sup>9</sup> entirely the product of nurture; making individuals perfectible through reason and education. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) empowered the idea of the grand narrative in general, envisaging every thesis giving rise to an antithesis, with the 'dialectic'<sup>10</sup> between the two producing a synthesis that forms a new thesis; the process continuing until the achievement of absolute knowledge. This had significant repercussions for the nineteenth century and its all-important ideal of progress; Terry Pinkard (1996) writes that it '...has been praised and blamed for the development of existentialism, communism, fascism, death of God theology, and historicist nihilism'.<sup>11</sup>

But the Enlightenment, associated with the rise of the middle-class from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries, was primarily a reaction against the inherited and traditional privileges of feudal aristocracy and the Established Church. The Enlightenment culminated in what Eric Hobsbawm (1996) calls the 'Age of Revolution';<sup>12</sup> namely, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, together transforming the political and economic spheres. And in reaction to these revolutions, Romanticism imagined a new narrative emphasising the importance of intuition. Both movements sought to open '...the doors of perception'<sup>13</sup> in different ways, and the manners in which they did so informed the debate about the French Revolution that constituted the foundation of cultural and political discourse for the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The increasing association of the

Enlightenment grand narrative with the threat of revolution meant that the British Enlightenment was affected in a manner that would strongly influence the course of debates surrounding science and religion. In particular, the Enlightenment had produced what may be termed, following Pierre-Simon de Laplace's terminology, the 'God Hypothesis,'<sup>15</sup> which attempted to appropriate the idea of God from the 'Queen of the Night' and bring it into the 'Temple of the Sun' by demonstrating the existence of God to be scientific fact; as per Francois-Marie Arouet's (Voltaire, 1694-1778) declaration that: '...all nature cries out to us that He does exist'.<sup>16</sup> And the Romantic reaction to Enlightenment thought often sought to demonstrate design through more intuitive means, less vulnerable to empirical falsification.

This chapter provides an insight into British Enlightenment and Romantic thought in regard to God and the role of religion in reference to attempts at a science of natural theology. The chapter examines debates about design and the various theological, philosophical and literary thought-experiments that articulated the complex and evolving views of the period. I will juxtapose an examination of the Enlightenment views of those who sought to scientifically demonstrate the existence of a literal God, with an analysis of the Romantic views that sought God through more religiously intuitive means. Close attention will be paid to the language underlying the philosophical premises of these views, in order to determine the dominant discourses forming the foundation for nineteenth century debate about science and religion.

***'But all nature cries out to us that He does exist'.***

The dominant support for cataphatic religion, oriented around belief in a literal God, in the early nineteenth century is undoubtedly the theory of 'natural theology'. The concept of a 'God Hypothesis' exemplifies the syncretist model of science and religion, where science itself is held to vindicate cataphatic beliefs; a model that is understandable in the context of the Enlightenment *weltanschauung*. Although the theological tradition of formulating rational arguments for the existence of a literal God is ancient, exemplified by Thomas Aquinas' (1225-1274) *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274) with its 'Five Ways',<sup>17</sup> the concept of the 'God Hypothesis' of science arguably only became prominent during the Enlightenment. In fact, religious scholar Karen Armstrong argues that the

description of God in positive terms of what God *is* (as opposed to negative terms of what it *is not*), only became prominent after Isaac Newton (1642-1727).<sup>18</sup> Armstrong's claim remains debatable, but what seems clear is that a discourse had arisen in which the ineffable would indeed be increasingly described in positive and empirical terms. Newton's influence is difficult to overestimate. With *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) – often regarded as the culmination of the Copernican Revolution that had decentred humanity from the apex of the universe, as carried out by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) – Newton established a cosmology based upon the laws of Universal Gravity, or an absolute, mechanistic conception of space and time.<sup>19</sup> For those who lived before the reformulation of cosmology by Albert Einstein (1879-1955),<sup>20</sup> the very existence of absolute laws implied the existence of a literal God external to the universe, winding the universal clock and leaving it to tick in accordance with natural law. And for those who subscribed to a literal reading of the Book of Genesis, the date for creation had been precisely established at 4004 BCE; a date arrived at through a calculation of biblical genealogies by Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656), whose conclusion was widely accepted until the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

The dominant cosmology at the turn of the nineteenth century can be characterised by the 'Great Chain of Being'.<sup>22</sup> This model varied slightly among writers, but it generally described a world-view of top-down design; namely, God, angels, humans, beasts, chaos, and nothingness. Alexander Pope's (1688-1744) *An Essay on Man* (1734) exemplifies this view. Just as John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost* (1667) narrates the Genesis story of Adam and Eve's fall via eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, in order to '...justify the ways of God to men',<sup>23</sup> Pope sought a theodicy to explain the appearance of faulty design:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
 All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
 All discord, harmony not understood;  
 All partial evil, universal good:  
 And, spite of pride in erring reason's spite,  
 One truth is clear, whatever is, is right...  
 Know, then, thyself, presume not God to scan;  
 The proper study of mankind is man.  
 Placed on this isthmus of a middle state

A being darkly wise, and rudely great...  
 Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule –  
 Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!  
 Superior beings, when of late they saw  
 A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,  
 Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape  
 And showed a Newton as we show an ape.<sup>24</sup>

For Pope, the universe is a design that, if not perfect, is at least the best of all possible worlds; and it is only seen as chaotic and unjust due to the limits of the finite human self in understanding the design; a consequence of inhabiting a 'middle state' on the 'Great Chain of Being'. Therefore, humanity must simply accept that 'whatever is, is right' – it is all part of a plan – and they must not 'presume' to 'teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule'. Such design-based cosmologies might explain Enlightenment discourse. For despite the Enlightenment's strong Baconian imperative to control nature and tame the aspects thought to be 'bad', there is also a tendency among Enlightenment *philosophes*, from John Locke to Thomas Paine (1736-1809) to look to a state of nature to determine the good in the first place; and expressions like 'whatever is, is right', were emblematic of that discourse throughout the nineteenth century.

It has been suggested that the human mind evolved to understand events on the relatively small timescales pertaining to human lives, timescales of years and decades, but certainly not millions of years; and these were timescales during which the only complex objects that could arise were indeed those formed by design, albeit human design (tools, mechanical apparatus, etc.).<sup>25</sup> In this case, then whether or not the Argument from Design is correct, the mind would find it difficult to understand the rise of complexity without imputing top-down intelligent design analogous to human design. Much debate can be had regarding this view; debate beyond the scope of this thesis. But a similar point can be made with regard to language, insofar as language has also evolved – albeit differently – to describe natural phenomena on similar timescales, and exhibits certain limits that render it difficult to describe natural phenomena without design. It may not be a coincidence that Pope believed in both the fixity and immutability of language, and the fixity and immutability of entities in the 'Great Chain of Being'. The essentialist distinctions given by words, names, and labels, as applied to natural phenomena on the timescales that language evolved to describe, create a discourse

which imagines fixed, unchanging, essentialist forms within those timescales; so that a ‘horse’ is *really* a horse, a ‘tree’ is *really* a tree; and, indeed, that the individual ‘self’ or ‘I’ that is commonly held to be at the centre of a person’s experience, is something that *really* exists independently of nature. In fact, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), father of modern taxonomy, was himself an essentialist, and yet Peter F. Stevens reminds his readers that Linnaeus was: ‘...as much managing information as naming or classifying nature’.<sup>26</sup> Classification was more about the usefulness of labels than about strict correspondence to reality. But the essentialism implied by such labels is more supportive of belief in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ (thus going beyond even ideas of theistic or God-guided evolution), than in gradual development from prior forms, where labels become more arbitrary and indistinct. It is as though each link in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ came into existence all at once and fully formed, without earlier stages of development to blur the line between a horse being a horse and being something else; again, in accordance with the timescales that language evolved to describe. It is a description of natural phenomena in which the conclusion of design becomes the only explanation for the complexity and diversity of organic forms. And from a belief in *benevolent* design, it is only too natural to postulate that ‘whatever is, is right’, and that ‘natural’ is ‘good’.

Applying a study of the limits of language on key texts concerning design has never been done before, but such an analysis seems necessary in light of the important effects of these limits. Certainly, these limits of language were present in discourse of the ‘Age of Revolution’. In this discourse the divine was not only, in Armstrong’s terms, described in positive terms of what it *is*, but also was, along with nature itself, classified and categorised in empirical and essentialist terms that supported the ‘Great Chain of Being’. Indeed, it was the empirical nature of this discourse which meant that, despite Pope’s misgivings regarding science, the Argument from Design was employed by Enlightenment deists like Paine against Christianity, in the belief that if theology was to become the domain of empirical science, then traditional revealed religion would be rendered obsolete.

This empirical discourse of design was so pervasive that it did not always even need explicit mentioning:

Design’s ubiquitous presence during the period means that it frequently operated less than explicitly, an assumed

background to any theological discussion rather than a proposition that needed continued demonstration: one need simply refer to the beautiful complexity of the natural world, and one's listeners could link it to its divine source.<sup>27</sup>

However, recent writers on the Enlightenment reveal some disagreement about the nature of this period, and what it meant for scientific and religious thinkers. Ann Thomson argues that attempts to find a single mode of irreligious thought running through the Enlightenment ignore the multiple strands of thinking that composed the Enlightenment.<sup>28</sup> Yet Isaac Kramnick argues that the Enlightenment critique *did* seek the death of the old God, the jealous, wrathful, interested, prayer-answering and miracle-working God of Judeo-Christian revelation, in favour of what they regarded as a more rational and worthy deity:

Central to the Enlightenment agenda was the assault on religious superstition and its replacement by a rational religion in which God became no more than the supreme intelligence or craftsman who had set the machine that was the world to run according to its own natural and scientifically predictable laws.<sup>29</sup>

For Kramnick, it seems that the Argument from Design was, indeed, a common irreligious thought during the Enlightenment.

Atheism did have its advocates, most notably Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) whose *Common Sense* (1772) passionately denounced the very idea of a creative superintendent over nature, or of morality being dependent on belief in one.<sup>30</sup> However, many Enlightenment thinkers rejected this stance. While Voltaire had believed that religion '...must be destroyed among respectable people and left to the canaille large and small, for whom it was made',<sup>31</sup> he also believed, famously, that God was a moral necessity:

I want my lawyer, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God, because it means that I shall be cheated and robbed and cuckolded less often... If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.<sup>32</sup>

This argument foreshadows a crucial debate in nineteenth century literature; the debate about whether belief in a literal God and literal design was necessary for preserving moral and existential value. This debate usually centred on contentions about human nature, including those surrounding whether Thomas Hobbes'

(1588-1679) *On the Citizen* (1642) was correct to assert that human nature is primarily selfish; an entire discourse holding that, in a state of nature where everyone has an equal claim to everything, there will rise a ‘...war of all men against all men’,<sup>33</sup> and therefore that human nature requires authoritarian institutions to restrain its worst excesses. Hobbes had employed this vision of humanity as an argument for absolute monarchical authority; and so it could certainly be that those benefiting from the discourses wherein words, names, and labels created essentialist distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘this’ species versus ‘that’ – where human nature could be spoken of as fundamentally selfish and individualistic – were in fact secular, authoritarian political and economic institutions. Yet individuals like Voltaire used the same view of human nature as an argument for divine authority, in the context of the discourse of design. Certainly, the ‘Great Chain of Being’ is a discourse which posits top-down hierarchy as necessary for the existence of both natural and moral order.

However, for Voltaire this debate is currently moot; for it is here that he declares: ‘But all nature cries out to us that He does exist’. Voltaire did criticise naïve versions of the Argument from Design in *Candide* (1759), satirising their logic through Professor Pangloss: ‘Observe, that the nose has been formed to bear spectacles. Legs are visibly designed for stockings – and we have stockings’.<sup>34</sup> Voltaire acknowledges the confusion of cause-and-effect in the anthropocentric premise that nature is adapted to humans rather than humans to nature. However, the thought that ‘all nature cries out to us that He does exist’ still points to the tendency of design-advocates to appeal to nature as evidence of God; except that it did not matter that the ‘God Hypothesis’ was vulnerable to falsification, for if science did falsify it then it would merely be ‘necessary to invent him’.

And yet, the notion that it would ever be falsified might well have appeared ludicrous, and here language itself may be an influence. Voltaire obviously does not literally envision nature as ‘crying out’, yet the act of personifying nature hints the contemporary discourse of using the anthropomorphic language of design, or language that assumes design in order to prove design. This limitation can be seen in Paine’s *The Age of Reason* (1794), one of the most important deistic works to emerge in the literature of the period, encapsulating the deism of the British Enlightenment in defence against the atheism of the French Enlightenment. As

Jeffrey Hammond notes, Edward H. Davidson and William J. Scheick have connected Paine's deism to political concerns:

Davidson and Schieck solidly connect Paine's religious views with his underlying political agenda, demonstrating that the evolution of his increasingly anti-Biblical stance was a function of his growing awareness of the culpability of traditional Christianity in supporting repressive monarchical systems.<sup>35</sup>

Paine's political agenda was far from unique among Enlightenment thinkers, and so it is possible that the creation of the 'God Hypothesis' was influenced by a political reaction against Christianity. Paine championed the French revolutionaries in rejecting the Divine Right of Kings that made monarchs answerable not to the people, but to the Church, and of course in rejecting the authority of the Church itself (albeit not with the violent suppression thereof).

But in this 'Age of Revolution', Paine also wanted to salvage deism from those who took opposition to authoritarianism too far: 'Lest, in the general wreck of superstition, of false systems of government, and false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true'.<sup>36</sup> He declared his intellectual independence, writing: 'My own mind is my own church',<sup>37</sup> and added that the Established Churches were '...no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolise power and profit'.<sup>38</sup> For Paine, an Established Church was but another absolute monarchy and corporate enterprise. For this view, Paine was widely despised in the fledging United States, which had ousted monarchical control in 1776, for being too irreligious; even while he was hunted in France for not being irreligious enough. Nevertheless, he captured the intellectual climate of the largely deistic British Enlightenment.

According to Paine, science, or the study of nature, was not only compatible with belief in a literal God, it was the one true revelation of a literal God. While science and religion may have been in conflict in the minds of deists such as Paine, even here the relationship could be viewed as one of *conflicting revelations* of a literal God; rather than one of science conflicting with a literal God, or of science simply being mute on the question. In rejecting the God of Religion, Paine introduces the God of Science. For Paine, the Book of Nature was the true word of God, and its revelation was the only first-hand revelation accessible to all people, of all times and places. And this first-hand revelation declared the

existence of a designer: ‘Everything we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself. Every man is an evidence to himself that he did not make himself... neither could any tree, plant, or animal make itself’.<sup>39</sup>

Paine further announces that while human words and language are local and changeable, Creation spoke a universal language:

It is an ever existing original which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other... Do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the Creation.<sup>40</sup>

By pointing to how this revelation cannot be ‘counterfeited’, ‘lost’, ‘altered’, ‘suppressed’, Paine exalts it as transcending the human world in a way that traditional revealed religions do not. But the words, names, or labels of ‘tree’, ‘plant’, and ‘animal’ suggest an unchanging essentialism whereby these things were always what they are now, creating a mystery articulated in the form of how each could ‘make itself’; which presupposes that they must be *made* in the first place, as though they consist of parts put together by something else, a ‘maker’. Paine’s words, unable to describe natural phenomena (i.e., natural objects or organisms) beyond terms of their having been made and designed, exhibit limits to how language in this discourse could describe the world; limits supporting design analogous to human design. The Enlightenment’s empirical and essentialist discourse surrounding design could only strengthen belief in a literal God.

How such an empirical discourse surrounding design translated into support for Christianity might be explained by the fact that the most articulate and thoroughly reasoned version of the Argument from Design came, at the turn of the century, from Christian philosopher and theologian William Paley; with *Natural Theology* (1802). For despite the use of the Argument from Design by deists against Christianity, and despite John Barton’s perception that the terms ‘natural theology’ and ‘Bible’ should ‘...never appear in the same sentence’,<sup>41</sup> contemporary work has also argued the very opposite: ‘...there is a considerable amount of natural theology in the Bible’.<sup>42</sup> Given the contradictory uses of the Argument from Design, Aileen Fyfe notes the complexity of Paley’s reception,

with devout Christian and abolitionist William Wilberforce (1759-1833) writing that Paley's work was '...both untenable and unsafe... because we recollect that it was made the grounds of the theological system of Thomas Paine'<sup>43</sup>; while the *Edinburgh Review* praised Paley for: '...the judicious dispositions of his forces, and the skill and confidence with which he has extended his array to every point which atheism had affected to menace'.<sup>44</sup> However Paley was perceived, Fyfe affirms the pre-eminence of the Argument from Design in scientific circles at the time: '...many of the professors undoubtedly saw natural theology as the framework in which they pursued their science'.<sup>45</sup>

In line with Enlightenment tradition, Paley was an Evidentialist, believing that: 'It is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence'.<sup>46</sup> He opens his argument with a thought experiment:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given...<sup>47</sup>

It is intuitively recognised that the stone's existence does not require too much by the way of an explanation, while the watch's certainly does. Paley proceeds to point out how the watch, unlike the stone, is organised with a very high degree of complexity: 'Its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose'. Could this degree of improbable complexity, 'working' so harmoniously and inexorably with such obvious 'purpose' have arisen by chance? Absolutely not. Every shred of reason and common sense compelled the reader towards the inevitable conclusion:

The watch must have had a maker – there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who completely comprehended its construction and designed its use.<sup>48</sup>

Crossing the heath, it would not matter if the observer had never seen a watch made, or had never seen a watchmaker, or could not make a watch themselves, or

could not understand exactly how it worked in its every particular; the involvement of some intelligent agency, somewhere at sometime, could not be reasonably doubted. Even if the watch was sometimes inaccurate, or even broke entirely (pre-empting the Argument from Evil against a benevolent designer's existence), this would not throw doubt on the fact of it having been designed in the first place. And surely the observer would be surprised to be told that the watch was the mere result of the 'laws of metallic nature', without purpose or intent. This suggested, indeed demanded, an *original* designer.

For Paley, the watch was analogous to living organisms everywhere:

Every manifestation of design which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature, with the difference on the side of nature being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism... yet... are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end... than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.<sup>49</sup>

Paley proceeds to provide a wealth of specific examples in nature exhibiting complexity of design that exceeds the watch. The complexity of the human eye surpasses even that of the telescope. This was the ultimate argument: 'This conclusion is invincible', Paley wrote confidently.<sup>50</sup> Doubt simply could not be maintained without absurdity, and yet, '...this is atheism'.<sup>51</sup> However, it is again possible to note how language itself performs a role in the conclusion of design. To use anthropomorphic language in describing how the watch's cogs, springs, and wheels are 'working together' in 'perfect harmony' towards the 'specific purpose' of keeping time, assumes intentional design in order to demonstrate intentional design. While this is perfectly acceptable with regard to a watch – which is incontestably a product of intelligent design – it is the fact that the bodies of living organisms are so readily described using the same language, being 'mechanical', 'contrivances', and 'accommodated to their end', that leads to the watch analogy appearing so convincing in the first place.

However, even in its own time, the Argument from Design was not quite as 'invincible' as Paley had believed. David Hume (1711-1776) had pointed out the various flaws in the design argument in his posthumously published *Dialogues*

*Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). What Hume had done was raise a series of questions for all those who followed the Argument from Design. Hume asked: Why should it have automatically followed that, because mind is *a* producer of order (as in the case of a watchmaker), that it therefore must be the producer of *all* order? Was this not dependent on an unproven, *a priori* assumption that matter itself did not contain an internal source of order, just as the mind did? <sup>52</sup> As difficult as it was to imagine the material world containing the source of its own order, was it not equally difficult to imagine a designer containing the source of *its* own order? For if the Argument from Design was valid, the order that must be inherent in the designer itself would demand that the designer also be designed (every bit as much as the watch demanded design), resulting in an infinite regress of designers that simultaneously eliminated the possibility of a ‘first cause’ and left no more explanation of the origin of order than before.<sup>53</sup> The Argument from Design explained one obscurity by creating another still greater. Furthermore, would not the suffering and waste permitted by the natural order demand that a designer be inferred that is – in accordance with Epicurus’ (341-270 BCE) formulation of the Argument from Evil – either impotent or malevolent?<sup>54</sup> Or perhaps that – in accordance with the Manicheans – there is not just one designer, but rather two locked in conflict?<sup>55</sup> Pope may have been correct about the limits of the mind in apprehending the design, but according to Hume, if a designer was to be inferred from the attributes of the ‘design’ in the first place, then the above questions logically followed. It was theological statements to which Hume was responding in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), when he demonstrated that ‘ought’ could not be derived *a priori* from ‘is’;<sup>56</sup> a distinction often identified with the Naturalistic Fallacy.

Yet it must be said that, as problematic for the Argument from Design as these questions were, as ‘stone dead’ as A.N. Wilson declares the ‘God Hypothesis’ to have been rendered in their wake,<sup>57</sup> Hume did in the end concede some form of design to be provisionally true. While it might be questioned how much freedom Hume had to voice godless conclusions in this Britain at this time, Daniel Dennett contends that Hume’s concession was likely not due to the threat of persecution:

Why did Hume cave in? Out of fear of reprisal from the establishment? No. Hume knew he had shown that the

Argument from Design was an irreparably flawed bridge between science and religion, and he arranged to have his *Dialogues* published after his death in 1776 precisely in order to save himself from persecution. He caved in because he just could not imagine any other explanation of the origin of the manifest design in nature.<sup>58</sup>

As Gregory W. Dawes insists, the complexity in nature still cried out for an inference to the best explanation, and at this time there simply seemed to be no alternative.<sup>59</sup> And indeed, all that Hume really disputed was how analogous the designer, or designers, is or are to traditional conceptions of deity. Yet the very fact that it *was* the best explanation on offer, the only explanation that most individuals could ‘imagine’, might itself be ascribed to the discourse of describing the world in terms of design analogous to human design. If the impulse to describe phenomena in terms of design is so strong, then cataphatic religion would certainly continue to thrive.

***‘If the doors of perception were cleansed...’***

Despite the powerful influence of the ‘God Hypothesis’, there was much more to religion in the early nineteenth century than Paley and Hume. The Romantic discourse was on the rise, and it adopted a very different approach to theology. Romanticism, still a search for a single or essential world-view – again, in very general terms – grew from, and reacted to, Enlightenment discourse. It was a continuation of the Enlightenment in the sense of often rejecting feudal aristocracy and Established Churches, yet it also reacted against sole reliance on reason.<sup>60</sup> Romanticism can be viewed as opposing the effects of what Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno once termed the ‘dialectic of Enlightenment’.<sup>61</sup> According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the Enlightenment is to be viewed as a dialectic of contradictory elements where reason does liberate humanity from tyranny and superstition, but also enslaves humanity to reason itself, which treats the world and human beings as mere objects to be studied and exploited. The prime exemplar is the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), for whom ‘sadism’ is named, and whose novel *Juliette* (1798) envisages instrumental reason deployed as the tool of sadistic domination.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) signals the triumph of the middle-classes over the inherited privilege of the aristocratic

classes in the Industrial Revolution. Smith, following the essentialist distinctions implied by words, names, and labels which differentiate between 'self' and 'other', engaged in Hobbes' discourse of human nature as fundamentally selfish and individualistic and turned it into a positive virtue. Smith depicted capitalist self-interest in competitive free markets as leading to the greater good of society: 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest'.<sup>63</sup> Yet even Smith believed that such economic liberty was justified only because he believed it would lead to some measure of economic equality;<sup>64</sup> and the Industrial Revolution, in bringing an end to the old aristocratic order, only created new relations of inequality and oppression.

Furthermore, the influx of people into the cities in search of factory work created all the problems that come with large numbers of people living in close proximity, such as those associated with disease, sewerage, and crime; while the factories steadily pumped pollution into the air. For the Romantics, what nature 'cries out to us' was often a return to a more natural state, operating within a more natural conception of time as cyclical and eternal. It is true that David Perkins has contended, in reference to Romantic literature, that: 'Love of nature, as a theme in poetry, is deeply motivated... by human self-hatred', explaining that: 'Because of the way we imagine nature, we see mankind as nature's violator or despoiler, and hate ourselves'.<sup>65</sup> However, it can be argued that Romantic discourse involved not so much a 'hatred' of humanity itself, as it did a reaction to the Enlightenment's and the Established Churches' discourses, which *turned* humanity into selfish, individualistic, exploitative creatures. Indeed, as this chapter will show, Romantics often imagined humanity to be naturally innocent, idealising those thought to be closest to nature and therefore freest from the objectifications of instrumental reason: children, the common people, and indigenous peoples.

But Marilyn Butler attests that Romanticism was not so much a set of ideas as a set of attitudes: 'Romanticism is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and continues to experience since the middle of the eighteenth century'.<sup>66</sup> Defining Romanticism is problematic. Many Romantics stressed that intuition was equally important as, if not superior to, reason in the attempt to know the world. To experience nature, to 'feel' it, was to know it more

deeply than through any rational, scientific analysis. To contemplate a butterfly in flight was to know it differently, and more deeply, than a dissection and analysis of its parts would allow. According to theistic Romantics, this ‘experience’ might also apply to knowledge of a literal God. David P. Haney notes the importance of the relationship between Romantic literature and religion:

[There] is a long tradition of reading Romantic poetry for spiritual solace. ...the works of the British Romantics were turned to for explicitly religious reasons, as the nineteenth century attempted to redefine its spirituality in the face of an increasingly material culture. For such readers, both poetry and literary criticism assist in connecting us to the transcendent...<sup>67</sup>

Romantic literature, turned to for ‘explicitly religious reasons’ to ‘assist in connecting us to the transcendent’, is, therefore, very important in determining the place of literature in the survival of religion in the face of science. The relationship between Romanticism and religion, particularly organised religion, was complex. Romanticism certainly did not embrace the logical, designing, mechanical deity of Enlightenment rationality; which could be seen as a cold, distant entity, embedded in a discourse positing top-down authority as necessary for natural and moral order in a manner that supported authoritarian institutions, such as capitalism and the state. Yet as Arthur Mitzman comments, Romanticism was also often reluctant to return to the bosom of the Established Church, still viewing the Church as an authoritarian institution wedded to the state.<sup>68</sup>

Romanticism might indicate, paradoxically, that while the limits of language create a tendency to describe the world in terms of design, they may also create some degree of hostility towards the Argument from Design. This hostility proceeded upon much the same lines as the those of modern theologians such as Karl Barth, with his idea that: ‘...rational arguments always run the risk of diminishing the mystery of God, seeking to bring it under the human mind’s control’, rendering those arguments: ‘...idolatrous attempts on the part of finite humans to grasp the infinite and incomprehensible God in rational terms’.<sup>69</sup> In particular, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s (1772-1834) denouncement of natural theology in *Aids to Reflection* (1825) indicates that this attitude existed late into the Romantic movement:

I more than fear [...] the prevailing taste for books of natural theology, physico-theology, demonstrations of God from nature, and the like. Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the want of it.<sup>70</sup>

While words can serve as pointer to that which is beyond words, names, and labels, the true experience of value at the heart of religious experience is that which is beyond words, names, and labels; beyond essentialist distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘this’ versus ‘that’. And if an experience is rendered into words, becoming too easily described, like the statement that ‘rocks are hard’, then it is precisely to that extent dull and common.

However, it can be argued that transcendent experience in the Romantic period still participated in the discourse of design surrounding the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and ‘whatever is, is right’, even while undermining its mechanical, pro-authority interpretations. Whereas Pope had urged his readers to accept their ‘middle state’ in the ‘Great Chain of Being’, where they are unable to perceive the overall plan of the design, the point of transcendent experience in the Romantic period is often tacitly posited as being to graduate from that ‘middle state’ and experience God’s view; whereupon ‘self’ and ‘other’ are no longer separate, and nature is perceived as divine and benevolent. This marriage of self-transcendence and design may produce a version of the Argument from Personal Experience, given by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a figure who can be viewed as either the last of the Enlightenment *philosophes* or the first of the Romantics. Arthur M. Melzer’s argues that: ‘The counter-Enlightenment begins with Rousseau’, and with Rousseau’s initiation of the ‘...philosophical project to re-enchant the world’.<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) offered a critique that foreshadowed later protests against the Industrial Revolution, and the objectifications of instrumental reason, that would inspire Romantic religion:

The first man who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, “This is mine”, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how many misfortunes and horrors, would that man have saved the human species, who pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditches should have cried to his fellows: Be sure not to listen to this imposter; you are lost,

if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody!<sup>72</sup>

Rousseau acknowledged that the concept of private property would not have developed so consciously and suddenly. Nevertheless, the above passage, as a thought experiment, suggests a discourse wherein the notions of ‘self’ versus ‘other’, rational self-interest and ‘this is mine’ – the essentialist distinctions demanded by language which set people on the road out of nature in the first place – are absurd. Indeed, Rousseau wrote of the existence of sympathy as: ‘...another principle that has escaped Hobbes’.<sup>73</sup>

For Rousseau, the alternative to Hobbesian self-interest was the Romantic religious experience of nature. Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) contends that an individual can know God’s presence not through Enlightenment rationality, but through a form of personal emotional experience, forming what can be termed the Argument from Personal Experience: ‘I perceive God everywhere in His works. I sense Him in me; I see Him all around me’.<sup>74</sup> Such a sense, Rousseau said, could tell him that a designer existed, and to explain it he creates a thought-experiment comparing atheists to a deaf man, who (parodying Hume) denied the existence of sound because he had never heard it:

Let us suppose a deaf man who denies the existence of sounds because they have never struck his ear. By means of a hidden stringed instrument, I make another stringed instrument that I have placed before him sound in unison with it. The deaf man sees the string vibrate. I say to him, “It is sound which causes that”.

“Not at all”, he answers. “The cause of the string’s vibration is in it. It is a quality common to all bodies to vibrate thus”.

“Then show me”, I respond, “This vibration in other bodies or, at least, its cause in this string”.

“I cannot”, replied the deaf man, “But because I cannot conceive how this string vibrates, why must I go and explain that by your sounds, of which I do not have the slightest idea? That is to explain an obscure fact by a cause still more obscure. Either make your sounds accessible to my senses, or I say that they do not exist”.<sup>75</sup>

The deaf man could deploy all the rational Humean scepticism in the world and be logically correct (from his limited point of view), and still be spectacularly wrong about the existence of sound. It is conceivable that sound could be described to

the deaf man in words, but words could only ever serve as pointers; they could never deliver the actual experience of sound. In such a case, the experience of sound itself resides in the realm of the indescribable, beyond the limits of language; and from that perspective, the extent to which sound is beyond the limits of language would be the extent to which it inspires a certain profound awe. For Rousseau, the experience of God was to be regarded no differently, and for that reason he compares the deaf man to atheists everywhere: 'They [atheists] are indeed deaf to the inner voice crying out to them in a tone difficult not to recognise'.<sup>76</sup> In this view, the atheist may be imprisoned in Pope's 'middle state', but the theist can transcend it.

Deeper detail of the 'middle state' that had to be transcended is demonstrated by William Blake (1757-1827). In the style of many during the French Revolution, Blake called his poetry 'prophetic'; yet according to Robert W. Rix, Blake: '...does away with judging a prophet on the success or failure of his predictions'.<sup>77</sup> Instead, Blake's function '...is to act as a public voice of conscience'.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789-1805), Blake seeks to act as the 'voice of conscience' by overtly attempting to reform the Established Churches' view of children being *born* into a fallen state of sin, and covertly contradicts Hobbes' view that human nature is fundamentally selfish.<sup>79</sup> Instead, children are born into a pre-linguistic state of 'innocence', knowing the world in its wholeness prior to its differentiation through words, names, and labels, and they are only corrupted with maturity through 'experience' of the authoritarian institutions of the ruling classes supporting the Industrial Revolution. For Blake, these classes *impose* limits of language, or '...mind-forg'd manacles...';<sup>80</sup> not the least of which included the description of human nature as existing in a fallen state of Hobbesian self-interest, which justifies the existence of authoritarian institutions to restrain or redirect humanity's worst impulses.

As Ralph A. Bellas notes, Blake saw the French Revolution as finally freeing humanity from their chains:

Not only have visionaries broken nets before, but to Blake in 1790 it seemed that all of Western civilisation was breaking nets. The French Revolution was under way, and the revolutionary spark would spread from France to bring political change, of course, but also to restore humanity's

fallen perception: 'Now is the dominion of Edom [France], and the return of Adam into Paradise'.<sup>81</sup>

And so, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) Blake writes: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern'.<sup>82</sup> The 'doors of perception' leading out of the 'cavern' can undoubtedly be seen as a reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, a thought experiment which finds prisoners chained facing a cave's wall since early childhood and perceiving nothing but shadow-figures cast by the light emitted through 'narrow chinks', which the prisoners can only take for reality.<sup>83</sup> The Platonist hope is that the doors can be cleansed and the cave itself transcended entirely by the philosopher. Indeed, Blake asserts his own evangelical mission: 'The desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite. This the North American tribes practice'.<sup>84</sup> Asli Gocer has commented on how Plato's Allegory can be variously interpreted as referring to religious transcendence or to secular enlightenment, or as a comment on the theatre.<sup>85</sup> Here, Plato's cave can be conceptualised as the limits of language, forming what Carl Woodring concisely terms the '...separation of self from other',<sup>86</sup> the original form of alienation that gives rise to all others, including alienation from nature and the rest of humanity. For without it, there could be no conception of the kind of self-interest praised by Adam Smith, much less the crimes, wars, and murders lamented by Rousseau. And, indeed, if it is true that words are that which differentiate between objects in order to form concepts, assisting a belief in essentialism, then words would very well assist the sense of an essentialist, finite 'self' that is separate from the rest of the 'infinite' universe in the first place.

However, it can be argued that the limits of language are an intrinsic part of the sense of self-transcendent awe in the first place. It is precisely because the 'infinite' is beyond anything that language has evolved to describe that there is a sense of transcending language, and therefore the linguistic and essentialist 'separation of self from other'; just as Plato's prisoners might experience upon gathering the impression that there could be more to life than shadows (to say nothing of being chained in one place). This can be demonstrated in the most widely cited verse of Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' (1803):

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
 And a heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
 And eternity in an hour.<sup>87</sup>

Here, it can certainly be noted that phenomena themselves need not necessarily be grand, complex, or difficult to understand in order to invoke the sense of self-transcendence beyond the limits of language. They can be something as simple as a ‘grain of sand’ or a ‘wild flower’; but the artistic, poetic, or religious *experience* of those simple phenomena remains beyond description. The images of a ‘world in a grain of sand’ and ‘heaven in a wildflower’ invoke a sense of mind-expansion precisely because things of indescribable magnitude are being seen in the very smallest of things; and ‘infinity’ and ‘eternity’ invoke this sense because they are extremes of size and time inherently beyond the grasp of language. Indeed, to speak of ‘infinity’ within a finite space or ‘eternity’ within a finite unit of time are paradoxes that suggest language is failing. This was certainly Aldous Huxley’s (1894-1963) experience in 1952; long after Blake, of course, but borrowing from Blake’s ideas regarding the ‘doors of perception’:

My eyes travelled from the rose to the carnation... The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss – for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to.<sup>88</sup>

The ‘prodigious syllables’ could refer to the experience, but clearly they alone cannot help him fully understand that to which they referred, as it was only in this moment that he ‘for the first time... understood’. Indeed, even then he is unable to describe his experience ‘on the verbal level’.

The role of literature here is that it can be said to press at the limits of language, pointing the individual beyond to the sense of awe that cannot be described. But Blake is attempting to describe something of which the point is that it cannot be described. An individual who has not already experienced the kind of ‘moment’ to which Blake is referring might find his paradoxical poem nonsensical; much like Rousseau’s deaf man attempting to fathom the concept of sound. In this view, there is no substitute for experience itself, prior to linguistic articulations of it. This is not an unreflective experience that simply accepts

mundane appearances, but is a poetically informed experience enabling the individual to sense the threshold of the limits of language.

Howard H. Hinkel concisely explains Blake's preoccupation in exploring such experiences:

Blake examines time – what it is, how it restricts human experience, how it can be transcended... The later prophecies make it clear that the human experience of time arises from within, and that consequently so do visions of eternity. What we ordinarily perceive as time is only a measurement, arising from a predominantly mechanistic intelligence that we have imposed upon eternity.<sup>89</sup>

If modern civilisation had mastered nature by repudiating natural conceptions of time as cyclical, and by turning time into a measured, described, and known quantity moving in a linear and progressive direction, Blake's embrace of eternity – the immeasurable, indescribable, and unknown, beyond the limits of language – appears to be a return to nature through the transcendent experience.

Although Blake is known for branding the God of the Established Church a 'Nobodaddy', who is '...silent and invisible', hiding Himself '...in clouds', and creating a world where '...none dare eat the fruit but from/ The wily serpent's jaws',<sup>90</sup> Blake does offer an argument in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that is reminiscent of Rousseau. Blake narrates a scenario where he encounters the Biblical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, and he asks the two prophets '...how they dared...' to claim that God spoke to them without thinking of the consequences of being misunderstood, and Blake's Isaiah repudiates claiming any such thing:

I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remained confirm'd; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.<sup>91</sup>

As in Rousseau's argument, God is not to be found in 'finite organical perception' like sight and hearing; God is to be found in transcendence of the self and its limits of language, a feeling ascribed the same sensory status as the physical feeling of an external phenomenon.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) followed Blake with an attempt to graduate from humanity's 'middle state' through the romanticisation of nature.

Wordsworth emphasised the role of literature in this project through *The Lyrical Ballads* (1802), a collection of works composed by Wordsworth and Coleridge which best encapsulate the Romantic attitude and introduced the movement to England. This was, arguably, an important point in history, as Philip Martin suggests: ‘Wordsworth’s insistence on casting this famous volume as an ‘experiment’ was at least as historically significant as its generic impact on literary history’.<sup>92</sup> Wordsworth’s *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* fosters the view that poetry should be about the attempt to know the world through personal experience, using words as a pointer to that which cannot be described. Wordsworth’s well known definition of poetry is concise: ‘Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from an emotion recollected in tranquillity’.<sup>93</sup> Powerful poetry is not best written in an emotional state, but in a composed state *recalling* the emotional state; true experience of love – or, indeed, hate – might be beyond description, but the cool recollection of the circumstances and inspirations of that emotion are not. Some might still agree with W. J. B. Owen that this definition is ‘...widely but not generally applicable’,<sup>94</sup> yet it does lend insight into Wordsworth’s idealism. According to Wordsworth, poetry is the product of the true, inner nature of human beings: ‘It is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves’.<sup>95</sup> This contrasts with Locke’s doctrine of the blank slate, and instead points to a universal human nature that is the source of all emotion and impulse, which must be acknowledged.

Roger Sharrock notes that some critics have ‘...usually followed Coleridge’s dangerous implication that Wordsworth is most himself as a poet when he forgets his theories’.<sup>96</sup> Yet Wordsworth’s theories do reflect a certain theme recurrent in the literature. Wordsworth believed that the need for ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’, the need for self-transcendent awe in the face of nature, had never been more necessary than in his own generation. Disillusioned with the French Revolution, and turning to Britain as a greater hope for freedom but wary of its damaging pursuit of wealth, Wordsworth reacted forcefully to the Industrial Revolution.<sup>97</sup> In an age of ‘...increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident’, a force was present in society to ‘...blunt the discriminating powers of

the mind and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor'.<sup>98</sup> Even the emphasis upon self-interest within industrial capitalism at this time could have been interpreted as an instance – as Blake had feared – of the ruling classes locking individuals within the narrow confines of the finite self, within the limits of language, barring it from any sense of self-transcendence. The self-interested, Promethean craving for science and technology comes to be seen as the great danger, threatening to brutalise and reduce human beings to savages by threatening what it meant to be human in the first place. Poetry could keep human beings human in this increasingly urban and mechanised world, making the Romantic poet the philosopher who heroically leads humanity out of Plato's cave.

It was in the name of this mission that Wordsworth sought to overthrow conventional notions that poetic language should be loftier and more refined than everyday language. For Wordsworth, it was the everyday language of the common person that reflected the spontaneous feelings and elementary principle by which real human beings live, and therefore it was everyday language that best serves as a pointer to the indescribable:

The principal object, then... was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe through, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way... Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint... because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity.<sup>99</sup>

To counter the Industrial Revolution, Wordsworth turns – like many Romantics, including Blake and Rousseau – to the idealisation of nature, children, the common people, and indigenous peoples. Claiming that the language of the common person is '...far more philosophical',<sup>100</sup> Wordsworth quotes Aristotle's claim that 'poetry is the most philosophic of all writing', its object '...truth... but carried alive into the heart by passion'.<sup>101</sup> For Wordsworth, literature has a definite purpose in society as philosophy and social critique, and it is all the more powerful for impacting emotion as well as reason.

Yet the limits of language in describing the world without essentialism and design remain, even if the intellectual rationale for it has changed. This change is adroitly expressed in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807). Here, Wordsworth yearns for a vision of nature as seen through the eyes of his childhood; and as Woodring notes, it is a vision that has had a profound influence on British society: ‘It [*Ode*] has propagated for millions a reverence for childhood. For good or ill, it remains a major romantic assertion of imagination as creative awareness vital to individual growth’.<sup>102</sup> The appeal of Wordsworth’s vision is evident in the poem: ‘There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,/ The earth, and every common sight,/ To me did seem/ Apparelled in celestial light’.<sup>103</sup> Far from Hume’s criticism of nature’s design as cruel, nature is now imbued with ‘celestial light’, and the ‘...glory and freshness of a dream’.<sup>104</sup> Through his childhood’s eyes, nature is distanced from any harsh reality and bathed in a benevolent, dream-like, almost otherworldly glow. Wordsworth laments the world of his adulthood: ‘It is not now as it hath been of yore; - /Turn wheresoe’er I may,/ By night or day, The things which I have seen I now can see no more’.<sup>105</sup> Evidently he believes that nature really was once as he remembers, ‘apparelled in celestial light’. Cruelty, or the concept of bad design, is utterly unknown in this vision of nature:

And all the earth is gay;  
Land and sea  
Give themselves up to jollity,  
And with the heart of May  
Doth every Beast keep holiday...  
Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call  
Ye to each other make; I see  
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;  
My heart is at your festival,  
My head hath its coronal,  
The fullness of your bliss, I feel – I feel it all.<sup>106</sup>

The tranquil scene is applied to ‘all the earth’; nature, even when taken as a whole, could not be more ideal or perfect. With the animal kingdom knowing nothing but ‘jollity’ and ‘bliss’, there is a sense that Eden was never lost; the lion is lying down with the lamb. Here, what nature ‘cries out to us’ is that ‘natural’ really does mean ‘good’, and ‘unnatural’ really does mean ‘bad’. It is a vision of nature that makes sense only on the assumption that nature is – in every aspect –

benevolently and purposefully designed, rather than emerging even partially through morally indifferent chance and necessity; a vision where the ‘heavens’ are, in some manner, literally above and laughing with the joy of nature.

Yet according to Wordsworth, it is children who best hear heaven’s laugh:

But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home:  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!...  
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
 Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,  
 And by the vision splendid  
 Is on his way attended.  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day.<sup>107</sup>

Wordsworth follows Blake’s vision of innocence and experience, of paradise giving way to the fall. Children, rather than being born into a state of sin, come ‘trailing clouds of glory’. Children are those who know the truth, and the real Original Sin occurs only with maturity, as adults neglect the truth in their concern with common things. The child is ‘Nature’s Priest’, the true interpreter of what Paine referred to as ‘the scripture called the Creation’, rendering nature itself divine (even if Wordsworth feels, somewhat ironically, that this message requires the mediation of an adult poet like himself). Although Pope wrote that humans cannot perceive the divine plan of nature’s design, locked as they are in Plato’s cave, Wordsworth insists that children can lead adults out of that cave, and see precisely that divinity.

The personification of nature is made more explicit in the moment that Epifanio San Juan Jr. identifies as Wordsworth’s attempt to reconcile what he sees as the negative situation of children becoming adults and losing their bond with nature, with the fact that children becoming adults is, itself, part of the natural order:

The next three sections attempt to elucidate the cause and necessity of change, to invent a fiction that will ascribe metaphysical cogency and consistency to the movement from childhood to maturity. But here precisely lies the difficulty, the dubious theorising, that critics and scholarly interpreters find discordant with the sublime and intensely dramatised beginning and ending.<sup>108</sup>

Yet it is in Wordsworth's 'dubious theorising' that he describes nature in its most human form:

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
 And, even with something of a Mother's mind,  
 And no unworthy aim,  
 The homely Nurse doth all she can  
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,  
 Forget the glories he hath known.<sup>109</sup>

The Romantic view of nature as 'Mother' appears not merely as a metaphor, but as a literal, living entity capable of 'yearnings', possessing a 'mind' and 'no unworthy aim' that transforms the mother into a 'homely Nurse', benevolently nurturing her children, even as she facilitates the child's transformation into adulthood. Nature, as the name given to the world that gives 'birth' to all living things, is only naturally described as a 'mother' with all that that word implies. By this logic, it may be natural to assume that childhood, the time in which people are closest to their human mothers, is also the time in which people are closest to nature.

Yet while children are meant to be those who lead the people out of Plato's cave, instead adults lead the children *into* that cave. Despite the reference to nature itself making her 'Foster-child' forget past 'glories', the transformation into adulthood is attributed to adult ignorance. The child, praised as 'best Philosopher', the 'Eye among the blind', and the 'Mighty Prophet' of the 'eternal mind' comes to be burdened with 'the inevitable yoke'.<sup>110</sup> As Woodring notes: 'The *Ode* gives a further turn to the proverbial blind leading the blind: adults, blinded by objective separation of self from other, lead the visionary child into blindness'.<sup>111</sup>

In this instance, the transcendent experience, provoked by the limits of language in describing nature, encourages a vision of nature as good; a vision that makes sense only if nature comes 'from God'. In this light, the leap from transcendent experience to cataphatic belief in a literal God is not so mysterious. Wordsworth himself concedes that this leap from awe of nature to belief in a literal God is not entirely barred from adults; he is, after all, one of them: 'O joy! That in our embers/ Is something that doth live,/ That nature yet remembers/ What was so fugitive!'<sup>112</sup> Wordsworth could not have even conceived his own poem if

only children could be the ‘priests’ of nature. The line: ‘To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears’,<sup>113</sup> express not only all the ‘intimations of immortality’ that Wordsworth could require, but tacitly suggests that adults, too, will make a religious connection with nature.

That the invocation of a sense of both self-transcendence and design for adults is to be – in a society influenced by Wordsworth – the ‘proper’ role of literature, is indicated in one of Wordsworth’s most well known verses from the posthumously published work, *The Prelude* (1850):

There are in our existence spots of time,  
That with distinct pre-eminence retain  
A renovating virtue, whence – depressed  
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
In trivial occupations, and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse – our minds  
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;  
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,  
That penetrates, enables us to mount,  
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.<sup>114</sup>

Mark Hewson has written on Wordsworth’s poetry on time and death, as expressed in Wordsworth’s *Essays on Epitaphs* (1810), as ‘poetic meditation’.<sup>115</sup> But it is in the above passage that the use of meditation is most clear. Here, poetry is used to point to the idea that the mind-numbing spell of the ordinary experience can be broken by extraordinary experience within ‘spots of time’, or experience of the immediate present moment at the threshold of what is normally describable.

Furthermore, Wordsworth’s ‘Conclusion’ to *The Prelude* is reminiscent of Rousseau’s leap from transcendent experience to literal deity:

There I beheld the emblem of a mind  
That feeds upon infinity...  
Its voices issuing forth to silent light  
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained  
By recognitions of transcendent power...<sup>116</sup>  
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,  
And cannot choose but feel. The power, which all  
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus  
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express  
Resemblance of that glorious faculty...  
Such minds are truly from the Deity,  
For they are Powers...  
And all affections by communion raised

From earth to heaven, from human to divine;...  
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak...<sup>117</sup>

Invoking ‘infinity’, or that which is beyond the self’s limits of language, and rendering ‘silent’ the endless chatter of the self’s internal dialogue or ‘voices’ in favour of ‘one continuous stream’ of consciousness, beyond the sense of ‘separation of self from other’, Wordsworth appears to echo Rousseau’s argument. According to Wordsworth, as according to Rousseau, even the ‘least sensitive’ of adults ‘cannot choose but feel’ what Wordsworth himself feels. All people ‘acknowledge when thus moved’, the experience or ‘the power... which Nature thus to bodily sense exhibits’, and for Wordsworth this ‘power’ can only be described in reference to some form of designer, ‘the Deity’. Individuals need only speak to the ‘Prophets of Nature’ as the true philosophers leading out of Plato’s cave. And so, part of the role of Romantic literature in the survival of religion was that it took transcendent experience in the face of nature, and encouraged individuals to refer its source upward; transferring it ‘from earth to heaven, from human to divine’.

The importance of the Romantic poet as the harbinger of self-transcendence, the hero leading humanity from Plato’s cave, is perhaps even more explicit in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s (1792-1822) *A Defence of Poetry* (1821):

Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known;  
Imagination is the perception of the value of those  
quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects  
the differences, and Imagination the similitudes of things.  
Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as  
the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.<sup>118</sup>

If reason is analytic, pulling things apart to understand how they work, or respecting ‘the differences’ – the differentiation of phenomena through words, creating the sense of ‘separation of self from other’ – artistic imagination is synthetic, pulling things together to understand them in their wholeness, or respecting ‘the similitudes’. Here, the poetic imagination can be viewed as the bridge to the transcendent; imagination is the use of words to reach that which is beyond words; or as Shelley writes: ‘The poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one’.<sup>119</sup> This theme is developed through the claim that imagination is the true creative force of civilisation, and therefore that it is the

‘poets’ in the broadest sense of the term, who are the ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world’<sup>120</sup>:

Poets... are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance and architecture and statuary and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers....<sup>121</sup>

With the argument that poets are both the original legislators and prophets of humanity, Shelley claims that ‘...all original religions are allegorical’, or that poetry is prophecy in the sense that poetry is an authoritative expression of human experience, and that it is only superstition that ‘...would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry’.<sup>122</sup> Here, Shelley co-opts religious language to talk about concepts or feelings not reducible to words, elevating that which is beyond the limits of language to a status so great that it can only be described as ‘religious’. Religion becomes no more, but also no *less*, than the poetic and imaginative creation of values. ‘Poets’ are the ‘prophets’; not in the sense of possessing clairvoyant access to the future, but in the sense of being in tune with nature and humanity enough to be able to make educated predictions; or at least in Blake’s sense of being a ‘voice of conscience’. Poets, then, become the ‘legislators of the world’, the ‘institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers’.

Through Rousseau, Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley, literature’s role in assisting the survival of religion becomes emphasised through its role in seeking to push at the limits of language, assisting the sense of self-transcendent awe, even while it sometimes describes that sense in terms of divine design.

***‘Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings...’***

If the sense of self-transcendent awe is assisted in the first place by the limits of language, then would it not be the case that whoever attempts to eradicate and transcend those limits, whether it is the theologian, the philosopher, the scientist, or even the poet, will simultaneously and ironically *devalue* transcendent experience?

This angle of Mary Shelley’s (1797-1851) *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) has never been investigated, and yet it is prominent in the text.

Just as the ancient Prometheus was punished for stealing the secret of fire from heaven and bestowing it upon humanity, so would ‘the modern Prometheus’ – the modern philosopher, scientist, or poet – be cursed for ‘stealing’ the secret of life and doing likewise. The idea of *Frankenstein* as a warning of the dangers of science is readily demonstrated, but Chris Bond suggests that the novel could also be about other, equally Promethean movements: ‘Frankenstein could equally have been a philosopher with some personal theory, or a Romantic poet, and the dominant themes of the novel would have remained the same’.<sup>123</sup> Bond even suggests that the novel could be more aptly about the danger of pseudoscience, the cure for which is good science, not an abandonment of science: ‘Indeed, Victor ignores scientific method, with its formulating and testing of hypotheses, and rushes headlong towards a preconceived solution’.<sup>124</sup>

Bond’s analysis is certainly valid; nevertheless one of the ‘dominant themes’ of the novel is explicitly the danger of knowledge, scientific or otherwise:

Learn from me [Victor Frankenstein] if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.<sup>125</sup>

The cliché ‘ignorance is bliss’ applies here in full force, supporting the notion that the ability to reduce phenomena to the rationally describable is seen as antithetical to self-transcendence.

Frankenstein’s motivation is explicitly to adopt the traditional place of God for a new design or creation:

A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.<sup>126</sup>

Bond argues that this is the result of egotism rather than true science: ‘There is an extreme vanity and egotism acting as the motivating force for Victor’s work, as opposed to a disinterested desire to further the interest of the human race in general’.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, Mary Shelley’s message seems to be that ‘acquirement of knowledge’ is dangerous in that it can provide the tools and means for such vain and egotistical individuals to exploit, the evidence of which was readily to be

found in the harsh conditions of those affected by the Industrial Revolution. Victor's willingness to use science to usurp the role of designer and creator, without regard for moral consequences, leads to the abominable parody of the creation of Adam that is Frankenstein's monster, which effectively negates the Enlightenment ethos that it is 'good' to strive for power over nature. It is for this that Patrick J. Callahan and Ray Hammond believe Shelley's work to be only a criticism of the kind of science that follows the Baconian distinction between 'two truths' to the point where science drifts entirely free of values: '*Frankenstein* is... a comment on *amoral* science, a discipline ignorant of any social responsibility.'<sup>128</sup> Science needed some kind of guidance from religion or moral philosophy to remain humane.

The novel can also be said to be, more specifically, a warning against the dangers of materialism. The novel emerged at a time when the debate between the materialists and the dualists was rapidly brewing over the origin of the principle of life: 'It was in 1814 that a schism in the life-sciences between strict materialists and those willing to share vocabulary with the religious came out into the open in Britain'.<sup>129</sup> The image of Victor Frankenstein gathering body parts from various corpses and animating the resulting creature with life through electricity, as opposed to the insertion of a soul or spirit, is something that can only be possible if materialism is true. Shelley's novel, then, is a thought experiment of what could happen if humanity is left with nothing more than materialism:

The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence. I shall not be supposed as according the remotest degree of serious faith to such an imagination; yet in assuming it as the basis of work of fancy, I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors.<sup>130</sup>

In the novel itself, Victor Frankenstein leaves his family to pursue his scientific work, symbolic, perhaps, of him abandoning values for amoral knowledge. However, the Romantic appeal of scientific work is presented the novel: 'In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder'.<sup>131</sup> Here science itself is revealed to be fuelled by the romantic element of

creativity and wonder that drives discovery; even if it is the same wonder that drove Prometheus after fire, or Eve after her forbidden fruit.

Frankenstein's creature, a patchwork of parts from multiple human corpses brought to life, is essentially a tragic figure, and it is this tragedy that draws the reader's sympathy and serves to promote the novel's central message. The creature is born an abomination and is quickly abandoned by his creator. However, the creature is also born into innocence and ignorance; the perfect exemplar of Locke's blank slate. The state of innocence and ignorance go hand in hand; the lack of knowledge, or lack of descriptions of phenomena that make those phenomena readily describable and valueless, is meant to be viewed as a positive thing.

The creature, left to make his own way in the world, learning only through pleasure and pain, experiences several harsh encounters with humans and learns to be afraid of them. Tragedy strikes when the creature tries to meet a family that he had taken to observing from afar, a family the creature had come to know and even to love. The family attempts to kill the creature upon meeting him, and this event determines that the fate of Frankenstein's creation will be that his 'blank slate' is filled in largely by bitterness and loneliness, nurturing the creature towards becoming the very monster that people feared to him to be. As the creature explains to Frankenstein upon meeting him, he is a monster directly because of how he is abused: 'I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces... remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?'<sup>132</sup> The creature insists that Frankenstein make for him a female companion, raising fears of the creature reproducing and creating an entire race of creatures that could threaten humanity's very existence. This grotesque parody of Adam and Eve as mother and father of humanity is depicted as the worst case scenario of humanity's Promethean attempt to acquire knowledge.

However, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is not only a cautionary tale of the consequences of attempting to usurp the role of creator and designer from God, but a criticism of the traditional Argument from Design itself, at least as a support for Christianity. After all, as Coleridge's antipathy to natural theology indicates, the Argument from Design also attempts to reduce phenomena to a rational description. A literal God and designer can be seen as analogous to Victor

Frankenstein not simply in desiring a creation that would owe him their existence, but in designing a creature in a manner that is far from perfect, and then abandoning it to an unknown and bewildering world.

Like Frankenstein's monster, humanity is forced to make its own way in the world as a 'blank slate' (according to Locke) that is filled only by the knowledge gained from harsh experience, and the harsh experience of others, in the wake of an absentee father. And like Victor Frankenstein, a literal God may be seen as needing to take some responsibility, as is suggested by Shelley's opening quote, from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667): 'Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?'<sup>133</sup> That Shelley employed this quote from Milton's Adam suggests that she did expect her readers to draw a parallel between humanity and Frankenstein's monster, every bit as much as the monster in the novel drew a parallel between himself and Milton's Adam, thereby subjecting the idea of a literal God to the same criticisms as those directed at Frankenstein. These criticisms ferment within Frankenstein's own soul: 'Did I not, as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?'<sup>134</sup> The theme appears to be that even if the design owes its designer gratitude, the designer nevertheless 'owes' its design happiness. Although Frankenstein later concludes that it is far too dangerous to fulfil his creation's wish for a female companion of the creature's kind, Frankenstein does acknowledge his debt and his responsibility toward his creation, to the point that in the end, Frankenstein is willing to die by his creation's side; analogous, perhaps, to the Christian God dying on the cross.

Mary Shelley's cautionary tale, then, may not be simply that humanity should not seek to usurp the role of creator and designer, but that the Argument from Design itself is – echoing Hume – problematic in a world where the 'design' includes such suffering. This criticism has an impact for not only being told to the reader through logic, but being shown to the reader through the intuitive thought-experiment of a monster's emotional angst; but like Hume, Mary Shelley does not entirely reject the existence of design. Shelley's thought-experiment remains a criticism of materialism; she simply questions, like Hume, the faults of the traditional Argument from Design as a support for Christianity. Yet, in any case, rational attempts to describe the indescribable, viewed as stripping the world of self-transcendent awe, are anathema.

Antipathy towards rational descriptions of phenomena became more radical as the Industrial Revolution progressed irreversibly, and science was seen as the principal culprit. This antipathy is adroitly expressed in John Keats' (1795-1821) *Lamia* (1819):

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.<sup>135</sup>

Here, the mind too curious to let sleeping mysteries lie will strip all beauty and value from the world, condemns all scientific inquiry, all attempts for explanations of cause (including, presumably, an attempt to explain the cause of the senses of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science). According to Keats, for science to describe phenomena, and know them *within* the limits of language, is to strip them of the very mystery that gives them their capacity to invoke self-transcendent awe, and make them 'common'. A Big Question is awe-inspiring, but a Big Answer is not. Therefore, too much curiosity is a vice:

Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.<sup>136</sup>

In this view, 'mysteries' have an intrinsic value simply for being mysterious, and for that reason *should* remain forever beyond the grasp of language. The search for knowledge is described as nothing less than a militant force for destroying value, a force for 'clipping', 'conquering', 'emptying', and 'unweaving' all beauty from the world. Such a view has not always been without sympathy among critics. Arthur Symons joined the anti-science crusade as late as 1901, indicating the enduring nature of such negative attitudes toward science: 'He [Keats] is not cursed with that spirit of analysis which tears our pleasures to pieces, as in a child's hands, to find out, what can never be found out, the secret of their making'.<sup>137</sup>

Keats was echoed by none other than Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), in 'To Science' (1829):

Science! True daughter of Old Time thou art!  
 Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.  
 Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,  
 Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?  
 How should he love thee? Or how deem thee wise...  
 Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?  
 And driven the Hamadryad from the wood  
 To seek a shelter in some happier star?  
 Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,  
 The Elfin from the green grass, and from me  
 The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?<sup>138</sup>

The militant force is now the daughter of 'Time', the destroyer of all things, and takes the form of the bird of prey most associated with death. Dull, unlovable, and unwise, the vulture conjures an image of blood-dripping beak and claws tearing into the dead carrion of 'the poet's heart', of all that *is* colourful, lovable and wise. The vulture rips from all discourse the wonder of magical creatures such as the 'Hamadryad', the 'Naiad', and the 'Elfin'. It can be noted that literal 'magic' itself is something that is necessarily indescribable and unknowable, for if its properties were known it would simply be defined as another force of physics. For Poe, in order for magic to *be* magical, 'wisdom' must be allied with the *retreat* from knowledge rather than the gain of it.

Keats and Poe represent a position according to which things are not indescribable because they are valuable, but instead are valuable because they are indescribable. In this view, science, with its ability to describe phenomena and render it known, seemed antithetical to the realm of value.

### ***On Natural Theology***

The dialogue of science and religion in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods were shaped by the 'doors of perception'. Religious belief was assisted by language aiding the essentialist belief – conjured by words, names, and labels – that phenomena are static and unchanging, as they seem within the timescales of years and decades that language evolved to describe; timescales during which the only complex objects that arose were those formed by design, albeit human design. This entailed that language found it difficult to describe natural phenomena without design analogous to human design. And religious experience was assisted by the phenomenon whereby awe was induced by that which is beyond what language has evolved to describe; creating a sense of transcending

language, and therefore the linguistic and essentialist ‘separation of self from other’. Sometimes, if language can too easily describe it, it is commonplace. When this occurred, there was a perception that science, with its power to describe phenomena, renders them valueless.

Despite criticisms of the Argument from Design that existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this period remains characterised by an acute need to explain phenomena in reference to some form of designer; a discourse reinforcing the belief that top-down hierarchy and authority were necessary for the existence of natural and moral order. Newton’s cosmology and Paley’s biology seemed to make the ‘God Hypothesis’ the most useful starting point for a scientific understanding of the world, while Rousseau’s and Wordsworth’s sense of self-transcendence in the face of nature made design a requisite for an intuitive experience of the world. Yet the struggle between the legacies of the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement not only on the realm of factual truth, but on moral and existential truth, remains to be explored.

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 1**

- <sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The Magic Flute*, 1791, in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick, (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 25-26.
- <sup>2</sup> Jonathan Irvine Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.
- <sup>3</sup> Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. v.
- <sup>4</sup> Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. v.
- <sup>5</sup> Jonathan Irvine Israel, 'Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67.3 (2006), 523-545.
- <sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, 1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 24.
- <sup>7</sup> Patrick J. Callahan, 'Frankenstein, Bacon and the "Two Truths"', *Extrapolation*, 14.1 (1972), 39-48.
- <sup>8</sup> Callahan, 39-48.
- <sup>9</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 104.
- <sup>10</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807, ed. and trans. by J. B. Baillie (Lawrence: Digireads, 2009), p. 38.
- <sup>11</sup> Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. xi.
- <sup>13</sup> William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1789-1805, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 40.
- <sup>14</sup> George Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origin of Modern Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> Pierre-Simon de Laplace, in Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 396.
- <sup>16</sup> Voltaire, in Himmelfarb, p. 155.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1265-1274 (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), pp. 13-14.
- <sup>18</sup> Armstrong, *A History of God*.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard S. Westfall, 'Newton and the Scientific Revolution', *Queen's Quarterly*, 95.1 (1988), 4-18.
- <sup>20</sup> Namely with Special Relativity (1905) and General Relativity (1916).
- <sup>21</sup> Colin V. Murray-Wallace, 'Understanding 'Deep' Time – Advances Since Archbishop Ussher?', *Archaeology in Oceania*, 31.3 (1996), 173-177.
- <sup>22</sup> Pope variously terms it the 'vast chain of being' or the 'Great Chain'. – Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: Empire Books, 2012), p. 4; p. 13. But for the sake of consistency it can simply be termed, as it is commonly known, as the 'Great Chain of Being'.
- <sup>23</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667 (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Pope, pp. 15-17.
- <sup>25</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), p. xix.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter F. Stevens, 'Why Do We Name Organisms? Some Reminders from the Past', *Taxon*, 51.1 (2002), 11-26.
- <sup>27</sup> Colin Jager, 'Mansfield Park and the End of Natural Theology', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 63.1 (2002), 31.
- <sup>28</sup> Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. vii.
- <sup>29</sup> Kramnick, p. xii.
- <sup>30</sup> Baron d'Holbach, *Superstition in All Ages - Common Sense*, 1732 (New York: Fili-Quarian Classics, 2010).
- <sup>31</sup> Voltaire, in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenment* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 155.
- <sup>32</sup> Voltaire, in Himmelfarb, p. 155.
- <sup>33</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 1642 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 12.
- <sup>34</sup> Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: BiblioBazaar, 2007), p. 16.

- <sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Hammond, 'Paine, Scripture, and Authority: 'The Age of Reason' as Political and Religious Ideas', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 94.3 (1995), 434.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 1794 (Charleston: Forgotten Books, 2007), p. 290.
- <sup>37</sup> Paine, p. 290.
- <sup>38</sup> Paine, p. 291.
- <sup>39</sup> Paine, p. 296.
- <sup>40</sup> Paine, p. 296.
- <sup>41</sup> John Barton, 'Biblical Faith and Natural Theology', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 47.2 (1996), 777.
- <sup>42</sup> Barton, 777.
- <sup>43</sup> Aileen Fyfe, 'The Reception of William Paley's *Natural Theology* in the University of Cambridge', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 30.3 (1997), 321-335.
- <sup>44</sup> Fyfe, 321-335.
- <sup>45</sup> Fyfe, 321-335.
- <sup>46</sup> William Sweet, 'Paley, Whately, and "Enlightenment Evidentialism"', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 45.3 (1999), 143-166.
- <sup>47</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, 1802 (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. 3.
- <sup>48</sup> Paley, p. 4.
- <sup>49</sup> Paley, p. 12.
- <sup>50</sup> Paley, p. 12.
- <sup>51</sup> Paley, p. 12.
- <sup>52</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779 (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp. 56-58.
- <sup>53</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 72.
- <sup>54</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 109. Hume cites Epicurus' formulation as: 'Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?'
- <sup>55</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 122.
- <sup>56</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739 (London: John Noon, 2007), p. 335.
- <sup>57</sup> A.N. Wilson, *God's Funeral* (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 403.
- <sup>58</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), p. 32.
- <sup>59</sup> Gregory W. Dawes, 'What Is Wrong With Intelligent Design?', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 61.2 (2007), 69-81.
- <sup>60</sup> Mary Edwardson, 'Romanticism', *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion* (1999), <<http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 20 November 2009].
- <sup>61</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- <sup>62</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, 1798 (New York: Grove Press, 1994).
- <sup>63</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776 (Chichester: Capstone Publishing, 2010), p. 27.
- <sup>64</sup> Smith, p. 91.
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- <sup>66</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 184.
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## CHAPTER 2

### ‘ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR’

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life...<sup>1</sup>

Karl Marx envisions industrial capitalism sweeping away the ‘fixed, fast-frozen relations’ of the aristocratic feudal order, freeing the people from one form of oppression, only to bond them under another. In particular, Pam Morris notes that the 1832 Reform Bill has been held to comprise the ‘...interests, compromises, and shifting balances of power...’ that mark the rise of the middle class against the aristocratic class.<sup>2</sup> The grand narrative of linear progress inherited from the Enlightenment had made industrial capitalism seem irreversible, in spite of the best efforts of the Romantics to halt its march. As Jude V. Nixon writes: ‘They [Victorians] inherited a faith in ‘progress’, reinforced by the advance of science and technology, and thus a perception of time as homogenous, linear, and unrepeatable’.<sup>3</sup> The Victorians’ linear trajectory of ‘time’ saw a sharp increase in the problems of urbanisation, disease, and sewerage, and in the dehumanising brutality of working conditions.

In this age when industrial capitalism was at its most exploitative of workers and environment alike, the moral theory of utilitarian consequentialism, positing happiness and suffering as being humanity’s ‘...two sovereign masters’,<sup>4</sup> was deployed to justify that exploitation. It was a theory which, according to its opponents, reduced human beings to numbers and statistics; and which, like the rise of industrial capitalism itself, reflected all the tendencies described by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno as the ‘dialectic of Enlightenment’,<sup>5</sup> freeing humanity from superstition only to enslave them to the tyranny and objectifications of instrumental reason. This extends the argument beyond Romantics like Keats, who had believed that science reduces nature to the ‘...dull catalogue of common things’;<sup>6</sup> for it raises the contention that science and technology were threatening to reduce values themselves to such a ‘catalogue’. The result was that *values* once thought to be ‘solid’ were becoming that which melt ‘into air’. As per the Biblical injunction that individuals ‘...cannot live by

bread alone,<sup>7</sup> religion, despite often supporting industrialisation, was also viewed as its only alternative.

This chapter will further investigate how the limits of language effect the senses of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science, this time in reference to attempts at a science of values. This chapter juxtaposes an examination of Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), as one such attempt, and Thomas Carlyle's (1795-1881) *Signs of the Times* (1829) as a cultural criticism thereof, with an analysis of Charles Dickens' (1812-1870) *Hard Times* (1854), which associates Bentham's endeavour with the reduction of human beings to numbers and a means of production.

***'Under the governance of two sovereign masters...'***

Although Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) utilitarian consequentialism came to be seen by some, including Carlyle and Dickens, as aligned with industrial capitalism, this was not always a necessary connection. In fact, utilitarian consequentialism set the agenda for much of nineteenth century British social progress, as A. N. Wilson comments: 'The utilitarians were responsible for many of the great reforms which made Britain, little by little, a saner and more tolerable place to live in than many of the autocratically governed countries of the European Continent'.<sup>8</sup> A political radical, Bentham was known for championing causes such freedom of speech, democracy, universal suffrage, women's equality, poor reform, and the abolition of slavery.<sup>9</sup> Bentham supported these causes on the principle that morality ought to operate not on the basis of authority and tradition, but on the basis of happiness and suffering. If individuals were not, despite the decree of the fledgling United States' Declaration of Independence, '...all created equal...' in many of the ways that equality might be measured,<sup>10</sup> they were at least equal in their ability to experience happiness and suffering. Bentham's *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) aspired to institute this 'Greatest Happiness Principle'<sup>11</sup> or 'Principle of Utility' in society at large:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure... On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve

but to demonstrate and confirm it... The principle of utility recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system... Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense...<sup>12</sup>

According to Bentham, there are factually better and worse ways of increasing happiness and decreasing suffering beyond individual and cultural preferences, and these ways can be described by the scientific method.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Mautner comments on how Bentham defines his terms: ‘Although he describes the good not only as pleasure, but also as happiness, benefit, advantage, etc., he treats these concepts as more or less synonymous...’<sup>14</sup> For this chapter I will simply use the terms ‘happiness’ and ‘suffering’ in order to be consistent with the main idea, known as the Greatest Happiness Principle; and because Bentham defines ‘happiness, benefit, advantage, etc.’ as ‘more or less synonymous’, I will also.

Technically, the focus on happiness as the only end-in-itself makes utilitarian consequentialism a form of ‘hedonism’. Yet at the same time, utilitarian consequentialism is not necessarily ‘hedonistic’ in the sense that that term has come to acquire in popular discourse, where it carries unsavoury connotations of selfishness and consumer-materialism in the much narrower pursuit of *physical* pleasure. It is such characterisations of utilitarian consequentialism that Bentham seeks to foreclose with the argument that happiness and suffering ‘govern us in *all* we do, in *all* we say, in *all* we think’; for with this line, Bentham is only beginning to hint at the totalitarian dominion of humanity’s ‘two sovereign masters’. He challenges the notion that any persons – including those would accuse him of selfishness and consumer-materialism – can be concerned with anything besides happiness and suffering:

A principle that it is right for a man to pursue, admitting (what is not true) that the word *right* can have a meaning without reference to utility, let him say whether there is any such thing as a *motive* that a man can have to pursue the dictates of it: if there is, let him say what that motive is, and how it is to be distinguished from those which enforce the dictates of utility: if not, then lastly let him say what it is this other principle can be good for?<sup>15</sup>

According to Bentham, even if another theory, such as Aristotelian virtue ethics (seeking not to rationally discover the answers to moral dilemmas ahead of time, but to develop a virtuous character that will prepare individuals to respond well in

the moment), is the best approach, it can only be because that approach has been rationally discovered to have the best consequences for happiness. Therefore, those who attempt to offer virtue ethics as an *alternative* to utilitarian consequentialism ‘deal in sounds instead of sense’.<sup>16</sup> This demonstrates the principle thesis; specifically, that happiness is logically the only thing that can ever be an end-in-itself; that a line of inquiry into any other motive will eventually reveal happiness to be the ultimate motive regardless; and that the line of inquiry is terminated only by identifying the motive for happiness to be happiness.

Today, a science of happiness does exist in the form of positive psychology, which focuses on increasing happiness (to be contrasted with negative psychology, which focuses on decreasing suffering), and which seeks to expand upon Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) simple, albeit adroit, observation that happiness is found in love and work.<sup>17</sup> It rests upon the philosophy of happiness, which describes the difficulties of defining and measuring happiness but largely concedes that factual studies – much like factual studies of depression, a term subject to the same difficulties – are possible.<sup>18</sup> Instead, much of the philosophical literature consists of debating the *value* of happiness, and it is here that Bentham faces challenges. Elliott Sober cites Robert Nozick’s thought-experiment of the ‘greatest happiness machine’ and points out that many individuals prefer not to be plugged into a virtual world to lead artificial lives where happiness is programmed to be maximised, which is alleged to be a problem for the thesis that happiness is the only thing that is an end-in-itself. The thought-experiment of ‘the lonesome stranger’, where a sheriff knows a stranger to be innocent of murder, but also knows that many deaths will ensue in a riot if he or she does not comply with a mob howling for the stranger’s execution, is alleged to be a problem if justice is valued. The thought-experiment of ‘the fanatical majority’, where a majority intolerant of a minority might be justified in persecuting that minority, is alleged to be a problem if liberty is valued. The thought-experiments of ‘dirty hands’ and ‘personal loyalties’, where in the former it makes no difference to consequences for happiness and suffering whether we or someone else accept a job as a Nazi torturer, and where in the latter it makes no difference to consequences for happiness and suffering whether we save our own drowning child or a stranger’s drowning child, are alleged to be problems if it is believed that consequences are all that matter.<sup>19</sup>

Whether a utilitarian analysis of these objections will eventually reveal happiness to be the ultimate motive regardless and validate Bentham's claim that 'every effort we can make to throw off our subjection [to consequences for happiness and suffering] will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it', remains endlessly debated between utilitarian consequentialists and their opponents. For example, L. W. Sumner suggests that thought experiments like those above do not refute the value of happiness, they simply assist in defining the kind of happiness that *is* valued; i.e., Nozick's 'greatest happiness machine', and another concerning the 'happy slave', define the form of happiness that is valued to be 'authentic happiness', which is: '...the happiness of an informed and autonomous subject'.<sup>20</sup> John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Bentham's most ardent champion in the nineteenth century with *On Liberty* (1859)<sup>21</sup> and *Utilitarianism* (1863),<sup>22</sup> made similar distinctions about different kinds of happiness in response to contemporary objections.

But G. E. Moore (1873-1958) objected to Bentham's thesis by writing that Bentham commits the Naturalistic Fallacy by identifying a moral property with a natural property like happiness; yet, as Sober notes, this is where people like Moore can be accused of committing the 'Naturalistic Fallacy Fallacy'.<sup>23</sup> Sober writes: 'For two terms to refer to the same property, it is not essential that they mean the same thing'.<sup>24</sup> While the claim that a natural property is *synonymous* with a moral property violates the fact/value distinction, the claim that a moral property can be *identified* with a natural property – via an auxiliary value-judgement – does not. Only the former view makes utilitarian consequentialism a *science* of values, and is a fallacy; the latter simply makes utilitarian consequentialism a *philosophy* of values – the auxiliary value-judgement justified only by an intuition that does not admit of further rational or linguistic justification – and is not. Yet a science of values is what some attempted to make of utilitarian consequentialism, resulting in what can be termed scientism; a mode of thought where science is regarded as the only valid path to knowledge. Here, Bentham's most fierce opponents would view his theory as a form of scientism insisting on a life whereby the individual ignores private emotion in favour of robotic calculation, caring nothing for principled stands and making no distinction between loved ones and strangers; rendering humanity's enslavement to the objectifications of instrumental reason the scientific *fact* of how society *ought* to

be. In this view, the connection between utilitarian consequentialism and industrial capitalism, as the actual emerging ‘two sovereign masters’ of society, was seen to be almost natural.

*‘We war with rude Nature...’*

Thomas Carlyle’s (1795-1881) *Signs of the Times* (1829) perceives a relationship between scientism reducing human beings to a number, and industrial capitalism reducing human beings to little more than means of production. Criticism of Carlyle’s work has varied over the many decades since he wrote it. Richard Bishirjian notes that early twentieth century critics held Carlyle’s ‘religion’ to be ‘Protestant and even Puritan’,<sup>25</sup> while critics contemporary to Bishirjian in the mid-twentieth century demurred: ‘That it was not Christian is a view contemporary Carlyle scholars have come to hold’.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, Bishirjian usefully summarises critics’ sentiment towards Carlyle’s work throughout the decades: ‘Carlyle himself understood his social vision, his critique of English society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and his eschatological prophecy of the imminence of a this-worldly golden age, to be in essence a religious vision’.<sup>27</sup> Rochelle Gurstein comments on Carlyle’s critical reception and influence on nineteenth century literature:

At his death... Carlyle was among the most revered writers in Britain... he was called ‘prophet’, and in his last years, ‘the Sage of Chelsea’. George Eliot could speak of his enormous influence as early as 1855: ‘There is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle’s writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived’.<sup>28</sup>

However, an investigation of Carlyle’s work in terms of the limits of language does not yet exist.

Carlyle appears to accept Bacon’s doctrine of the ‘two truths’<sup>29</sup> dividing facts from values; and yet, like Mary Shelley, Carlyle resents how the former appeared to be gaining power over the latter, as opposed to the other way around: ‘This condition of the two great departments of knowledge – the outward, cultivated exclusively on mechanical principles; the inward, finally abandoned, because, cultivated on such principles, it is found to yield no result – sufficiently

indicates the intellectual bias of our time'.<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Taylor comments on Carlyle's pervasive distaste for science overstepping its mark in all his works:

Thomas Carlyle... directly challenges both the Laplacian view of the universe and the efficacy of statistics. ...he condemns Laplace's *Book on the Stars* as a mere 'Mechanism of the Heavens' unable to comprehend 'the ... quite infinite depth ... of Nature'. Even more to the point... he asserts that '[statistical] tables are ... like the sieve of the Danaides; beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but which will hold no conclusion ... [since] one circumstance left out may be the vital one on which all turned'. Carlyle, that is, emphasises the vital importance of individual circumstances, something which is necessarily overlooked by the 'coarse-grained averaging' demanded by statistics and probability theory.<sup>31</sup>

The Newtonian-Laplacian model extends the mechanistic ethos beyond technology and making it a metaphysical statement about the universe as a whole. By pointing to the 'quite infinite depth... of Nature', Carlyle points to that which is beyond the limits of language, as both the source of true value and beyond the grasp of science. Applied to human life, scientism simplifies everything through the 'sieve of the Danaides', in which the scientific method appears superficially impressive but in reality is empty and insubstantial. The 'vital importance of individual circumstances' envisages far more variables in terms of moral action than could possibly be measured or calculated, and yet scientism attempts to do just that, resulting in 'coarse-grained averaging'. It may be that, by attempting to describe the 'province' of values within the limits of language, thereby 'mechanising' them, scientism reduces phenomena to the simplistic; to 'the dull catalogue of common things'.

Carlyle did make concessions to the benefits of industrialisation:

We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils... How much better fed, clothed, lodged and, in all outward respects, accommodated men now are, or might be, by a given quantity of labour, is a grateful reflection which forces itself on every one.<sup>32</sup>

However, in Carlyle's mind, things of value must not be scientifically described, and 'machines' like utilitarian consequentialism defied this sacred division,

bringing values within the limits of language and rendering them dull and dangerous. The universal acid of mechanisation had also seeped into religion, in the form of the authoritarian Established Churches:

The Bible Society, professing a far higher and heavenly structure, is found, on inquiry, to be altogether an earthly contrivance: supported by collection of moneys, by fomenting of vanities, by puffing, intrigue and chicanery; a machine for converting the heathen. It is the same in all other departments.<sup>33</sup>

The Established Churches were an affront, rejecting the indescribable ‘far higher and heavenly structure’ that is about charity, compassion, and concern for the poor, in favour of becoming just another corporate enterprise concerned with selling a product and accumulating wealth and power: ‘Thus religion too is a profit, a working for wages, not reverence, but vulgar hope or fear’.<sup>34</sup>

To Carlyle, values were to be found in the ‘...dynamic...’<sup>35</sup> rather than the mechanic, the indescribable rather than the describable. Christianity in particular, in its indescribable form, was to be regarded as the ‘crowning glory’, or the ‘life and soul’ of society at the time.<sup>36</sup> Asking how Christianity first rose, Carlyle argues that it was not by the mechanics of institutions, establishments and organizations: ‘Not so, on the contrary, in all past and existing institutions for those ends, its divine spirit has invariably been found to languish and decay’.<sup>37</sup> Instead, Christianity arose dynamically: ‘It arose in the mystic deeps of man’s soul; and was spread abroad by the preaching of the word... and flew, like hallowed fire, from heart to heart, till all were purified and illuminated by it’.<sup>38</sup> Reference to ‘the mystic deeps’ indicates that the religious impulse derives from that which the limits of language bar the individual from knowing, and scientific attempts to describe it are subsequently seen as a threat. Taking this view of religion in general and Christianity in particular, Carlyle attempts to make his case through history: ‘Strange as it may seem if we read history with any degree of thoughtfulness, we shall find that checks and balances of profit and loss have never been the grand agents with men’.<sup>39</sup> Carlyle has a point in the sense that individuals are seldom inspired and motivated by the bankers and business persons of history; they are inspired by the social, cultural, and political pioneers, whose values and motives are certainly beyond description in terms of ‘profit and loss’.

Taylor argues that for Carlyle, ‘...history... lies at the root of all science’, and that history has been far too intertwined with the Newtonian-Laplacian model of the world:

In Walter Houghton’s words, ‘starting in the eighteenth century, a host of thinkers assumed a natural order in human society analogous to that which Newton had discovered in the physical world’... It is precisely this Newtonian-Laplacian linearity and fixity that Carlyle is castigating in *On History*, when he attacks some historians for merely tracking ‘chains’, or chainlets, of ‘causes and effects’. He declares that ‘it is not in acted, as it is in written History’.<sup>40</sup>

In rejecting the mechanistic narratives of ‘written history’, history that is too readily described within the limits of language, Carlyle institutes his own ‘dynamic’ narrative that appears to follow from Hegelian historical idealism. Although the moral value of some of the particular historical events Carlyle proceeds to list might be considered questionable, in Carlyle’s mind the Crusades, the Reformation, the English Revolution and the French Revolution were all noble events born of dynamic and not mechanic forces; that is to say invisible, mystic, and ideal aims on the threshold of the describable:

Men did battle, in those old days, not for purse-sake, but for conscience-sake... The French Revolution itself had something higher in it than cheap bread and a habeas-corpus act... It was a struggle, though a blind and at last an insane one, for the infinite, divine nature of right, of freedom, of country.<sup>41</sup>

The values ‘of right, of freedom, of country’ are again only valuable because they are ‘infinite, divine’, beyond the limits of language, creating the sense of awe that is made into the ‘divine’. To Carlyle, every truly important and worthwhile moment in human history was born of ‘the mystic deeps’, from that which is at the threshold of the describable. Although Carlyle’s historical idealism may be viewed as naïve, Carlyle demonstrates the perception that everything of indescribable value is left to religion, while everything readily describable and therefore valueless – the shallow, the mundane, and the profit-seeking – is left to science.

Carlyle projected his own ideals onto past events in order to highlight what he saw as the flaws in modern society, and he attacked those flaws. The moral

condition of society was that good behaviour was driven ‘...not by a greater love of virtue, but by a greater perfection of police, and of that far subtler and stronger police, called public opinion’.<sup>42</sup> Values had been reduced to a matter of compulsion powered by the external mechanics of the social and justice systems, which attempt to describe values, rendering them valueless; as opposed to a matter of impulse powered by the internal dynamics of intuition that leave values undescribed, and therefore valuable: ‘This last [public opinion] watches over us with its Argus eyes more keenly than ever, but the “inward eye” seems heavy with sleep’.<sup>43</sup>

Carlyle offers religion as the alternative to mechanistic scientism, lamenting that ‘...invisible, divine things...’ have as ‘few traces’ in modern values as it has to everything else.<sup>44</sup> Here, the ‘invisible’ and ‘divine’, as indescribable qualities, are metaphysical claims that restore value to the universe. In the scientific value-system, ‘...virtue is pleasure, is profit; no celestial, but an earthly thing’.<sup>45</sup> It is here that Carlyle begins to equate a Benthamite concern with happiness and suffering with profit and loss, in accordance with the connotations of selfishness and consumer-materialism given to the word ‘hedonism’ in popular discourse. This aligns utilitarian consequentialism with industrial capitalism, criticising the former for attempting to render the moral value of profiteering a scientific ‘fact’. This value-system is about ambition, and ‘...beyond money and money’s worth...’, the only ‘...rational...’ state to seek is ‘...popularity’.<sup>46</sup> In industrial capitalism, material wealth and fame are the only goals of life: ‘It were but a fool’s trick to die for conscience’.<sup>47</sup> To Carlyle, the attempt to describe values within the limits of language, and thereby mechanise them, is as all-pervasive in modern minds as the Industrial Revolution itself is in the outside world: It ‘...encumbers the whole movements of our mind, and over our noblest faculties is spreading a nightmare sleep’.<sup>48</sup>

By writing of the ‘...faith in mechanism...’ Carlyle implies that to do away with a religion of dynamic things is to make a religion of mechanical things, where shallow wealth and fame is all-important.<sup>49</sup> This new and mechanistic ‘faith’ is the ‘common refuge’ of ‘weakness and blind discontent’ in all ages, the refuge of those who believe that humanity’s goodness lies without, not within.<sup>50</sup> Yet the problems of the mechanical age are ‘...chains of our own forging, and which ourselves also can rend asunder’.<sup>51</sup> The way to do this is reminiscent of

Blake's and Wordsworth's vision of childhood; for according to Carlyle, children view the world through '...young eyes, as yet unhardened into scientific shapes', and see a world '...plastic, infinite, divine, as lay before the eyes of Adam himself'.<sup>52</sup> The experience of the 'infinite' is described in terms of the 'divine', represented as existing at the beginning of the world before its corruption by human interference with nature.

Carlyle's beacon of hope, therefore, lies in restoring a religious vision:

Are the solemn temples, in which the divinity was once visibly revealed among us, crumbling away? We can repair them, we can rebuild them... Mechanism is not always to be our hard taskmaster, but one day to be our pliant, all-ministering servant... a new and brighter spiritual era is slowly evolving itself for all man. But on these things our present course forbids us to enter.<sup>53</sup>

Carlyle's prose is perhaps overly dramatic, quoting the ominous yet hopeful adage that "the darkest hour is nearest the dawn", but he captures well the sentiment that the sign of the times is '...a deep-lying struggle in the whole fabric of society; a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old'.<sup>54</sup> This 'boundless grinding' already foreshadows the names of the principal characters in Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), Mr Bounderby and Mr Gradgrind. The French Revolution was the offspring of this profound conflict, and: 'France was the scene of their fiercest explosion', and yet its strongest reverberations were yet to be felt.<sup>55</sup>

Writers in northern England, amongst the main areas of industrialisation, concurred with Carlyle. Elizabeth Gaskell's (1810-1865) *Mary Barton* (1848)<sup>56</sup> deals with the conditions of the Manchester working classes, and Charlotte Brontë's (1816-1855) *Shirley* (1849)<sup>57</sup> is set against the context of the Luddite rebellions against the Yorkshire textile industry. Yet the most fierce of attacks on industrial capitalism occurred in Friedrich Engels' (1820-1895), *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), which declares that no constraint should be upon the workers to exercise their rage at their inhuman condition, and indicts Carlyle for acknowledging the plight of the workers and yet condemning the spirit of revolt animating their ranks:

Carlyle is perfectly right as to the facts and wrong only in censuring the wild rage of the workers against the higher classes. This rage, this passion, is rather the proof that the workers feel the inhumanity of their position, that they

refuse to be degraded to the level of brutes, and that they will one day free themselves from servitude to the bourgeoisie.<sup>58</sup>

Engels attempts to identify the true 'god', the true end-in-itself, within the industrial capitalist system:

Money is the god of this world; the bourgeois takes the proletarian's money from him and so makes a practical atheist of him. No wonder, then, if the proletarian retains his atheism and no longer respects the sacredness and power of the earthly God.<sup>59</sup>

For Engels, the 'death of God' thesis speaks to the labour theory of value that Marx would define in *Das Kapital* (1848); a theory positing that a commodity's value is created by the amount of labour time taken to produce it,<sup>60</sup> with the effect that profit taken by the capitalist is profit alienated from the worker. It is an exploitative act that unfairly concentrates wealth in the hands of a few and reduces workers to mere means of production, so that they are also alienated from their humanity.<sup>61</sup> Because of this, the spectre of the French Revolution was alive and well in Engels' mind, and it was a welcome sight. As David McLellan comments: 'Engels wrote in the immediate aftermath of what was the worst economic slump of the nineteenth century... He expected an imminent revolution – a replay of the French Revolution, but on socialist principles'.<sup>62</sup> In the context of an 'economic slump' prior to reforms, revolution seemed for some the only option. It was, of course, the vision of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), which borrows from Hegelianism to envisage a grand narrative of historical progress through successive modes of production, driven by a dialectic between contradictory elements in the material conditions of society, or 'class struggles'.<sup>63</sup>

It was in *A Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) that Marx famously declared that religion was an 'opium', numbing the people to their suffering and rendering them docile and unwilling to rebel:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The overcoming of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. The demand that they should abandon illusions about their conditions is the demand to give up conditions that require illusions. The critique of religion is therefore in embryo a critique of the

vale of tears, whose halo is religion... Thus, the critique of heaven turns into the critique of earth...<sup>64</sup>

Unless the people have heaven on earth, they will require a heaven above. There might even be a kernel of truth to this view, if Gregory Paul's study correlating fluctuations of religiosity with fluctuations of socio-economic security is valid;<sup>65</sup> perhaps the impulse to describe the world in terms of design is mitigated or exacerbated by socio-economic conditions.

However, while Marx's comment could be applied to the working classes of many nations on the European Continent, it could not fully be applied to those in Britain. The British working class was widely atheistic; or, perhaps more accurately, simply apathetic through sheer lack of time or conditions to consider metaphysical questions.<sup>66</sup> Christianity – like many world religions – certainly began as an offer of solace for the 'oppressed creature' in contrast to the moneyed elite; the latter who, in Jesus' words: '...shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>67</sup> But a Marxist analysis would be compelled to view the Established Church – as it views most of the world's *organised* religions – as a bourgeois institution using religion to justify power-relations that favour the moneyed elite.<sup>68</sup>

This is a view very much in accord with Carlyle's indictment of contemporary 'mechanical' Christianity. But while Marx and Engels advocated literal revolution in the context of 'the worst economic slump of the nineteenth century', the word 'revolution' can mean many things. Carlyle's vision is one of spiritual revolution: '...the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on himself'.<sup>69</sup> Change imposed from without is neither secure nor moral; change must come from within, by individuals transcending the linguistic and essentialist '...separation of self from other',<sup>70</sup> which is the original act of alienation that gives rise to all others. For Carlyle, the true revolution overthrowing money as 'the god of this world' was to be a spiritual one, inaugurating a 'brighter spiritual era' replacing the mechanical Established Church with 'dynamic' religion.

***'The whole town seemed to be frying in oil...'***

Dickens' *Hard Times* identified scientism's reduction of human beings to numbers as the ideological support for the industrial capitalist reduction of human

beings to means of production. As Dickens wrote in a letter to Carlyle, this novel was intended to ‘...shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days’.<sup>71</sup> This ‘terrible mistake’ is made clear in *Household Words* (1850):

No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished.<sup>72</sup>

It is because this novel is so polemical that many critics appear to have branded it artistically inferior. John Harrison points out how critics have regarded the work as interesting as a social-problem novel, but inferior as a work of art.<sup>73</sup>

Yet Christopher Barnes comments on the importance of *Hard Times* in capturing the message of many of Dickens’ other novels:

In *Barnaby Rudge*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, the Dickensian trope of ‘fancy’ plays a role of contrast, innocence, and respite, a haven of imagination opposed to an alienating reality... *Hard Times*, however, employs fancy in a much more forceful way than do any of Dickens’ other novels. In *Hard Times*, fancy is a much more active force, not respite and not mere contrast, but a resistant, potent force representing the practices, intuitions, and the intelligence of the subaltern.<sup>74</sup>

Barnes appears to affirm the role of *Hard Times* as not only as Dickens’ most polemical novel, but as the novel that best encapsulates the message of many of his other novels. Valerie L. Wainwright may be correct in observing that: ‘...Dickens’ political stance continued to be the subject of debate... doubts have been raised as to whether his treatment of moral/political issues in the novel can be taken as the expression of a coherent and consistent viewpoint’.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, it is uncontroversial that there are general themes that can be addressed. In any case, the role of the limits of language in shaping Dickens’ polemic has never been thoroughly investigated.

The novel can be said to centre on the contrast, articulated by Romantics such as Wordsworth, between a ‘scientific’ way of viewing the world and a ‘religious’ way of viewing it. Here, the very term ‘hard times’ depicts not only a

time of hardship, or a time of hardness in both the construction of industrial monstrosities and in the character of their creators, but also hardness in terms of a time concerned only with hard, concrete, material things. Here, it is values once thought to be 'solid' that are melting 'into air' as a dream-like night fades into the harsh and dirty reality of waking day:

The fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. ...all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again... The lights were turned out, and the work went on. The rain fell, and the smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth.<sup>76</sup>

As Tamara Ketabquian writes, machinery in Dickens' world is depicted in new light: 'Departing from mechanical models of rationality and self-regulation, Coketown's engines assume the figurative guise of mad, disordered animals'.<sup>77</sup> It can be added that the 'monstrous serpents of smoke' and the 'melancholy mad elephants' represent nature perverted. Industrial society appears as a parallel world with objects similar to the natural world, and yet uncannily and sinisterly different; as Frankenstein's monster is to humanity.

The setting of the novel alone deserves further analysis in terms of these themes:

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful... All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both... Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial.<sup>78</sup>

The idea that the limits of language, in describing the indescribable, assist the sense of self-transcendent awe, may illuminate the sentiment behind Dickens' depiction of Coketown. There is nothing to inspire awe and wonder in the town precisely because everything within it is easily describable and quantifiable in terms of 'fact, fact, fact'.

One problem with the Industrial Revolution may well have been that it threatened the sense of self-transcendence through its attempt to describe,

quantify, and therefore regulate human lives in terms of numbers and means of production. In particular, this period represents the first time in history that workers began to live their lives by the artificial hours of the clock, rather than by the natural cycles of the days and the seasons. While the Victorians might have viewed their progress-narrative as an inheritance of the Enlightenment's description of time as linear and 'unrepeatable', Dickens appears to portray this as a lie; time is still cyclical, it is simply an artificial and mechanical cycle rather than natural and dynamic cycle; the clock's ability to *describe* time strips time itself of its value. As Lewis Horne also notes, the clock, describing Time and therefore reducing all lives to the readily describable and therefore dull, translates into every person working uniform hours, at uniform jobs, every day the same as the next.<sup>79</sup> The clock was also Newton's analogy in his mechanistic description of the cosmos, making a reduction of phenomena to the describable and quantifiable into an almost metaphysical premise about the universe as a whole. In this world the workers themselves are called the 'Hands',<sup>80</sup> and like the hands of the clock the workers live repetitively, labouring for no other end than to repeat the same old motions. Catherine Gallagher captures this aspect of the novel well:

In this novel the most pervasive problem attending industrialism is not factory hours, low wages, child labour, dangerous machinery, unsanitary housing and neighbourhoods, pollution, unemployment, class conflict, unsympathetic masters, or even the cash nexus. Many of these are mentioned, but the most pervasive problem is, quite simply, labour itself in its repetitious invariability.<sup>81</sup>

Gallagher also notes how the writing of the novel itself reflects this theme of 'repetitious invariability', repeating grammatical constructions and formulations such as 'like one another' three times in one sentence.<sup>82</sup> If there is anything worse than the easily describable and therefore dull, it is the endless repetition of the easily describable.

As Eric P. Levy points out: 'At the most profound level, time has value in Coketown only through its monotony. For during the unvarying succession of its units, one after another, the illusion is created that nothing can happen but more of the same'.<sup>83</sup> Levy interprets this to mean that the Industrial Revolution is a process by which humanity is seeking to transcend natural mortality itself through rigid control of Time, that ancient enemy of immortality: '...the formative

principle of Coketown is the need to create an artificial time that repudiates the natural temporal tendency toward change and decay'.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps this line of thought can be extended to surmise that Dickens is advocating a very old moral: science's power to describe the world, its power to invent industrialism and attempt to control the natural order, is Victor Frankenstein creating his monster, Prometheus stealing the fires of heaven, and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. The fall from a romanticised state of nature into industrial hell is the monster run amok, Prometheus bound to the rock, humanity's fall from grace, and all continuing education in industry is the final consumption of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, '...whose mortal taste/ Brought death into the world, and all our woe'.<sup>85</sup>

If the Victorians' claim to a linear, progressive, and 'unrepeatable' view of time is false, then it is 'progress' in scare quotes. Dickens connects industrial capitalism's social problems with environmental problems:

Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there, because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect with a town. A blur of soot and smoke... that showed nothing but masses of darkness. Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen.<sup>86</sup>

Coketown is a microcosm of industrial society; intensely regulated, controlled, and polluted; being 'impervious to the sun's rays', it is set against the natural order. Nature is entirely lost in the midst of the 'haze' that numbs the sensibilities of the people as much as it did in Wordsworth's poetry. It is a vision of industrial hell: 'The whole town seemed to be frying in oil'.<sup>87</sup> Oil, of course, is the life blood of an industrial economy, yet here it brings to mind the lake of fire and brimstone of the Book of Revelations; and on this point, the debt that Dickens owes to Dante Alighieri's (c1265-1321) *Inferno* (c1308-1314)<sup>88</sup> is noted by Susan Colon, who points to the '...infernal imagery in the descriptions of Coketown's factories and machinery'.<sup>89</sup> The factory itself is a desert in which its workers are 'wasting with the heat'. And yet the temperature makes no difference to those 'melancholy mad elephants' that moved monotonously and relentlessly, indifferent to the changes of Nature.<sup>90</sup>

Nature enters the narrative only as a golden memory of something lost, and is contrasted with industrial monstrosity of the town as though it were the contrast between heaven and hell themselves:

The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels.<sup>91</sup>

The ‘shadows of rustling woods’ and the ‘summer hum of insects’ are given in past-tense. The Wordsworthian idealisation and sense of self-transcendence in the face of nature in response to the Industrial Revolution is evident; nature is envisioned as good, and the human-made is derided as bad. Dickens repeatedly juxtaposes the goodness of nature with the evil of human influence. A ‘rare sight’ of Coketown boys engaging in fun by rowing a boat across the river, an image perhaps of better times and better attitudes closer to the natural order of things, is poisoned by the fact that the river is ‘black and thick with dye’, and ‘every dip of an oar stirred up vile smells’.<sup>92</sup> And somehow, although the town and the factory are represented as a hellish desert baking in insufferable heat, the sun that shines upon it is ‘less kind to Coketown than hard frost, and rarely looked intently into any of its closer regions without engendering more death than life’.<sup>93</sup> Any heat is human-made and deadly, while natural warmth is fended off by black smog; once again inducing the appearance of hell, which is often imagined as being, at once, burning yet sunless. Dickens then makes a comparison suggestive of nature’s intentional agency: ‘Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison’.<sup>94</sup> As with Wordsworth, this vision of nature as good makes sense only on the assumption of benevolent design.

But, also like Wordsworth, Dickens expresses the need to reach beyond ordinary experience to extraordinary experience, beyond the easily describable and mind-numbing, beyond the reduction of human beings to numbers and means of production, to that which is at the threshold of the describable and therefore overwhelming, restoring the divine spark to humanity; and also like Wordsworth, Dickens associates the former with human design, and the latter with divine design.

***‘Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts...’***

Dickens’ central argument can be summarised by lines that read like a direct rebuttal to Bentham:

It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me that capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent... There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever.<sup>95</sup>

If values are intuitive, then they do not admit of further linguistic or rational justification; they are beyond the reach of science, beyond what the limits of language can fully describe. But unlike the argument given by Keats in regard to the rainbow, Dickens’ argument in regard to values appears to be not merely that things are valuable because they are mysterious, but rather that they are mysterious because they are valuable. This message encapsulates *Hard Times* from the outset.

Sissy Jupe is introduced to the science of values at the school of Thomas Gradgrind (whose name conjures imagery of the gradual grinding of tedious monotony). Sissy is subsequently taught to favour ‘Fact’ as the only important category of thought, and to disregard ‘Fancy’ as trivial and frivolous. Dickens proceeds to reduce the idea of scientism in a similar fashion to the text’s portrayal of scientism reducing the world, primarily through the character of Thomas Gradgrind: ‘A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations... ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic’.<sup>96</sup> From the opening scene, the novel exhibits what will become of values, if described by science, through the cold and brow-beating nature of Gradgrind’s philosophy: ‘Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boy and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else... Stick to the Facts, Sir!’<sup>97</sup>

The chapter addressing the education of children is dramatically titled ‘Murder of the Innocents’; a theme reminiscent of Blake’s and Wordsworth’s idealisation of children as born not in a state of sin, but in a state of truth and innocence that is degraded by maturity and adult education. Gradgrind, in his role

as such an educator, is described in harsh and militaristic terms, ready to inflict violence on the innocent children: ‘He seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge’.<sup>98</sup> The mode of ‘fancy’ appears to be deployed as a weapon against scientism, with the language of fairytale describing Gradgrind’s scientism in terms of an Ogre: ‘Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle... taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair’.<sup>99</sup> Not only is scientism a monster that borders on child abuse, but Fact takes the place of God in the expletive. When the reader first meets the character Jupe, Gradgrind refers to her not by name but by number: ‘girl number twenty’.<sup>100</sup> Here is a scientific description of values reducing human beings to numbers and statistics, and reducing non-quantifiable values like love and meaning to the quantifiable – the easily describable – thereby stripping them of their value.

Gradgrind’s demand that ‘girl number twenty’ provide the exact definition of a horse, reveals Dickens’ perception that the scientific way of describing phenomena is starkly different from the way consistent with human nature. Sissy Jupe is unable to give a definition, and so another student does it for her. Bitzer is the epitome of scientism, a student carved by Gradgrind’s education, and whose name could perhaps refer to science ‘reducing’ phenomena into ‘bits’, or to the effect of Gradgrind’s ‘cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts’ blowing childhood to ‘bits’. Bitzer is described in utterly inhuman terms: ‘His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white’.<sup>101</sup> The sense is almost that, just as an individual who would literally ‘bleed white’ could not exist in reality, so an individual with Bitzer’s personality could not exist in reality, so far from humanity his character strays. Bitzer gives the ‘true’ definition of a horse: “‘Quadruped. Graminivorous forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth’”.<sup>102</sup> This is the prime example of scientism reducing things to what Keats called ‘the dull catalogue of common things’. With the definition of a horse given, Gradgrind matter-of-factly informs Sissy: “‘Now girl number twenty... you know what a horse is’”.<sup>103</sup> The suggestion that an individual does not know what a horse is

until they have quantified it and reduced it to its ‘bits’ may come as a surprise to simple common sense, which says that an individual primarily knows what a horse is through the experience of a horse; especially for Sissy, who was raised around horses. Dickens’ satirical depiction throws into sharp relief how deeper realities, or true values, are more intuitive and less readily describable in quantitative terms, and that the attempt to easily describe and quantify values simultaneously strips them of their value.

Every trace of wonder and ‘fancy’ is eliminated in the ruthless Gradgrind philosophy, a potent example being Gradgrind’s reaction against the notion of wall paper depicting horses, no matter how realistic: ““Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality – in fact? Do you?””<sup>104</sup> When half of the children respond in the positive, Gradgrind’s answer to his own question, ‘of course not’ is accompanied by the ‘indignant look’ of one clearly unable to comprehend humour.<sup>105</sup> He continues:

‘Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don’t have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact... This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery’.<sup>106</sup>

This ‘new principle’ – an allusion to Bentham – is, unsurprisingly, applied with miserable consequences, as seen with the Gradgrind children: ‘No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon... no little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are. No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject’.<sup>107</sup> In Gradgrind’s world, only practical matters truly matter: ‘Gas and ventilation, drainage and water-service... Iron clamps and girders... mechanical lifts for the housemaids, with all their brushes and brooms’, were ‘everything that heart could desire’.<sup>108</sup>

As a thought-experiment, this scene simply illuminates the very obvious absurdity of Gradgrind’s scientism by showing the reader what they are not; that is, they are not someone who will find ‘everything that heart could desire’ solely in that which is strictly useful for survival; they also need that which is useful for making survival something worth having in the first place, such as art, music, and literature. Yet what is also evident here is that the things strictly useful for survival are easily describable, and mundane. Naturally, then, if Gradgrind’s

scientism easily describes and quantifies values like love and meaning, it would to exactly that extent render them as mundane and worthless as Gradgrind indeed believes them to be. Dickens' argument can be characterised as saying that, if a scientific description of values empirically does nothing but strip everything of value, then a science of values is – empirically – oxymoronic. Values are values because they are indescribable, the experience of them not truly graspable in words; which means that the true method for determining them must be intuition, which admits of no rational or linguistic justification.

The alternative to Gradgrind's world is the wild circus of Mr Sleary, whose epitaph encapsulates the novel's entire counterpoint to the philosophy of Fact: 'People muht be amuthed'.<sup>109</sup> Sleary's lisp itself subtly speaks of a lack of constraint by rules, order, and formal education; it could even be a gesture towards deficiencies of language in describing value. In the context of Sleary being Dickens' mouthpiece, the lisp almost becomes an asset rather than a deficiency, inviting readers to question their own allegiances to conventional rules and norms.

In stark contrast to Gradgrind's school, fixed and stationary in the prison of the polluted Coketown, Sleary's circus exhibits a life of freedom, of always being on the move to wherever Fancy takes them. Where Gradgrind's world is easily describable in quantifiable terms, Sleary's world is most certainly not. Where Gradgrind's world is tightly constrained by laws, rules, and regulations, Sleary's world is unconstrained and left to follow the spontaneous impulse of the moment. Where Gradgrind's world is host to wealthy businessmen, Sleary's world is host to vagabonds who nevertheless have something far greater than all the wealth and facts of the former, and in this way the striking contrast of the two worlds is a graphic thought experiment as to what constitutes existential value. For, despite being rich, Gradgrind has only cold hard factual descriptions to comfort him; while, despite being vagabonds, the circus people are depicted as the ideal society of human impulse living at the threshold of the describable, where impulsive selflessness is the rule over calculated self-interest:

There was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of

as much generous construction, as the every day virtues of any class of people in the world.<sup>110</sup>

The elevation of ‘childishness’ as a virtue rather than a vice is reminiscent of Blake’s and Wordsworth’s idealisation of children as existing in a pre-linguistic state of innocence, and thus being capable of leading adults out of Plato’s cave; fostering those feelings that are beyond rational description and utilitarian calculus. In this light, it seems that no one is more a victim of scientism than those who advocate it; those who live, think, and breathe it.

Sleary’s circus is, needless to say, an abomination to Gradgrind’s well-ordered, well-regulated world, and exists as the contrast to the ethos of reducing all things to rational description; and the interest in the circus exhibited by Gradgrind’s children reveals the nature of the conflict between the two world-views. Gradgrind adheres to Locke’s theory of the blank slate, which holds that individuals are solely the product of their education and conditioning. According to this theory, Gradgrind’s children, having been educated in the rules and logic of Fact, should have exhibited no interest in something as trivial, frivolous, and fun as Sleary’s circus:

‘I have systematically devoted myself (as you know) to the education of the reason of my family. The reason is (as you know) the only faculty to which education should be addressed... in minds that have been practically formed by rule and line, from the cradle upwards, this is so curious, so incomprehensible’.<sup>111</sup>

That the children’s curiosity about the circus is ‘so incomprehensible’ suggests that it might provoke awe and wonder in Gradgrind, if he would but let it; but that curiosity itself suggests that the appeal of Fancy at the threshold of the describable is innate, an intrinsic aspect of human nature that is not easily educated away, and which is anathema to Gradgrind’s mentality: ‘I should as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry’.<sup>112</sup> Gradgrind concludes that his children have been overly influenced by Sissy Jupe, which is an explanation that fits with the theory of the blank slate; and yet his daughter Louisa gives her own explanation. Mr Gradgrind censures her:

‘What can you possibly want to know of circuses then? I am sure you have enough to do, if that’s what you want.

With my head in its present state I couldn't remember the mere names of half the facts you have got to attend to!<sup>113</sup>

Louisa's simple reply, "that's the reason", is readily dismissed as more nonsense.<sup>114</sup> What this tells the reader is that the real explanation for her interest in the circus is that her mind is simply rebelling against what she had been educated and conditioned to be; it rejects both Locke's 'blank slate' and Hobbes' view of human nature as characterised by murderous self-interest, and affirms the idea of a human nature disposed to the 'dynamic' religious impulse at the threshold of the describable. In fact, the 'dynamic' religious impulse could be innate even if Louisa initially lacked any conscious concept of it, due to not being taught it within the limits of Gradgrind's language. In this view, some degree of human nature may exist, even if *knowledge* of human nature is dependent on the manner in which a given language finds it useful to describe it. Louisa may simply have been unhappy, without the vocabulary to describe and thereby form a concept of *why* she was unhappy. It is, in effect, upon learning the language of Sleary's circus that Louisa gains a concept of the 'dynamic' religious impulse, and it is described as a fire that burns within in spite of the cold conditioning that has frozen her exterior, a fire 'with nothing to burn' which nevertheless cannot burn out.<sup>115</sup> Regardless, in the vision of humanity Dickens describes, human nature is only good in reference to its divine origins, and therefore *requires* the divine in order to be good.

Even Gradgrind proves to be not impervious to the innate 'dynamic' impulse. He does, after all, have a clear concept of this impulse in his vocabulary, even if he only mentions it in order to deride it. He begins to doubt his philosophy when Louisa returns to him in poor condition, '...so colourless, so dishevelled, so defiant and despairing, that he was afraid of her'.<sup>116</sup> As explained by Colon, the debt Dickens owes to Dante extends to the notion that Louisa's sullenness is the manifestation of repressed anger; an anger which does not burst but which seethes quietly beneath the surface like Dante's 'sullen souls... fixed in the slime of the swamp of Styx'.<sup>117</sup> However, Louisa's repressed anger does eventually rise to the swamp's surface in her final ultimatum:

'Father, you have trained me from my cradle?... I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny... How could

you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death?’<sup>118</sup>

Louisa’s words ‘I curse the hour’ may contain a double meaning, cursing not only the hour in which she was born into her ‘destiny’, but the very concept of an ‘hour’ as an artificial measurement reducing time to the describable; calling to mind both the literal clock by which people have come to live during the Industrial Revolution, and the clock analogy that Newton attributed to his mechanistic description of the cosmos. Gradgrind’s response of ‘vacantly repeating’ the words ‘Curse the hour? Curse the hour?’ is itself reminiscent of the mindless repetition of a clock’s tick. Louisa insists she would have been much happier if her father had simply neglected her, rather than nurture her solely as a creature of relentlessly factual descriptions of life and the world. That it is ‘inappreciable things’ that make life worth living, things that cannot be entirely described or explained, is made more explicit as Louisa speaks of an innate impulse that defies her conditioning:

‘With a hunger and thirst upon me, father, which have never been for a moment appeased; with an ardent impulse towards some region where rules, and figures, and definitions were not quite absolute; I have grown up, battling every inch of the way’.<sup>119</sup>

Values must be beyond absolute ‘definitions’ in order to be valuable at all. So miserable and despairing is Louisa that her upbringing, where values have always been reduced to the describable and quantifiable, is child-abuse in terms of the psychological damage that it has caused her. Gradgrind’s philosophy proves to be a house of cards even to him: “‘The ground on which I stand has ceased to be solid... The only support on which I leaned, and the strength of which it seemed, and still does seem, impossible to question, has given away in an instant’”.<sup>120</sup>

Gradgrind eventually comes to abandon his scientism altogether, becoming ‘...a wiser man, a better man, than in the days when in this life he wanted nothing but Facts’, indicating that even one of the hardest hearts in the novel could not be unaffected by the ‘dynamic’ religious impulse at the threshold of the describable. Dickens’ position is succinctly summarised by Nelson: ‘Imagining is a way of knowing; intellectual knowledge by itself is of another order, from the realms of lead not the realms of gold’.<sup>121</sup> Descriptive facts alone have no value, they must

be given value from beyond what is merely described; value is indescribable. As John Hedley Brooke notes, science itself must be underpinned by values: ‘As soon as one asks why science should be pursued at all, questions of value immediately arise’.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps what Dickens proves is not that science is inherently threatening to values, but simply that science is dependent on values; not even science can live by bread alone.

***‘Nobody to thank for my being here, but myself’.***

Dickens’ critique of scientism is greatly exacerbated by the connection that he makes between scientism and the brutal Industrial Revolution. And there may indeed be a natural path between the belief that the only kind of work worth doing is that which has strict utility for survival, and the pursuit of money through business and commerce. Accordingly, Dickens’ representation of the issues holds that those benefiting from a science of values reducing human beings to numbers were the wealthy industrial capitalists, who reduced human beings to means of production. Here, it is not religion, but rather the systematic eradication of imaginative ‘fancy’, which is aimed at manufacturing a docile and compliant workforce; an ‘opium’ rendering people unable to imagine any alternative beyond their narrow cage, thus closing their ‘...doors of perception’.<sup>123</sup>

Industrial capitalists are represented in the novel by Josiah Bounderby (a name conjuring an image of being ‘bound’), who subscribes wholeheartedly to Adam Smith’s idea of promoting Hobbesian self-interest as a virtue. Bounderby is Gradgrind’s business associate and ‘...bosom friend, as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship with another man perfectly devoid of sentiment’.<sup>124</sup> The ‘relationship’ between Gradgrind and Bounderby represents the relationship that Dickens depicts existing between scientism and industrial capitalism itself, the theory of one justifying the other, as Barry Stiltner notes:

Though *Hard Times* is Dickens’s ‘industrial novel’, his only book-length consideration of the British proletariat, it is also his most programmatic elaboration of mid-Victorian institutional circuits and disciplinary mechanisms. For *Hard Times* not only depicts the ‘antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes’ but also uniquely delineates a cultural model where Gradgrind’s utilitarianism and Bounderby’s factories form a

disciplinary symbiont that regulates the lives of Coketown's populace.<sup>125</sup>

Together, Gradgrind and Bounderby have become the 'two sovereign masters' to which society is being made to bow. Bounderby is an unlikeable character, the clearest example of Michael Hollington's point regarding physiognomy in *Hard Times*.<sup>126</sup> Bounderby is a 'big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh', further described in the most unattractive terms possible:

A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start.<sup>127</sup>

The image of 'being inflated like a balloon' already suggests an individual full of hot air, and easily popped. The balloon is inflated by Bounderby's constant and relentless boasting about being a 'self-made man' who began life in squalor and rose to great wealth and success.<sup>128</sup> For this, he is described as the 'bully of humility'.<sup>129</sup>

The poverty-stricken social status out of which Bounderby supposedly rose is elaborated to absurd extremes:

'I hadn't a shoe to my foot. As to a stocking, I didn't know such a thing by name. I passed the day in a ditch, and the night in a pigsty. That's the way I spent my tenth birthday. Not that the ditch was new to me, for I was born in a ditch'.<sup>130</sup>

When inquired about whether the ditch was dry, of course it was not: "'A foot of water in it'".<sup>131</sup> Claiming to have been '...born with inflammation of the lungs, and of everything else... that was capable of inflammation', Bounderby was '...one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen'.<sup>132</sup> This is all a rhetorical platform to a boast that he is a thoroughly self-made man: 'How I fought through it, I don't know... I was determined, I suppose, I have been a determined character in later life, and I suppose I was then. Here I am... nobody to thank for my being here, but myself'.<sup>133</sup> The help of others counted for nothing in getting where he is today:

'My mother left me to my grandmother... and, according to the best of my remembrance, my grandmother was the

wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. If I got a little pair of shoes by any chance, she would take 'em off and sell 'em for drink'.<sup>134</sup>

The lie is given away when Mr Gradgrind meets the supposedly drunken monster that is Bounderby's mother. Upon her indignation at the accusation of abandonment, Gradgrind presses her: "Do you deny, then, madam, that you left your son to – to be brought up in the gutter?"<sup>135</sup> The truth is revealed. Bounderby had come from parents who had 'loved him as dear as the best could, and never thought it hardship on themselves to pinch a bit that their son might write and cipher beautiful'.<sup>136</sup> Bounderby's success depends almost entirely on a loving, self-sacrificing family, and his story of being a 'self-made man' is represented as being every bit as fanciful as the ogres and the jingles forbidden by the philosophy of Fact. Bounderby's lie stands revealed as a cynical attempt to bolster a bourgeois ideology designed to perpetuate the system that benefits the bourgeoisie. This ideology dictates that an individual's social status, rich or poor, is solely determined by self-interested hard work, so that they alone are to be praised or blamed for their lot in life. The status quo is thereby legitimised as fair and just; so that the workers, reduced to mere 'Hands', cannot complain.

Once again, Sleary's circus suggests the rebuttal, if Jackie Shead is correct about the symbolic role of the circus as a 'collective enterprise':

The circus trick of balancing (and possibly falling) also connects to a wider pattern of ideas... The physical interdependence of the families suggests a connected, mutually supportive community, and stands as an alternative to the isolating philosophy of self-help. As a collective enterprise, the circus forms a micro-society.<sup>137</sup>

Dickens' critique suggests that there are many complex factors that determine an individual's lot in life, not the least that of the anti-Hobbesian social support network into which an individual is born. The idea of everyone doing everything themselves is depicted as being every bit as unrealistic as an individual balancing in the air without support from others; an argument in line with the Marxist labour theory of value, positing that profit is created not privately by the individual capitalist, but collectively by their workers. Sleary's circus is represented as being the fairer system for being a 'collective enterprise', a system without a capitalist employer. Presumably, if Shead is correct, each worker in Sleary's circus is a free

and equal participant in owning and running the workplace, so that workers retain the profit of their labour; which would, ideally, prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, thus reducing the motive for greed that leads to exploitation of people and the environment.

The larger message here could be that the role of imaginative ‘fancy’ is not merely to offer entertainment. It is to dream of alternative ways of thinking, doing, and being, beyond the ordinary and the conventional; rather than simply accepting the status quo as the only way that things could ever be. It is the indescribable, creative imagination – not scientifically discovered facts – that becomes the safeguard of values. Through his use of imagination, Dickens follows Blake and Wordsworth in deemphasising the linguistic and essentialist ‘separation of self from other’ imposed by the limits of language, and which creates the notion of self-interest in the first place.

Bounderby’s factory is, of course, is no ‘collective enterprise’. The workers, alienated from the profits of their labour, are reduced to mere ‘Hands’; a term that can readily be interpreted as a reference not just to the hands of a clock, but to the reduction of the human being to the sole part of them that has utility for production and manufacture:

...the multitude of Coketown, generically called ‘the Hands’ – a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs...<sup>138</sup>

Use of the phrase ‘generically called’ suggests that all individuality or uniqueness has been erased in favour of a mass generalisation, or what Carlyle had termed a ‘coarse-grained averaging’. In this view, science ignores difference in its attempt to articulate universally applicable laws of human nature, and reducing humanity to mere workers and consumers. That ‘Providence’ has not, in fact, ‘made’ working class individuals in any such form emphasises that providence has ‘made’ them for something more; the language of design emerges to restore the workers’ humanity.

The ‘Hands’ are represented in the novel by Stephen Blackpool, one of Bounderby’s workers. Although only forty, he is called ‘Old Stephen’;<sup>139</sup> he is a victim of Time even before his time:

It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen's case, whereby somebody else had become possessed of his roses, and he had become possessed of the same somebody else's thorns in addition to his own.<sup>140</sup>

At one point, Blackpool even muses to himself that '...there is a sort of Divine Right'<sup>141</sup> there, suggesting that the middle class had not defeated the aristocratic class and its Divine Right of Kings, so much as it had merely replaced it and assumed the very same role. That Bounderby's wealth is the result of an accident of birth – being born into the right family in the right place at the right time – and of the labour of others, could be Dickens' way of indicating that the industrial workplace is an area where autocratic tyranny and aristocratic feudalism had emerged unscathed from the civilising influences of modernity; like a living museum of medieval social relations. As far as someone like Blackpool is concerned, there might as well have been no Enlightenment, no age of democratic reform, no abolition of slavery; no Victorian 'progress' in the ways that matter.

Blackpool's sad beginnings meet with a tragic end in *The Old Hell Shaft*, the most potent symbol of industrial capitalism in the novel. Blackpool is badly injured but is left enough time for a death befitting a Romantic hero. In the arms of Rachael, the woman he loves, he asserts: "If Mr Bounderby had ever know'd me right – if he'd ever know'd me at aw – he would'n ha took'n offence wi' me"<sup>142</sup> This line attributes class antagonism to lack of socialisation between them, Blackpool's final message on class before exclaiming: 'But look up yonder, Rachael! Look above!'<sup>143</sup> He is gazing upon a star, a vision of Nature bursting through the artificial smog, and all that that symbolises. Blackpool explains: "It ha' shined upon me... in my pain and trouble down below. It ha' shined into my mind. I ha' look'n at 't and thowt o' thee, Rachael, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa..."<sup>144</sup> Here, Blackpool experiences one of Wordsworth's 'spots of time' in the face of nature; just as the star shines through Coketown's smog, so does the sense of self-transcendent awe clear away the 'muddle' of his mind. Again, the experience is awe inspiring precisely because it is beyond description, beyond rational quantification and calculation. This emotional appeal is aimed against the gospel of self-interest: "I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom together more, an' get a better unnerstan'in o' one another, than when I were in 't my own weak seln"<sup>145</sup> The

sense of self-transcendence in the face of nature is also attributed to divine design: “...I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour’s home”<sup>146</sup> Blackpool’s transcendence of his condition in the face of nature, attributed to design, suggests how ‘dynamic’ religion is offered as the answer to the ‘spiritless conditions’ of the age. Blackpool is carried forth in a movement of people in the direction of the star; a movement that soon becomes ‘...a funeral procession’.<sup>147</sup>

Blackpool’s death alone is obviously poignant enough with regard to the brutal form of capitalism practiced during the Industrial Revolution. Yet even more crucially, the bourgeois ideology remains even after it is exposed as a dangerous lie; and on this point, J. S. Shrimpton captures the crucial distinction between the two primary fact-driven characters:

Gradgrind at least has integrity, good intentions, and is capable of change; Bounderby is not. Exposed as a blustering and insensitive hypocrite, he responds, after a slight faltering, by continuing on the same course as inexorably as the relentless industrial processes that enslave the Hands and pollute the environment’.<sup>148</sup>

Gradgrind’s change can be interpreted as the ability of a science of values to at least cease its course when it is exposed as false; while Bounderby’s lack of change can be interpreted as Dickens’ perception of the inability of industrial capitalism to cease even when its theoretical basis has been stripped away. Industrial capitalism exhibits only a ‘slight faltering’, followed by a return to business as usual.

***‘Putting no more faith in anything than Lucifer’.***

The consequences of Gradgrind’s education on the philosophers themselves are yet to be realised. The novel’s thought experiment of what would happen to the world if it adopts scientism culminates with Bitzer, who had delivered the quantitative definition of a horse: ‘He was a thorough gentleman, made to the model of the time; weary of everything, and putting no more faith in anything than Lucifer’.<sup>149</sup> Here, faith is tacitly suggested as the alternative to a scientific world view, the latter of which is associated with the metaphor of the Devil. As a creature of Gradgrind’s making, a comparison with Victor Frankenstein and his monster is not unfair in terms of the disastrous effect that this scientific creation threatens to have. Bitzer has grown into an almost perfect bourgeois psychopath:

‘His mind was so exactly regulated, that he had no affections or passions. All his proceedings were the result of the nicest and coldest calculation’.<sup>150</sup> Bitzer’s mind is easily describable and devoid of values, and his psychopathy is represented as the only psychological state in which an individual could truly perform impartial, premeditated, describable calculations concerning moral actions in everyday situations, as is seen in his beliefs about commercial transaction:

His only reasonable transaction in that commodity [tea] would have been to buy it for as little as he could possibly give, and sell it for as much as he could possibly get; it having been clearly ascertained by philosophers that in this is comprised the whole duty of man – not a part of man’s duty, but the whole.<sup>151</sup>

The individual he is conducting the ‘transaction’ with is his mother. This moment is a thought experiment testing how industrial capitalist relations might work in an actual social context, where the mentality of always demanding something of equal or greater value in return is revealed to be not in line with human nature, but profoundly against it. As Rousseau remarked of Hobbes,<sup>152</sup> empathy is the principle that escapes this model of social relations. Bitzer is the very embodiment of what would happen if Gradgrind’s interpretation of Locke is correct after all and Gradgrind’s education works *well*, rather than simply resulting in psychological dysfunction as it had with Gradgrind’s children. In this view, without a description of human nature as divinely designed, Locke’s – or, indeed, Hobbes’ – view of humanity becomes the correct one. Nevertheless, Bitzer does allow his mother half a pound of tea per year, which he knows is weak of him;<sup>153</sup> once again, even in the hardest hearts there remains just the tiniest spark of goodness, however faint.

When Gradgrind’s son Tom commits robbery, an act stemming from the selfish, ‘hedonistic’ state of mind that was Tom’s own reaction to an upbringing based on a science of values that emphasised happiness, Bitzer is uncompromising and unwilling to show compassion in seizing Tom and planning to bring him to justice. Bitzer’s action is represented in the novel as the rational course to take; and yet it is also the most heartless, unforgiving course, precisely *because* it is the most rational. As the ‘whole duty of man’ in this Hobbesian conception of self-interest, Bitzer, predictable as clockwork ruling the people’s lives, denies Gradgrind’s bribe for him to show compassion:

‘I wish to have his [Tom’s] situation, Sir, for it will be a rise to me, and will do me good... I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest... I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, Sir, as you are aware’.<sup>154</sup>

Bitzer had even run the calculations of what would be more profitable to him: promotion or Gradgrind’s bribe, and his calculation had concluded that it was in fact the promotion. The narrator summarises the vision of a world ruled by bourgeois capitalist’s scientism:

Everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn’t get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there.<sup>155</sup>

Clearly, the shock-value of this claim is in the elevation of the utilitarian ethos above the traditional conception of the ultimate Good, as represented by heaven. This vision of radical self-interest, of course, sharply contrasts with that of the indescribable and impulsive selflessness found in Sleary’s circus; a virtue-ethicist view which acknowledges that everyday moral dilemmas cannot wait for impartial premeditated calculations.

Yet Bitzer is punished when, in the attempt to drag Tom back to the literal and symbolic prison of Coketown, he is intercepted by Sleary who sets the dogs on Bitzer and allows Tom to escape. In other words, there is punishment of sorts for behaving like Bitzer, encouraging readers to not be like him, to not adopt scientism, on the grounds that it will simply transform an individual into an easily describable and therefore coldly valueless human machine. And in the aftermath of the Bitzer scene, a religious theme is presented in the narrator’s musings of what would become of Gradgrind:

How much of futurity did he see? Did he see himself, a white-haired decrepit man, bending his hitherto inflexible theories to appointed circumstances; making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity, and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills?<sup>156</sup>

The reference to 1 Corinthians 13:13 reveals the underlying ethos; the alternative to the science of values and industrial capitalism is not just a return to design, but to ‘dynamic’ religion; in this case, Christianity.

### *On Utilitarian Consequentialism*

The role of the limits of language in assisting the creation of the sense of self-transcendent awe alone indicates that science cannot be the safeguard of values. Instead, values must be on the threshold of the describable in order to be ‘valuable’ at all; the method for values must be intuition, which admits of no further rational or linguistic justification; and the true safeguard of values must be the creative imagination, not already discovered facts. Therefore, an answer to the survival of religion is that even if claims about a literal God and literal design were to become undermined, something beyond science and reason was still necessary; something at the threshold of the limits of language, something that was still called, by some, ‘religion’.

However, past critics have tended to view *Hard Times* only as a repudiation of utilitarian consequentialism. Leona Toker, for example, sees a relativistic message where all happiness and value are solely determined by the individual. Because Toker brands Gradgrind – and by extension, Bentham – as ‘utopian’ for having ‘...mapped out and started following a specific path towards an expected improvement of the social order’, Toker calls *Hard Times* ‘...a critique of utopian thinking...’, and ‘...ahead of its time...’ in arguing for ‘...recognition of the incommensurability of different people’s views of happiness and value’.<sup>157</sup> However, no critic appears to have applied a utilitarian analysis itself to the text whereby facts of happiness and suffering are found to be Dickens’ ultimate motive regardless. Dickens might indeed argue against a fascist one-best-way of increasing happiness within human nature, but his novel – if taken as a thought experiment of the issue – does depend upon there at least being factually *better* and *worse* ways of increasing happiness and decreasing suffering, which could translate into values. Indeed, the novel itself has ‘mapped out’ a ‘specific path towards an expected improvement of the social order’. While Sleary’s and Bitzer’s views on happiness are certainly ‘incommensurate’, Dickens’ point is not that a difference of opinion means that all happiness is relative and no one is right; his point is that *Sleary* is right. Dickens’ belief that Sleary’s virtuous character and

anti-Hobbesian social support network is better than Gradgrind's 'nothing but facts' scientism and education, better than Bounderby's industrial capitalist greed and bourgeois ideology, and better than Bitzer's psychopathic calculations, amount to claims regarding what increases happiness and decreases suffering; facts that individuals can be right or wrong about (just as Gradgrind, Bounderby, and Bitzer are represented as wrong). A devil's advocate might argue that *Hard Times* vindicates Bentham's assertion that: 'every effort we can make to throw off our subjection [to happiness and suffering], will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it'. Like Sumner's interpretation of Nozick's 'greatest happiness machine', perhaps the value of the novel rests not so much in its capacity to refute the value of happiness, as it does in its capacity to assist in defining the kind of happiness that *is* valued.

Nevertheless, G. E. Moore was at least correct that to claim that values are necessarily *synonymous* with the facts of happiness and suffering is to commit the Naturalistic Fallacy. Here, Bentham faces a certain paradox of his own if the value-judgement that individuals ought to identify values with the facts of happiness and suffering, cannot, itself, be discovered by scientific method, but only created by intuition; in other words, if facts cannot imply values as a matter of *fact*, but only as a matter of *value*, then a science of *values* is impossible. It is almost a truism in thought-experiments that when intuition conflicts with a moral theory, it is the moral theory that is thrown out, not the intuition; and so it could well be that intuition, a faculty admitting of no further justification and therefore indescribable, is the only possible method for values.

Regardless of whether happiness and suffering are too relative to be meaningful, or whether values must ultimately be indescribable, the limits of language in the discourse surrounding the utilitarian consequentialism and industrial capitalism led to a tendency to describe nature in general and human nature in particular in terms of design, while also igniting an antipathy toward scientific descriptions of values; both of which led to a reliance on cataphatic religion in its role of explaining the world and safeguarding moral and existential value instead. In the mid-nineteenth century, this antipathy was heightened by the identification of scientism, reducing human beings to numbers, with industrial capitalism, reducing human beings to means of production; and this would have consequences for the rise of science to come.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones, trans. by Samuel Moore (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Pam Morris, 'Heroes and Hero-Worship in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54.3 (1999), 385-307.

<sup>3</sup> Jude V. Nixon, *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, 1863 (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> John Keats, *Lamia*, 1819, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Duncan Wu (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 1078.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 4:4, *King James Bible* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 1551.

<sup>8</sup> A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral*, 1910 (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Fred Cutler, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Public Opinion Tribunal', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63.3 (1999), 321-346; James E. Crimmins, 'Bentham's Political Radicalism Reexamined', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55.2 (1994), 259-281.

<sup>10</sup> Faye Marley, 'We Are Not Created Equal', *The Science News-Letter*, 84.4 (1963), 55-63.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Ryan, 'Introduction', in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Bentham, in Mill and Bentham, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> The 'Greatest Happiness Principle' is, today, still most often expressed as 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. However, it must be noted that Bentham later revised this formulation:

Bentham himself worried the issue and decided to drop the ending phrase 'for the greatest number' from his formulation of the greatest happiness principle when he realised that 'distributing a minority of 2000 men as slaves among the majority of 2001 promotes the happiness of the greatest number...'

Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Mautner, 'Utilitarianism, Hedonistic', in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 631.

<sup>15</sup> Bentham, in Mill and Bentham, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?', *The Journal of Ethics*, 3.3 (1999), 163-201.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, in *The Annual of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 29: Sigmund Freud and his Impact on the Modern World*, ed. by Jerome A. Winer and James William Anderson, (2001), p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Dan Haybron, 'Happiness', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, updated 2011 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/ockham/>> [accessed 3 March 2011].

<sup>19</sup> Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), pp. 416-430.

<sup>20</sup> L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 172.

<sup>21</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859 (London: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002).

<sup>22</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1863, in Mill and Bentham, p. 272.

<sup>23</sup> Sober, p. 394.

<sup>24</sup> Sober, p. 394.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Bishirjian, 'Carlyle's Political Religion', *The Journal of Politics*, 38.1 (1976), 96.

<sup>26</sup> Bishirjian, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Bishirjian, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Rochelle Gurstein, 'The Case of Thomas Carlyle', *American Scholar*, 70.3 (2001), 77.

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- <sup>29</sup> Patrick J. Callahan, 'Frankenstein, Bacon and the "Two Truths"', *Extrapolation*, 14.1 (1972), 39-48.
- <sup>30</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Signs of the Times*, 1829, in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 39.
- <sup>31</sup> Jonathan Taylor, 'On History, Chaos, and Carlyle', *CLIO*, 33.4 (2004), 397.
- <sup>32</sup> Carlyle, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>33</sup> Carlyle, p. 35.
- <sup>34</sup> Carlyle, p. 49.
- <sup>35</sup> Carlyle, p. 44.
- <sup>36</sup> Carlyle, p. 43.
- <sup>37</sup> Carlyle, p. 43.
- <sup>38</sup> Carlyle, p. 43.
- <sup>39</sup> Carlyle, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>40</sup> Taylor, p. 397.
- <sup>41</sup> Carlyle, p. 44.
- <sup>42</sup> Carlyle, p. 50.
- <sup>43</sup> Carlyle, p. 50.
- <sup>44</sup> Carlyle, p. 50.
- <sup>45</sup> Carlyle, p. 50.
- <sup>46</sup> Carlyle, p. 51.
- <sup>47</sup> Carlyle, p. 51.
- <sup>48</sup> Carlyle, p. 51.
- <sup>49</sup> Carlyle, p. 51.
- <sup>50</sup> Carlyle, p. 51.
- <sup>51</sup> Carlyle, p. 52.
- <sup>52</sup> Carlyle, p. 52.
- <sup>53</sup> Carlyle, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>54</sup> Carlyle, p. 53.
- <sup>55</sup> Carlyle, p. 53.
- <sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 1848 (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).
- <sup>57</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, 1849 (London, Penguin Books, 1974).
- <sup>58</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1845, ed. and trans. by David McLellan (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 129.
- <sup>59</sup> Engels, p. 126.
- <sup>60</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: Critique of Political Economy*, 1848 (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 130.
- <sup>61</sup> Ken Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 124.
- <sup>62</sup> David McLellan, 'Introduction', in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. xix.
- <sup>63</sup> Marx and Engels, p. 219.
- <sup>64</sup> Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Right', 1843, in *The Portable Karl Marx*, edited by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 115-124.
- <sup>65</sup> Gregory Paul, 'Why Belief in God is Not Innate', *The Wall Street Journal*, updated 2010 <<http://online.wsj.com/article/.html>> [accessed 10 April 2010].
- <sup>66</sup> Wilson, p. 107.
- <sup>67</sup> Matthew 20: 23, p. 1573.
- <sup>68</sup> This view of Christianity as a religion offering solace for the oppressed, but being hijacked by a ruling class, is also found in regard to nineteenth century American slavery; particularly in the work of escaped slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818-1895):

It is because I love this religion [Christianity] that I hate ...the soul-destroying religion that exists in the southern states of America. It is because I regard the one as good, and pure, and holy, that I cannot but regard the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. Loving the one I must hate the other.

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855 (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 311.

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- <sup>69</sup> Carlyle, p. 54.
- <sup>70</sup> Carl Woodring, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>71</sup> Paul Schlicke, 'Introduction', in *Hard Times*, 1854, by Charles Dickens (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. vii.
- <sup>72</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words*, 1850, in 'Hard Times: Fancy as Practice', by Christopher Barnes, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 34 (2004), 233-258.
- <sup>73</sup> John Harrison, 'Dickens' Literary Architecture: Patterns of Ideas and Imagery in *Hard Times*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 36.2 (2000), 115-138.
- <sup>74</sup> Barnes, 233-258.
- <sup>75</sup> Valerie L. Wainwright, 'On Goods, Virtues, and *Hard Times*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 26 (1998), pp. 169-186.
- <sup>76</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 91-92.
- <sup>77</sup> Tamara Ketabquian, 'Melancholy Mad Elephants: Affect and the Animal Machine in *Hard Times*', *Victorian Studies*, 45.4 (2003), p. 649.
- <sup>78</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 29.
- <sup>79</sup> Lewis Horne, 'Hope and Memory in *Hard Times*', *Dickensian*, 75.3 (1979), 167-174.
- <sup>80</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 83.
- <sup>81</sup> Gallagher, pp. 62-63.
- <sup>82</sup> Gallagher, p. 63.
- <sup>83</sup> Eric P. Levy, 'Dickens' Pathology of Time in *Hard Times*', *Philological Quarterly*, 74.2 (1995), pp. 189-207.
- <sup>84</sup> Levy, pp. 189-207.
- <sup>85</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667 (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 3.
- <sup>86</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 146.
- <sup>87</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 147.
- <sup>88</sup> Dante Aligheri, *Inferno*, c1308-1314 (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).
- <sup>89</sup> Susan Colon, 'Dickens' *Hard Times* and Dante's *Inferno*', *The Explicator*, 65.1 (2006), 31.
- <sup>90</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 148.
- <sup>91</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 148.
- <sup>92</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 148.
- <sup>93</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 148.
- <sup>94</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 91.
- <sup>95</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 83.
- <sup>96</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 3.
- <sup>97</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 2.
- <sup>98</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 3.
- <sup>99</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 11.
- <sup>100</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 4.
- <sup>101</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 6.
- <sup>102</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 6.
- <sup>103</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 6.
- <sup>104</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 7.
- <sup>105</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 7.
- <sup>106</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 7-8.
- <sup>107</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 11.
- <sup>108</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 12-13.
- <sup>109</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 53.
- <sup>110</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 46.
- <sup>111</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 24-25.
- <sup>112</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 22.
- <sup>113</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 23.
- <sup>114</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 23.
- <sup>115</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 16.
- <sup>116</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 287.
- <sup>117</sup> Colon, p. 31.
- <sup>118</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 287.

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- <sup>119</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 289.
- <sup>120</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 295.
- <sup>121</sup> Nelson, p. 1.
- <sup>122</sup> John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 337.
- <sup>123</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1793, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 40.
- <sup>124</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 18.
- <sup>125</sup> Barry Stiltner, 'Hard Times: The Disciplinary City', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 30 (2001), 193-215.
- <sup>126</sup> Michael Hollington, 'Physiognomy in *Hard Times*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 9.2 (1992), 58-66.
- <sup>127</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 18.
- <sup>128</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 18.
- <sup>129</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 18.
- <sup>130</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 19.
- <sup>131</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 19.
- <sup>132</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>133</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 20.
- <sup>134</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 20.
- <sup>135</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 348.
- <sup>136</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 348.
- <sup>137</sup> Jackie Shead, 'A Ring of Authenticity? *Hard Times* and Circus', *The English Review*, 15.4 (2005), 31.
- <sup>138</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 83.
- <sup>139</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 84.
- <sup>140</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 84.
- <sup>141</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 105.
- <sup>142</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 363.
- <sup>143</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 363.
- <sup>144</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 363.
- <sup>145</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 363.
- <sup>146</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 364.
- <sup>147</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 365.
- <sup>148</sup> J. S. Shrimpton, 'Hard Times: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>149</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 158.
- <sup>150</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 153.
- <sup>151</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 153.
- <sup>152</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755 (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 20.
- <sup>153</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 153.
- <sup>154</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 383.
- <sup>155</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 384.
- <sup>156</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 395-396.
- <sup>157</sup> Leona Toker, 'Hard Times and a Critique of Utopia: A Typological Study', *Narrative*, 4.3 (1996), 218-234.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ‘SCARPED CLIFF AND QUARRIED STONE’

‘So careful of the type’? but no.  
 From scarped cliff and quarried stone  
 She cries, ‘A thousand types are gone:  
 I care for nothing, all shall go...’<sup>1</sup>

Although wildflowers and the jubilee of life had sung to Wordsworth, in spite of his own losses, a vision of nature as a nurturing and protective ‘Mother’, others became less optimistic about the benevolence of nature. What Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) called the ‘scarped cliff and quarried stone’ of early nineteenth century geological excavations, digging free the mounting evidence of long perished organisms, cried out with a new vision; one of nature caring for nothing but the purposeless eventual destruction of all things.

Tennyson’s views conflicted sharply with views of nature as benevolently designed. These views were beginning to haunt the Victorian era throughout the 1830s and 1840s, just as the term ‘scientist’ was beginning to replace the antiquated term ‘natural philosopher’, and Tennyson is one of the most personal spokespersons of the doubt they ignited. Tennyson does not necessarily pursue a central argument through a single over-arching thought experiment, but rather writes in a Wordsworthian stream-of-consciousness style reflecting how the mind actually operates in the moment; he describes myriad shifting, wandering thoughts and thought experiments as they occur. As such, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1849) is less an intentional engagement in contemporary public debates than it is a private and therapeutic working through of existential issues in response to the death of a friend. Nevertheless, because Tennyson viewed some of those existential issues as exacerbated by the new science, Tennyson’s micro thought experiments contributed to contemporary public debates surrounding the ramifications of science. An investigation of the limits of language in Tennyson’s work will provide some insight into how these limits influenced religion in response to science.

The role of the limits of language in assisting the sense of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science, will be explored through this chapter with reference to the effect of emerging geological and biological challenges to the view of nature as benevolent and divine. In particular, this chapter juxtaposes

an examination of Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) *The Principles of Geology* (1830-1833) as the exemplar of developments in geology that laid the foundation for the undermining of natural theology, with an analysis of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1851); a response to the former as triggered by personal tragedy, and which examines philosophical questions surrounding the source of moral and existential value in a universe that is not described in terms of divine design, purpose, and order.

***'Those dreadful hammers!'***

If there is a significant moment which could be said to be a 'beginning' of the 'revolution' against natural theology and biblical creationism as explanations of the world, it may be said to be 1830. This was the year that saw the first volume of *The Principles of Geology*, popularising the notion that the earth's antiquity was far greater than Archbishop Ussher's literal reading of 'Genesis' had allowed. Colin A. Ronan writes that the most prominent reaction to this work's publication was one of 'sensation'.<sup>2</sup> But Michael Tornko urges caution against hyperbole in addressing its impact on religion: 'While geological texts, preeminently *The Principles of Geology*, did influence religious sentiment, reading their impact only as disastrously negative reflects a post-Darwinian vantage point'.<sup>3</sup> Tornko adds that it is possible to '... view Lyell and Tennyson as engaged in similar, not contradictory, projects that revise Paleyan natural theology'.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, neither Lyell's nor Tennyson's work can be simplified as bomb-shells flung in a war between science and religion; both criticise aspects of religion in their time with the objective of reforming religion. But for Lyell, among those aspects targeted for criticism were a literal reading of Genesis; as A. N. Wilson notes, it was Lyell who '...really laid the foundation for the destruction of 'creationist' thought in Britain, America, and Northern Europe'.<sup>5</sup> Wilson's point is valid not least because, for Lyell, geology extended over what would later be considered paleontology: 'Geology is the science which investigates the successive changes that have taken place in the organic and inorganic kingdoms of nature'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, early evolutionary theories regarding the 'organic' kingdoms fell within Lyell's domain. It was geology that John Ruskin (1819-1900) lamented: 'If only the geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence

of the Bible verses'.<sup>7</sup> But although Lyell's work affected natural theology and literal readings of the Bible, there has not yet been an investigation of how Lyell's responses to his opponents in *The Principles of Geology* suggest the role of the limits of language in describing the world without design.

Of the two camps that rose to explain such peculiarities as the marine fossils that showed mountain ranges to have once been ocean floors, or deserts to be ancient sea beds, Lyell espoused James Hutton's (1726-1797) Uniformitarianism, in opposition to Georges Cuvier's (1769-1832) Catastrophism. Cuvier's *A Discourse on the Revolutions of the Surface of the Globe* (1831)<sup>8</sup> had contended that the geological past was formed by paroxysmal, catastrophic events; an idea which British natural theologians William Buckland (1784-1856) and Robert Jameson (1774-1854) championed as more commensurate with natural theology and young earth creationism. But Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* (1795) viewed the geological past to be formed instead by gradual, linear, uniform change, or 'deep-time' reaching back far further than a strict reading of 'Genesis' allowed.<sup>9</sup> Hutton's Uniformitarianism was premised upon the inductive inference that nature's laws are uniform, and therefore will be the same in the future as they were in the past; and Hutton is attributed with rephrasing this as: 'the present is the key to the past'.<sup>10</sup> By inferring that processes now present were also operating in the past, the earth's history could be known; and this principle would become the primary principle of all historical sciences, including evolution. Although Stephen Jay Gould argued in 1965 that Uniformitarianism was unnecessary, as it unreasonably restricts the geological past to the conditions of the geological present and rules out past catastrophes *a priori*,<sup>11</sup> Derek Ager more recently wrote that:

...geologists do not deny Uniformitarianism in its true sense, that is to say, of interpreting the past by means of the processes that are seen going on at the present day, so long as we remember that the periodic catastrophe is one of those processes.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, Lyell is still regarded as the father of geology.

Lyell's assertion of the value of geology captures precisely John Ruskin's problem: 'By these researches into the state of the earth and its inhabitants at former periods, we acquire a more perfect knowledge of its present condition, and

more comprehensive views concerning the laws now governing its animate and inanimate productions'.<sup>13</sup> The inevitable inference from past to present establishes a continuum where nature does not stop simply because humanity is here, already decentring human importance. Lyell attributes Catastrophism to a form of superstition stemming from ancient conceptions of time as cyclical. He cites the mythology of Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks, and the Celtic Druids, who all held the world's history to be characterised by cycles of creation and destruction, variously speaking of global conflagrations or global deluges.<sup>14</sup> Lyell explains such accounts as the result of reasonable, if mistaken, inferences:

The marks of former convulsions on every part of the surface of our planet are obvious and striking... it seems natural that the mind should come to the conclusion... [that there are] alternate periods of repose and disorder... Floods and volcanic eruptions, the agency of water and fire... are so peculiarly calculated to inspire a lasting terror, and are so often fatal in their consequences to great multitudes of people, that it scarcely requires the passion for the marvellous... to augment them into general cataclysms and conflagrations.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, in ancient periods the limits of language in apprehending the scope of the world might very well support an interpretation of the destruction of their local region as that of the entire world; as for them, that region *is* their entire world. Lyell cites Alexander von Humboldt's (1769-1859) example of Cumana, rocked by an earthquake in 1766: "The Indians... celebrated... by festivals and dancing, the destruction of the world and the approaching epoch of its regeneration".<sup>16</sup> Here, *The Principles of Geology* can almost be said to be pioneering the concept of conceptual relativity, with the idea that the mind does not simply reflect the world, but in some sense constructs it through its limitations. Certainly, nineteenth century scientists did not escape the limits of language either. John Playfair (1748-1819) was one scientist who had praised Hutton's linear conception of time, with its compatibility with progress-oriented grand narratives, as being more in line with '...the dignity of Nature and the wisdom of its Author'.<sup>17</sup> But the foundation that Lyell lays for 'the destruction of 'creationist' thought' is a thorough-going explanation of young-earth geology as the product of what are, in effect, the limits of language in the context of *earlier*

societies, which had been inherited by the present. Lyell continues that in the world's mythologies, the catastrophes were of course attributed to the gods:

...the Egyptians believed the world to be subject to occasional conflagrations and deluges, whereby the gods arrested the career of human wickedness, and purified the earth from guilt. After each regeneration, mankind were in a state of virtue and happiness, from which they gradually degenerated again into vice and immorality.<sup>18</sup>

The Stoics adopted this system, including '...the doctrine of the gradual debasement of man from a state of innocence'.<sup>19</sup> Lyell explains: 'In a rude state of society, all great calamities are regarded by the people, as judgements of God on the wickedness of man';<sup>20</sup> and he cites a contemporary example: '...the priests persuaded a large part of the population of Chile... that the great earthquake of 1822 was a sign of the wrath of heaven for the great political revolution just then consummated in South America'.<sup>21</sup> Here, the appeal to the 'wrath of heaven' even becomes a tool for political domination. On this point, Lyell cites many examples from world mythology, whereby the gods are variously described as wrathful, jealous, and vengeful. The limits of language in describing phenomena without design affects even the interpretations of disasters; and with disasters being attributed to divine intent they are likely be viewed as provoked by human misdeeds that require atonement. The world becomes something not only divinely designed, but divinely – and severely – managed. The parallel to Genesis, and indeed the Old Testament in general, becomes obvious. Uniformitarian inference from the present, opting for the simplest explanation rather than a grand, complicated cosmic drama, is the scientific thing to do: 'The philosopher at last becomes convinced of the undeviating uniformity of secondary causes... and often rejects the fabulous tales of former ages...'.<sup>22</sup>

Lyell investigates and seeks to correct the misapprehensions that led to such widespread '...belief in want of conformity in the physical constitution of the earth, in ancient and modern times', asserting that 'every circumstance which could have influenced their minds and given an undue bias to their opinions deserves particular attention'.<sup>23</sup> Lyell appreciates too well the magnitude of error that is risked through the limits of language, and he conveys this error in a thought experiment:

Let us imagine... that Champollion, and the French and Tuscan literati now engaged in exploring the antiquities of Egypt, had visited that country with a firm belief that the banks of the Nile were never peopled by the human race before the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that their faith in this dogma was as difficult to shake as the opinion of our ancestors... it is easy to perceive what extravagant systems they would frame... to account for the monuments discovered in Egypt. The sight of the pyramids, obelisks, colossal statues, and ruined temples, would fill them with such astonishment, that for a time they would be as men spell-bound – wholly incapacitated to reason with sobriety. They might incline at first to refer the construction of such stupendous works to some superhuman powers of a primeval world.<sup>24</sup>

Again, it is the limits of language in describing the ‘pyramids, obelisks, colossal statues, and ruined temples’ that invoke ‘astonishment’, for the hypothetical persons are ‘incapacitated to reason’ about them; and their natural recourse is to instead describe them in terms of ‘superhuman powers’ of design. But Lyell then supposes that some ‘...vast repository of mummies’<sup>25</sup> is discovered, undeceiving the antiquarians but leaving non-eye-witnesses to hear it second hand, and to engage in various mental contortions in order to reconcile their beliefs with the facts. Lyell goes on to imagine the form those contortions might take, including:

They [the mummies] may have been generated by some *plastic virtue* residing in the interior of the earth, or they may be abortions of nature produced by her incipient efforts in the work of creation. For if deformed beings are sometimes born even now, when the scheme of the universe is fully developed, many more may have been ‘sent before their time, scarce half made up’, when the planet itself was in the embryo state.<sup>26</sup>

Lyell adds: ‘These speculations... would not fail to attract many zealous votaries, for they would relieve men from the painful necessity of renouncing preconceived opinions’.<sup>27</sup> Lyell might not be wrong; he did eventually come to encounter contemporary geologists like Philip Gosse (1810-1888), an otherwise eminently respectable scientist who is unfortunately now best known for opposing Lyell with his ‘Omphalos Theory’, stating that: ‘...the object created [a given geological formation] bore false witness to past processes, which had never taken place’.<sup>28</sup> God had created the earth recently, but had simply created it with the

*appearance* of great antiquity. For Lyell, such violations of the principle of parsimony could not be excused.

Lyell outlines another barrier to science in a thought experiment that conveys the limits of language in describing geological deep-time: ‘If we could behold in one view all the volcanic cones thrown up in Iceland, Italy, Sicily... and imagine that all these events had happened in one year, we must form most exalted ideas...’.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, language did not evolve to describe vast scales of time, and the result is such a magnitude of error in describing the earth’s scars that those scars become laden with superstition. This is not least because shorter timescales diminish the capacity of probability theory to explain bizarre coincidences, whether in the geological past or in life, and so they amplify the need to explain those coincidences in terms of ‘...a suspicion of the preternatural...’.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Lyell conjures yet another thought experiment that demonstrates the limits of language in describing subterranean processes that occur beyond everyday observation:

...an amphibious being, who should possess our faculties, would still more easily arrive at sound theoretical opinions in geology, since he might behold... the decomposition of rocks in the atmosphere, and the transportation of matter by running water... Yet, even with these advantages, he would be liable to fall into the greatest errors when endeavouring to reason on rocks of subterranean origin... and would therefore be in danger of attributing them, wherever they are upraised to view, to some ‘primeval state of nature’.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Lyell appears to understand the importance of relative environments in shaping and limiting any given species’ ability to describe foreign environments. Humans developed to understand a land-based environment, and this development limits individuals in describing the geological past, and leads to assumptions of Catastrophism and design; assumptions that Lyell goes on to attempt to thoroughly demolish in succeeding chapters.

Lyell uses the geographical distribution of plants and animals to support his argument, but he takes exception to evolutionary theories of his time. He repudiates Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s (1744-1829) theory of evolution by inheritance of acquired characteristics, branding such theories to be ‘strange

conclusions' that were 'defective in evidence' and 'fallacious in reasoning'.<sup>32</sup> Modern science and history deems Lamarck right about evolution and wrong about the mechanism, yet given the paucity of evidence for evolution at the time, Lyell can be forgiven for finding fault. However, despite the scarcity of evidence, the impact of evolutionary theories on public discourse was already profound. Robert Chambers' (1802-1871) *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) argued for the occurrence of evolution, and was initially published anonymously to avoid the inevitable furore. As James Secord comments:

The book seemed to emanate from the very centre of English life. Leading aristocrats, members of Parliament, and famous men of science were suggested as the author. As novelist and politician Benjamin Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah, *Vestiges* 'is convulsing the world, anonymous' and from a publisher he had never heard of.<sup>33</sup>

A rather sensationalist review in *The Examiner* described *The Vestiges* as 'the first attempt that has been made to connect the natural sciences into a history of creation'.<sup>34</sup> But Chambers was not a scientist and his work was not original. Chambers, a layman who had read the older evolutionary theories of Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), is put firmly in his place by Lyell, who said of *The Vestiges* that it '...made the English public familiar with the leading views of Lamarck on transmutation and progression, but brought no new facts or original lines of argument to support these views'.<sup>35</sup>

Scientifically, *The Vestiges* was dismissed; yet in terms of public influence it was another matter entirely. Despite the fact that Chambers was fiercely deist by theology, the public reaction to *The Vestiges* reveals the fears of the atheistic consequences of evolutionary theories – of any kind – in British society at this time:

Evolutionary narratives from an older classical tradition had been reshaped in the salons of enlightened Paris into materialist philosophical works.... In Britain, these books were blamed for the bloody horrors of the French Revolution, and any account that could be read as linking matter with mind through material causes became suspect. For fifty years after the Terror, such books were associated with revolutionary atheists, pornographers, radical medical men, and dissolute foreigners.<sup>36</sup>

Geology had already invaded the private sanctuaries of natural theological discourse, and now biology's shadow was beginning to darken all doors. According to the discourse of natural theology, if human beings are not the product of design, then they might as well become like Bitzer after all, reducing values to the Hobbesian state of murderous self-interest. Adam Sedgewick's (1785-1873) remark in a letter to Lyell remains emblematic of the dread that was felt:

If *The Vestiges* be true, the labours of sober induction are in vain; religion is a lie; human law is a mass of folly, and a base injustice; morality is moonshine; our labours for the black people of Africa were works of madmen; and man and woman are only better beasts!<sup>37</sup>

In this reaction, knowledge has no legitimate basis or purpose, religion and morality are pretensions of a primitive and ignorant age, and the outlawing of the slavery – a hard-won struggle still close within recent memory – were for nothing; all because humans had been identified as part of the animal kingdom.

But with evidence for evolution so thin at this time, Lyell instead favoured the view that species developed in one area, spread, and eventually became extinct to give way to new species: ‘...the species existing at any particular period must, in the course of ages, become extinct one after the other’.<sup>38</sup> He quotes Buffon: ““They must die out... because Time fights against them””.<sup>39</sup> Although evolution at this time hovered on the fringes of scientific consensus, the idea of all species staring down the barrel of Time had already emerged as a key explanation for the mass graves of ancient life forms unveiled by geological excavations. Michael Tornko may very well ameliorate a simplistic view of conflict between science and religion. Nevertheless, Sedgewick's lament for science, religion, law, morality, the abolition of slavery, and the progress of civilisation in the face of eventual, inevitable demise – symptomatic as it is of the limits of language in describing moral and existential value without design – adroitly captures how geologists and early evolutionary theorists raised the existential question of the *purpose* of it all.

**“The stars”, she whispers, “blindly run...”**

Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* responds to the work of Lyell and early evolutionary theorists, becoming the epitome of the Victorian ‘crisis of faith’ in literature. John Morton argues that ‘...journalism and literature written during the Great War shows that he [Tennyson] retained far more influence than one might have thought throughout the years 1914-1918’.<sup>40</sup> Wim Tigges’ declaration is typical of the place accorded to Tennyson: ‘Whatever is understood by ‘Victorianism’, one thing about it is certain: that Alfred, Lord Tennyson has always been regarded as its embodiment’.<sup>41</sup> John Batchelor has made a poignant point regarding Tennyson’s enduring significance:

In 1862, soon after the death of her beloved Prince Consort, Queen Victoria received Tennyson and said to him, ‘Next to the Bible, *In Memoriam* is my comfort’. This famous remark reminds us of what we are looking at when we read *In Memoriam*: a great national monument which spoke centrally to the age about faith, love, and bereavement.<sup>42</sup>

The perception that Tennyson was the voice of his generation was articulated by George Eliot (1819-1880):

He, at least, while belonging emphatically to his own age, while giving a voice to the struggles and the far-reaching thoughts of this nineteenth century, has those supreme artistic qualities which must make him a poet for all ages. As long as the English language is spoken, the word music of Tennyson must charm the ear; and when English has become a dead language, his wonderful concentration of thought into luminous speech, the exquisite pictures in which he has blended all the hues of reflection, feeling, and fancy, will cause him to be read as we read Homer, Pindar, and Horace.<sup>43</sup>

That Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* was indicative of the minds of many in the Victorian period is generally accepted by literary critics, while scholars still acknowledge A. C. Bradley’s pertinent point:

It is a fashion at present to ascribe the great popularity of *In Memoriam* entirely to the ‘teaching’ contained in it... This is equivalent to an assertion that, if the so-called substance of the poem had been presented in common prose, the work would have gained the same hold upon the mass of educated readers that is now possessed by the

poem itself. ...he ['the ordinary reader'] would never have taken *In Memoriam* to his heart if its consoling or uplifting thoughts had not also touched his fancy and sung in his ears.<sup>44</sup>

Yet while this might attest to the power of poetry to deliver 'teaching' through thought experiment, the teaching itself is still the poem's *raison d'être*, as Bradley concedes: 'It is true, however, that he ['the ordinary reader'] dwells upon these thoughts, and that the poem is often valued by him for its bearing upon his own life'.<sup>45</sup>

Much of the renewed attention *In Memoriam* received in the late twentieth century focuses on the doubt over theistic or religious doctrines caused by the suffering and apparent absence of deity in nature, and the loss of purpose and hope for the future, triggered by the death of Tennyson's friend, Arthur Hallam. John Boyd succinctly traces the movement of the poem:

The movement of the speaker's development with respect to [the question of individual immortality] is from confidence to anxiety, to precarious satisfaction, back to confidence, to doubt, to ecstatic certainty, and back to confidence broken by a moment of doubt, quickly dispelled.<sup>46</sup>

Julian Lamb, seeking to analyse the poem itself as a pivotal point in the poet's life rather than as a consequence thereof (as per traditional biography), views *In Memoriam* as an emotional event: 'This is not a rational argument for faith, but the struggle of a wandering mind, the drama of an evolving soul searching for meaning'.<sup>47</sup> This has led to a view in the work of literary critics that the fluctuation of hope and despair in the poem disproves the notion that science only ever led to despair for faith; Michael Tornko writes:

Redefined and negotiated by scientists, theologians, and poets, the terms of belief about immortality, the supernatural, as well as the relation between body and soul, did change significantly in the nineteenth century, but the move of Victorian society and literature, at least in the prominent works of Lyell and Tennyson, was not, as in David Dean's paraphrase of George Meredith, simply from 'geology to despair'.<sup>48</sup>

*In Memoriam* is certainly far more complex than 'geology to despair'. But there has not yet been an analysis of *In Memoriam* in terms of the effect of the limits of

language on its philosophical wanderings. However, *In Memoriam* was written over a period of seventeen years, and the Prologue was written with the Epilogue after the body itself. Therefore, a decision must be made about whether to analyse *In Memoriam* as a ‘product’ or as a ‘process’. This analysis investigates *In Memoriam* as a stream-of-consciousness of various micro thought experiments, and so the work will be viewed a process, and the Prologue will be discussed after the body as the end of Tennyson’s seventeen year long thought process.

At first, faith in immortality is presented in the past-tense: ‘I held it truth, with him who sings/ To one clear harp in divers tones,/ That men may rise on stepping stones/ Of their dead selves to higher things’.<sup>49</sup> Doubt about this conclusion is presented through poignant self-questioning: ‘But who shall so forecast the years/ And find in loss a gain to match? Or reach a hand thro’ time to catch/ The far-off interest of tears?’<sup>50</sup> The questioning seems directed against the solipsism that says God, nature, or the universe *owes* humanity compensation for losses such as death. To speak of ‘gain’ and of collecting ‘interest’ seems to mock the common idea of expecting such compensation as being akin to believing that the universe is a just and fair economic system. If nineteenth century discourse had prioritised ‘progress’, emphasising goals, teleology and purpose in the context of design, then the limits of language that emerged from this discourse would certainly have rendered it difficult to define happiness *without* goals, teleology and purpose. In other terms, it would be difficult to describe the universe in any manner other than as a just and fair economic system that ultimately rewards goal achievement and compensates loss. It can be also be argued that such a discourse is the source of both secular and religious grand narratives, which attempt to imagine a valued vision of the future not just as a creative act, but as a discovered *fact* regarding the natural or inevitable *purpose* of history. Tennyson’s doubts, therefore, may be calamitous precisely because they clash so mightily against the kind of vision of the world demanded by the limits of language in the Victorian cultural context.

Tennyson acknowledges, through a thought experiment, that whatever the case with an afterlife or with Hallam’s fate, it is better to cherish the memory of love than to regret ever loving at all:

Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,  
To dance with death, to beat the ground,

Than that the victor Hours should scorn  
 The long result of love, and boast,  
 'Behold the man that loved and lost,  
 But all he was is overworn'.<sup>51</sup>

This could be the only consolation for the death of a loved one if there is no afterlife. At first it appears that it is this kind of consolation that *In Memoriam* is accepting, content to place the sense of meaning in this world rather than the next, but this view is fleeting.

*In Memoriam* shifts from view to view, with: '...sporadic bouts of scepticism and faith'.<sup>52</sup> But it must be remembered that its many individual parts were only collated after they were written. As Gerald L. Bruns contends, this should not be seen as a problem:

Such an ideal (homogeneity) tends to persuade us that the poet's inability (or reluctance) to locate a certain or discernible centre in the midst of disorder is a form of aesthetic failure; or, conversely (and worse), it may compel us to break up our experience of reading the poem into explanations of the poem's 'hidden' or 'unnoticed' or 'complex' wholeness. I begin instead with the assumption that there is nothing wrong with Tennyson's poem or with Tennyson's mind.<sup>53</sup>

Today, it should be added that too much order or homogeneity would be antithetical to the very struggles surrounding disorder that this work conveys; in this case, it is *too much* order that would be 'aesthetic failure'.

Tennyson personifies his 'Sorrow'<sup>54</sup> as a 'Priestess in the vaults of Death',<sup>55</sup> a spectre who tells him that everything is pointless, whispering of the order of nature from what the third poem labels her 'lying lip':<sup>56</sup>

'The stars', she whispers, 'blindly run;  
 A web is wov'n across the sky;  
 From out waste places comes a cry,  
 And murmurs from the dying sun:

'And all the phantom, Nature, stands-  
 With all the music in her tone  
 A hollow echo of my own,-  
 A hollow form with empty hands'.<sup>57</sup>

Anna Henchman has adroitly observed the influence of Tennyson's interest in astronomy, his knowledge of the nebular hypothesis, and: '...the hypothesis'

darkest implication: solar and stellar decay'.<sup>58</sup> Here, the notion that Nature's 'tone' is a 'hollow echo' of Sorrow's own, simply because the stars 'blindly run' and decay, can be illuminated in the light of the discourse oriented around goals, teleology, and purpose. Without such a discourse, it may be difficult to grasp why the stars blindly running should produce sorrow; but with such a discourse, it is difficult to grasp why they should not. The poem questions if this '...thing so blind...',<sup>59</sup> the blind purposelessness of nature, should be embraced as a '...natural good...',<sup>60</sup> or should be crushed '...upon the threshold of the mind'.<sup>61</sup> The 'threshold of the mind' renders such a description of nature too difficult to grasp, raising the suggestion that even if it is true, it should be suppressed. The limits of language in describing a world without design, or the limits of describing it without an objective purpose that justifies suffering and loss, returns in even greater force.

The limits of describing a world without design and purpose resonates into the poem's contemplation of a thought experiment that envisages loss being common to humanity, and therefore that no individual is alone in their struggle. It is an argument Tennyson rejects: 'That loss is common would not make/ My own less bitter, rather more:/ Too common! Never morning wore/ To evening, but some heart did break'.<sup>62</sup> Tennyson counters with his own series of thought experiments exploring just how comforting it is to point out that '...loss is common to the race'.<sup>63</sup> He addresses a nameless father: 'Who pledgest now thy gallant son;/ A shot, ere half thy draught be done,/ Hath still'd the life that beat from thee'.<sup>64</sup> He points to a nameless mother: '...praying God will save/ Thy sailor, - while thy head is bow'd,/ His heavy-shotted hammock-shroud/ Drops in his vast and wandering grave'.<sup>65</sup> He turns to a nameless maiden, thinking of a night to be spent with her lover: 'And, even when she turn'd, the curse/ Had fallen, and her future Lord/ Was drown'd in passing thro' the ford,/ Or kill'd in falling from his horse'.<sup>66</sup> That death is the 'common' order of nature renders death worse, not better; it simply renders the problem global rather than merely personal. It creates an entire existential crisis at the absurdity and meaninglessness of it all: 'O what to her shall be the end?/ And what to me remains of good?/ To her, perpetual maidenhood,/ And unto me no second friend'.<sup>67</sup> Once again, it is difficult to speak of even random events without reference to 'ends' and resultant 'goods', and it is certainly difficult to be *content* without speaking without those

references; and as such, the mind finds it difficult to form a concept of not having an 'end' or purpose to all things. Death, destroying the notion of reaching any positive 'end', becomes not just the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of the Victorian ideal of 'progress', but of existential value. Both the otherworldly consolation of an afterlife, and the this-worldly consolation that it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all, are forgotten in the purposelessness of it all.

The ninth poem exhibits the imagery of peaceful seas and journeys: 'Fair ship, that from the Italian shore/ Sailest the placid ocean-plains/ With my lost Arthur's loved remains,/ Spread full thy wings, and waft him o'er'.<sup>68</sup> The sea represents the movement of life and death, Tennyson wishing for a peaceful journey therein with fair and placid weather: 'Sphere all your lights around, above;/ Sleep, gentle heavens, before the prow;/ Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,...'.<sup>69</sup> However, this is hardly a relief from sorrow: 'An awful thought, a life removed,/ The human-hearted man I loved,/ a Spirit, not a breathing voice'.<sup>70</sup> It seems that even the consolation that Hallam still exists in spirit-form is not enough; Tennyson still exhibits a need to describe Hallam in human-form, 'human-hearted', and with a 'breathing voice'; if the limits of language determine a conclusion of design and purpose, it is design and purpose in this world. The hope for immortality falters here, even if it is the preferable view. It is inconceivable that Hallam is truly gone, even in human-form, speculating on how he would react if Hallam were to suddenly return: 'And I perceived no touch of change,/ No hint of death in all his frame,/ But found him all in all the same,/ I should not feel it to be strange'.<sup>71</sup> Hallam alive in human-form still seems more normal, more real, than Hallam dead, in spirit-form or not.

Yet Tennyson's yearning for immortality is asserted more poignantly as science itself, as the primary tool for describing the order of nature, enters the poem (alongside politics), where it is depicted as a fairly trivial endeavour. *In Memoriam* conjures voices of those responding to Tennyson's song of grief, the third voice described as wrathful:

A third is wroth: 'Is this an hour  
For private sorrow's barren song,  
When more and more the people throng  
The chairs and thrones of civil power?

‘A time to sicken and to swoon  
 When Science reaches forth her arms  
 To feel from world to world, and charms  
 Her secret from the latest moon?’<sup>72</sup>

*In Memoriam* expresses almost a bitter contempt for this message: ‘Behold, ye speak an idle thing:/ Ye never knew the sacred dust:/ I do but sing because I must,/ And pipe but as the linnets sing’.<sup>73</sup> To assert that the wrathful man ‘never knew the sacred dust’ – an image which could refer to Hallam in particular, or love in general – suggests that such a person has never known true grief, or true religious experience in response to it. Grief is also described as being in need of an outlet as naturally as the linnets must sing, and in the face of this grief, politics and science are described as ‘idle’, emphasising the need to describe the world as more than what science could possibly offer.

It can be argued that *In Memoriam* is as much about grieving the loss of faith in a literal God as it is about mourning Hallam’s death, lamenting as it does the ‘...faithless coldness of the times’<sup>74</sup>. Tennyson and Hallam are initially described together, as are faith and reason, ‘...making one music...’, before being faced with the Argument from Evil, or the presence of suffering casting doubt on the immortality of the soul and sense of purpose demanded by the limits of language: ‘The path by which we twain did go,/ Which led by tracts that pleased us well...’<sup>75</sup> and ‘...we with singing cheer’d the way...’.<sup>76</sup> Yet the spectre of autumn, that enduring poetic symbol of dying, enters: ‘But where the path we walk’d began/ To slant the fifth autumnal slope,/ As we descended following Hope,/ There sat the Shadow fear’d of man’.<sup>77</sup> They both followed ‘Hope’, yet in the advance of life and experience they walked into the Argument from Evil as given by reason, ‘the Shadow fear’d of man’. Tennyson’s fear that ‘...somewhere in the waste/ The Shadow sits and waits for me’,<sup>78</sup> then, reads like an expression of the fear that hope will lose the argument.

The description of the Shadow: ‘cloak’d from head to foot,/ Who keeps the keys of all the creeds,...’<sup>79</sup> then could be seen as reason holding the answer to what is true; an idea depicted as dangerous, leading to hope’s lament for what might have been:

...Looking back to whence I came  
 Or on to where the pathway leads;

And crying, how changed from where it ran  
 Thro' lands where no a leaf was dumb;  
 But all the lavish hills would hum  
 The murmur of a happy Pan:...

...And many an old philosophy  
 On Argive heights divinely sang...<sup>80</sup>

True to the stream-of-consciousness form, Tennyson is attempting to find resolution through an internal dialectic: 'And was the day of my delight/ As pure and perfect as I say? ...And is it that the haze of grief/ Makes former gladness loom so great?'<sup>81</sup> Perhaps Tennyson is exaggerating the past; or, that past is only fully appreciated when it is gone: 'Or that the past will always win/ A glory from its being far;/ And orb into the perfect star/ We saw not, when we moved therein?'<sup>82</sup> The limits of language dictate that individuals cannot describe all that is good about the present, because the valuation of 'good' or 'bad' depends in part on a relative comparison with the future; a comparison with the 'end'.

The first Christmas arrives in the twenty-eighth poem to mark the passage of time: 'The time draws near the birth of Christ:/ The moon is hid; the night is still;/ The Christmas bells from hill to hill/ Answer each other in the mist'.<sup>83</sup> In explicitly spelling out the significance of Christmas as commemorating 'the birth of Christ', it can be noted that time in the poem is being marked by a symbol of new birth. But the moon, a symbol of dreams and imagination in contrast to the sun of waking day and reality, is hidden, delivering both the sense that Tennyson's dreams have clouded over, and that he is wallowing in the darkest of dark nights. The night is still, but there is a sense of melancholy to this particular stillness. The dark atmosphere of the night is sharply contrasted by the light Christmas cheer of the townspeople: 'Peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace,/ Peace and goodwill, to all mankind'.<sup>84</sup> The good cheer has an uneasy sense of being out of place in the dark night, but of course it is only out of place within Tennyson's own mind: 'This year I slept and woke with pain,...'.<sup>85</sup> It is as though the year gone has simply been a bad dream, and he is only now waking, only to find that it was real after all: '...I almost wished no more to wake,/ And that my hold on life would break/ Before I hear those bells again;...'.<sup>86</sup> This Christmas, the first after Hallam's death, is a thought experiment imagining the juxtaposition of good times with tragedy, and demonstrates how the comparison only intensifies

sorrow: 'They [the bells] bring me sorrow touch'd with joy,/ The merry merry bells of Yule'.<sup>87</sup>

***'The spirit does but mean the breath...'***

The question of whether there is such a thing as immortality, and what the nature of immortality could be, continues to vex. Tennyson's thought experiment here involves looking to the one place where a Christian might suppose such knowledge to be found: the story of Lazarus, risen from the dead in the Gospel of John. Tennyson's question is the same as Mary's: "'Where wert thou, brother, those four days?'"<sup>88</sup> The answer would surely throw light on the entire matter of the afterlife. Yet Tennyson notes: 'There lives no record of reply,/ ...Behold a man raised up by Christ!/ The rest remaineth unreveal'd;/ He told it not; or something seal'd/ The lips of that Evangelist'.<sup>89</sup> Christians are in the same position as all others, knowledge of mortality and immortality remaining deeply, agonisingly mysterious. Yet hope might remain in the limits of language at describing human life without immortality of the soul: 'My own dim life should teach me this,/ That life shall live forevermore,...'<sup>90</sup> The case is not that Tennyson simply wishes to believe in immortality; the case is that he cannot even describe his 'own dim life' without immortality, or without the language of enduring design.

The limits of language in describing human life without design, purpose, and immortality exacerbates the sheer need of design and immortality: '...Else earth is darkness at the core,/ And dust and ashes all that is;/ This round of green, this orb of flame,/ Fantastic beauty; such as lurks/ In some wild Poet, when he works/ Without a conscience or an aim'.<sup>91</sup> Without design, purpose, and immortality, nature might remain beautiful but it is formed 'without a conscience or an aim'; a very bad thing if the limits of language demand that nature *must* exhibit 'a conscience and an aim'. Without describing the world and the individual in terms of design, purpose, and immortality, individuals might as well surrender to the beast that is death: "'Twere best at once to sink to peace,/ Like birds the charming serpent draws,/ To drop head-foremost in the jaws/ Of vacant darkness and to cease'.<sup>92</sup>

This conclusion appears to be the entire point of the poem at this point regarding descriptions of nature lacking design, purpose, and immortality. That it

is the ‘cold faithlessness of the times’ in general that becomes the true target of the poem is never more evident than in the angst delivered against any description of nature that represents it as ungoverned by a literal God. There is defensiveness in the face of science: ‘Or, if we held the doctrine sound/ For life outliving heats of youth,/ Yet who would preach it as a truth/ To those that eddy round and round?’<sup>93</sup> If the scientists and philosophers of the ‘cold faithless’ times are ‘those that eddy round and round’, conjuring an image of individuals circling the sink-hole, then the essential defensiveness of the poem’s position can be seen. The poem enjoins the reader: ‘Hold thou the good: define it well:/ For fear divine Philosophy/ Should push beyond her mark, and be/ Procuress to the Lords of Hell’.<sup>94</sup> The fear here is reminiscent of Dickens’ war on scientism, speaking against philosophy pushing ‘beyond her mark’, taking unquantifiable values from the threshold of the describable and describing them in easily quantifiable terms.

*In Memoriam* here enters the fight to keep the realm of value under the authority of religion, and it is following this that some of the most renowned, and most quoted lines of the poem are launched against godless descriptions of nature. The description of the world demanded by the limits of language is apparent: ‘Oh yet we trust that somehow good/ Will be the final goal of ill’.<sup>95</sup> Here, Tennyson describes a just and fair universe in the teeth of any evidence to the contrary, a thought experiment in itself when attempting to compare it to reality:

That nothing walks with aimless feet  
That not one life shall be destroy’d  
Or cast as rubbish to the void  
When God hath made the pile complete

That not a worm is cloven in vain  
That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivell’d in a fruitless fire  
Or but subserves another’s gain.

Behold, we know not anything  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last – far off – at last, to all  
And every winter change to spring.<sup>96</sup>

Here, the limits of language, in describing a world without design, can also be seen to dictate that a description of the world without design is actually a description of ‘rubbish’. Instead, Tennyson clings to hope reminiscent of Pope’s

belief that there is a divine design after all, and that the mind is simply limited in perceiving the ultimate benevolent purpose of such things as worms ‘cloven in vain’, and moths ‘shrivell’d in a fruitless fire’, and where ‘good’ really is the ‘final result of ill’. But for Tennyson, this theodicy proves hollow in the face of real suffering: ‘So runs my dream: but what am I?/ An infant crying in the night:/ An infant crying for the light:/ And with no language but a cry’.<sup>97</sup> This is an example of *grief* at the threshold of the describable; an indescribable despair, at the opposite end of the spectrum from indescribable awe.

Here, there is the question of who exactly is the ‘I’ that is speaking. *In Memoriam* is certainly deeply personal, relating to Hallam’s death, to the point where some critics, including Christopher Craft, have focussed on that relationship and discussed homosexual love as the central force underpinning the poems.<sup>98</sup> However, critics have also widely regarded the ‘I’ to be ‘the voice of all humanity’: ‘Tennyson said firmly that it was to be viewed as “a poem, *not* an actual biography”, and that the “I” of the poem was sometimes to be regarded not as the poet, but as “the voice of the human race speaking through him”’<sup>99</sup>; an observation in which Batchelor concurs.<sup>100</sup> In his own words, Tennyson indeed said the poem was: ‘...rather the cry of the whole human race than mine’.<sup>101</sup> Of critics who deemphasise this point, Tornko comments:

While I certainly do not wish to deny the biographical importance of Tennyson’s grief for Hallam, critics have sometimes let this overshadow the public, argumentative nature of Tennyson’s published 1850 text...<sup>102</sup>

Irene Hsaio adds that it is precisely this ‘public’ quality that makes *In Memoriam* relevant to others: ‘...transferring the loss to the “human race” forcibly creating a sympathetic community by sacrificing the anonymised “I” in the site of the poem’.<sup>103</sup> *In Memoriam*, then, becomes a description of a global existential crisis caused by the limits of language in describing the world without design and purpose. This crisis of doubt, the unwelcome intruder, is shouting in the ear of not just Tennyson but all humanity, forever suggesting that faith, as an antidote to despair, might be merely a ‘dream’ born of the notion that suffering has reduced humanity to defenceless, inarticulate infants. Although Tennyson’s grief is personal, it is certainly far from idiosyncratic; the mixed blessing of a long life

includes that almost everyone will at some point experience what Tennyson is feeling, with increasingly likelihood as the years roll by.

Tennyson's next thought experiment attempts to imagine existential value existing in the world that individuals like Lyell are revealing, and fails. The difficulty of language in describing the world without design is exhibited through the argument between God and nature: 'Are God and Nature then at strife,/ That Nature lends such evil dreams?/ So careful of the type she seems,/ So careless of the single life'.<sup>104</sup> To even raise this question might betray the limits of language in describing nature as anything less than an intelligent and nurturing entity analogous to a benevolent human mind; for without this belief, *bewilderment* at the notion that nature might *not* be benevolent makes little sense. While this anthropomorphic description of nature can be attributed to the simple fact that *In Memoriam* is poetry, Susan Gliserman's research still convincingly suggests that Tennyson's language is very little different from standard science writing in his time:

More significant are imprecise but emotionally charged descriptions which become the focal point for important scientific controversies. Important examples of this charged language are the numerous verbal strategies used to make 'Nature' a conscious, protective force. These strategies had become such a pervasive and persuasive way to talk about function and purpose in biology that Geoffroy St. Hilaire found it necessary to counteract the language.<sup>105</sup>

Even when the idea of nature's benevolence is lost, nature's anthropomorphism, 'pervasive and persuasive' in the scientific community and lay public alike, is not. It is no mystery, then, that Tennyson's above question seems almost prophetic, anticipating the very issues that would later surround Darwinism as a description of nature lacking a literal God. Darwinian natural selection would indeed be 'careful of the type', while 'careless of the single life', carefully selecting individuals with positive traits for survival and reproduction while culling individuals without, the single life tried in the court of nature and, if found wanting, sentenced under its laws to the death penalty.

Part of Tennyson affirms meaning: 'That I, considering everywhere/ Her secret meaning in her deeds...'<sup>106</sup> If the 'I' is the 'whole of the human race', then it is all humanity that is unable to accept a world with no design, no 'secret

meaning'. Yet another part of Tennyson, or humanity, affirms existential nihilism in the wastefulness of nature revealed by early evolutionary theorists: 'And finding that of fifty seeds,/ she often brings but one to bear,/ I falter where I firmly trod,/ And falling with my weight of cares...' <sup>107</sup> The 'hope' that Tennyson, or humanity, followed before, is in trouble. It is a desperate hope, but nevertheless it seems to win: 'I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,/ and gather dust and chaff, and call/ To what I feel is Lord of all,/ And faintly trust the larger hope'. <sup>108</sup> All that Tennyson's thought experiment offers him at this point is the 'faint' hope that existential value exists in *spite* of what he knows.

The limits of language fling the poem into still darker ruminations, even reconsidering whether nature is truly 'careful' of anything: "'So careful of the type"? but no./ From scarp'd cliff and quarried stone/ She cries, "A thousand types are gone:/ I care for nothing, all shall go"' <sup>109</sup> Nature's personified voice, calling from the geologists' excavations, recalls mass extinction events of the past and combines it with Lyell's Uniformitarianism. The line "'I care for nothing"' is a statement of present natural law, which the principle of uniformity assumes will hold for the future: 'all shall go'. Humanity becomes just another species caught in a series of extinction events that do not cease simply because humans are here. It is all conveyed in a tone of almost bored indifference: "'Thou makest thine appeal to me:/ I bring to life, I bring to death:/ The spirit does but mean the breath:/ I know no more"' <sup>110</sup> The word 'spirit' does indeed derive from the Latin *spiritus*, which means 'breath', but it can be readily seen that a world-view in which 'spirit' means *nothing more* than 'breath' is a materialist world-view. The poem is suggesting that perhaps the endless course of creation and destruction, of bringing to life and bringing to death, could mean something in a non-materialist description of the world, but it means nothing in a materialist description of the world.

Can the advent of humankind really be so trivial in the grand scheme of things? The thought experiment commences as God and nature rage over this question: 'Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,/ Such splendid purpose in his eyes,/ Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,/ Who built Him fanes of fruitless prayer,...' <sup>111</sup> The description of humankind being 'fair' and with 'such splendid purpose' suggests the limits of language in describing humanity as an accident of nature, and yet the compelling image of psalms being received only by 'wintry

skies' and of prayer being 'fruitless' suggests the suspicion that humanity's existence is indeed accidental. Tennyson's concern is valid even if humanity is indeed part of a divine plan; for what entitles individuals to the hubris of believing that their particular species is the culmination of that plan, rather than a mere transitional phase toward some greater species that might exist millions of years in the future, and which is the true object of the divine will? Nature's bored indifference with humanity, the purposelessness it exhibits, can be interpreted either way.

The argument continues: '...Who trusted God was love indeed/ And love Creation's final law –/ Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw –/ With ravine, shriek'd against his creed-...' <sup>112</sup> The savage image of 'Nature, red in tooth and claw' – undoubtedly the most famous image in *In Memoriam* – seems to enter the poem almost as an abrupt and abrasive interruption to the preceding contemplation of God's love, conjuring the same sense in the reader as a pail of cold water being hurled upon him/her while asleep and dreaming, waking them to grim reality. As Barri J. Gold observes, this line is so prescient that, although it is found in a section known to have been written before even the publication of Chamber's *Vestiges*, has come to epitomise Victorian Christian reactions to evolution in the eyes of historians. <sup>113</sup> In the reality conjured by this line, Pope's theodicy is a distant memory, and Nature is suddenly not so much bored and indifferent as she is positively hostile. While the 'hope' that Tennyson followed suggests that the world is ruled by a God of Love, reason suggests that it is ruled by a Goddess of Death, where purposeless Hobbesian self-interest is the first and only commandment: '...Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,/ Who battled for the True, the Just, be blown about the desert dust,/ Or seal'd within the iron hills?' <sup>114</sup> For all that human beings are, their best fate is simply to be buried for future geologists to excavate. For a moment it seems almost as though hope might lose: 'O life as futile, then, as frail!/ O for thy voice to soothe and bless!/ What hope of answer, or redress?/ Behind the veil, behind the veil'. <sup>115</sup> The veil could be the veil of death, or the veil of the great unknown beyond the limits of language. Either way, the 'hope of answer, or redress' is simply unknowable, and Tennyson is left in the existential attitude of confusion.

However, Tennyson seems to doubt the fruitfulness of dwelling on such earthly matters, appealing to peace: 'Peace; come away: the song of woe/ Is after

all an earthly song:/ Peace; come away: we do him wrong/ To sing so wildly: let us go'.<sup>116</sup> If it is the divine that Tennyson seeks, then this 'earthly song' is not worth the trouble, doing no justice to Hallam: 'Methinks my friend is richly shrined;/ But I shall pass; my work will fail'.<sup>117</sup> Because this song is earthly it is impermanent, and it seems that immortality is not to be found in poetry. And yet, his farewell is also an earthly one: 'I hear it now, and o'er and o'er,/ Eternal greetings to the dead;/ And "ave, ave, ave", said,/ 'Adieu, adieu', forevermore".<sup>118</sup> The use of the word 'adieu', although spoken 'forevermore', suggests the possibility of meeting again. Whatever becomes of an individual's immortality, it does not seem to matter that this poem will one day be gone and forgotten; what matters is its value in the present moment.

By the second Christmas, appearing in the eighty-third poem, Tennyson appears, if not consoled, at least more hopeful:

As in the winters left behind,  
Again our ancient games had place,  
The mimic picture's breathing grace,  
And dance and song and hoodman-blind.

Who show'd a token of distress?  
No single tear, no mark of pain:  
O sorrow, then can sorrow wane?  
O grief, can grief be changed to less?<sup>119</sup>

Unlike the first Christmas, the traditions and memories of previous Christmases in happier times no longer seem to torture Tennyson. Sorrow and grief remain, but there is hope that they will 'wane' and 'be changed to less': 'O last regret, regret can die!/ No – mixt with all this mystic frame,/ Her deep relations are the same,/ But with long use her tears are dry'.<sup>120</sup> Even if sorrow and grief remain in full, Tennyson is past the time for tears.

***'Love is and was my Lord and King...'***

The question of whether the impermanence of earthly things means that individuals should not bother with them continues, as Tennyson returns to contemplating whether it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all: 'This truth came borne with bier and pall,/ I felt it, when I sorrow'd most,/ 'Tis better to have loved and lost,/ Than never to have loved at all-'.<sup>121</sup> He ponders the otherworldly consolation for suffering: 'And whether trust in things

above/ Be dimm'd of sorrow, or sustain'd;...'<sup>122</sup> This thought experiment, comparing the scenario of loving and losing with never loving at all, and imagining sorrow's compatibility with 'things above', raises the question of whether suffering is an argument against faith, or just another motivation for it? He ponders the this-worldly consolation: 'And whether love for him have drain'd/ My capabilities of love;'.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps it is in fact *not* better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Yet this is not the view that Tennyson ends up taking:

I woo your love: I count it crime  
To mourn for any overmuch;  
I, the divided half of such  
A friendship as had master'd Time;

Which masters Time indeed, and is  
Eternal, separate from fears:  
The all-assuming months and years  
Can take no part away from this:<sup>124</sup>

Time, the 'all-consuming' destroyer of all things, is mastered by love and friendship. If love's value is indescribable, then Tennyson's mastery of Time is similar to Blake's, where the indescribable concepts of 'infinity' and 'eternity' are evoked to erase the sense of the finite self and its finite mortality. Both solutions appeal to abstract concepts beyond that which the limits of language can definitively describe. These limits entail that although time might eventually take the friend away, it has no power to destroy the friendship that was; it 'can take no part away from this'.

Even if life is to be described without objective meaning, Tennyson is choosing to value a particular perspective on his condition. Here, the despair at the absurdity and objective meaninglessness of it all leads not to existential nihilism, but to the need to create meaning through what the individual chooses to value. The limits of language might render it difficult to describe the world without design and purpose, but not impossible to be at peace with it. And, indeed, if a poem can be treasured for its present value regardless of its earthly impermanence, surely the same can be said of a human life. Tennyson appears able to accept a this-worldly consolation. Because of this, it can be questioned whether science could ever assist in such sorrow. If science eschews the metaphysical in principle and offers a view of death as final, then there may be

consequences for the kind of things that an individual will value. The thought experiment can be posed: Will an individual who is faced with death – perhaps especially if death is final – care more about wealth, fame, and grudges, or family, friends, and memories? It is clear where Tennyson’s inclination lies, even if it is not simple. He knows he cannot live solely in the past: ‘My old affection of the tomb,/ A part of stillness, yearns to speak:/ ‘Arise, and get thee forth and seek/ A friendship for the years to come’.<sup>125</sup> He does not feel he can quite love another the way he loved Hallam: ‘If not so fresh, with love as true/ I, clasping brother-hands, aver/ I could not, if I would, transfer/ The whole I felt for him to you’.<sup>126</sup> Perhaps the love lost truly has drained some of his capacity to love, yet he knows what he must do:

My heart, tho’ widow’d, may not rest  
Quite in the love of what is gone,  
But seeks to beat in time with one  
That warms another living breast.

Ah, take the imperfect gift I bring,  
Knowing the primrose yet is dear,  
The primrose of the later year,  
As not unlike to that of Spring.<sup>127</sup>

However imperfect his heart may have been rendered in the wake of lost love, he knows he must give it to another; and here the final image seems to confirm his previous hope that ‘every winter change to spring’.

Significantly, at this point, Tennyson addresses those who say that ‘...doubt is Devil-born’,<sup>128</sup> and makes the case for the superiority of ‘honest doubt’ over blind belief:

There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gather’d strength,  
He would not make his judgement blind,  
He faced the spectres of the mind  
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;<sup>129</sup>

Here, any religious creed that discourages doubt in favour of blind belief is held to be a lesser faith. Carlisle Moore once described how critics of the line ‘there lives more faith in honest doubt’ were not unknown in Tennyson’s time: ‘...the praise

was not unanimous. Some critics thought the doubt which they saw there made the faith less than ‘honest’, and objected to Tennyson’s admitting it even into the concluding sections’.<sup>130</sup> Yet it can be argued that faith that doubts is more honest than faith that is blind, the latter being that which by definition has not and cannot stand to bear comparison with the facts of reality, as Tennyson’s faith has attempted to do. It might be that Tennyson, despite his trepidation that the world might lack a literal God or afterlife, would nevertheless agree not with Blaise Pascal’s (1623-1662) wager that individuals ought to believe that God exists just in case He does and He punishes disbelief, but with Thomas Jefferson’s (1743-1826) wager that individuals ought to honestly question whether God exists just in case He does and He punishes dishonesty.<sup>131</sup> Tennyson’s ‘honest doubt’ agrees with Daniel Dennett’s contention:

Our love of truth is surely a central element in the meaning we find in our lives. In any case, the idea that we might preserve meaning by kidding ourselves is a more pessimistic, more nihilistic idea than I for one can stomach. If that were the best that could be done, I would conclude that nothing mattered after all.<sup>132</sup>

In this view, it is not the honest doubters who are ‘pessimistic’ and ‘nihilistic’, but rather those who blindly invoke faith out of fear of honest doubt. This is all very well, but the existential crisis born of the human need to describe the world in terms of design and purpose remains; it may be said that Tennyson’s ‘honest doubt’ can only be meaningful if it leads to the creation of new meaning in life. Yet it can also be argued that this is precisely the challenge to which Tennyson heroically rises, in the attempt to base existential value on the very values that reside at the threshold of the describable – like love – provided at the limits of language.

In the third Christmas, occurring in the one-hundreth-and-fifth poem, the moon remains hid, and this can be connected to Tennyson still describing nature as undermining providence: ‘Our father’s dust is left alone/ And silent under other snows:/ There in due time the woodbine blows,/ The violet comes, but we are gone’.<sup>133</sup> The natural wind sweeps away the dust; nature remains at strife with a literal God. However, this time Tennyson will not allow that to prevent joy: ‘No more shall wayward grief abuse/ The genial hour with mask and mime;/ For change of place, like growth of time,/ Has broke the bond of dying use’.<sup>134</sup> In the

thought experiment of the third Christmas, Tennyson finds that his ‘honest doubt’ does not preclude embracing this-worldly consolation and meaning in family and friends. Contra Hobbes, there is at least a tacit recognition that to care about personal happiness is to care about love of others; to be more moral, not less.

After the third Christmas, a thought experiment on ‘vacant yearning’ finds Tennyson no longer favouring what he calls ‘barren faith’:

What profit lies in barren faith,  
And vacant yearning, tho’ with might  
To scale the heaven’s highest height,  
Or dive below the wells of Death?

What find I in the highest place,  
But mine own phantom chanting hymns?<sup>135</sup>

Tennyson is unwilling to simply find the will to believe in spite of doubt, believing that it will only lead to his ‘own phantom chanting hymns’; just as Dennett believes such an act to be ‘pessimistic’ and ‘nihilistic’. Tennyson instead favours whatever this-worldly consolation for sorrow he can find: ‘I’ll rather take what fruit may be/ Of sorrow under human skies:/ ‘Tis held that sorrow makes us wise,/ whatever wisdom sleep with thee’.<sup>136</sup> The consolation for his sorrow must be this-worldly, found ‘under human skies’, and that consolation is that ‘sorrow makes us wise’.

Tennyson’s exact attitude to science has been subject to debate, ranging, as John Holmes states, from the position that he was diligently attentive of it, to the belief that he was ambivalent towards it.<sup>137</sup> Tennyson seems to regard science and knowledge highly, but in perspective: ‘Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail/ Against her beauty? May she mix/ With men and prosper! Who shall fix/ Her pillars? Let her work prevail’.<sup>138</sup> Yet although Tennyson views science as beautiful, and believes that it should prevail, there are caveats: ‘But on her forehead sits a fire’.<sup>139</sup> Tennyson states it plainly: ‘Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain-/ She cannot fight the fear of death’.<sup>140</sup> Tennyson directly counters the scientism that would view science as the only road to knowledge or consolation. Science is described as being as vain as science is young, befitting the metaphor of a child or adolescent who makes large assumptions about themselves. And for Tennyson, part of acknowledging the limits of science is that mere intellectual knowledge of the contents and workings of nature and the universe cannot

assuage the emotional fear of death. Tennyson makes a distinction not unlike Bacon's 'two truths' and puts science in its place: 'Let her [knowledge] know her place;/ She is the second, not the first'.<sup>141</sup>

However, considering the emphasis on this-worldly love, family, and friends as the ultimate consolation, it may be wondered what exactly it is that Tennyson puts 'first', or what it is that he is using to create meaning in life after his despair at the lack of objective meaning to life. Moore connected Tennyson's faith to a Methodist style of conversion popular in the nineteenth century: 'Sometimes it [conversion] is followed by a prolonged period of doubt which delays and modifies the faith ultimately attained'.<sup>142</sup> How Tennyson's faith is 'modified' might be seen as early as the third Christmas. He does not renew faith in a benevolent natural order, indeed the description of nature is still undermining providence in the third Christmas. Instead he embraces family and friends as his new consolation.

Tennyson does say that: 'A higher hand must make her [knowledge] mild,/ If all not be in vain;',<sup>143</sup> which might suggest that without a literal God, science is pointless, or 'vain'. Yet in the succeeding lines the 'higher hand' appears not to be a literal God, but simply 'wisdom' itself: 'The higher hand must 'guide/ Her footsteps, moving side by side/ With wisdom, like the younger child;/ For she is earthly of the mind,/ But Wisdom heavenly of the soul'.<sup>144</sup> Although 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' are often equated together in common parlance, Tennyson makes a distinction whereby 'wisdom' refers to how to live well; it refers to moral and existential value, not facts. An individual can be highly knowledgeable and still unwise, and vice versa. With 'moving side by side' it might be said that each works better if informed by each other; yet wisdom is clearly more profound and important. And 'wisdom', it can be recalled, is what Tennyson referred to as the 'fruit' of 'sorrow under human skies', rendering wisdom as being of this world rather than the next; and the term 'heavenly of the soul' seems to be used simply as an adjective, not as a statement that wisdom literally comes from a place of eternal paradise. Tennyson appears to agree with Wordsworth's sense that it is 'Not in Utopia,/ ...But in the very world, which is the world/ Of all of us, - the place where, in the end, we find our happiness, or not at all!'<sup>145</sup> Tennyson learns this from the example of Hallam himself:

O, friend, who camest to thy goal  
So early, leaving me behind,

I would the great world grew like thee,  
Who grewest not alone in power  
And knowledge, but by year and hour  
In reverence and in charity.<sup>146</sup>

The dichotomy here is not between scientific knowledge and cataphatic religion, but scientific knowledge and reverence and charity; what might be termed *practical* religion, rather than doctrinal religion.

George Eliot's comment on Tennyson's poem is significant here: 'Whatever was the immediate prompting of *In Memoriam*, whatever the form under which the author represented his aim to himself, the deepest significance of the poem is the sanctification of human love as a religion'.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps Tennyson's newfound religion, at the end of all the agonising doubt, is less literal and more allegorical. As Julian Wolfreys notes, Tennyson's faith, throughout the body of the poem, appears rather less than literal, and even apophatic:

The poet resists the normative grounding of faith in orthodox, church-sponsored representations of Christ, and thereby a lapse into unthinking acceptance. In doing so, he struggles to come to terms with the appropriate language for... an onto-theological consideration of being which maintains both mystery and revelation: 'A little flash, a mystic hint'. What becomes apparent in reading the indirect embodiment of Christ and Christian faith in the poem... is that one would be more accurate in speaking of Tennyson's faith as the manifestation of an apophatic discourse driven by a poetics of difference...<sup>148</sup>

According to Wolfreys, Tennyson's faith resembles less traditional or literal theology than apophatic and allegorical theology, relying on '...a mystic hint...'<sup>149</sup> or inner transcendent experience at the threshold of the describable. Wolfreys admits that Tennyson's faith cannot truly be formulated in such a systematic manner, and Ashton Nichols' warning that the term 'mystic' invites more confusion than clarity in the study of Tennyson, can be duly noted.<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, Tennyson's apophatic 'mysticism', in the sense of a use of negation to mark the threshold of the indescribable experience, beyond which there is no differentiation through words, is apparent: 'But there is more than I can see,/ And what I see I leave unsaid'.<sup>151</sup> And: 'I leave thy praises unexpress'd/... I leave thy

greatness to be guess'd;/ ...What practice howsoe'er expert/ In fitting aptest words to things, ...Hath power to give thee as thou wert?'<sup>152</sup> It can be recalled that earlier in the work, Tennyson enunciated a view that seems to borrow from Blake: '...here the man is more and more;/ But he forgets the days before/ God shut the doorways of his head'.<sup>153</sup> The 'days before' are explicitly explained as the individual's days of infancy, the days of: 'The baby new to earth and sky', who 'Has never thought that "this is I"'.<sup>154</sup> This is where, contra Nichols, Tennyson can be said to be moving towards an apophatic mysticism, describing the infant's subsequent development of a: '...separate mind', with a sense of: '..."I", and "me"', not as a positive development, but as a: '...frame that binds him', until 'His isolation grows defined'.<sup>155</sup> The '...doors of perception...' <sup>156</sup> thus closed, there is a '...separation of self from other'.<sup>157</sup> Although, at that time, in the throes of his grief, Tennyson had also described the Blakean view as: '...faith as vague as all unsweet', <sup>158</sup> it can be argued that he is now returning to that view.

In keeping with apophatic tradition, it is possible to argue this case by first analysing what Tennyson's faith is *not*:

Love is and was my Lord and King,  
And in his presence I attend,  
To hear the tidings of my friend,  
Which every hour his couriers bring.

Love is and was my King and Lord,  
And will be, tho' as yet I keep  
Within his court on earth, and sleep  
Encompass'd by his faithful guard, ...<sup>159</sup>

As Eliot suggested, it is not necessarily a literal God in whom Tennyson finally places his faith, but love itself; and the use of the past-tense 'was' even suggests that this always was his true religion. This can be demonstrated through Tennyson's pantheism, in a poem where it is again ambiguous whether he is speaking of Hallam or God:

Thy voice is on the rolling air;  
I hear thee where the waters run;  
Thou standest in the rising sun,  
And in the setting thou art fair...

...My love involves the love before;  
My love is vaster passion now;  
Tho' mixed with God and Nature thou,

I seem to love thee more and more.<sup>160</sup>

In the view that Tennyson's love *is* his God, his 'Lord and King', it appears entirely natural to describe Hallam in this manner. Perhaps it is this mode of perceiving Hallam 'on the rolling air', 'where the waters run', and 'in the rising sun,/ And in the setting', to which the "“adieu”" refers. The references to hearing and seeing Hallam in natural phenomena, and especially the reference to Hallam being 'mixed' with *both* God and nature, suggests that this is not the same God that was 'at strife' with nature, but rather that this is an almost pantheistic, Spinozistic God that is synonymous with nature.

This is the God of Tennyson's later poem, *The Higher Pantheism* (1869), which opens: 'The sun, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains,/ Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?'<sup>161</sup> With: '...dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?'<sup>162</sup> there is a sense that the world of appearances can be something less than real, particularly the appearances noted in the following line: 'Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,/ Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from/ Him?'<sup>163</sup> To speak of 'division' suggests that unity is the true reality. This notion is made more explicit: 'For is He not all but thou, that hast power to feel/ 'I am I?''<sup>164</sup> As Nathan A. Cervo notes, the crucial issue of the poem is that the sense of individual 'I' in isolation is not a positive: 'The Heideggerian *Grundstimmung* (personalistic wavelength) of the 'I' hampered by faithlessness is not visionary... but divisive'.<sup>165</sup> It is here that Tennyson seems to have returned to the Blakean view, moving more in line with eastern religious thought wherein the sense of 'I' is dissolved in self-transcendent experience of unity with nature: 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet'.<sup>166</sup> The limits of language are also made explicit in this poem's treatment of various positions for and against the existence and nature of God, with an admission of all that anyone can truly know: '...all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in/ a pool;/ And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man/ cannot see;'.<sup>167</sup> The optical illusion of a staff half submerged in water appearing bent demonstrates how the senses can be deceived, filtering information from the external world falsely. The line 'the ear of man cannot hear' alludes to Matthew 11:15: 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'<sup>168</sup> and suggests that it might not actually be that simple. The bent staff, like Plato's cave, becomes a

symbol of the limits of human knowledge and descriptions of nature. Yet regardless, pantheism is presented as a viable alternative to false certainty, being true regardless of the existence of a literal God: ‘But if we could see and hear, this Vision – were it not/ He?’.<sup>169</sup>

But in contrast to natural theology and Romantic idealisation of nature, Tennyson asserts that this non-literal, pantheistic God cannot be Nature alone. As Tennyson himself is reported to have said:

God *is* love, transcendent, all-pervading! We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, she tells us that God is disease, murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest in us.<sup>170</sup>

Here, the emphasis on the ‘is’ has arguably made 1 John 4:8<sup>171</sup> not merely about identifying a literal God as loving, but about making God *synonymous* with love itself, which assists to transcend the linguistic and essentialist sense of ‘separation of self from other’. To ‘get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest in us’, Tennyson’s faith is highly reminiscent of Luke 17:20: ‘The kingdom of God is within you’.<sup>172</sup> His God is more akin to the inner God of the mystics than the external God of tradition.

To see God in Nature, then, is only something that can come from within, not without. Bruns explains the development of this new faith:

One of Tennyson’s ‘official’ responses to his poem was to say it ‘begins with a funeral and ends with a marriage... a sort of Divine Comedy, cheerful at the close’. Tennyson was perhaps no better a commentator than any of us, but one may still appreciate his thesis: in rough approximation to a sublime or sacred comedy, *In Memoriam* begins in chaos and ends with the evocation of a new cosmos, a newly felt order of creation predicated upon the active unity of God and Nature.<sup>173</sup>

If the poem struggles with ‘God and Nature then at strife’, then its resolution is with an ‘active unity of God and Nature’. In place of doubt is his new religion:

In the death of Hallam the poet had suffered the shattering of a world once ennobled by the presence of human excellence and harmonised by personal affection, by a sense of belonging or of being at home, but he speaks in the end of a world restored through the inauguration of a

love that is no less real or personal for having been diffused throughout a cosmic and impersonal space.<sup>174</sup>

Moore identifies the same theme with mysticism, noting that through much of the poem there is a longing for this experience: ‘There is a plea for a vision of Hallam which is answered with the trance-like experience which ultimately gives him the assurance he has sought’.<sup>175</sup> This makes sense of Tennyson seeing ‘as one enlightened by mystery’:

The idea of mystery is rarely a useful critical concept, because it presupposes an unspeakable distance between experience and interpretation. This distance, however, is precisely what is characteristic of *In Memoriam*, the more so because Tennyson assumes the sagelike responsibility of constructing a version of what he cannot know...<sup>176</sup>

Bruns’ contention that mystery is ‘rarely a useful critical concept’ is problematic in that mystery is not intended by mystics as a critical concept but as an enlightening one. The limits of language again lend the sense of overwhelming awe central to the mystical experience, and perhaps it is this theme that ‘is characteristic of *In Memoriam*’.

Remembering that the Prologue was written with the Epilogue after the body of the poem itself, it is now possible to analyse the Prologue in light of the body. Here it can be noted that the Prologue and Epilogue affirm faith while the body affirms doubt, in what might be called faith framing doubt. Yet Wolfreys notes how differently some of the Prologue’s lines might be interpreted in light of the notion that Tennyson’s religion might be less than literal:

As Michael Wheeler and Donald Hair have pointed out, the image of God as love is taken by Tennyson from Arthur Hallam’s *Theodicaea Novissima*, an essay first read by Hallam to the Cambridge Apostles in 1831, and in which Hallam both configures God as Love and associates love with incarnation.<sup>177</sup>

The Prologue’s ‘Strong Son of God’<sup>178</sup> might be love itself. Yet it must be admitted that Tennyson’s God can also often be interpreted literally. Tennyson does seem to invoke a leap of faith, whereby faith, or hope, is all that an individual can truly have, rather than belief: ‘By faith, and faith alone, embrace,/ Believing where we cannot prove;’,<sup>179</sup> and: ‘We have but faith: we cannot know;/ For knowledge is of things we see;’.<sup>180</sup> If his God is love, then an intuitive value-

judgement, or 'faith', would be all that is necessary. Nevertheless, John D. Rosenberg, interpreting this line literally, once found it 'extraordinary' considering that the Prologue was only written after the body of the poem:

This final admission is extraordinary, for it climaxes seventeen years of obsessive meditation on the death and after-life of the poet's friend. It epitomises the energetic conflict between doubt and the will to believe which makes *In Memoriam* the most dramatic as well as the most religious of English elegies.<sup>181</sup>

However, Wolfreys, far more recently, doubts this interpretation:

It has been the case, generally, that Tennyson's 'Prologue', written after the rest of *In Memoriam* in 1849... is regarded as a somewhat conventional gesture towards the institutionalised discourse of Broad Church theology, and that, more cynically, the lyric was written to appease, and thereby win over, the future Mrs Tennyson (and, more importantly, her father).<sup>182</sup>

According to Wolfreys, it may well be that the openness of interpreting Tennyson as returning to strong traditional faith in the Prologue and Epilogue are a deliberate appeasement to Church and loved ones. It might be added that the 'extraordinary' leap of faith in the teeth of all doubt does seem to contradict Tennyson's conviction, in the body of the poem, that 'there is more faith in honest doubt... than in half the creeds', and that 'he would not make his judgement blind'.

Tennyson affirms that we should still seek knowledge: 'Let knowledge grow from more to more'.<sup>183</sup> However, Tennyson has a caveat: 'But more of reverence in us dwell;/ That mind and soul, according well,/ May make one music as before,/ But vaster'.<sup>184</sup> Hsiao interprets 'mind and soul' as knowledge and awe combining to create faith:

If our awe for real creation develops in proportion to our discovery of the extent of our lesser human inventions, it would be possible to form a greater choir of faith... The music the speaker describes is no polyphony, merely layer upon layer of unison, a mass of individuals whose unity of belief is multiplied, an image of communion with God that permits human knowledge to have a place and a purpose in reinforcing and increasing true creativity.<sup>185</sup>

The reference to mind and soul, or knowledge and reverence, ‘making one music *as before*’ might well be recalling a time when science appeared to confirm cataphatic beliefs, for example, in the form of the Argument from Design as given by Paley and the eighteenth-century deists. Yet if Tennyson is not exactly returning to literal doctrinal religion, the ‘reverence’ that he wishes to make ‘one music’ with knowledge might well be, as Hsiao indicates, simply a ‘religious’ sense of awe that empowers science.

In the Epilogue, it does appear that it is more through love than simple belief in an afterlife that Tennyson emerges from his despair: ‘Regret is dead, but love is more/ Than in the summers that are flown,/ For I myself with these have grown/ To something greater than before;...’.<sup>186</sup> It is love that has made him greater than he was, not a mere reaffirmation of previous cataphatic beliefs, and because of it his sorrow throughout the poem appears almost absurd: ‘Which makes appear the songs I made/ As echoes out of weaker times, As half but idle brawling rhymes, The sport of random sun and shade’.<sup>187</sup> This interpretation supports the idea that Tennyson is in fact only emerging from his doubt to embrace *practical* religion, namely: ‘A love that rose on stronger wings,/ Unpalsied when he met with death’.<sup>188</sup> It is love that conquers fear of mortality, becoming the ‘...faith that comes of self-control’,<sup>189</sup> the faith that remains even after the difficult embrace of ‘honest doubt’, the faith that is necessary for meaning; the form of religion which comes ‘first’ before science.

According to Tennyson, it is not science that combats fear of mortality, nor is it necessarily belief in a literal God or immortality; it is nothing less than love itself. If ‘honest doubt’ has led Tennyson to finding ‘a stronger faith his own’, then honest doubt is described as necessary for meaning, for it allows the individual to *create* the meaning that is actually meaningful to them. This form of religion echoes Romanticism and foreshadows existentialism, as Wim Tigges has already noted:

Unlike Wordsworth’s ego... Tennyson’s is a tormented one, ‘haunted by its responsibility for itself and its world’. Inasmuch as this explains anything about Tennyson’s Romanticism, it also seems to point forward to an essentially Modernist concern, one strongly reminiscent of Sartrean Existentialism.<sup>190</sup>

Here, the loss of design in the form of an externally decreed plan and purpose for being leads to the individual creating their own purpose for being, suggesting a manner in which religion adapts to science in order to survive; reinterpretation into less literal, more allegorical forms. In such interpretations, a parallel can be drawn between Tennyson's idea that his form of religion must come 'first' and the notorious claim of the arguably existentialist (although he denied the label) Albert Camus (1913-1960) in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942):

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.<sup>191</sup>

All other questions are of secondary importance to the primary question concerning why individuals ought to not end it all at this very moment; and science, along with politics, law, economics, and everything else useful to human society, is indeed 'vain' unless the individual does not first answer this question. But it is a question whose answer cannot be discovered through a laboratory experiment, but only created through values, which Tennyson is attempting to do through his form of religion, art, and poetry; as per Dickens, these things are not strictly useful for survival, but they are eminently useful for making survival something worth having in the first place.

Therefore, the title *In Memoriam* itself might refer not only to Hallam, but to Tennyson's belief in a literal God. Yet this 'death of God' only gives rise to the birth of a new God, Love itself. This interpretation adds another layer to how to view the division of the poem by three Christmases as a thought experiment. Tennyson could have marked the passage of time by three Easters instead; for Easter represents immortality and the resurrection of a God, and if Tennyson was resurrecting his former faith, Easter could well have been appropriate. But if Tennyson is not resurrecting faith in a literal God, but instead giving birth to a new one, then Christmas, representing Incarnation, is indeed more appropriate.

However, Tennyson's concluding sentiment regarding humanity in general, and Hallam in particular, remains valid whether he came to believe in a literal God or an allegorical one. He does not seem to hold the scientific description of

humanity's evolutionary past to be so objectionable: 'A soul shall draw from out the vast/ And strike his being into bounds,/ And, moved thro' life of lower phase,/ Result in man, be born and think,/ And act and love...' <sup>192</sup> There is peace with the notion of humanity's origin in 'life of lower phase', because such origins do nothing to diminish humanity as it is now, and indeed results in humanity being able to be 'born and think,/ And act and love'. Tennyson calls these combined qualities of humanity 'a closer link/ Betwixt us and the crowning race', <sup>193</sup> making humanity 'those that, eye to eye, shall look/ On knowledge; under whose command/ Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand/ Is Nature like an open book'. <sup>194</sup> These lines seem to echo the Baconian Enlightenment belief in knowledge as power, and in a Book of Nature as the only true revealed scripture, which linked to the preceding lines seem to identify the ability to do science itself as one of the things that makes human existence important. But of course, it is not the only thing:

No longer half-akin to brute  
For all we thought and loved and did  
And hoped, and suffer'd, is but seed  
Of what in them is flower and fruit;

Whereof the man, that with me trod  
This planet, was a noble type  
Appearing ere the times were ripe... <sup>195</sup>

Tennyson still strives to invest importance in human existence, and yet he does it by identifying natural, this-worldly qualities: 'all we thought and loved and did and hoped, and suffer'd'. Tennyson thereby creates meaning in human existence in an existentialist religious sense, whereby he can view Hallam as being of the 'noble type', as opposed to just another accident of the random cycle of nature. The God, 'To which the whole creation moves' makes love an all-pervasive force, even if it ultimately comes from us, as the 'faith from ourselves, from what is highest in us'.

### ***On Geology***

Tennyson's personal reconciliation with Hallam's death is effected precisely because he deals with a global existential crisis, addressing questions and fears universal to humanity, which is arguably what makes *In Memoriam* so timeless.

There may be no this-worldly consolation that can quite compete with the other-worldly consolation of an afterlife, though there have been noble attempts. Certainly, the sentiment that ‘it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all’ is of a similar way of thinking as the this-worldly consolation – inspired by science and popularised by Richard Dawkins – which can, perhaps, be liberally paraphrased as ‘it is better to live and die than never to have lived at all’:

We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here.<sup>196</sup>

This thought experiment, imagining the born and the unborn, contends that instead of bemoaning death, individuals ought to celebrate the fact that they were ever born in the first place, precisely *because* of the contingency and lack of inevitability behind the historical, evolutionary, geological, and cosmological circumstances that led to each individual existence. The impermanence of earthly life could, perhaps, merely mean that this life should be treasured more rather than less, each moment regarded – as Tennyson regards his poem – for their present value, rather than feeling compelled by their earthly impermanence to sink into ‘...vacant darkness and to cease’. In accordance with existentialism, the lack of objective purpose and necessity to life – or, indeed, to the ‘progress’ of history – could simply be seen as opening up possibilities regarding the *creation* of purpose. Whether such a consolation suffices is undoubtedly up to the individual; but either way, this consolation is itself a human value-judgement of meaning beyond the facts that some, like Gould or Karen Armstrong, would define as practical religion (although Dawkins would disagree with the label). Facts alone are mute on consolation in the face of mortality, which means that consolation cannot come from science itself, but from human value-systems; which is why ‘religion’ defined in terms of values retains an important role even for ‘honest doubters’ like Tennyson.

Nevertheless, *In Memoriam*, capturing the mood of a generation and representing a movement in world-view, not only demonstrates further how the limits of language assist the sense of self-transcendence, but also that the limits of language in describing a world without design led to a need to impute design as necessary for moral and existential value in general, and consolation in the face of mortality in particular. The displacement of natural theology's vision of nature as benevolent and divine in favour of geology's vision of it as 'red in tooth and claw' is a lament that captures the sentiment of many. *In Memoriam*, reacting to Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and early evolutionary theories, is almost a prophecy of how individuals would respond to Darwin's theory, eight years later.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

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- <sup>2</sup> Colin A. Ronan, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the World's Science* (Bath: The Pitman Press, 1983), p. 424.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Tornko, 'Varieties of Geological Experience: Religion, Body, and Spirit in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Lyell's *Principles of Geology*', *Victorian Poetry*, 42.2 (2004), 113.
- <sup>4</sup> Tornko, 113.
- <sup>5</sup> A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians* (London: Random House, 2002), p. 97.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Lyell, *The Principles of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> John Ruskin, in Wilson, p. 344.
- <sup>8</sup> Georges Cuvier, *A Discourse on the Revolutions of the Surface of the Globe* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831).
- <sup>9</sup> James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth*, 1795, in *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*, by Stephen Jay Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 61.
- <sup>10</sup> Hutton, in *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, p. 67.
- <sup>11</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, 'Is Uniformitarianism Necessary?', *American Journal of Science*, 263 (1965), 223–228.
- <sup>12</sup> Derek Ager, *The Nature of the Stratigraphical Record*, 3rd edn (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 83–84.
- <sup>13</sup> Lyell, p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Lyell, pp. 5–6.
- <sup>15</sup> Lyell, p. 7.
- <sup>16</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, in Lyell, *The Principles of Geology*, p. 8.
- <sup>17</sup> John Playfair, in Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, p. 94.
- <sup>18</sup> Lyell, p. 9.
- <sup>19</sup> Lyell, p. 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Lyell, p. 10.
- <sup>21</sup> Lyell, p. 10.
- <sup>22</sup> Lyell, p. 76.
- <sup>23</sup> Lyell, p. 76.
- <sup>24</sup> Lyell, pp. 76–77.
- <sup>25</sup> Lyell, p. 77.
- <sup>26</sup> Lyell, pp. 77–78.
- <sup>27</sup> Lyell, p. 78.
- <sup>28</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, 1907 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 104. 'Omphalos', Greek for 'navel', is so named for the creationist belief that the biblical Adam would still exhibit an 'omphalos' even though '...no umbilical cord had ever attached him to a mother'. Edmund Gosse also writes that: 'But, alas! atheists and Christians alike looked at it, and laughed, and threw it away'; and that even theologian Charles Kingsley claimed he could not '...give up the painful and slow conclusion of five and twenty years study of geology, and believe that God has written on the rocks one enormous and superfluous lie'. Gosse, p. 105.
- <sup>29</sup> Lyell, p. 79.
- <sup>30</sup> Lyell, p. 80.
- <sup>31</sup> Lyell, p. 82.
- <sup>32</sup> Lyell, p. 21.
- <sup>33</sup> James Secord, *Victorian Sensation* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 10.
- <sup>34</sup> Secord, p. 9.
- <sup>35</sup> Charles Lyell, in *The Victorians*, p. 96.
- <sup>36</sup> Secord, p. 11.
- <sup>37</sup> Adam Sedgwick, in *The Life and Letters of the Reverend Adam Sedgwick*, ed. by John Willis Clark and Thomas McKenny Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), p. 84.
- <sup>38</sup> Lyell, p. 176.
- <sup>39</sup> Comte de Buffon, in Lyell, *The Principles of Geology*, p. 176.

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- <sup>40</sup> John Morton, 'Tennyson and the 1914-1918 War', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 8.5 (2006), 353-367.
- <sup>41</sup> Wim Tigges, 'Heir of All the Ages: Tennyson between Romanticism, Victorianism and Modernism', *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: The Fusions and Confusions of Literary Periods*, ed. by C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 307-322.
- <sup>42</sup> John Batchelor, 'Alfred Tennyson: Problems of Biography', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36.2 (2006), 78-95.
- <sup>43</sup> George Eliot, 'Belles Lettres', *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, 64.126 (1855), 596-615.
- <sup>44</sup> A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1901), pp. 36-48.
- <sup>45</sup> Bradley, pp. 36-48.
- <sup>46</sup> John Boyd, 'In Memoriam and the Logic of Feeling', *Victorian Poetry*, 10 (1972), 100.
- <sup>47</sup> Julian Lamb, 'Memoriam as Biography', *Critical Review*, 39 (1999), 20-28.
- <sup>48</sup> Tornko, p. 113.
- <sup>49</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'I', p. 230.
- <sup>50</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'I', p. 230.
- <sup>51</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'I', p. 230.
- <sup>52</sup> Bibhudutt Dash, 'In the Matrix of the Divine: Approaches to Godhead in Rilke's Duino Elegies and Tennyson's In Memoriam', *Language in India*, 11.11 (2011), 355.
- <sup>53</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, 'The Lesser Faith': Hope and Reversal in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77 (1978), 247-264.
- <sup>54</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>55</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>56</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>57</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>58</sup> Anna Henchman, 'The Globe We Groan In': Astronomical Distance and Stellar Decay in *In Memoriam*', *Victorian Poetry*, 41.1 (2003), 29-45.
- <sup>59</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>60</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>61</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'III', p. 231.
- <sup>62</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 231.
- <sup>63</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 231.
- <sup>64</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 231.
- <sup>65</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 231.
- <sup>66</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 232.
- <sup>67</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'VI', p. 232.
- <sup>68</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'IX', p. 232.
- <sup>69</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'IX', p. 232.
- <sup>70</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XIII', p. 233.
- <sup>71</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XIV', p. 234.
- <sup>72</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXI', p. 235.
- <sup>73</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXI', p. 235.
- <sup>74</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CVI', p. 258.
- <sup>75</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXII', p. 236.
- <sup>76</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXII', p. 236.
- <sup>77</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXII', p. 236.
- <sup>78</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXII', p. 236.
- <sup>79</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXIII', p. 236.
- <sup>80</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXIII', p. 236.
- <sup>81</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXIV', p. 236.
- <sup>82</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXIV', p. 236.
- <sup>83</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXVIII', p. 237.
- <sup>84</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXVIII', p. 237.
- <sup>85</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXVIII', p. 237.
- <sup>86</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXVIII', p. 237.
- <sup>87</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXVIII', p. 237.
- <sup>88</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXXI', p. 238.

- <sup>89</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXXI', p. 238.
- <sup>90</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXXIV', p. 238.
- <sup>91</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXXIV', p. 238.
- <sup>92</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XXXIV', p. 238.
- <sup>93</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LIII', p. 243.
- <sup>94</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LIII', p. 243.
- <sup>95</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LIV', p. 243.
- <sup>96</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LIV', p. 243.
- <sup>97</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LIV', p. 243.
- <sup>98</sup> Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 46.
- <sup>99</sup> Joanne Zuckermann, 'Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as Love Poetry', *Dalhousie Review*, 51.2 (1971), 202-217.
- <sup>100</sup> Batchelor, 78-95.
- <sup>101</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, in 'Memoriam as a Personal Poem', by Arthur Pollard, *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 3.5 (1981), 175-184.
- <sup>102</sup> Tornko, p. 113.
- <sup>103</sup> Irene Hsaio, 'Calculating Loss in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', *Victorian Poetry*, 47.1 (2009), 173.
- <sup>104</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LV', p. 243.
- <sup>105</sup> Susan Gliserman, 'Early Victorian Science writers and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*: A Study in Cultural Exchange', *Victorian Studies*, 18.3-4 (1975), 437-459.
- <sup>106</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LV', p. 243.
- <sup>107</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LV', p. 243.
- <sup>108</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LV', p. 243.
- <sup>109</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>110</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>111</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>112</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>113</sup> Barri J. Gold, 'The Consolation of Physics: Tennyson's Thermodynamic Solution', *PMLA*, 117.3 (2002), 449-464.
- <sup>114</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>115</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', p. 243.
- <sup>116</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVII', p. 243.
- <sup>117</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVII', p. 244.
- <sup>118</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVII', p. 244.
- <sup>119</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXVIII', p. 248.
- <sup>120</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXVIII', p. 248.
- <sup>121</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 250.
- <sup>122</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 250.
- <sup>123</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 250.
- <sup>124</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 250.
- <sup>125</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 251.
- <sup>126</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 251.
- <sup>127</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LXXXV', p. 251.
- <sup>128</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XCVI', p. 254.
- <sup>129</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XCVI', p. 255.
- <sup>130</sup> Carlisle Moore, 'Faith, Doubt, and Mystical Experience in *In Memoriam*', *Victorian Studies*, 7.2 (1963), 155-169.
- <sup>131</sup> Blaise Pascal, in 'Doubling the Wager: Doubt, Faith and Risk', by John Garvey, *Commonweal*, 122.1 (1995), 9; Thomas Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1994), pp. 900-906.
- <sup>132</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), p. 22.
- <sup>133</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CV', p. 258.
- <sup>134</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CV', p. 258.
- <sup>135</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CVIII', p. 259.
- <sup>136</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CVIII', p. 259.

- <sup>137</sup> John Holmes, “‘The Poet of Science’: How Scientists Read Their Tennyson”, *Victorian Studies*, 54.4 (2012), 655-678.
- <sup>138</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>139</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>140</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>141</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>142</sup> Moore, 155-169.
- <sup>143</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>144</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>145</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 220.
- <sup>146</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXIV’, p. 260.
- <sup>147</sup> Eliot, 596-615.
- <sup>148</sup> Julian Wolfreys, ‘The Matter of Faith: Incarnation and Incorporation in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*’, in *Writing the Bodies of Christ: The Church from Carlyle to Derrida*, ed. by John Schad (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 59-74.
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- <sup>150</sup> Ashton Nichols, ‘The Epiphanic Trance Poem: Why Tennyson is Not a Mystic’, *Victorian Poetry*, 24.2 (1986), 131-148.
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- <sup>153</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘XLIV’, p. 241.
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- <sup>155</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘XLV’, p. 241.
- <sup>156</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1793, in Bloom and Trilling, p. 40.
- <sup>157</sup> Carl Woodring, ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview’, in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
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- <sup>159</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXXXVI’, p. 263.
- <sup>160</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘CXXX’, p. 264.
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- <sup>162</sup> Tennyson, ‘The Higher Pantheism’, p. 239.
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- <sup>167</sup> Tennyson, ‘The Higher Pantheism’, p. 239.
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- <sup>169</sup> Tennyson, ‘The Higher Pantheism’, p. 239.
- <sup>170</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, in Bruns, 247-264.
- <sup>171</sup> 1 John 4:8, p. 1843.
- <sup>172</sup> Luke 17:20, p. 1645.
- <sup>173</sup> Bruns, pp. 247-264.
- <sup>174</sup> Bruns, pp. 247-264.
- <sup>175</sup> Moore, p. 155-169.
- <sup>176</sup> Bruns, pp. 247-264.
- <sup>177</sup> Wolfreys, pp. 59-74.
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- <sup>183</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘Prologue’, p. 230.
- <sup>184</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ‘Prologue’, p. 230.
- <sup>185</sup> Hsaio, 173.

<sup>186</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 264.

<sup>187</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 264.

<sup>188</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXVIII', p. 263.

<sup>189</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 264.

<sup>190</sup> Tigges, no page number given.

<sup>191</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York, Toronto: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 265.

<sup>193</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 265.

<sup>194</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 266.

<sup>195</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'CXXXI', p. 266.

<sup>196</sup> Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 1.

## CHAPTER 4

### ‘A STRANGE INVERSION OF REASONING’

If a tenth part of the pains which have been expended in finding benevolent adaptations in all nature had been employed in collecting evidence to blacken the character of the Creator, what scope for comment would not have been found in the entire existence of the lower animals, divided, with scarcely an exception, into devourers and devoured... If we are not obliged to believe the animal creation to be the work of a demon, it is because we need not suppose it to have been made by a Being of infinite power.<sup>1</sup>

Mill’s forceful paraphrase of Hume captures the shift to Tennyson’s lamenting vision of ‘nature, red in tooth in claw’,<sup>2</sup> using the division of the animal kingdom into predators and prey – the former ‘designed’ to kill the latter and the latter ‘designed’ to evade the former – to critique the Argument from Design. This was a vision central to what one commentator called the ‘...strange inversion of reasoning...’<sup>3</sup> constituting the Darwinian continuation of the Copernican Revolution, decentring humanity’s importance within the organic realm; and it was bitterly opposed by those beholden to young-earth creationism, natural theology, and human exceptionalism. Therefore, while Charles Darwin’s work marks a significant point in the march of science, it is also a point in the development of religion within the realm of moral and existential value.

This chapter will examine how the limits of language assist the sense of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science not only in reference to debates surrounding Darwinism and religion, but also to debates surrounding Darwinism and moral and existential value. The chapter investigates Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) *The Origin of Species* (1859) and his *Autobiography* (1887) to examine further the question of how, or whether, moral and existential value can be preserved without a description of the world in terms of design. This will then be compared to Matthew Arnold’s (1822-1888) ‘Dover Beach’ (1867) as a poem that is emblematic of both the despair for a world without design, and the hope of finding meaning regardless. Because Darwin’s work is so pivotal to the nineteenth century dialogue between science and religion, this chapter differs from others in that the weight of its focus is upon the non-fiction.

***‘Running faster in order to stay still...’***

Daniel Dennett writes: ‘If I were to give an award for the single best idea anyone has ever had, I’d give it to Darwin, ahead of Newton and Einstein and everyone else’.<sup>4</sup> Dennett’s view is that, although Newton and Einstein may have achieved more heroic feats of intelligence, it is Darwinism that has the most wide-reaching implications for humanity. But debate surrounding what these implications actually are is as unsettled as the debate surrounding the scientific fact of Darwin’s theory *is* settled. As noted in the Introduction, Darwinism has been described by writers such as Francis Collins as simply explaining how God achieved His creation, while others, including Richard Dawkins, view it as the sword that slew the ‘God Hypothesis’<sup>5</sup> and, therefore, the rational basis for belief in a literal God of any kind. Stephen Jay Gould cites the existence of scientists who accept both theism and evolution, and Paul Draper counters with the existence of scientists who reject theism because of evolution:

What Gould neglects to mention is that many well-educated people, including many of Gould’s colleagues on the irreligious end of the spectrum, reject theism precisely because they believe in evolution. For example, William B. Provine, a leading historian of science, maintains that those who retain their religious beliefs while accepting evolution ‘have to check their brains at the church-house door’.<sup>6</sup>

Still others, particularly creationists, echo George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), who believed that Darwinism leads to existential nihilism:

[Darwinism] seems simple, because you do not at first realise all that it involves. But when its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you. There is a hideous fatalism about it, a ghastly and damnable reduction of beauty and intelligence, of strength and purpose, of honour and aspiration.<sup>7</sup>

However, some Darwinists, like Brian Boyd (2009), assert the opposite. Boyd contends that the evolution of physical characteristics with functions is the evolution of ‘purpose’ of a kind:

Does evolution by natural selection rob life of purpose, as so many have feared? The answer is no. On the contrary, Charles Darwin has made it possible to understand how purpose, like life, builds from small beginnings, from the

ground up. In a very real sense, evolution creates purpose...<sup>8</sup>

The human mind's need for a description of evolution in terms of purpose is apparent, even if it can only be recognised as such in hindsight.

Jonathan Smith looks at how *The Origin of Species* (1859) was received, and subsequently its effect on the public: '...most Victorian readers got their Darwinism not from Darwin and Huxley, but from non-professionals who quietly or pugnaciously absorbed it into a providential account of nature. *The Origin* was not natural theology's death-knell'.<sup>9</sup> However, W. F. Bynum identifies the importance of *The Origin of Species* as a work that was indeed read by the public: 'Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*... occupies a remarkable place in the history of science. No other scientific work of comparable standing was written for a general readership'.<sup>10</sup> Here Bynum notes the difference and similarity between Darwin and his nearest rival for the public dissemination of science, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939):

His [Darwin's] star continues to wax, while Freud's has waned. ...however, Darwin and Freud share one similarity. The twin questions 'do you believe in evolution?' and 'do you believe in psychoanalysis?' have a disturbing symmetry. It would not occur to a pollster to ask 'do you believe in gravity?' or 'do you believe that the blood circulates?'.<sup>11</sup>

Bynum's observation here is telling. Darwin's theory may have been couched in the language of providence to many, but it nevertheless remained troubling enough to be doubted by many in the public.

Rebecca Stott has studied in detail how the idea of natural selection predates Darwin.<sup>12</sup> The concept had, in fact, been offered within natural theology, as nature's method of preserving fitness. Patrick Matthew (1790-1874) posited natural selection, but it appeared only briefly in a work entitled *Naval Timber and Arboriculture* (1831), and Darwin – along with most others – had never heard of it.<sup>13</sup> Yet with Matthew relying upon natural theology, it can be said that Darwin was the first to understand the significance of natural selection not just as a preserver of fitness, but as a creative force of complexity. Darwin was inspired by the geologists' idea that many minuscule changes can accumulate into great

changes over time, and by the Uniformitarian premise that ‘the present is the key to the past’<sup>14</sup>:

I always feel as if my books came half out of Lyell’s brain... for I have always thought that the great merit of the *Principles* was that it altered the whole tone of one’s mind and therefore, that when seeing a thing never seen by Lyell, one yet saw it partially through his eyes.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, Lyell’s tacit use of the limits of language to explain young-earth geology and creationism could also have the effect of altering ‘the whole tone of one’s mind’. Darwin was also influenced by economics, including Adam Smith’s idea of the ‘invisible hand’ self-adjusting prices according to supply and demand,<sup>16</sup> and Thomas Malthus’ (1766-1834) *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), with his apocalyptic thought-experiment about nature:

Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten-thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow, levels the population with the food of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Malthus’ words read almost like the Book of Revelation, including references to all Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. According to this thought experiment, even if the population succeeds in defeating War and Pestilence, and achieves its goal of flourishing, this only means the population will flourish beyond the environment’s capacity to support it, inviting Famine. In all cases – without a conscious attempt to prevent the over-proliferation of offspring – the result is an inevitable and competitive ‘struggle for existence’<sup>18</sup> in which, for most, the victor is Death.

Darwin notes how humans employ artificial selection in regard to animals, whereby favourable variations are selected for and unfavourable variations are selected against, changing species for domestic purposes over time. For change to

be possible, novel variations must sometimes arise.<sup>19</sup> Darwin simply argues that nature can exert the same influence – i.e., *natural selection*<sup>20</sup> – whereby favourable variations are selected for and unfavourable variations are selected against in the Malthusian ‘struggle for existence’. Darwin records in his *Autobiography* (1887):

I happened to read... Malthus on *Population*, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species.<sup>21</sup>

The idea is so simple that Thomas Huxley (1825-1895) once wondered: ‘How extremely stupid not to have thought of that’.<sup>22</sup> Yet the application of natural selection is a little more complex. The primary application of it is, today, described through ‘the Red Queen Hypothesis’, which Peter Atkins explains:

Natural selection is an arms race. The Red Queen Hypothesis is the idea that predators and prey are engaged in a constant battle, with predators evolving better predation strategies and techniques and prey doing likewise (The Red Queen instructed Alice to go on running faster in order to stay still). A sharpened tooth here brings about a thicker skin or fleeter foot elsewhere, which in turn can encourage the emergence of a still sharper tooth.<sup>23</sup>

Through natural selection, through arms races in which predators and prey must in each generation improve in parallel or be exterminated (‘running faster in order to stay still’), only favourable variations can accumulate over time, increasing the complexity and diversity of forms; and if artificial selection can change an ancient auroch into a domestic cow with mere thousands of years, it can only be imagined what natural selection can do with millions – or hundreds of millions – of years.

Darwin’s views were no mere impersonal observation. Darwin’s career was punctuated by the death of his immuno-deficient daughter Annie, which could only have given him a very personal understanding of the Malthusian ‘struggle for existence’: ‘We have lost the joy of the household, and the solace of our old age.... Oh that she could now know how deeply, how tenderly we do still and shall ever

love her dear joyous face'.<sup>24</sup> Here, what Tennyson had referred to as 'the cry of the whole human race'<sup>25</sup> in the face of 'nature, red in tooth and claw' can be seen as a principal idea within the 'Darwinian Revolution' itself; the principal idea within a description of nature in which organisms do not live under the glow of heaven with design and purpose, but under the shadow of the Red Queen, with the origin of 'beauty and intelligence... strength and purpose... honour and aspiration' reduced to their utility for reproduction in a race of nothing more than 'running faster in order to stay still'. It is not difficult to see why Tennyson cries out so dramatically against such visions of nature, nor why Shaw condemns it for its 'hideous fatalism'.

Evolution already had supporters in the scientific community before 1859, and Darwin's theory of it was not immediately accepted.<sup>26</sup> Darwin was ignorant of the mechanism of inheritance, favouring a 'blending theory' which could only result in novel variations being diluted in subsequent generations, rendering evolution unworkable, Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), with his discovery of genetics (which resulted in the modern synthesis),<sup>27</sup> would change this, though debates remained regarding the details of the evolutionary process.<sup>28</sup> But worse, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) had independently arrived at nearly identical conclusions regarding the connection between evolution and the 'struggle for existence'.<sup>29</sup> It might almost be said that evolution by natural selection was simply an idea whose time had come. Yet it came first to Darwin, which alongside his diligent collection of evidence for the theory, was what made it the 'Darwinian' Revolution.

***'By a strange inversion of reasoning...'***

Darwin seems to both anticipate and seek to ameliorate the threatening sense of meaninglessness within the pages of *The Origin of Species* itself. This may have been part of his (somewhat ironic) aversion to controversy, as Leila S. May comments: 'Darwin's fear of confrontation is well-known, as is the pain he suffered when he contemplated the offence that his ideas provoked'.<sup>30</sup> In 1844, Darwin wrote to his friend Joseph Hooker: 'I am almost convinced (quite contrary to the opinion that I started with) that species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable'.<sup>31</sup>

In order to counter this sense of meaninglessness, Darwin arguably resorts to the sense of self-transcendent awe experienced at the threshold of the limits of language. Critics have certainly identified such a sensibility in Darwin's work before; particularly by making use of Hayden V. White's historiography, which holds that the chaos of historical data renders the historian's work necessarily selective, and that they must select the facts according to the tropes of their chosen 'plot' in order to construct a comprehensible narrative.<sup>32</sup> Gillian Beer has written authoritatively on Darwin's 'plots', identifying the tropes of romance and tragedy validating the plot-narrative that Darwin is constructing.<sup>33</sup> But even prior to White, Stanley Edgar Hyman argued in 1959 that such tropes might even have been part of the reason for the text's public success: 'I would submit that *The Origin of Species* caught the imagination of its time as a dramatic poem, and a dramatic poem of a very special sort', and 'If Darwin's tragic vision embraces bloodshed and murder, it also embraces beauty and joy'.<sup>34</sup> According to Hyman, Darwinism is not simply cold hard fact, but something that an individual could enjoy even if it were mere epic fantasy; a cosmic drama to rival *The Iliad* and *Paradise Lost*. Here, an analysis of Darwin's tropes and plots will be explored in further depth, in order to demonstrate how Darwin made use of tropes and plots to make his work appeal to an audience, and the difficulties imposed on his plots by the limits of language.

The Romantic language that would be employed later is evident even in Darwin's early writings. Beer has already written that *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1845) exhibits 'extremes':

Extremes of scale; extremes of silence; extremes of time; ruins and drifts: but no mist: everything clear, intense, profound; and culture and nature equally called in to express that intensity: a thunderstorm, or a full orchestra and chorus from the *Messiah*; watching and listening. The sublime here is natural, un-peopled, with a hint of the sacred...<sup>35</sup>

As an experience to be compared with George Frederick Handel's (1685-1759) renowned oratorio *Messiah* (1741), an explicitly religious evocation, Darwin's 'sublime' arguably contains more than a mere 'hint' of the sacred. But it can be added that if the 'sublime' exists at the 'extremes' of experience, then it exists at the brink of what they can comfortably describe through language.

But one passage from *The Voyage of the Beagle* in particular exemplifies the limits of language in describing nature. First, the example of two primeval forests is given: ‘Both are temples filled with the varied productions of the God of Nature: – no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel that there is more in main than the mere breath of his body...’<sup>36</sup> Only a co-option of religious language – ‘temples’ – will suffice to describe this vision, and in being described as ‘productions’ the language of design emerges to support the idea of a ‘God of Nature’; a term from deistic discourse, as Darwin was prone to in his younger days. But the limits of language are more vivid when Darwin attempts to analyse his feelings about Patagonia:

I find that the plains of Patagonia frequently cross before my eyes; yet these plains are pronounced by all wretched and useless... Why, then, and the case in not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory? ...I can scarcely analyse these feelings: but it must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination. The plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely passable, and hence unknown: they bear the stamp of having lasted, as they are now, for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time... who would not look at these last boundaries to man’s knowledge with deep but ill-defined sensations?<sup>37</sup>

Darwin seems very self-consciously aware that his feelings here are ‘scarcely’ analysable in rational linguistic terms, and this is clear through the use of the negative terms ‘boundless’, ‘scarcely passable’, ‘unknown’, and ‘no limit’. Darwin’s conception of ‘the free scope of the imagination’ is much like Percy Shelley’s, where it is imagination that bridges the gap between the describable and the indescribable. It is imagination that gives the impression that the plains are almost infinite in time and space, or that they may as well be so for all that an individual can describe them. The ‘ill-defined sensations’ thus produced speak of awe at the threshold of limits of language, the ‘last boundaries to man’s knowledge’.

It is this language of Romanticism that carries through to Darwin’s vision of nature in *The Origin of Species*; particularly in the organic imagery of the great ‘Tree of Life’:

The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those produced during each former year may represent the long succession of extinct species. ...all the growing twigs have tried to branch out on all sides, and to overtop and kill the surrounding twigs and branches, in the same manner as species and groups of species have tried to overmaster other species in the great battle for life. The limbs divided into great branches, and these into lesser and lesser branches, were themselves once, when the tree was small, budding twigs; and this connexion of the former and present buds by ramifying branches may well represent the classification of all extinct and living species in groups subordinate to groups... As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications.<sup>38</sup>

The word ‘great’ in ‘great branches’ and ‘great Tree of Life’, and the word ‘beautiful’ in ‘ever branching and beautiful ramifications’ are value judgements precisely where Darwinism overwhelms the mind with awe; namely, where an individual can identify their own surname-based family tree as a twig of a twig of a twig of an incomprehensibly greater family tree that includes every living organism, from human and chimpanzee to fungi and bacteria, branching throughout geological deep-time. This is an orderly view of nature, articulated in romantic language where even the ‘struggle for existence’ that generated the tree is described as ‘the great battle for life’, conveying a similar idealised sense of war as found in Lord Byron’s (1788-1824) *The Eve of Waterloo* (1816).<sup>39</sup>

Darwin’s value judgements continue in the most renowned lines of the text, which form a thought experiment imagining the order of nature operating in an ‘entangled bank’:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.<sup>40</sup>

This thought experiment, concentrating on specific imagery of ‘plants of many kinds’, ‘birds singing on the bushes’, ‘various insects flitting about’, and ‘worms crawling through the damp earth’, conveys the Victorian sense of progress and improvement through science’s unveiling of nature’s laws:

These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms.<sup>41</sup>

At first, this appears to be an instance of science reducing phenomena to a mere intellectual understanding, stripping it of awe. Although it was certainly not the case that all Romantics were anti-science, readers might recall Keats sullenly resenting science for destroying the beauty of the rainbow by explaining how it works, reducing it to ‘...the dull catalogue of common things’,<sup>42</sup> and Poe railing against science for being a vulture preying upon the poet’s heart.<sup>43</sup> For these individuals, the chains of scientific ‘laws’ were something to be transcended.

Yet the entire point of Darwin’s thought experiment, a point that is echoed by many scientists today – perhaps most evangelically by Dawkins<sup>44</sup> – is eminently Victorian: the experience of nature is *more* beautiful – not less – when individuals can look upon the ecosystem of the entangled bank and see the order and progress of nature, in a place where science and literature meet, as Waring illuminates:

Science is driven by the need to ‘know’, literature by the need to ‘utter’... But there is also a point at which the expressive instinct is neither one thing nor the other... Darwin experienced both the desire to know and to utter at this primordial level of his consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

Reductionism may ‘reduce’ a phenomenon to how it works in order to understand it, but it does not ‘reduce’ awe and grandeur. Beer has also noted this: ‘Law to him [Darwin] is not in opposition to wonder, but is rather the energy of the wonderful’.<sup>46</sup>

Donald M. Hassler echoes Beer’s sentiment:

Far from being brutal and ‘red-toothed’ as Tennyson feared, Darwin’s vision in *The Origin of Species* is a beautiful and lyric image of unity and community. Not only his final picture of the ‘tangled bank’ that is often quoted but also the weight of all his detail envisions one large life force on this planet...<sup>47</sup>

The ‘unity and community’ emerges in all life being literally related, becoming ‘one large life force’. Such concepts push at the limits of what language had evolved to describe, assisting the sense of awe. The very manner of expression in which Romantic, quasi-religious value-judgements about science are often given by biologists like Dawkins might demonstrate this:

Cliché or not, ‘stranger than fiction’ expresses exactly how I feel about the truth... This [Darwinism] is a truth which still fills me with astonishment. Though I have known it for years, I never seem to get fully used to it.<sup>48</sup>

That a fact could be ‘stranger than fiction’ indicates that it is beyond what language had evolved to grasp, and that it is only because of this that the individual can be in a continual state of ‘astonishment’, literally incapable of getting ‘fully used to it’. Even George Eliot, as Darwin’s contemporary, thought that ‘...development theory and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes’.<sup>49</sup> This has been interpreted by Anna Neill in the light not of anti-Darwinism – for Eliot accepted Darwin’s ‘development theory’ – but rather in the light of Darwin’s sense of the ‘sublime’: ‘What sounds uncharacteristically mystical probably expresses a passion for the unknown as it is navigated by the imagination’.<sup>50</sup> In this view, ‘explanations of processes’ only produce ‘a feeble impression’ next to the far greater impression of the awe of the Darwinian story; awe induced by ‘mystery’, or the ‘passion of the unknown’, or the inability of language to truly describe the magnitude of the Darwinian vision of nature. Perhaps linguistic descriptions of phenomena, rather than destroying the sense of profound awe and mystery at the threshold of the describable, instead simply shifts the threshold of the describable to hitherto unimagined and undescribed realms. It seems likely that it is precisely this phenomenon that is at the heart of religious experience.

Yet Darwin's description of organic forms being 'elaborately constructed' also conveys the difficulty of escaping the discourse wherein Romantic, self-transcendent awe is described in terms of design and purpose. A possible value judgment imputing purposefulness emerges by seeking to give meaning to the suffering inherent to nature: 'Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows'.<sup>51</sup> Although this is, in itself, apparently a simple statement describing a simple fact – albeit poetically – it enables the reader to view the suffering in nature as being *for* something: 'the production of the higher animals'. It is a very Victorian 'plot' applied to nature, whereby science reveals the laws of nature that empower progress. Here, suffering and 'the struggle for existence' are facts of nature regardless of whether Darwinism is true, but while they appear meaningless and depressing in themselves, Darwinism can be seen as allowing people to *give* them meaning and purpose. Without nature 'red in tooth and claw', without natural selection, the 'production of the higher animals' would not be possible. Although evolution strictly has no intended goals at all, Darwin selects the 'higher animals' as an important goal nonetheless and focuses on the tropes that validate his plot: the romance and tragedy of the 'war of nature'. Yet by positing a goal to evolution, Darwin gives the impression of design. In fact, this was noted in Darwin's own time: '...in 1874, [Asa] Gray wrote that Darwin had done a "great service to Natural Science in bringing back to it Teleology: so that instead of Morphology *versus* Teleology, we shall have Morphology wedded to Teleology"'.<sup>52</sup>

The most renowned passage from *The Origin of Species* summarises Darwin's theory in a similar vein:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.<sup>53</sup>

This final exaltation about the sublimity of nature conveys all the Romantic value-judgements, yet the references to 'several powers', 'originally breathed', 'cycling on', as the process by which life evolved, invoke images of design and purpose. Such language has been noted before. For example, Beer highlights the

anthropomorphic use of ‘the face of nature’,<sup>54</sup> and George Levine points to Darwin’s appropriation of ‘...the language and many of the strategies of adaptation from natural theology’.<sup>55</sup> The notions of a ‘law’ being legislated, whereby nature ‘selects’, indeed seem anthropomorphic, ironically engaging the same discourse of design exhibited in Paley’s *Natural Theology*.

While Darwin was simply using the term ‘natural selection’ for its analogy to the already well established term ‘artificial selection’, Wallace himself had warned against the term for being too anthropomorphic in his essay entitled ‘Mr. Darwin’s Metaphors Liable to Misunderstanding’.<sup>56</sup> Robert M. Young discusses how readily Darwin’s metaphor was indeed misunderstood:

The most widespread of the misconceptions played a very ironic part in the debate surrounding Darwin’s theory. As Adam Sedgwick put it in a cordial but profoundly pained letter, ‘You write of ‘natural selection’ as if it were done consciously by the selecting agent’. Sedgwick wanted to insist on the role of final causes in nature and asserted that natural laws were manifestations of the will of God. Like so many of those who seized on the anthropomorphic use of ‘natural selection’, Sedgwick wanted to assimilate it to an active role for the Deity in sustaining and guiding the history of nature.<sup>57</sup>

Such language, invoking the sense of a conscious ‘selecting agent’, seemed to have only reinforced the discourse of describing the world in terms of design. As Young points out, the irony is apparent in an analysis of Darwin’s language: ‘While Darwin grew increasingly unsympathetic to attempts to couple natural selection with a conception of design, it was Darwin’s language which had given his interpreters a warrant for their views on designed evolution’.<sup>58</sup>

Michael Spindler argues that such language may have been part of Darwin’s attempt at writing in a style suited to public rhetoric, pointing out that Darwin often employs ‘frequent use of the inclusive first-person plural pronoun to establish communality with his implied listeners or readers – ‘Let us consider....’, ‘If we admit ...’; he even talks of ‘our theory!’.<sup>59</sup> But whether Darwin’s use of the language of design was unconscious or merely part of his rhetoric, the question of whether such language and themes could be mistaken for design does not appear unreasonable in the light of how difficult it is for language to describe all life

evolving by natural selection from common origins. This difficulty is best expressed in by a criticism of Darwin published anonymously in 1868:

In the theory with which we have to deal, Absolute Ignorance is the artificer; so that we may enunciate as the fundamental principle of the whole system, that, in order to make a perfect and beautiful machine, it is not requisite to know how to make it. This proposition will be found, on careful examination, to express, in condensed form, the essential purport of the Theory, and to express in a few words all Mr. Darwin's meaning; who, by a strange inversion of reasoning, seems to think Absolute Ignorance fully qualified to take the place of Absolute Wisdom in all the achievements of creative skill.<sup>60</sup>

This 'strange inversion of reasoning', overturning humanity's view of the world from a top-down 'Great Chain of Being'<sup>61</sup> in favour of bottom-up evolution, represents a violation of common sense within the discourse of design that is best expressed by Darwin himself, who cites Paley's own example of the eye:

To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amount of light, and of the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree.<sup>62</sup>

This sentence is followed by a lucid explanation of exactly how the eye could indeed have evolved by natural selection, explaining that the initial sense of absurdity is – like that experienced in regard to the sphericity of the earth – unfounded.<sup>63</sup> But that sense of absurdity deserves examination. If it is indeed the case that the environment that language evolved to describe was an environment of relatively small timescales, during which the only complex objects to arise were indeed those formed top-down by human design and contrivance, then a description of complexity arising bottom-up by natural selection over millions of years, and of humans sharing common ancestors with chimpanzees – much less with turnips – may indeed be difficult to fathom.

This difficulty is readily evident in the essentialism suggested by language, whereby species are named, labelled and classified as if they are indeed fixed, immutable, essentialist forms. This makes it seem as though (to anthropocentrically take the hominid line as an example) *Australopithecus*, *Homo*

*Habilis*, *Homo Erectus*, and *Homo Sapiens* are each absolutely distinct from each other rather than mere arbitrary labels imposed upon what is in fact a continuous, unbroken line. Had language evolved to describe time on a geological scale, then such categorisations might very well not need exist, and the fact that humans share ancestors with turnips might be as tedious and commonplace a concept as that of ‘rocks are hard’. But because humans did not, it may be difficult to outgrow the language of design. The essentialism suggested by the limits of language implies that humans are something *essentially* different from their common ancestors with turnips, which makes the idea of an anti-essentialist transition phase appear absolutely absurd. That this intuitive sense is unfounded may demonstrate that just as laboratory experiment is inappropriate for determining values, intuition is inappropriate for determining facts.<sup>64</sup> But the initial sense of absurdity is powerful nonetheless. The wonder is not how people like Huxley did not manage to think of evolution by natural selection, but how Darwin did.

***‘A dog might as well speculate on the mind of Newton’.***

If the impulse to describe the world in terms of design was so prevalent, Tennyson’s implicit question remains. Could a description of nature without the language of design retain a sense of moral and existential purpose for life? Here I wish to interrogate Darwin’s religious views, as related in his *Autobiography* (1887), with reference to society at the time, to explore the notion that what might have been the issue favouring the survival of religion was not so much the compatibility of a world without design with the existence of a literal God, as it was the compatibility of a world without design with moral and existential value. An analysis of Darwin’s *Autobiography* can certainly be informed by Linda H. Peterson’s argument that Victorian autobiography in general was hermeneutic and interpretative, as opposed to strictly representative:

Anyone who attempts to trace the history of a literary genre, especially one like autobiography which itself raises questions of historical method, recognises soon that histories are created by interpreters and that interpretations depend upon chosen points of origin... That method I shall call ‘hermeneutic’ – hermeneutic first in the sense that it foregrounds self-interpretation rather than narration or self-expression...<sup>65</sup>

This view of autobiography matches White's characterisation of historical works in general as orderly narratives imposed upon the chaos of the past, and this argument is perhaps more forceful in regard to autobiographies, given their personal nature. Darwin's view of his own past would have been inflected by what his values dictated were important in the present, making his *Autobiography* an insight not just into his past, but into his state of mind at the moment of writing. Certainly, Victorian autobiographies frequently contained a moral, imparting the life lessons of celebrated individuals to the reader; and in order to do so, that moral – operative in the present – influences the narrative. Darwin's *Autobiography* is an example of this Victorian trend, and the moral that Darwin defends does not include viewing evolution by natural selection to be antithetical to cataphatic religion.

Darwin's own loss of faith in Christianity was effected not by evolution but by scriptural criticism and moral concerns. Darwin's *Autobiography* relates his devoutly Christian disposition as late as his voyage on the *Beagle*, where he travelled the globe making the observations that would develop into his later theories: 'Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality'.<sup>66</sup> Here Darwin's own religiosity appears to have been value-driven. As far as religion's factual claims were concerned, he became beset by doubts owing to what he saw as the non-credible history of the Biblical narrative and the inconsistencies of the Gospels, likely as revealed by contemporary German biblical criticism. On this subject, Darwin relates a telling fantasy: 'I can well remember often and often inventing day-dreams of old letters between distinguished Romans and manuscripts being discovered at Pompeii or elsewhere which confirmed in the most striking manner all that was written in the Gospels'.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, Darwin's doubts eventually eroded his belief in Christianity, at a rate so slow that he 'felt no distress'.<sup>68</sup> This suggests that losing religious faith need not be as calamitous as it would at first seem, so long as it is gradual. But it was moral concerns that sealed Darwin's doubt:

[I] have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct. I can indeed hardly see how

anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.<sup>69</sup>

Naturally, much has been made of the final line. Michael Neve writes of its importance to Victorian society: ‘These six words are, without exaggeration, the Victorian crisis of faith in miniature’.<sup>70</sup> Neve’s statement is true to the notion that it was the moral consequences of beliefs that animated the ‘crisis of faith’ occurring at this time. However, Darwin’s moral objection only applied to those varieties of fundamentalist Christianity that espouse the doctrine of eternal torment for those who do not believe as they do. As Darwin’s devout wife Emma Darwin (1808-1896) commented: ‘Nothing can be said too severe upon the doctrine of everlasting punishment for disbelief – but very few now would call that Christianity’.<sup>71</sup> Darwin’s words do not apply to more liberal strains of Christianity, much less to belief in a literal God itself.

Some might contend that there is an indication that the scientific way of thinking did influence Darwin against belief in God, as is, perhaps, evidenced in one of Emma’s letters:

May not the habit in scientific pursuits of believing nothing till it is proved, influence your mind too much in other things which cannot be proved in the same way, and which if true are likely to be above our comprehension.<sup>72</sup>

Of this letter Darwin wrote: ‘When I am dead, know that many times, I have kissed and cried over this’.<sup>73</sup> However, it can also be argued that the scientific way of thinking simply influenced Darwin against forming firm conclusions either way on the existence of a literal God. Darwin certainly did not believe evolutionary theory to be incompatible with a literal God, and his reasons were logical, not simply diplomatic out of deference to Emma’s religious sensibilities.

It is true that, by introducing a natural, yet non-chance alternative to design to explain complexity in nature, Darwin had provided the material source of order that Hume had lacked, and with it Darwin believed that he had refuted the Argument from Design as given by Paley and so many others before him: ‘The old argument from design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been

discovered'.<sup>74</sup> Darwin also objected to those who might still seek to insert a role for a designer somewhere in the new paradigm, as he believed that the point of his theory was to provide a natural explanation for the complexity and diversity of life, and that any need for a designer would entail a failure of that explanation: 'I would give nothing for the theory of natural selection if it required miraculous additions at any one stage of descent'.<sup>75</sup> Theists who agree with Thomas Burnet (c.1635-1715) that a God who creates nature to create itself is superior to a God who creates nature in such a manner as to require his constant intervention, might even agree with Darwin.

It is also true that Darwin believed his theory was more compatible with the existence of the suffering inherent in nature than was the Argument from Design:

[The] very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent first cause seems to me a strong one; whereas, as just remarked, the presence of much suffering agrees well with the view that all organic beings have been developed through variation and natural selection.<sup>76</sup>

For Darwin, it was the Ichneumonidae wasp that proved to be a barrier to Pope's theodicy: 'I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars'.<sup>77</sup> Yet in the 'Red Queen' theory of natural selection, such a cruel order is not only explained, but expected. Because of this, Gould has even argued that it is *more* desirable to view nature as non-designed: '...if intent be truly manifest, then what can we make of our universe – for the scene is evil by any standard of human morality'.<sup>78</sup> In this view, it is better to see 'nature, red in tooth and claw' as the product of chance and necessity, and values the product of individual creation from within, than both being the product of a terrible and malevolent will.<sup>79</sup> Theists like Collins and Kenneth Miller, who distance God from nature for similar reasons,<sup>80</sup> might agree.

It is true that Darwin could not accept the Argument from Personal Experience, which he describes as being '...the most usual argument for the existence of an intelligent God'<sup>81</sup>:

...it cannot be doubted that Hindoos, Mahomedans and others might argue in the same manner and with equal force in favour of the existence of one God, or of many

gods, or as with the Buddhists of no God... Therefore I cannot see that such inward convictions and feelings are of any weight as evidence of what really exists. The state of mind which grand scenes formerly excited in me, and which was intimately connected with a belief in God, did not essentially differ from that which is often called the sense of sublimity.<sup>82</sup>

Clearly, the ‘state of mind’ which was ‘intimately connected with a belief in God’ recalls such moments as his contemplation of the ‘boundless’ plains of Patagonia. Yet now – however valuable that indescribable ‘sublimity’ is – Darwin invokes a relativity thesis to explain that a leap from feelings to reality regarding God cannot be made.

Nevertheless, Darwin himself relates how he had been a devout theist while writing *The Origin of Species*, a position that only waned later:

Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with the reason and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty or rather impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity.<sup>83</sup>

With the term ‘extreme difficulty’ dismissed as too poor and meagre a description of his state of mind, there is a sense here that Darwin’s ‘impossibility of conceiving’ humanity to be an accident of historical contingency, of ‘blind chance and necessity’, cannot be described hyperbolically enough; language simply fails. It is reminiscent of Tennyson’s sense that humanity, with ‘all we thought and loved and did’, are too special to be so contingent. At first, these limits of language in describing a world without design drove Darwin to a conclusion that seemed as ‘invincible’ to him as design had been to Paley:

When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist. This conclusion was strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote *The Origin of Species*; and it is since that time that it has very gradually with many fluctuations become weaker.<sup>84</sup>

With the compulsion to impute intelligence ‘in some degree analogous to that of man’, it seems that even Darwin was not immune to describing complexity without design analogous to human design. However, Darwin did eventually realise this, resulting in his belief ‘very gradually with many fluctuations’ becoming ‘weaker’.

If evolutionary theory influenced Darwin’s mind in any direction, it is arguably in the direction against forming firm conclusions either way, as he relates:

But then arises the doubt – can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions? May not these be the result of the connection between cause and effect which strikes us as a necessary one, but probably depends merely on inherited experience? ...I cannot pretend to throw the least light on such abstruse problems. The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us.<sup>85</sup>

The ‘inherited experience’ of the mind entails that it can only explain effects in terms of causes prior to the effect itself, leading to talk of a ‘First Cause’ prior to time; indeed it is a ‘connection that strikes us as a necessary one’. Yet it is unclear what the terms ‘cause and effect’ can even mean prior to the existence of time, calling into question the very coherency of phrases like ‘the beginning of all things’. Worse, if words like ‘universe’ and ‘nature’ are defined as ‘everything’, then to say that any ‘cause’ existed *outside* the universe or nature would be simply to say that that cause does not exist.

Similar problems have certainly been noted before, as David Macey comments: ‘Developments within philosophy itself, and especially the so-called Linguistic Turn, mean... that the traditional concerns of metaphysics are often viewed as problems that arise from the misuse of language’.<sup>86</sup> The fact that language readily enables grammatically and syntactically correct formulations of such phrases can certainly explain why beliefs based upon them can seem logical, and therefore survive. Yet Darwin, like Lyell, appears to have been aware that language is limited in what it can describe: ‘I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect. A dog might as well speculate on the mind of Newton’.<sup>87</sup> This foreshadows J. S. Haldane’s (1892-1964) ‘suspicion’, in 1927, that: ‘...the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer

than we *can* suppose'.<sup>88</sup> There may well be truths about the universe that are as far beyond what could ever occur to a human as theoretical physics is beyond what could ever occur to a dog. As much as people feel that both their mind and their language ought to be capable of grasping all things – a feeling that itself could arise from the limits of the mind and the limits of language – the analogy of the dog speculating on Newton reminds the reader that the dog, too, likely feels the same about its own mind, from its own limited point of view.

Yet it seems clear that Darwin's words are a call for humility, rather than a call to form firm conclusions for or against the existence of a literal God. Like the mind, the workings of language also likely depend 'merely on the inherited experience' from the particular environment in which it evolved, and therefore cannot possibly be expected to be able to describe the beginning of the universe; which would mean that the answer is left not to science, but to individual value-judgement, in accordance with Bacon's 'two truths'<sup>89</sup> doctrine. But the 'insoluble' mystery of the universe, too, can provide the sense of awe experienced at the threshold of the limits of language. If Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was correct to insist that the '...wonder *that things are...*'<sup>90</sup> – the wonder that anything exists at all rather than nothing – ought to be the beginning point of all science and philosophy, then the limits of language that give rise to that wonder might not be a negative thing.

Nevertheless, so long as an individual's belief did not depend on a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis, so long as it did not depend on the Argument from Design in nature (hardly the only theistic argument before Darwin), and so long as it did not already have a problem with the Argument from Evil (which, of course, existed millennia before Darwin), it is difficult to see how Darwinism itself could conflict with belief in a literal God. Brooke may be right that the conflict model has been exaggerated: 'Darwin's critique did not touch the central thrust of their [the Christian commentators'] doctrine, which was that everything ultimately owed its existence and preservation to a power transcending the natural order'.<sup>91</sup> The problem that individuals had with Darwinism was not necessarily that it conflicted with cataphatic theology, but with the limits of language that demand design to preserve moral and existential value; and this deserves exploration.

***‘Our descent from the apes is a humiliating discovery...’***

Darwinism did not always involve a moral and existential crisis. In fact, Darwin opposed practices such as slavery and animal abuse *because* of the moral meaning he created concerning evolutionary facts; and yet the reasons why his moral meaning did not take root may also be due to the limits of language. The evolutionary fact that Darwin used to oppose slavery and animal abuse was gradualism, which erases the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. After all, at what point did ‘human’ become something separate from ‘animal’? At what point in human history did one ‘race’ become distinct from another? According to Darwin’s theory, there was no such ‘point’, only gradual change where any distinction is arbitrary. Matthew Day’s analysis of Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (1871) also addresses this point:

‘Man in his arrogance’, he [Darwin] irritably judged, ‘thinks himself a great work. Worthy the interposition of a deity, more humble and I believe true to consider him created from animals’. For Darwin, the narcissistic project that begins with inserting a gulf between ‘us’ and ‘them’ ultimately ends with the immoral and self-debasing practice of treating other human beings like animals. It should come as little surprise then, that in *Descent* we find Darwin addressing the ‘great Sin of slavery’ in the same paragraph that he confronts the ‘horrible cruelty to animals’. From his point of view, both practices were expressions of the same nefarious decision to separate ourselves from Nature.<sup>92</sup>

In this view, the meaning of Darwinism’s dethronement of humanity from an imaginary place of exceptionalism is not purposelessness, but a welcome and humbling deflation of a dangerous and narcissistic arrogance that divides the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’. The problem, Day argues, is that all the traits once held to be the defining traits that divide humans from animals have either been found in other species (as has been the case with empathy, foresight, and tool-use, to name a few), or they have the adverse effect of also dividing humans from other humans.<sup>93</sup> For example, if great intelligence is invoked as the defining trait of humanness, then are more intelligent humans more human still? Ought the more intelligent humans be the object of greater moral concern than the less intelligent? In a remarkable inversion, the moral meaning that might be created concerning Darwinian gradualism undermines this very disturbing line of thought.

In addition to Day's analysis, perhaps the problem is that the very words 'human' and 'race' are arbitrary demarcations. Like the '...separation of self from other',<sup>94</sup> separation between 'species' and 'race' are born of a linguistic convenience imposed by the limits of language; creating the illusion of an 'human' or 'racial' *essence* which does not exist, and without which discrimination and intolerance would be literally inconceivable.

On morality, Darwin even suggested a non-theistic source:

A man... looks forwards and backwards, and compares his various feelings, desire and recollections. He then finds, in accordance with the verdict of all the wisest men that the highest satisfaction is derived from following certain impulses, namely the social instincts. If he acts for the good of others, he will receive the approbation of his fellow men and gain the love of those with whom he lives; and this latter gain undoubtedly is the highest pleasure on this earth.<sup>95</sup>

This idea can be analysed in reference to the objection raised by Walter Waring:

Incredibly, Darwin believed that these impulses will generally tend toward the 'good'... it seems to contradict that cardinal rule of natural selection which states that no variation is selected for the good of another creature, individual survival and fertility being the tests of fitness. How then can nature build up an instinct in man for helping others and so gaining their good wishes?<sup>96</sup>

It must be said that plausible evolutionary stories explaining the origin of moral intuition in the form of 'the social instincts' – as well as the aggressive instincts – do, in fact, abound in the form of sociobiology.<sup>97</sup> Yet even Darwin's account suggests that Waring's objection misses the point; for even if human nature is a real phenomenon with innate instincts that can be known, the mere existence of such instincts says nothing about whether individuals *ought* to act upon them. Darwin knew that if the mind had evolved so that the organism could consciously respond to its environment in order to survive and reproduce effectively, then this would have the effect of the mind being capable of acting independently of its instincts; until it 'looks forwards and backwards, and compares... various feelings, desire and recollections'. Therefore, even if evolution did also select for aggressive instincts, the human mind is able to consciously think about happiness,

and recognise that it is ‘the social instincts’ – not the aggressive – that are ‘the highest pleasure on this earth’.

While an individual who agrees with Day’s reasoning might stop short of the moral trapdoor of pointing to this particular thinking ability as the defining trait of humanity, it remains an important warning against the Naturalistic Fallacy of deriving values from *whatever* instincts nature has endowed. Darwin seems to be engaging a discourse that also appears in the literature of Dickens and Tennyson: an anti-Hobbesian discourse, contending that even if all that people care about is their own happiness, their own happiness is best ensured by caring about the happiness of others; simply because people require the ‘approbation’ and ‘love of those with whom [they live]’ in order to be fulfilled. Even without a deity, if people do not want to live in a world without morality, if that world would be bad for them, then that is reason enough to care about morality.

However, the limits of language, demanding an essentialism that denies gradualism and favours design, explains why Waring is more indicative of the common vision of a Darwinian view of life in Darwin’s time. There was certainly a widespread discourse wherein ‘natural’ was synonymous with ‘good’ on the assumption that nature is benevolently designed; a belief strengthened by claims like Pope’s ‘whatever is, is right’,<sup>98</sup> and the belief that some things appear chaotic and unjust only because the mind is too limited in apprehending the design. And although Darwin had employed Romantic language, Robert M. Ryan points to Wordsworth’s anti-Darwinian influence, citing Aldous Huxley’s complaint that: ‘...seventy-nine years after Wordsworth’s death, his influence was still impeding acceptance of the Darwinian vision of nature’, with ‘...most serious-minded people...’ accepting ‘...an axiom that nature is divine and morally uplifting’.<sup>99</sup> The result was deplored at the time by Mill:

If it can be said with any plausibility that ‘nature enjoins’ anything, the propriety of obeying the injunction is by most people considered to be made out; and, conversely, the imputation of being contrary to nature is thought to bar the door against any pretension, on the part of the thing so designated, to be tolerated or excused; and the word ‘unnatural’ has not ceased to be one of the most vituperative epithets in the language.<sup>100</sup>

If the limits of language in describing the world without design lead to the belief that ‘natural’ means ‘good’, then Darwinism, holding that human beings were forged in an eons long ‘struggle for existence’ within the ‘war of nature’, renders the famous characterisation of natural selection as ‘survival of the fittest’<sup>101</sup> into a moral imperative. Perhaps the threat to moral and existential value came not just from a discourse of Darwinism refuting design, but also from a discourse wherein Darwinism was *confused* with design.

Pope and Wordsworth cannot be blamed for this; after all, Darwin himself engaged the discourse of design. But Social Darwinism, the *reductio ad absurdum* of confusing ‘natural’ with ‘good’, with its stage-theory of development upon which the ‘races’ were ranked, appears to have less in common with evolutionary gradualism – which erases the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction of race – than it does with the ‘Great Chain of Being’. The ranking of races as superior and inferior had, of course, already long constituted the ideological justifications of racism, imperialism, and slavery; even among some of those considered to be the most enlightened of Enlightenment writers. In 1742, Hume asserted that non-whites were ‘naturally inferior’,<sup>102</sup> and in 1764 Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote approvingly of Hume’s verdict.<sup>103</sup> Often, ideological racism did work simply as a post-hoc justification for more material concerns; as Margaret Kohn and Daniel I. O’Neill observe, economic dependence on slavery, and competition with other European powers, caused even some of those who detested slavery to oppose its abolition.<sup>104</sup> As Peter Quinn notes, for later individuals Social Darwinism was certainly a convenient new rationalisation.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, it was just the kind of ‘progressive narrative’ into which many Victorian imperialists were seeking to insert Britain, in an attempt to escape the fate of the empires of Ancient Greece and Rome, upon which Britain’s empire was modelled.<sup>106</sup>

Like the ‘Great Chain of Being’, the limits of language create an essentialistic ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction between stages or ‘races’ in Social Darwinism.<sup>107</sup> Terms like ‘English’ suggest an essence differentiating English and non-English peoples as *inherently* different, and yet that difference is necessarily artificial. Jude V. Nixon, exploring Victorian nationalism, therefore comments that the term ‘English’ was defined against what the ‘English’ were not; English characters in fiction sported ‘English’ characteristics as defined against ‘...the racialised outsider, such as Eliot’s gypsy or Thackeray’s Sambo’.<sup>108</sup> Anne

McClintock's earlier analysis of nationalism in general, and Victorian nationalism in particular, identifies nationalism as a 'fetish'; which is defined as any desire that, arising in contradiction to reality, must be constantly reinforced through repetition.<sup>109</sup> The contradiction between the artificial, essentialist ideal of a homogenous national identity, and the reality of a heterogenous collection of disparate individuals, creates the need for reinforcement of the national identity by repetition; whether through literary fiction as described by Nixon, or by such things as national anthems, national symbols, and national sports teams. Similarly, it can be argued that the contradiction between anti-essentialist, gradual evolutionary origins, and essentialist 'human' and 'English' identities created by the limits of language, created a renewed need for reinforcement of un-Darwinian 'human' and 'English' exceptionalism through fetishistic repetition. Social Darwinist discourse, based upon such artificial, essentialist distinctions, was a continuation of the 'Great Chain of Being' with a 'survival of the fittest' twist.

The order in the Social Darwinist chain is justified by the injunction that 'natural' means 'good', similar to the belief that 'whatever is, is right'; which, of course, in the case of Social Darwinism means that 'survival of the fittest' is 'right'. Rudyard Kipling's (1865-1936) *The White Man's Burden* (1899), that infamous: '...lightning rod for both the supporters and the opponents of imperialism, as well as of racism and white supremacy',<sup>110</sup> as Patrick Brantlinger puts it, is suggestive here:

Take up the White Man's burden  
Send forth the best ye breed  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captive's need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.<sup>111</sup>

The idea of a 'white man's burden' to civilise indigenous peoples is depicted as being predicated upon the idea that 'the best ye breed' in the struggle for existence *ought* to conquer the weaker 'fluttered folk and wild', who are lower on the Social Darwinist version of the 'Great Chain of Being' for being 'half-devil and half-child'. The tacit assumption is that because this is believed to be the way the

world *is*, it is therefore the way the world *ought* to be; which makes sense only on the assumption that the way the world *is*, is ultimately part of a benevolent design.

Some Social Darwinists even justified their views with the theory that it is only the limits of the human mind that disable individuals from seeing the wisdom in the natural state of things. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), a passionate advocate of Social Darwinism, argues along such lines when excoriating those ‘spurious philanthropists’ who denied the Social Darwinist gospel:

There are very many amiable people who have not the nerve to look at this matter fairly in the face. Disabled as they are by their sympathies with present suffering... they pursue a course which is injudicious, and in the end even cruel. ...We should think it a very foolish sort of benevolence which led a surgeon to let his patient’s disease progress to a fatal issue rather than inflict pain by an operation. Similarly, we must call those spurious philanthropists who, to prevent present misery, would entail greater misery on future generations.<sup>112</sup>

Spencer suggests that resistance to the rule of nature, the labelling of it as ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’, is simply due to the individual’s limited scope in apprehending the ‘greater misery on future generations’. Robert Winston, deploring the efforts of Social Darwinists, still comments: ‘Even now, how very plausible Spencer sometimes sounds’.<sup>113</sup> Yet the very fact that Spencer mentions ‘very many amiable people’, who rejected Social Darwinism, indicates that there were also many who penetrated through the superficial plausibility of Social Darwinist thought, and saw the horror lurking between the lines.

Such people included those who deplored Darwinism because they, too, had confused it with the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and ‘whatever is, is right’. Although Darwinism might superficially seem to fit with the Victorian ideal of progress,<sup>114</sup> it simultaneously negates progress by consigning the human species firmly within the animal kingdom; and for some, this was humanity descending a link on the ‘Great Chain’. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), reacted strongly along these lines: ‘Disraeli thought that Darwin’s theory of evolution threatened to put [humankind] on the side of the apes rather than on the side of the angels, and this horrified him’.<sup>115</sup> Here, Disraeli presupposes the ‘Great Chain of Being’ with angels above humans and apes below, and deplores what he sees as humanity moving closer to the apes. Carlyle deplored Darwinism for similar reasons:

Carlyle, in ordinary conversation, but not to the man's [Darwin's] face, had had his say often enough: our descent from the apes is a humiliating discovery, which scientists had much better have kept to themselves, and, in short, he would like to lay his stick over Darwin's back.<sup>116</sup>

To speak of Darwinism being a 'humiliating' truth suggests the involvement of a certain degree of egotism, which is antithetical to most religions. But it is humanity's perceived connection to a lower link on the 'Great Chain of Being' that is 'humiliating'. It is true that Darwinism does away with 'the Great Chain of Being' entirely rather than simply placing humans on a lower link upon it, and that the lack of distinction between humans and apes could be seen as leading to nothing more than an *expansion* of the definition of 'ape' (rather than a *reduction* of humanity to the previously held definition). But again, the limits of language can be identified as the source of such un-Darwinian, essentialist distinctions and definitions in the first place.

Barbara Morden's contention that humanity's dethronement from its imagined place struck at all aspects of western culture, also tacitly suggests the 'Great Chain of Being':

The two main platforms of western culture, the Christian and the Humanist traditions, place humanity in a privileged position, as overlord of Divine Creation... To suggest that *homo sapiens* was only a stage in an evolutionary process and that the universe was not made for our convenience challenged those fundamental assumptions... The cultural vision that had for generations been affirmed by the Grand Narratives of Literature and History, in which prophets, saints and heroes march confidently onwards and upwards, was apparently now obsolete.<sup>117</sup>

The 'Christian and the Humanist traditions' both tacitly followed the 'Great Chain of Being', and the loss of humanity's imagined 'privileged position' as 'overlord' of the earthly realm and the beasts 'below' them was profound. And nothing could be more antithetical to Victorian notions of 'progress' than mindlessly 'running faster in order to stay still'. The discovery of ape-ancestry was a tremendous blow to the human ego, to human solipsism, to quaint anthropocentrism, and morality itself seemed threatened. Today the situation appears little different, as Kenneth Miller states: 'Ask Darwin doubters what they find objectionable about evolution,

and as often as not the answer will be the wretched notion that “we came from monkeys””.<sup>118</sup> It seems clear that design was widely believed to be necessary for moral and existential value, and often because language was disposed to describing natural phenomena in terms of essentialism and design in the first place.

If language found it difficult to describe the world without design, and without ‘natural’ being synonymous with ‘good’, then the message of Darwinism was that the entire moral and existential value of life was merely to selfishly compete, survive, and reproduce. As Leila S. May relates:

One of the fears of anti-evolutionists was that Darwin’s theory would undercut the moral codes that allowed the kind of self-sacrifice required for the advance of civilisation: if moral theory had to fall back on instinct we would be returned to a Hobbesian state of nature where self-interest would be murderously promoted.<sup>119</sup>

Shaw’s reaction to Darwinism, citing its ‘hideous fatalism’, and ‘ghastly and damnable reduction’, is telling here. For Shaw, it is not that Darwinism is threatening to the existence of a literal God or to a religious doctrine, but to the sense of value in humanity itself. Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), derided Darwinism for the very same reason that Dickens derided utilitarian consequentialism: its connection, real or imagined, to industrial capitalism. Pierce, protesting the philosophy ‘...that greed is the great agent in the elevation of the human race and in the evolution of the universe’,<sup>120</sup> claimed that Darwinism ‘...merely extends politico-economical views of progress to the entire realm of animal and vegetable life’.<sup>121</sup> In a Marxist discourse that mistakes ‘natural’ with ‘good’, Darwinism, being more or less biological capitalism, might well be interpreted as a bourgeois ideology where ‘survival of the fittest’ justifies capitalist class oppression. Pierce, in particular, rejected Darwinism for what Matthew Hartman calls ‘sentimental’ reasons, advocating instead a theory of ‘evolutionary love’.<sup>122</sup>

Darwin remarks on the ‘march’ of science and philosophy: ‘Nothing is more remarkable than the spread of scepticism or rationalism during the latter half of my life’.<sup>123</sup> But while reactions to this ‘remarkable... spread’ are often viewed as foreshadowed and explained by Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, with nature ‘red in tooth and claw’, these reactions are also ironically – even paradoxically –

explained by the language of design. Darwin's theory did not simply aid in science advancing against religion in the realm of fact, but also in religion advancing against science in the realm of value.

***'Let us be true...'***

The spread of scepticism and rationalism in British society, even when embraced, was often embraced coldly and reluctantly in literature. According to Josef Altholz, sometimes religious answers to the new existential crisis were simply to not ask the troubling questions in the first place:

One reason for the non-asking of questions was the belief that doubt was not only sinful but that it rendered the doubter miserable... Men of much faith projected what they would feel if deprived of their faith; and no factual evidence of serene agnostics and happy atheists could shake their conviction that doubt was a state of misery.<sup>124</sup>

Here is the theme that the realm of value is dependent on cataphatic religion even if the given religion might be false; however pessimistic, nihilistic, and destructive of meaning philosophers like Dennett view such a prospect. This dark thought is captured eloquently in the work of Herman Melville (1819-1891), with *Moby Dick* (1851), as Starbuck receives his vision from the gold coin:

A dark valley between three mighty, heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a hope. If we bend down our eyes, the dark vale shows her mouldy soil; but if we lift them, the bright sun meets our glance half way, to cheer. Yet, oh, the great sun is no fixture; and if, at midnight, we would fain snatch some sweet solace from him, we gaze for him in vain! This coin speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me. I will quit it, lest Truth shake me falsely.<sup>125</sup>

The seemingly paradoxical final line can serve as a pointer to Bacon's 'two truths', and to the idea that a single item of knowledge can be simultaneously true in one sense and yet false in another; facts conflicting with values. This issue of whether the factual truth really matters would undoubtedly have profound implications for acceptance of Darwinism. Along these lines, Matthew Arnold's (1822-1888) 'Dover Beach' (1867) – said to be written on his honeymoon and

addressing his partner – can be analysed as a thought experiment asking whether an individual can ‘be true’; even while the world they had believed they lived in is being stripped away to reveal grim reality.

‘Dover Beach’ can be analysed as a reaction either to Lyell and the early evolutionary theorists or to Darwin, but in either case its message can be interpreted in the same way. As Lance St. John Butler asserts, ‘Dover Beach’ is an integral part of what is known as the Victorian crisis of doubt: ‘It is not coincidental that it was probably written soon after the publication of that epic of Victorian doubt, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* of 1850, and contemporaneously with the agnostic poetry of Arnold’s friend Arthur Hugh Clough’.<sup>126</sup> It is such themes that Murray Krieger argues were: ‘...the usual techniques and the usual patterns of thought which infect much of his [Arnold’s] verse...’.<sup>127</sup> Yet Krieger also argues that the success of ‘Dover Beach’ over some other Victorian poems is due to the timelessness of its message:

‘Dover Beach’ bears and rewards contemplation from the vantage point of the modern, and yet ancient, concept of time which has stirred our consciousness through writers like Mann, Proust, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot – a concept of time as existential rather than as chronologically historical... as the eternal and yet never-existing present.<sup>128</sup>

‘Dover Beach’ can be read as a significant example of a cold, reluctant acceptance of science, demonstrating how sole reliance on science was seen by many Victorians as antithetical to the very existence of a realm of value, even as it bemoans what it feels compelled to do, which is to ‘...let us be true’.<sup>129</sup> Lauren Caldwell articulates the critical consensus about ‘Dover Beach’: ‘Ever since Ruth Pitman demonstrated the corrosive influence of Victorian science on Matthew Arnold’s world and its manifestation in the eroding stanzaic structure of ‘Dover Beach’, scholarship devoted to exploring this relationship has proliferated’.<sup>130</sup>

Yet Caldwell has a caveat: ‘But while this trend has greatly clarified the particular scientific vision that troubles the poem, it yet remains quite clear that Arnold’s relationship to science was by no means unequivocal’.<sup>131</sup> Caldwell articulates the nature of science as represented in the poem:

Science... does not change the world: it changes the way we see a world that has always been the way that it is. The

cliffs of Dover may be eroding, but Victorian science showed that even erosion follows a natural trajectory that human vision or desire can do little to remedy. In effect, we may, through our own scientific progress, write ourselves out of the world.<sup>132</sup>

How the world is 'seen' versus how it 'really is', is indeed one of the most significant aspects of this poem, as Butler has also noted:

In a manner quite typical of Victorian modes of writing 'Dover Beach' moves from the convincingly realistic to the absolutely symbolic while hardly appearing to shift gear. Thus this *is* the beach at Dover... Yet all this leads into quite other and larger considerations...<sup>133</sup>

The first stanza conveys its message through the visual mode, arguably viewing religion in Arnold's time to be a surface of appearances only, increasingly eroded by the underlying reality of the spread of scepticism and rationalism. The sea of British society appears on its surface to be at peace with religion: 'The sea is calm tonight./ The tide is full, the moon lies fair/ Upon the straits;...' <sup>134</sup> Herbert R. Coursen's 1964 analysis of the Wordsworthian image of the moon in Arnold's poem remains poignant: 'the fact that the moon lies fair only sharpens the recognition that the moon lies'.<sup>135</sup> The tranquil image only makes what is to come all the more harsh. If the imagery of 'light' in this poem is taken to be the consolations of faith itself, such as the notion that humanity is a product of design rather than simple chance and necessity, a social commentary can be detected describing the appearances of the two nations either side of the English Channel: '...-on the French coast the light/ Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,/ Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay'.<sup>136</sup> The consolations of faith have gone from France, the legacy of an Enlightenment leaning more towards atheism than in Britain, where the consolations of faith remain standing, the light on the cliffs 'glimmering and vast', creating utter tranquillity. The reader is invited to take part of England's triumph of faith: 'Come to the window, sweet is the night air!' <sup>137</sup>

Yet what the visual mode highlights is an illusion: 'Only, from the long line of spray/ Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,/ Listen! You hear the grating roar/ Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,/ At their return, up the high strand...' <sup>138</sup> Where the eyes see glimmering cliffs of religious faith

standing strong, the ears hear the sea hurling stones of scepticism against it, in rhythmic intervals: ‘...Begin, and cease, and then again begin,/ With tremulous cadence slow, and bring/ The eternal note of sadness in’.<sup>139</sup> Here, the allusion to geological erosion and excavation – clearing away the surface to uncover the dreadful truth – and the slow, rhythmic beat of the geologist’s hammer, cannot be missed; and it ushers in the ‘eternal note of sadness’, that could be science laying the path for despair, or even, more particularly, geology laying the path for Darwinism.

Where the eyes see a calm and tranquil scene, the ears hear scepticism and rationalism. While in the first stanza Arnold describes the scene through the visual mode, which perceives the sea of British society to be at peace with religion, from the second stanza onward Arnold describes the scene through the auditory mode, which reveals British society to be at conflict with religion. There is a disturbing sense that the eyes are bewitched, seeing only a mirage, while the ears hear what is truly happening; the eyes are seeing heaven, but the ears are hearing hell. This difference could variously be a comment on those who see through the eyes of faith versus those who listen to the voice of reason, or on the appearance of British society versus the reality, or even on the appearance of design in nature versus the scientific testimony of mere chance and necessity in nature; the eyes see nothing but calm at the ‘thresholds’ of land and sea, while the ears hear nothing but turbulence.

This ‘eternal note of sadness’ is nothing new, and Arnold’s tracing of its history from ancient to contemporary times is significant: ‘Sophocles long ago/ Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought/ Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery; we/ Find also in the sound a thought,/ Hearing it by this distant northern sea’.<sup>140</sup> Sophocles, the Greek tragedian concerned with themes of fate and the gods, heard a voice similar to the one Arnold now hears in Victorian England, and like Tennyson and Darwin, Arnold is troubled by hearing in the sound ‘a thought’. Butler’s analysis of the word ‘thought’ captures the problem well: ‘...it is ‘a thought’ that destroys his peace of mind... For the problem is *intellectual*, too much thinking has undermined the deep security needed for the full enjoyment of a scene such as this’.<sup>141</sup> Reminiscent of Keats’ and Poe’s complaint that the intellect destroys the appreciation of mystery at the threshold of the describable, it is thought itself, the source of both science and Arnold’s

religious doubt, that is the eternal note of sadness played against religious faith; as loud in ‘the Aegean’ (Greek society) as it is in ‘this distant northern sea’, (British society). This reference is significant in light of the fact that it was in Ancient Greece that scepticism took hold in the form of Greek philosophy, as it is now taking hold in Victorian England in the form of modern science, suggesting that the ‘eternal note of sadness’ is always the effect of scepticism, whatever the form it takes.

The poem turns reflective, returning to the visual mode: ‘The Sea of Faith/ Was once, too, at the full, and round the earth’s shore’.<sup>142</sup> Faith seemed as omnipresent and immovable throughout the world as the literal sea itself seems. Vision and appearances describe how the Sea of Faith: ‘Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl’d’;<sup>143</sup> it was that which held society together. Yet inevitably the auditory mode returns in all its disillusioning fury: ‘But now I only hear/ Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’.<sup>144</sup> Faith is crying out, but only as it retreats into sadness: ‘Retreating, to the breath/ Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world’.<sup>145</sup> The ‘shingles’ could be human individuals, born naked and defenceless into the world and sheltered by their faith. The retreat of faith is depicted almost as a rape, the ‘folds of a bright girdle’ stripped to reveal the ‘naked shingles of the world’. The ‘eternal note of sadness’ is transformed into a more aggressive, more anthropomorphised form of sound, the ‘breath of the night-wind’; which could even bring to mind a sense of a shadow being cast over Darwin’s reference to life being ‘originally breathed’ into the world. But it is here that some critics, like U. C. Knoepflmacher, note that Arnold, for all his reliance on ‘the Wordsworthian matrix’ (using ‘situations that are Wordsworthian, images that are Wordsworthian, phrases that are Wordsworthian’, particularly in *Dover Beach*), rebels against Wordsworth’s ethos of poetry being ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’.<sup>146</sup>

It is only with this highly negative view of the spread of scepticism against cataphatic religion, that Arnold embraces truth: ‘Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another!’<sup>147</sup> This single line, the heart of Arnold’s thought experiment, has been heavily analysed in the criticism. Coursen brands this line ‘a fragile stay against anarchic darkness’, and a ‘desperate hope’ that ‘has been refuted convincingly by many Arnold poems’.<sup>148</sup> Robin Roberts, analysing the unseen lover in the line, notes: ‘Romantic love is depicted as the only possible means of salvation from

alienation, but the prospect of love is tinged with irony and sadness because of the turmoil that surrounds the lovers'.<sup>149</sup> It is, as Cervo states: 'To Arnold, in the modern world love conquers nothing. It is, instead, a refuge, a retreat into love's version of Parmenidean Being'.<sup>150</sup> Gordon Hartford, who concedes that much of Arnold's earlier poetry is indicative of Stoic influence, can find nothing of 'Stoicism's invulnerable composure'<sup>151</sup> here.

Certainly, Arnold's embrace of truth in this poem might at first seem reluctant and cold, as is revealed in the very next lines:

For the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, not light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.<sup>152</sup>

Once again, the visual mode delivers nothing but a 'land of dreams', rendering everything good and noble about the world an illusion, while the auditory mode delivers the grim antithesis, a reality overwhelmed by the 'confused alarms' of war and the loud clash of 'ignorant armies'. The initial sweetness of 'the night air' is exposed as one such illusion, the 'night' returning to its more clichéd metaphor of ignorance and terror. And yet the 'ignorant armies' perhaps are those who are the most dogmatic on all sides of the science/religion debate, whether theist, atheist, or any position between; they are too ignorant to know that the 'certitude' causing them to clash so vehemently is also listed as part of the illusory 'land of dreams'.

However, the injunction to 'let us be true/ To one another' can also be viewed as an existentialist urging for people to accept that they cannot find 'joy', 'love', 'light', 'certitude', 'peace', or 'help' in the truth or falsity of scientific claims about the external world, and that they can only find these things in 'one another' instead. This is much more in line with Arnold the Epicurean humanist, the author of *Empedocles on Etna* (1852), who chastises humanity for dreaming of a providential universe that *owes* them happiness, or that: 'The world does but exist that welfare to bestow'.<sup>153</sup> This is the Arnold who laments, in accordance

with Carlyle's advocacy of spiritual revolution over literal revolution, that: 'We would have inward peace,/ Yet will not look within'.<sup>154</sup> Arnold further wrote:

Is it so small a thing  
To have enjoy'd the sun,  
To have lived light in the spring,  
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;  
To have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling  
foes –

That we must feign a bliss  
Of doubtful future date,  
And, while we dream on this,  
Lose all our present state,  
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?<sup>155</sup>

Arnold's location of value in the present moment is very much in line with Wordsworth's belief that happiness is found: 'Not in Utopia,/...But in the very world, which is the world/ Of all of us'.<sup>156</sup> It is in accord with Tennyson's response to the loss of design with his acceptance of '...honest doubt...'<sup>157</sup> and the cherishing of loved ones; and it is indicative of George Eliot's response in the form of a 'Religion of Humanity'.<sup>158</sup> Facts cannot threaten moral or existential value even in principle, because value comes from within. This aligns with much that has been written on the Naturalistic Fallacy; for it is generally accepted that even if nature was nothing but peace and tranquillity everywhere that the eye beheld, its 'goodness' would still be a value-judgement created from within, from human intuition; it would not a factual property of nature discovered by scientific observation. Therefore, scientific facts like Darwinism cannot, by themselves, threaten moral and existential value.

This interpretation is also more consistent with Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-1868), which asserts that freedom is meaningless if it is only an end-in-itself, and makes sense only if it is a *means* to an end. Even if existentialism is described in the most triumphal terms as freedom from the meaning of an individual's life being *imposed* upon them from above by a designing hand – that freedom, too, is meaningless if it is not used to create *new* meaning. For Arnold, religion remains the best candidate for constituting that new meaning, being '...the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself'.<sup>159</sup>

Yet in *Literature and Dogma* (1873), Arnold defines religion as: ‘...morality touched by emotion’.<sup>160</sup> This line epitomises the concept of practical religion, and conveys Arnold’s thought that an action cannot be moral at all if it is done only on the hope of reward or the threat of punishment. In accordance with Epicureanism, morality stems from the view that happiness is the greatest good, but that happiness is best attained through the tranquillity that results from compassion and modest living.<sup>161</sup> As with utilitarian consequentialism, the focus on happiness as the only end-in-itself technically makes Epicureanism ‘hedonistic’, but it is clearly not hedonistic in the popular sense of that term. In fact, Arnold’s definition of ‘religion’ parallels Dickens, finding contentment not through self-interest but in the collective of the circus; it parallels Tennyson, finding meaning in loved ones; and it parallels Darwin, finding the ‘highest pleasure on this earth’ in the ‘social instincts’. This humanist and existentialist form of religion was growing in the mid-nineteenth century as a potent force in literature’s response to the rise of science.

### ***On Biology***

Science in nineteenth century Britain, particularly in the theories of Lyell and Darwin, can be seen as offering a description of nature and humanity that appeared antithetical to the existence of a realm of value. Yet this was because the limits of language, with its inherent essentialism, dictated that transcendent experience, along with all moral and existential value, were difficult to describe without either design that renders ‘natural’ into ‘good’, or antipathy to science. The problem was not just that Darwinism refuted design, but that it was itself *confused* with design, manifesting as Social Darwinism which merely combined ‘survival of the fittest’ with older views of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and ‘whatever is, is right’. As much as science can be seen by some as harming cataphatic religion, it was also creating a situation that empowered belief in cataphatic religion.

Whether the view that a deity is necessary for moral and existential value is warranted remains endlessly debated. It is true that if there is a scientific meaning or purpose to life, it has been found: it is to reproduce genes. It is also true that the fact that no one accepts this as the meaning of their life proves that such meaning cannot truly be found by science; that meaning can only ever be what individuals

accept it to be; and therefore that fears of a scientific 'is' implying a bad moral 'ought' are self-refuting. But science's 'strange inversion of reasoning' that removes the necessity of a designer may not be antithetical to non-scientific conceptions of meaning either; Darwin's exuberance about the potential grandeur in the Darwinian view of life may draw sympathy from the Romantic in any individual. Science can indeed be seen as enhancing rather than only 'reducing' our experience of nature; it can indeed be seen that there is 'grandeur in this view of life', and that 'nature red in tooth and claw' is not merely needless suffering, but also that which leads to complex life. Morality can be seen as good for the individual, and humanity's dethronement from a place of special privilege as simply humbling, awe-inspiring, and a welcome repudiation of the harmful 'us' versus 'them' distinction.

However, for many the particular answers that Darwin offers unfortunately seem to do little more than 'let the eternal note of sadness in'. Given the limits of language in describing phenomena without design or antipathy toward science, the question of whether individuals could fulfil Arnold's humanist promise to recreate moral and existential value in a post-Darwin world, yet remained; and the efficacy of such attempts would determine the forms in which religion survived.

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 4**

- <sup>1</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, 1874, ed. by Louis J. Matz (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2009), pp. 99-100.
- <sup>2</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'LVI', 1849, in *Tennyson: Poems and Plays*, ed. by T. Herbert Warren (London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 243.
- <sup>3</sup> Anonymous, in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, by Daniel Dennett (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 65.
- <sup>4</sup> Dennett, p. 21.
- <sup>5</sup> Pierre-Simon de Laplace, in *A History of God*, by Karen Armstrong (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 396.
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Draper, 'Evolution and the Problem of Evil', in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. by Louis P. Pojman (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), p. 194.
- <sup>7</sup> George Bernard Shaw, in 'Purpose-Driven Life', by Brian Boyd, *American Scholar*, 78.2 (2009), 24.
- <sup>8</sup> Boyd, 24.
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan Smith, 'Introduction: Darwin and the Evolution of Victorian Studies', 51.2 (2009), 215.
- <sup>10</sup> W. F. Bynum, 'The Cambridge Companion to "The Origin of Species"', *Victorian Studies*, 52.3 (2010), 460.
- <sup>11</sup> Bynum, 460.
- <sup>12</sup> Rebecca Stott, *Darwin's Ghosts: The Secret History of Evolution* (New York: Random House, 2012).
- <sup>13</sup> W. J. Dempster, *Evolutionary Concepts in the Nineteenth Century: Natural Selection and Patrick Matthew* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, 1995).
- <sup>14</sup> James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth*, 1795, in *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*, by Stephen Jay Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 67.
- <sup>15</sup> Robert M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 79-125.
- <sup>16</sup> Michael T. Ghiselin, 'Perspective: Darwin, Progress, and Economic Principles', *Evolution*, 49.6 (1995), 1029-1037.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798 (Boston: IndyPublish, 2002), p. 46.
- <sup>18</sup> Malthus, p. 16.
- <sup>19</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 1859, in *From So Simple A Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Edward O. Wilson (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 453.
- <sup>20</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 502.
- <sup>21</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, 1887, ed. by Nora Barlow (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958), pp. 98-99.
- <sup>22</sup> Peter Atkins, *Galileo's Finger: The Ten Great Ideas of Science* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 21.
- <sup>23</sup> Atkins, pp. 25-26.
- <sup>24</sup> Charles Darwin, in *Charles Darwin: Voyaging*, by Janet Browne (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 501.
- <sup>25</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, in 'Memoriam as a Personal Poem', by Arthur Pollard, *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 3.5 (1981), 175-184.
- <sup>26</sup> Michael Shermer, *In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 26.
- <sup>27</sup> Atkins, p. 22.
- <sup>28</sup> Mark E. Borrello, 'Synthesis and Selection: Wynne-Edwards' Challenge to David Lack', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 36.3 (2003), 531-566.
- <sup>29</sup> Shermer, p. xiii.
- <sup>30</sup> Leila S. May, 'Monkeys, Microcephalous Idiots, and the Barbarous Races of Mankind: Darwin's Dangerous Victorianism', *Victorian Newsletter* (2002), 20.
- <sup>31</sup> Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud as Imaginative Writers* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1959), pp. 26-43.

- <sup>32</sup> Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 7.
- <sup>33</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 114.
- <sup>34</sup> Hyman, pp. 26-43.
- <sup>35</sup> Beer, 'Darwin and Romanticism', 3.
- <sup>36</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, 1845, in *From So Simple A Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Edward O. Wilson (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 429.
- <sup>37</sup> Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, in *From So Simple A Beginning*, pp. 429-430.
- <sup>38</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 533.
- <sup>39</sup> Lord Byron, *The Eve of Waterloo*, 1816, in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. by Jerome H. McGann (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 110.
- <sup>40</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 760.
- <sup>41</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 760. The inclusion of the principle of 'use and disuse' is a partial concession to the earlier theory of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), in which 'use and disuse' was important, but which modern science has largely come to regard as falsified.
- <sup>42</sup> John Keats, *Lamia*, 1819, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Duncun Wu (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 1078.
- <sup>43</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *Sonnet - To Science*, 1829, in *The Best of Poe: The Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven, The Cask of Amontillado, and 30 Others*, ed. by Paul Moliken (Clayton: Prestwick House, 2006), p. 192.
- <sup>44</sup> Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion, and the Appetite for Wonder* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).
- <sup>45</sup> Walter Waring, 'Darwin's Nonscientific Writings', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>46</sup> Gillian Beer, 'Darwin and Romanticism', *Wordsworth Circle*, 41.1 (2010), 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Donald M. Hassler, 'The Origin of Species: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>48</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. xxi.
- <sup>49</sup> George Eliot, 'The Primitive Mind of Silas Marner', by Anna Neill, *ELH*, 75.4 (2008), 939-962.
- <sup>50</sup> Neill, 939-962.
- <sup>51</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 760.
- <sup>52</sup> Young, pp. 79-125.
- <sup>53</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 760.
- <sup>54</sup> Gillian Beer, "'The Face of Nature": Anthropomorphic Elements in the Language of The Origin of Species', in *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*, ed. by L. J. Jordanova (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1986), pp. 207-243.
- <sup>55</sup> George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 43.
- <sup>56</sup> Alfred Russell Wallace, in Young, pp. 79-125.
- <sup>57</sup> Young, pp. 79-125.
- <sup>58</sup> Young, pp. 79-125.
- <sup>59</sup> Michael Spindler, 'The Origin of Species as Rhetoric', *Nineteenth Century Prose*, 19.1 (1991), p. 26.
- <sup>60</sup> Anonymous, in Dennett, p. 65.
- <sup>61</sup> Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man and Other Poems*, 1734 (Philadelphia: Empire Books, 2012), p. 4; p. 13.
- <sup>62</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 569.
- <sup>63</sup> Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 569.
- <sup>64</sup> It must be said that the epistemic first principles or values that underpin science are, themselves, dependent on the intuitive sense. Even Thomas Reid's (1710-1796) Scottish School of Common Sense Realism (of which Hume was a member) acknowledges this:

If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without

being able to give a reason for them – these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.

*The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. by Terence Cuneo and Rene van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 85. This ‘realism’ actually seems to be pragmatism; the justification for first principles is their ‘necessity’ or usefulness, and individuals are simply obliged to *label* them ‘common sense’, and their antithesis ‘absurd’. This situation is simply inescapable for values.

<sup>65</sup> Linda H. Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 2-3.

<sup>66</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 72.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Neve, ‘Introduction’, in *Charles Darwin: Autobiographies*, 1887, by Charles Darwin (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. xxii.

<sup>71</sup> Emma Darwin, in Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup> Emma Darwin, in Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 198.

<sup>73</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 199.

<sup>74</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 73.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Darwin, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, by Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, 1888), p. 210.

<sup>76</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Darwin, *Letter to Asa Gray*, in Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 189.

<sup>78</sup> Gould, *Rocks of Ages*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>79</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that even if it cannot be denied that there is great suffering in nature, Darwin does write that he believes ‘happiness decidedly prevails’, and that:

If all the individuals of any species were habitually to suffer to an extreme degree they would neglect to propagate their kind... some other considerations, moreover, lead to the belief that all sentient beings have been formed so as to enjoy, as a general rule, happiness.

Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth Miller, ‘Faulty Design’, *Commonweal*, 134.17 (2007), 31.

<sup>81</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>83</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 77.

<sup>84</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 77.

<sup>85</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>86</sup> David Macey, *Critical Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 251.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Darwin, in Gould, *Rocks of Ages*, p. 191.

<sup>88</sup> J. S. Haldane, in *Possible Worlds, Death by Black Hole and Other Cosmic Quandaries*, by Neil deGrasse Tyson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick J. Callahan, ‘Frankenstein, Bacon and the “Two Truths”’, *Extrapolation*, 14.1 (1972), 39-48.

<sup>90</sup> Martin Heidegger, in Macey, p. 177.

<sup>91</sup> Brooke, p. 279.

<sup>92</sup> Matthew Day, ‘Godless Savages and Superstitious Dogs: Charles Darwin, Imperial Ethnography, and the Problem of Human Uniqueness’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69.1 (2008), 49.

<sup>93</sup> Day, 49

<sup>94</sup> Carl Woodring, ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview’, in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].

<sup>95</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 78.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Waring, 'Darwin's Mind', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].

<sup>97</sup> E. O. Wilson's comment is indicative of this research:

A great deal of evidence has accumulated to show that under many circumstances natural selection can also generate hereditary cooperation and even self-sacrifice. This ameliorative process can be easily explained as follows. If groups of cooperating individuals are better than solitary animals at obtaining food, building shelters, repelling enemies, or (red in tooth and claw again, I grant) exploiting others, then the species will evolve toward the formation of social groups. Such has been the case, for example, in corals, ants, and human beings.

Edward O. Wilson, 'Introduction', *On The Origin of Species*, 1859, in *From So Simple A Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Edward O. Wilson (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), p. 438.

<sup>98</sup> Pope, p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> Robert M. Ryan, 'Wordsworth's Response to Darwin', *Wordsworth Circle*, 41.1 (2010), 10.

<sup>100</sup> Mill, p. 70.

<sup>101</sup> The phrase 'survival of the fittest' is well known to be tautological, as those who are 'fittest' are those who survive, rendering the phrase into 'the survival of those who survive'. Yet this characterisation had become nearly synonymous with Darwinism itself.

<sup>102</sup> David Hume, *Essays, Moral and Political*, 1742, in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 629.

<sup>103</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 1764, in Kramnick, p. 638.

<sup>104</sup> Margaret Kohn and Daniel I. O'Neill, 'A Tale of Two Indias: Burke and Mill on Empire and Slavery in the West Indies and America', *Political Theory*, 34.2 (2006), 192-228.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Quinn, 'The Gentle Darwinians: What Darwin's Champions Won't Mention', *Commonweal*, 134.5 (2007), 8. Quinn argues that Darwin did have Social Darwinist sympathies. Yet in his attempt to establish this he, too, seems to mistake Darwin's statements about what *is* the case with statements of what *ought* to be the case.

<sup>106</sup> Duncan Bell, 'From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 49.3 (2006), 735-759.

<sup>107</sup> This idea is arguably implicit in Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) later work, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), where it tacitly undermines imperialist attitudes; even if Conrad's preoccupation is often with place, rather than people. Conrad's take on the 'blank spaces' of maps is telling:

...by this time it was not a blank space anymore. It had got filled... with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.

– Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), p. 9. In a Romantic touch, darkness is associated with knowledge through the black ink on maps, with the white of 'blank spaces' symbolising that which is beyond the limits of language, a realm of 'delightful mystery'. Clearly this inverts conventional colour symbolism in which darkness is associated with ignorance, as in the Victorian term 'Dark Continent' to describe Africa. But Conrad does use the conventional symbolism of 'darkness' when referencing Roman times, to remind readers that in that sense, Britain, too, had once been '...one of the dark places of the earth'. – Conrad, p. 5. In both ways, there is a sense of a world that is indescribable and beyond human understanding; and this mysticism, finding commonalities between places and blurring the essentialist distinctions implied by words, names, and labels on maps, ameliorates the 'separation of self from other' that had formed the basis of Social Darwinist attitudes. It must be acknowledged that Chinua Achebe has criticised Conrad's depiction of indigenous peoples on perfectly reasonable grounds. See Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, 9.1 (1978), 1-15. Nevertheless, Conrad's novel undermines Social Darwinist, might-is-right attitudes, saying that

strength is: ‘...nothing to boast of... since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others’. – Conrad, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Jude V. Nixon, *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> Anne McClintock, *The Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>110</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Kipling’s ‘The White Man’s Burden’ and Its Afterlives’, *English Literature in Transition*, 50.2 (2007), 172-191.

<sup>111</sup> Rudyard Kipling, ‘The White Man’s Burden’, 1899, in *Kipling: Poems*, ed. by Peter Washington (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 96.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Winston, *Human Instinct: How our Primeval Impulses Shape our Modern Lives* (London: Bantam Press, 2002), p. 219.

<sup>113</sup> Winston, p. 219.

<sup>114</sup> As Peter Atkins puts it, ‘Evolution does not necessarily lead to greater sophistication: the direction of evolution is not always up’. There is progress towards adaptation, but this does not necessarily mean progress toward that which individuals might usually identify with ‘progress’, such as strength, speed, intelligence, etc. These only constitute ‘progress’ from a human point of view. Atkins’ example is a sea squirt:

This little chap is a motile hunter in its larval form and therefore needs a brain. However, once it has found a suitable niche to which it can anchor itself to become sessile, it no longer needs to think, so it eats its own energetically burdensome brain.

Atkins, pp. 17-18.

<sup>115</sup> Winston, p. 371.

<sup>116</sup> Theodore Baird, ‘Darwin and the Tangled Bank’, *American Scholar*, 15.4 (1946), 477-486.

<sup>117</sup> Barbara Morden, ‘Fossils, Apes and Supermen: Evolution and the Literary Text’, *The English Review*, 20.1 (2009), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Kenneth Miller, ‘Faulty Design’, *Commonweal*, 134.17 (2007), 31.

<sup>119</sup> May, 20.

<sup>120</sup> Matthew Hartman, ‘Utopian Evolution: The Sentimental Critique of Social Darwinism in Bellamy and Pierce’, *Utopian Studies: Journal for the Society for Utopian Studies*, 10.1 (1999), 26-41.

<sup>121</sup> Hartman, 26-41.

<sup>122</sup> Hartman, 26-41.

<sup>123</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, p. 79.

<sup>124</sup> Josef L. Altholz, ‘The Warfare of Conscience with Theology’, *The Victorian Web*, updated 2010 <<http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/altholz/a2.html>> [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>125</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 542.

<sup>126</sup> Lance St. John Butler, ‘Dover Beach: Overview’, in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].

<sup>127</sup> Murray Krieger, ‘Dover Beach and the Tragic Sense of Eternal Recurrence’, *Critics on Matthew Arnold: Readings in Literary Criticism*, ed. by Jacqueline E. M. Latham (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 40-47.

<sup>128</sup> Krieger, pp. 40-47.

<sup>129</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, 1867, in Christopher Ricks, *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 305.

<sup>130</sup> Lauren Caldwell, ‘Truncating Coleridgean Conversation and the Revisioning of Dover Beach’, *Victorian Poetry*, 45.4 (2007), 429.

<sup>131</sup> Caldwell, 429.

<sup>132</sup> Caldwell, 429.

<sup>133</sup> Butler, [accessed 17 January 2013].

<sup>134</sup> Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, p. 304.

<sup>135</sup> Herbert R. Coursen, ‘“The Moon Lies Fair”: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 4.4 (1964), 569-581.

<sup>136</sup> Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, p. 304.

<sup>137</sup> Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, p. 304.

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- <sup>138</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 304.
- <sup>139</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 304.
- <sup>140</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 304.
- <sup>141</sup> Butler, no page number given.
- <sup>142</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>143</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>144</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>145</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>146</sup> U. C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Dover Revisited: The Wordsworthian Matrix in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold', in *Matthew Arnold: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by David J. DeLaura (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 46-53.
- <sup>147</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>148</sup> Coursen, 569-581.
- <sup>149</sup> Robin Roberts, 'Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach', Gender, and Science Fiction', *Extrapolation* 33.3 (1992), 245-257.
- <sup>150</sup> Nathan A. Cervo, 'Three Victorian 'Medieval' Poems: 'Dover Beach', 'The Windhover', and 'The Higher Pantheism'', *Victorian Newsletter*, 107 (2005), 28.
- <sup>151</sup> Gordon Hartford, 'Matthew Arnold: Not Quite a Stoic Poet', *English Studies in Africa*, 42.1 (1999), 51-62.
- <sup>152</sup> Arnold, 'Dover Beach', p. 305.
- <sup>153</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna', 1852, in *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 54.
- <sup>154</sup> Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna', p. 55.
- <sup>155</sup> Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna', p. 60.
- <sup>156</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 220.
- <sup>157</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 'XCVI', p. 255.
- <sup>158</sup> Auguste Comte, in Macey, p. 303.
- <sup>159</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 1867-1868, in *The Essential Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Lionel Trilling (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), p. 476.
- <sup>160</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, 1873 (Aurora: BiblioLife, 2010), p. 18.
- <sup>161</sup> Eric Brown, 'Contemplative Withdrawal in the Hellenistic Age', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 137.1 (2008), 79-89.

## CHAPTER 5

### ‘THE ISCARIOTISM OF OUR DAYS’

Here, one felt no weight of the supernatural pressing on the human mind, demanding homage and allegiance. Humanity – with all its distinct capabilities, talents, worries, problems, possibilities – was the centre of interest. It has been said that medieval thinkers philosophised on their knees, but, bolstered by the new studies, they dared to stand up and to rise to full stature.<sup>1</sup>

During the Renaissance, beginning in Italy and sweeping across Europe, a reaction emerged against the traditional Medieval scholasticism that had privileged theology and natural philosophy. Inspired by the rebirth of Ancient Greek philosophy, this movement was more Epicurean than Medieval Catholic, focusing on moral philosophy in relation to humanity and this world rather than God and the next; an approach that influenced the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Utopianism was part of this movement: ‘Seventeenth-century and English Christian humanists followed [Thomas] More’s lead in attempting to instil their humanist beliefs into plans for a perfect society’.<sup>3</sup> But it was not until the nineteenth century that the term ‘humanist’ became widely used, and it was adopted by people like Matthew Arnold in response to science and biblical criticism. Auguste Comte (1798-1857), in the context of his Positivist grand narrative, called it the ‘Religion of Humanity’.<sup>4</sup>

Comte’s philosophy had an imperfect relationship with British writers, but the central idea of a ‘Religion of Humanity’, informed by German Romanticism, with its biblical criticism and anthropological treatises on religion, did attract writers such as Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot, 1819-1880, hereafter referred to by her pseudonym). This current of thought, darkly referred to by some as ‘the Iscariotism of our days’,<sup>5</sup> rejected a Hobbesian view of human nature that requires an authoritarian regime – human or divine – to keep it in check. Instead, it sought to preserve moral and existential value in a manner begun by individuals like Tennyson before Darwin, but further developed by individuals like Eliot after Darwin; namely, the manner of practical religion, rather than doctrinal religion. Such views held that if God does not exist, then all individuals have is – as Arnold emphasised – ‘one another’.<sup>6</sup> Although Barbara Morden is correct that ‘humanism’ in the sense of enthroning humanity in a privileged place in the world

is incorrect after Darwin,<sup>7</sup> Eliot nevertheless advocates a form of humanism in the sense of simply finding meaning through what she calls ‘pure, natural human relations’.<sup>8</sup>

The role of the limits of language in assisting the senses of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science will be investigated through this chapter in reference to debates and tensions surrounding German Romantic biblical criticism and anthropologies of religion. This chapter explores George Eliot’s translations of David Friedrich Strauss’ (1808-1874) *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836, translated 1846) and Ludwig Feuerbach’s (1804-1872) *The Essence of Christianity* (1841, translated 1855), as attempts at an anthropological science of religion, and analyses how these ideas translated into British literature in the form of Eliot’s own work, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (1861), which reveals her views on religion. In so doing, I will investigate how attempts at reinventing religion interacted or conflicted with traditional religious belief, in order to investigate more deeply why design was still believed to be a necessity.

***‘The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’.***

Attempts to reinvent religion reacted as much to the threat of meaninglessness implied by a scientific description of a world without design, as to a description of the world implied by stern, harsh, orthodox interpretations of Christianity. According to Josef L. Altholz, Victorian society had cultivated individuals who believed that they were ‘...too moral to be orthodox, too humanitarian to be Christian’,<sup>9</sup> and one reason why science and biblical criticism had had such a pronounced effect on the intelligentsia was because these enterprises had ‘...provided stimuli and rationales for minds already unsettled and alienated on these moral grounds’.<sup>10</sup> These ‘minds’ included not only humanists, but also many among the emerging spiritualist and mesmerist movements, which sought to communicate with spirits via séance and so gain evidence – and therefore ‘scientific’ legitimacy – for the afterlife outside the confines of orthodox Christianity.<sup>11</sup> For Christianity to survive the rise of science, there were many who required various orthodox values to change dramatically.

Some individuals, like John Henry Newman (1801-1890), certainly did not reject all religion, but they did reject the enthusiasm of Evangelicals in the

Established Churches. And others, ranging from Enlightenment freethinkers such as Voltaire and Paine, to later culture critics such as Carlyle and Marx, had laid the foundations for moral alienation from those churches. These writers, in their various ways, sought to make clear that the Established Churches' doctrine posited an unjust authoritarianism in heaven in order to support their unjust authoritarianism on earth. When Darwin wrote of eternal punishment, saying: 'And this is a damnable doctrine', he captured the motive for the Victorian 'crisis of faith'<sup>12</sup> not merely as a problem caused by science or philosophy, but by morality. This led Altholz to write his authoritative essay not on Andrew Dickenson White's (1832-1918) idea of 'The Warfare of Science with Theology',<sup>13</sup> but on 'The Warfare of *Conscience* with Theology'.<sup>14</sup> For Darwin, who once ruminated on the endless smiting of the Old Testament God and branded Him a '...revengeful tyrant',<sup>15</sup> was but one of many who broke ties with traditional Christianity for what was perceived as its incommensurability with modern values. Altholz identifies this as a conflict between the morality that the evangelicals preached and the theology that the evangelicals believed:

Victorian morality was not merely stern, it was also humanitarian; though the evangelicals doubted whether the mass of mankind could be saved, they preached the duty of active benevolence; they freed the slaves and improved the conditions of factory labour... [on the other hand] The theology espoused by most evangelicals, and generally accepted by most others, was a sort of unsystematic and semiconscious quasi-Calvinism... stressing the sterner and harsher Christian doctrines: original sin, reprobation, vicarious atonement, eternal punishment. The unbalanced emphasis of these essentially unattractive themes was bound to come into conflict with the sentimental and humanitarian spirit of the age...<sup>16</sup>

This is a rather sweeping statement, and it must be acknowledged, as Emma Darwin noted, that few by her time continue to call this Christianity. Yet the 'sterner and harsher Christian doctrines', which did still exist for many, remained a problem for those who espoused ideals of liberty, humanitarianism, and 'active benevolence', stemming from a morality undeniably concerned about the welfare of others.

Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893) captures the ‘essentially unattractive’ nature of the above mentioned evangelical doctrines in an essay posthumously published in 1906:

The doctrine of the Atonement has often been explained in a way at which our moral feelings revolt. God is represented as angry with us for what we never did; He is ready to inflict a disproportionate punishment on us for what we are; He is satisfied by the sufferings of His Son in our stead... The imperfection of human law is transferred to the Divine.<sup>17</sup>

Jowett was among those who endeavoured to demonstrate that this was a false Christianity: ‘...these conceptions of the work of Christ have no foundation in Scripture’.<sup>18</sup> Yet with such ‘essentially unattractive’ doctrines, much evangelical theology conflicted with the humanitarian conscience of many Victorians. Altholz identifies Mill as epitomising ‘...the classic statement of this revulsion’<sup>19</sup> for his contemporaries; a statement following from the classic Euthyphro’s Dilemma,<sup>20</sup> defying the Divine Command Theory that the morally good is morally good because God commands it (as opposed to God commanding the morally good because it is morally good):

I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures, and if such a being can sentence me to Hell for not so calling him, to Hell I will go.<sup>21</sup>

These are fighting words indeed; according to Mill, if a human behaving in the manner Jowett describes cannot be morally good, then a God behaving in that manner cannot be morally good.

By the 1840s and 1850s, the biblical criticism and anthropological treatises of German Romanticism were being translated into English. In one sense they inflamed the establishment, providing the basis for Darwin’s own early doubts concerning Christianity. But for some, biblical criticism ameliorated the moral crisis of quasi-Calvinistic theology. Perhaps the doctrines need not be construed literally as ‘beliefs’, but figuratively as values; perhaps this need not necessitate an abandonment of the religion, but simply a reinvention of the religion; perhaps if the doctrines are not literal beliefs, and can be interpreted in a manner consistent with conscience, then the moral problems stemming from the literal beliefs would

disappear. Science could then be seen as simply allowing religion to claim its role in the realm of moral and existential value, based on the sense of self-transcendence at the threshold of the describable, provided by the limits of language.

A. N. Wilson summarises the threat that the German biblical critics posed for a literal reading of the Bible:

Jesus is quoted as saying that no one comes to the Father, except through Him, that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Such claims, if made by an historical personage who subsequently rose from the dead, would compel an awestruck belief. But supposing such words had not been said? Supposing the Gospels, like every other written papyrus in the ancient world, were products of a purely human and collective endeavour? Supposing they reflected not so much a literalist reality in the year 30 AD as the faith and beliefs of Christian communities in the year 60, 80, 100 AD?<sup>22</sup>

By the 1840s and 1850s, no individual cognizant of biblical scholarship could regard the Bible as literal and inerrant in every word and syllable; just as Genesis could no longer be a scientific account of origins, the Pentateuch could no longer be authored by one individual named Moses, nor the Gospels authored solely by the apostles to whom they are attributed. As David Carroll notes, these biblical critics had a powerful influence on Eliot's thought process, and on Eliot's own work at the 'cutting edge' of the debate ignited by them in Britain:

As these ideas were being assimilated into English intellectual life, George Eliot remained at the cutting edge of radical debate in her role as assistant editor of the freethinking Westminster Review where she reviewed the latest works on philosophy, biblical studies, sociology and mythology.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, an analysis of some of the contemporary biblical criticism is vital to understand Eliot's contribution to the debate, and her own translations represent her understanding of them.

The biblical critics and anthropologists of religion were a problem for some Christian denominations and not for others, depending on their positions on scripture and modern discoveries. David Friedrich Strauss' (1808-1874), *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836, translated 1846), a work of both

biblical criticism and anthropology of world mythology, was seminal to the influence of German Romanticism in Britain. It was viciously condemned: ‘One reviewer called it “the Iscariotism of our days” and another “the most pestilential book ever vomited out of the jaws of Hell”’.<sup>24</sup> At the other extreme, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) could not praise Strauss enough, asserting that Strauss’ book was ‘...one of the most perfect things in the whole range of learned literature’.<sup>25</sup> Marcus Borg agrees: ‘Of all the books on the historical Jesus published in the nineteenth century, David Friedrich Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* has had the most enduring significance’.<sup>26</sup> Borg concisely summarises the significance of Strauss’ work for later generations:

The details of Strauss’ argument, his use of Hegelian philosophy, and even his definition of myth, have not had a lasting impact. Yet his basic claims – that many of the gospel narratives are mythical in character, and that ‘myth’ is not simply to be equated with ‘falsehood’ – have become part of mainstream scholarship. What was wildly controversial in Strauss’ time has now become one of the standard tools of biblical scholars.<sup>27</sup>

Here, it can be noted that Strauss did not seek to undermine religion, but to *improve* it.

Strauss’ approach to religious texts revolves around interpreting scripture in the manner that he believed was necessary for the modern age. Similar to ideas of progressive revelation, Strauss contends that the Established Churches’ literal, supernaturalistic views of the history contained in the Bible had become outdated:

...the orthodox view of this history became superannuated earlier than the rationalistic, since it was only because the former had ceased to satisfy an advanced state of culture, that the latter was developed, while the recent attempts to recover... the supranatural point of view held by our forefathers, betray themselves, by the exaggerating spirit in which they are conceived, to be final, desperate efforts to render the past present, the inconceivable conceivable.<sup>28</sup>

In the orthodox Established Churches’ increasingly ‘desperate’ attempts to ‘render the past present’, there is a sense that these churches are defying the intellectual progress of history. Marilyn Orr notes how this Hegelian view of history influenced Eliot herself:

In 1849, writing of Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*, she [Eliot] affirms 'its suggestive hints as to the necessity of recasting the currency of our religion and virtue'... In... her review of R. W. Mackey's *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot explicitly refutes the Comtean view that 'human progress' means 'devot[ing our] energies to the actual rather than to the retrospective'... Eliot was engaged in the work that her beloved Carlyle called retailoring the tailor, refashioning the myth for a new age.<sup>29</sup>

As David Carroll puts it, myth is 'refashioned' as a thought-experiment for the idiosyncratic circumstances of each generation:

Myth becomes a kind of experimental hypothesis through which the individual or the community formulates an explanation of life... Inevitably, each hypothesis or world-view proves inadequate when subjected to harsh reality, and collapses. 'None of our theories', comments the narrator in *Felix Holt* laconically, 'are quite large enough for all the disclosures of time'... This is the disruptive yet evolutionary rhythm of life that is central to George Eliot's thinking.<sup>30</sup>

Here, Strauss' thesis has a direct impact on Eliot's thought. And in this view, if the Established Churches' 'fixed systems and creeds' were to be considered retrograde against progress – the most Victorian of ideals, whatever the grand narrative – then the establishment would indeed be compelled to change.

Strauss argued that: 'The new point of view, which must take the place of the above, is the mythical'.<sup>31</sup> Strauss does not side with the Enlightenment's rationalist, naturalistic interpretations. In fact, he rejects the 'half-measure' of rationalistic naturalism, which had accepted the events recorded in scripture as historical fact, and only attempted to conjure natural explanations for their occurrence. Therefore, Strauss can be described in one sense as going *further* than the rationalists by challenging the historicity of scriptural events, while at the very same time as not going as far as the rationalists in concluding that the scriptures are therefore worthless. Much like Blake, Strauss walks a third way between literalistic supernaturalism and rationalistic naturalism, where all Biblical miracles, from Jesus' walking on water to his divinity itself, were to be interpreted as myth with meaning, not literal facts of history. As 'pestilential' as some considered this idea, its purpose is hardly anti-religious; for Strauss was

determined to distance himself from the radical polemics of rationalistic naturalism:

The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts. The certainty of this can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism, and distinguish it from the naturalistic criticism of the last century, the design of which was, with the historical fact, to subvert also the religious truth...<sup>32</sup>

Although miracles could not be ‘historical facts’, they could remain ‘eternal truths’; truths maintained in their essence, their story, even if interpretations thereof are non-essential and ever-changing. As such, miracles are truths of a mythic nature, or truths concerning values, meaning, and morality. The purpose is not subversion, but progress:

Wherever a religion, resting upon written records, prolongs and extends the sphere of its dominion, accompanying its votaries through the various and progressive stages of mental cultivation, a discrepancy between the representations of those ancient records, referred to as sacred, and the notions of more advanced periods of mental development, will inevitably sooner or later arise... the fundamental ideas and opinions in these early writings fail to be commensurate with a more advanced civilisation.<sup>33</sup>

It is here that Strauss, viewing history as composed of ‘progressive stages of mental cultivation’, borrows from the Hegelian grand narrative of dialectical idealism. This narrative dictates that while the scriptures were written in a less developed age, civilisation was on the march toward ‘more advanced periods of mental development’, and either scripture is to be reinterpreted in light of the present age, or it is to perish into irrelevancy. Here, even before Darwin, Hegelianism can be viewed as submitting religion to a process that can certainly be called ‘Darwinian’; religion must change and adapt to the present cultural environment, or it will be driven into extinction.

According to Strauss, reinterpretation was an ancient solution within religion for dealing with moral conflict, and the present Victorian moral conflict was just another in a long historical line. Strauss credits the Ancient Greeks for having stumbled upon it. Anaxagoras, who Strauss credits with ‘...the invention

of the allegorical mode of interpretation', noted that the capricious Olympian gods of Homeric epic were incommensurable with Greek philosophy, and sought to '...apply Homeric delineations to virtue and to justice'.<sup>34</sup> Strauss identifies this Greek influence as central to the development of interpretation within the Judeo-Christian tradition: '...it was at that place where the Jewish mind came into contact with Greek civilisation... Alexandria – that the allegorical mode of interpretation was first consistently applied to the whole body of historical narrative in the Old Testament'.<sup>35</sup> Philo of Alexandria '...first fully developed...'<sup>36</sup> this method, while Origen is alleged to have endorsed this view with the line: 'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'; which Strauss claims is 'indicating only the inferiority of the literal to the deeper signification'.<sup>37</sup> A literal interpretation can be described within the limits of language, while an allegorical interpretation could point to the threshold of those limits, inspiring a sense of self-transcendent awe beyond anything that literalism could offer.

Amid the naturalistic interpretations of the Bible offered by the Enlightenment, Strauss identifies Kant as the philosopher who saw 'the old allegorical system of the Christian fathers all at once called up from its grave'.<sup>38</sup> Kant radically departed from the rationalistic interpretations of his time: 'He, as a philosopher, did not concern himself with the history, as did the rationalist theologians, but like the fathers of the church, he sought the idea involved in the history'.<sup>39</sup> Later, Strauss claims that Kant 'was even inclined to consider these thoughts as the fundamental object of the history',<sup>40</sup> in the manner of the Hegelian grand narrative. In Strauss' estimation, Kant locates the origin of values not in scripture, but in the reader of scripture: 'He [Kant] moreover attributed these ideas wrought into the biblical text, not to the Divine Spirit, but to its philosophical interpreters, or in a deeper sense, to the moral condition of the authors themselves'.<sup>41</sup> Yet the relevance of scripture is not destroyed, it is simply redefined; moral and existential value might not be empirically discovered in scripture-as-history, but they are existentially created through scripture-as-literature, where the text is read as a source of thought-experiments provoking ideas and ways of speaking about values. If the literalist method meant adopting a passive role that merely imbibes the surface lessons of the text, the allegorical method meant adopting an active role in wrestling with deeper, more relevant, meanings that push at the threshold of the describable. Strauss' work is almost a

postmodern thesis, acknowledging instrumentalism, constructivism and conceptual relativity in a manner that would allow religion to survive both the moral crisis created by literal interpretations of scripture, and the loss of belief in design as the source of moral and existential value.

Strauss notes that believers in many of the world's religions – from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the contemporary Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Hindus – have resorted to the allegorical method when they have found it ‘...not expedient to destroy...’ their ‘...fabulous legends’.<sup>42</sup> Strauss continues:

...even though it should... do violence to the text... [an allegorical interpretation] is to be preferable to a literal one, which either contains no morality at all or is in opposition to the moral principle. For example, the expressions breathing vengeance against enemies in many of the Psalms are made to refer to the desires and passions which we must strive by all means to bring into subjugation; and the miraculous account in the New Testament of the descent of Jesus from heaven, of his relationship to God... is taken as an imaginative description of the ideal of humanity well-pleasing to God.<sup>43</sup>

According to Strauss, a literal interpretation cannot make scripture compatible with morality, but Kant's method can; Kant's method renders such easily describable, allegedly factual doctrine into value-judgements on the threshold of the describable, and amenable to modern civilisation. Strauss further contends that this could be done without any pretentiousness or intellectual dishonesty; after all, Kant's method ‘...does not pretend that the sense now given to the sacred books, always existed in the intention of the authors; this question it sets aside, and only claims for itself the right to interpret them after its own fashion’.<sup>44</sup> Religion need not maintain the essentialist idea of being eternal and unchanging; a notion which, according to Strauss and Kant, is falsified by history. In this, Edwina G. Lawler insists that Strauss was: ‘...truer to the historical enterprise than were his critics’.<sup>45</sup> Instead, religion can – and, as a matter of fact, does – always change and evolve with the times; just like science, philosophy, art, or anything else. Strauss applies Kant's method to various parts of both Biblical Testaments. He regards reports of Jesus' divinity and miracles in the Gospels to be unsubstantiated and interpreting them as ‘myth’; not in the sense of ‘false’, but in a sense more akin to poetic symbolism in a literary thought experiment.

***'Religion is the dream of the human mind'.***

Ludwig Feuerbach's (1804-1872) *The Essence of Christianity* (1841, translated 1855) was another vital influence on Eliot's thought-process. In the nineteenth century, Feuerbach was interpreted variously as viewing all gods as phantoms to be destroyed so that humanity may flourish, or as simply critiquing the doctrines of the Established Church in favour of a new kind of religion. Marx recommended Feuerbach to others, and wrote that: '...there is no other way to truth and freedom than through the "river of fire"'; referring to the literal meaning of Feuerbach's name.<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Engels praised Feuerbach:

The spell was broken: the 'system' was shattered and thrown aside, the contradiction resolved: for it existed only in the imagination. No one can have an idea of the liberating influence of this book unless he himself experienced it. Enthusiasm was general: we were all for the moment 'Feuerbachians'.<sup>47</sup>

Ernest Renan (1823-1892) wrote, in 1865, that Feuerbach's work could not be much worse for the Church: 'Feuerbach is, without doubt, the most forward, if not the most correct expression of the antipathy we speak of, and if the nineteenth century is to witness the end of the world, he certainly must be called the Antichrist'.<sup>48</sup> Stephen P. Thornton comments on the weight given to Feuerbach in the nineteenth century, writing that it: '...may strike the modern reader as more than a little puzzling, since he is not usually represented as a major figure in the history of Western thought'.<sup>49</sup> Feuerbach's lack of renown may well be a consequence of how his work came to be regarded; certainly, Feuerbach ranks among those principal nineteenth century culprits whom Alister McGrath accuses of propagating a pernicious ideology replacing God with Man, leading to destructive self-worship.<sup>50</sup>

Howard W. Bischoff argued for the idea that Feuerbach was not so much condemning Christianity as attempting to find a more human-oriented faith;<sup>51</sup> the 'Religion of Humanity'. Indeed, Engels himself had also written that Feuerbach's intention was not to destroy religion: 'He by no means wishes to abolish religion; he wants to perfect it. Philosophy itself must be absorbed in religion'.<sup>52</sup> For those who demarcate values as the one proper religious project, moral and existential philosophy might well be 'absorbed' into the religious sphere. Rodney Taylor also

comments that: ‘...several scholars have pointed to the importance of Spinozan metaphysics for the young Feuerbach’, and contributes an analysis of ‘...the deep Spinozan significance of the *mors mystica* in Feuerbach’s early work’.<sup>53</sup> Robert Banks, investigating Feuerbach’s influence on twentieth century Christian theology, wondered if Feuerbach is not an ironic forerunner of sophisticated theologians like Karl Barth and Paul Tillich:

Barth himself... has written of one who stands in the Tillichian tradition that what his attempt amounts to is merely ‘speaking of God by speaking of man *in a loud voice*’, while in return one of his severest critics has written of ‘Barth’s inability to escape the sardonic grin of Feuerbach’. Are Barth and Tillich, then, also among the Feuerbachians?<sup>54</sup>

There may be some truth in every interpretation. In any case, Peter Preuss alleges that Feuerbach’s challenge to orthodoxy cannot be ignored:

There is no doubt whatever that Feuerbach’s book presents one of the most profound challenges to the theologian, a challenge which cannot be dismissed by dubbing it, with Karl Barth, ‘shallow’ or ‘impertinent’; and the theologian whose sole response is ‘to laugh in [Feuerbach’s] face’ must himself appear ridiculous.<sup>55</sup>

Whether Preuss or Barth is right, Bischoff’s notion that Feuerbach sought not so much to destroy religion as to create a new kind of religion certainly should be investigated further, in order to understand the role of humanism in nineteenth century discourse.

Feuerbach imposes limits upon his polemic: ‘Certainly, my work is negative, destructive; but, be it observed, only in relation to the *unhuman*, not to the human elements of religion’.<sup>56</sup> Although Feuerbach denies religion in the supernatural sense, he does not deny religion in the humanistic sense. He takes great pains to affirm empiricism against all forms of Hegelian Idealism is clear from the outset: ‘It [his work] generates thought from the opposite of thought, from matter, from existence, from the senses; it has relation to its object first through the senses, i.e., *passively*, before defining it in thought’.<sup>57</sup> The title itself claims to be about the ‘essence’ of Christianity, affirming realism in a very Romantic quest to transcend Plato’s cave. Contrary to Strauss and Kant,

Feuerbach does not seek to interpret religion but to ‘let religion itself speak’.<sup>58</sup>

And what he claims religion is speaking about is humanity:

It is not I, but religion that worships man... it makes God become man, and then constitutes this God, not distinguished from man, having a human form, human feelings and human thoughts, the object of its worship and veneration. I have only found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion... let it be remembered that atheism... is the secret of religion itself; that religion itself... not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature.<sup>59</sup>

Whether the Platonist’s hope of passively letting anything ‘itself speak’ so as to find its ‘essence’, without the interpretative filter of the individual’s own mind, is valid, and whether Feuerbach can distance himself with the line ‘It is not I, but *religion* that’ – and therefore whether Feuerbach can claim the honesty of Strauss and Kant, who at least admit to interpretation – can certainly be disputed. Yet Feuerbach’s ‘key’ provides a fundamental insight into the concept of the ‘Religion of Humanity’ championed by Eliot.

In Feuerbach’s view, the ‘secret of religion’ is in fact a form of atheism whereby a religion’s true essence is not God, but the human being; and religion has simply projected<sup>60</sup> or objectified the personal needs, ideals, and qualities of the human being into the heavens in the form of an anthropomorphic deity with ‘human form, human feelings and human thoughts’.<sup>61</sup> God is made in the image of man, and in being so made the qualities that compose Him are alienated from the human individuals from whence they came. If Christianity represents religion at its ‘highest’ state, where God is held to be ‘all’ – i.e., *all*-knowing, *all*-powerful, *all*-good – then it follows that humanity, being alienated from such qualities, must be at its lowest state and held to be nothing (i.e., ignorant, powerless, sinful). God is everything that humanity is not: ‘God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man weak; God holy, man sinful’.<sup>62</sup> However, this disunion is a fiction: ‘Disunion exists only between beings who are at variance, but who ought to be one, who can be one, and who consequently in nature, in truth, are one’.<sup>63</sup> For any quality to be projected or objectified into a literal deity in the first place, then that quality must already be within human individuals themselves. If God is deemed necessary for morality, then it is

because humans value morality already; which they would not if they were truly ‘sinful’, truly suffering ‘disunion’ with the moral value, and therefore truly needing a God to rescue morality. Even Renan’s suggestion that Feuerbach might be the Antichrist – if he had meant it seriously – could be subject to Feuerbachian analysis; Renan would, after all, be projecting or objectifying Feuerbach’s work into that of the supernatural agent of the ‘Antichrist’, thereby alienating the work from simple human agency. Feuerbach’s conclusion follows: ‘Man is the God of Christianity, anthropology the mystery of Christian theology’.<sup>64</sup>

The ‘nature or power’ that gives humanity ‘the consciousness of ‘union with God’, or reconciliation with human ideals, is ‘nothing else than the intelligence-the reason or the understanding’:<sup>65</sup>

Philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, physics, in short, science in general, is the practical proof, because it is the product, of this truly infinite and divine activity... this God, free from anthropomorphisms, impartial, passionless, in nothing else than the nature of the understanding itself regarded as objective.<sup>66</sup>

However, humanity’s understanding of reason and goodness is necessarily ‘above’ its objectification into a literal deity:

Even omnipotence cannot do what is contrary to reason. Thus above the divine omnipotence stands the higher power of reason; above the nature of God the nature of the understanding, as the criterion of that which is to be affirmed and denied of God... Canst thou believe in a God who is an unreasonable and wicked being? No, indeed; but why not? Because it is in contradiction with thy understanding to accept a wicked and unreasonable being as divine.<sup>67</sup>

This view seems to be an extension of Euthyphro’s Dilemma, questioning Divine Command Theory. God’s status as *God*, as a being who is not unreasonable or wicked, is subject to a human understanding of reason and goodness, which makes this understanding the only true ‘...necessary being’.<sup>68</sup> For Feuerbach, this renders human understanding of reason and goodness the true God, and its objectification into a literal deity an illusion.

Patrick Masterson argues that Feuerbach laid the foundations for contemporary atheism.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, Feuerbach’s work lends itself to Marx’s theory that an individual’s alienation from their own humanity within cataphatic

religion supports the worker's alienation from their own humanity within industrial capitalism. Feuerbach's work also lends itself to Freud's later theory in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), which extends Blake's 'Nobodaddy',<sup>70</sup> concept by writing that God is an objectification of the individual's latent '...longing for the father',<sup>71</sup> who the individual in their infancy believed to be omnipotent and omniscient, and who ruled with an absolute authority offering love, justice, and '...protection against the dangers one knew'.<sup>72</sup> Casting Feuerbach's theory in terms of the limits of language, it is the very attempt to describe God through words that differentiates and objectifies God into something external to the individual; and the limits of language in describing natural phenomena – including moral and existential value – without design, is an objectification of humanity's designing capabilities. This literal God is describable within the limits of language because He simply emerges *within* those limits.

But Feuerbach's reasoning also illuminates much about the 'Religion of Humanity'. If humanity's highest understanding of reason and goodness is the true 'necessary being', of which literal deities are simply projections or objectifications, then the true focus of religion that Feuerbach claims to have discovered is the God *within* rather than the God without; the God of personal values and ideals, rather than the God of literal facts and belief. As David Carroll summarises it, 'God is Love will become Love is God'.<sup>73</sup> The understanding of reason and goodness that resides within the limits of language points to that which is upon the threshold of those limits; namely, love. In Feuerbach's own words:

What then is the true unfalsified import of the Incarnation but absolute, pure love, without adjunct, without a distinction between divine and human love? For though there is also a self-interested love among men, still the true human love, which is alone worthy of this name, is that which impels sacrifice of self to another.<sup>74</sup>

Although Feuerbach counted this location of God within the individual, 'without distinction between divine and human love', as a point against God, theologians like Karen Armstrong might have no issue with this. According to Armstrong, it is only the attempt to describe God in positive terms that causes God to be projected, objectified, or linguistically differentiated as something beyond the individual. Certainly, the Gospel of Luke's claim that 'the kingdom of God is within you', Tennyson's claim that faith in God as love comes 'from ourselves, from what is

highest in us', make the location of God within the individual a point *for* God. For Arnold, the 'love' that 'impels sacrifice of self to another', constitutes the perfect example of his definition of religion as: '...morality touched by emotion'.<sup>75</sup> Feuerbach's theory of alienation could simply refer to the alienation inherent to the linguistic and essentialist '...separation of self from other'.<sup>76</sup>

Lines such as 'Man has his highest being, his God, in himself',<sup>77</sup> therefore, can be interpreted both positively as affirming selfless human solidarity, and negatively as threatening human self-worship. Yet there seems no doubt that Feuerbach promoted the positive interpretation in his intention, and therefore can be seen as offering not the destruction of religion, but a reinvention of it based on precisely the kind of values and feelings that cannot be described. As with Dickens, moral feelings ought to be on the threshold of the describable, which is precisely why they are valuable, or 'religious'. If God is synonymous with humanity's highest values of understanding and goodness, then morality, as Feuerbach alleges, is still a 'religious' endeavour: '...all moral feelings which man has towards man, are of a religious nature. Man feels nothing towards God which he does not also feel towards man'.<sup>78</sup> This is highly reminiscent of Matthew 25:35-46, encapsulated by the divine injunction: '...Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me'.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps as a logical extension of Renaissance humanism, the 'Religion of Humanity' can be viewed as using the sentiment of Matthew 25:40, based on certain key indescribable values, as the defining creed of the religion.

Therefore, Bischoff may be right that Feuerbach can be seen, in one sense, not as wanting to destroy religion, but to reform it. In Feuerbach's own words:

Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see real things in the entrancing splendour of imagination and caprice, instead of in the simple daylight of reality and necessity. Hence I do nothing more to religion – and to speculative philosophy and theology also – than to open its eyes.<sup>80</sup>

In one sense, Feuerbach foreshadows Thomas Hardy's *God's Funeral* (1910), which laments that God is a 'man-projected figure' and religion a 'dream'.<sup>81</sup> The 'death of God' thesis was beginning to be propounded. But in another sense,

Feuerbach could simply be saying that the focus of religion is and ought to be about this world rather than the next, about practice rather than belief. If it is a 'dream', it is simply the ability to dream about what 'ought' to be in terms of moral and existential value in this world.

This analysis of Strauss and Feuerbach only captures the basic theses of their respective works, but it affords an understanding of the background to George Eliot's own attitudes to religion. It was well after Eliot's translations that German biblical criticism became widely known to Britain, through other sources, but its effect was pronounced:

In 1860 appeared a book entitled *Essays and Reviews*, six of whose seven authors were clergymen of the Church of England, which brought to Britain the techniques and startling hypotheses of German biblical criticism. In 1862 the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was denied by no less than a bishop, John William Colenso. In 1864 and 1865 the courts decided that nothing could be done about these subversives within the Church, and in 1869 one of the Essayists and Reviewers became a bishop. Naturalistic, non-miraculous lives of Jesus appeared: Renan's *Vie de Jésus* in 1863, J. R. Seeley's *Ecce Homo* in 1865... To retain a traditional Bible-centred faith in the 1870s, an educated man had either to deny the findings of biblical criticism and natural science, supported by an increasing mass of evidence, or else to re-create that faith on a new basis which few were able to construct.<sup>82</sup>

Eliot was among those who sought to 'recreate that faith on a new basis' in terms of a 'Religion of Humanity', attempting to redress the threat of meaninglessness believed to be implied by the rise of a scientific description of the world without design. This approach, arguably begun by individuals like Tennyson before Darwin, was further developed by individuals like Eliot after Darwin. This form of religion spread among only a 'few', yet it is an important response to the 'death of God' thesis that either repelled or excited, variously leading to a need to deny the new faith, or to embrace it as sufficient for moral and existential value. The latter reaction will be examined through Eliot's own work.

***‘There is no just God that governs the earth righteously...’***

Eliot’s translations of Strauss and Feuerbach did not merely influence Eliot’s novels; they were given expression through her novels. As Susan E. Hill argues:

...it was Evans’ activity of translation that helped George Eliot create a methodological framework within which to articulate the moral worldview of her novels. Instead of clarifying her views on translation in the essay form, Evans chose, rather, to exemplify the idea and activity of translation through George Eliot’s literary characters.<sup>83</sup>

Certainly, Eliot’s novels can be viewed as ‘translations’ of the Straussian message that, in her own words, ‘...every phase of human development is part of that education of the race... every mistake, every absurdity into which poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit’.<sup>84</sup>

Eliot had already explored religion and humanism in *Adam Bede* (1859), before Darwin;<sup>85</sup> but *Silas Marner* (1861) extends Eliot’s contribution to Straussian myth-making and human ‘development’ after Darwin. As David Sonstroem comments, *Silas Marner* addresses a quintessentially Darwinian world:

*Silas*, published in 1861, two years after *The Origin of Species*, does address what is in several respects a Darwinian world. It depicts sudden, apparently random change. There are predators and victims. There is a struggle for existence, entailing individual and societal extinctions. There is a tangled bank of personal and causal relationships but no apparent grand design centred on humanity, let alone on any given individual. There is no discernible higher power directing events. Life’s events are intertwined but stochastic. Like Darwin and perhaps because of him, *Silas* confronts ‘higgledy-piggledy.’<sup>86</sup>

Marner’s world is one without design or providence, where personal fortunes are determined by a combination of chance and struggle. In the midst of the Victorian generation’s existential ‘crisis of faith’ following the doubts cast upon the ‘God Hypothesis’<sup>87</sup> and the God of mechanised Established Churches, Marner’s story is Eliot’s thought-experiment to determine whether order, meaning, and purpose can be found in such a world.

Brian Swann argues that the relevance of *Silas Marner* was that it encapsulates works like those of Strauss and Feuerbach, as well as many of Eliot's later works:

...it is not so much a moral fable as an anticipation of the later great novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*... It is more optimistic in its implications than *Middlemarch*, however, and anticipates *Daniel Deronda* in being about that revelation which is 'the education of the human race'. The novel, in true Feuerbachian fashion, shows revelation to be within man, and not without.<sup>88</sup>

As Orr explains, it was for this reason that Eliot consistently promoted her earliest works:

In her letters she repeatedly champions her first stories... largely because they contain 'ideas' that she doubts she 'can ever embody again'... In a broader sense this is an important idea, however, in that her philosophy was grounded in a belief in the idea of progress. This is most neatly exemplified in *Silas Marner*, which is often called a fable, but is a fable not just of one man's life but of the progress of humanity and civilisation, as reflected in the growth of a single consciousness and community.<sup>89</sup>

Eliot's characteristically Victorian belief in progress entailed that she would not deliver exactly the same message in her works twice, and this very belief is 'exemplified' in Silas' journey as a microcosm of the wider world. This message was humanistic: '...Eliot acknowledged to her publisher on 24 February 1861 that the aim of her story was to set "in a strong light the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations"'<sup>90</sup>.

Edwin Fairley, writing in 1913, went further, praising the art of *Silas Marner* above all of Eliot's other works:

*Adam Bede* is perhaps a greater book, but as a work of art it is, for some people, spoiled by the anticlimax of the reprieve of Hetty and the marriage of Adam and Dinah... *Romola* has always impressed me as a *tour de force*. The effort of the author stands out too much. ...*The Mill on the Floss* is too tragic and passionate, and in the later novels, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*, the habit of interweaving dissertations and preachments had grown so upon the author that it spoils them as pure works of art, however much it may increase their value as expressions of the author's spirit. But *Silas Marner* is complete in

design and admirable in construction, a masterpiece in which we may study our author in small compass.<sup>91</sup>

Whether Fairley's judgement stands today might be disputed; certainly, just what 'pure works of art' are *supposed* to be is contestable. But while *Silas Marner* is one of Eliot's less studied novels, the role of this text in capturing the underlying philosophy of all her works can certainly be affirmed. Certainly, for Felicia Bonaparte, *Silas Marner* is the novel in which George Eliot, '...dissatisfied with empiricism as the sole basis of her thought and yet unwilling to return to a theological creed...', sought to '...conceive, for herself and the modern world, a secular but a transcendent religion'.<sup>92</sup> It is just such an observation that renders an investigation of *Silas Marner* the most necessary.

The religious and industrial themes in *Silas Marner* are well known, with the novel set in the early days of the Industrial Revolution when the struggles and tensions of adapting to the new way of life were still fresh. Wordsworth's influence on *Silas Marner*, eloquently argued by Robert H. Dunham, is also well known, the appeal of Wordsworth's romanticisation of children and nature giving him a far-reaching influence.<sup>93</sup> However, here I will also investigate these themes as a continuation of Carlyle's and Dickens' social protest against both the 'mechanisation' of working life via industrial capitalism, and the 'mechanisation' of religion via belief-based orthodox religion, as informed by the developments of science, religious doubt, and Straussian/Feuerbachian humanism that had occurred since Carlyle's time and influenced Eliot's own thought process. The notion of Eliot's work as a continuation of Carlyle seems justifiable in two ways. Namely, the similar themes that emerge in *Silas Marner*, and Eliot's comments that: '...there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings',<sup>94</sup> and that 'there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived'.<sup>95</sup> It can be argued that Eliot's solution to society's ills in the form of a 'Religion of Humanity' can be seen as a continuation of Carlyle's wish for a 'brighter spiritual era',<sup>96</sup> a spiritual revolution where 'separation of self from other' is ameliorated. In addition, there has not yet been an analysis of Eliot's novel as a thought-experiment that throws more light upon the impact of the limits of language on religion.

Eliot opens her novel with a vision of the English countryside, on the cusp of the industrial era, as almost another world; a world of fear and superstition where the people resemble ‘...the remnants of a disinherited race’,<sup>97</sup> and hold weavers in suspicion. As Joseph Wiesenfarth asserts, the art of weaving is ‘...traditionally suspect because it is connected with Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, who spin, measure, and cut the thread of life’.<sup>98</sup> The country folk interpret the most common of circumstances to be the most ominous of signs:

The shepherd himself, though he had good reason to believe that the bag [of a passing weaver] held nothing but flaxen thread, or else the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil One.<sup>99</sup>

Peter Schock notes how belief in a literal Devil or ‘Evil One’ had largely waned among the educated by the turn of the nineteenth century: ‘By the end of the eighteenth century, among the literate classes of England, belief in the existence of the Devil had practically vanished’.<sup>100</sup> Eliot’s vision of the remote countryside is a one of a people frozen in time, untouched by the Enlightenment, and neglectful of the principle of parsimony which would insist that the weaver indeed carries only thread and linen. This superstitious thinking, whereby an irrational causal connection is made, exhibits a Feuerbachian discourse from the very first page. Fear of the unknown, entails that the unknown (in this case, the unknown source of the ability to weave linen) to be irrationally projected or objectified into a literal supernatural agent (the ‘Evil One’); thereby alienating the ability to weave linen from humanity. The limits of language in describing the unknown are evident here. With the Feuerbachian belief that the human ability to design can be projected or objectified onto supernatural agency, it is suggested that even human design can be described as supernatural design by those uninitiated in the secrets of the craft.

In this superstitious world, wandering men had no history that was known to a community, and being regarded as alien they were not to be trusted: ‘No one knew where wandering men had their homes or their origin; and how was a man to be explained unless you at least knew somebody who knew his father and mother?’<sup>101</sup> To the common people, the wider world was unknown, and therefore the object of suspicion: ‘...the world outside their own direct experience was a

region of vagueness and mystery... a settler, if he came from distant parts, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust...'<sup>102</sup> This distrust applied in even greater force if 'he [the settler] had any reputation for knowledge, or showed any skill in handicraft'.<sup>103</sup> Any intellectual competence was a threat described in terms of dark forces: 'All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult instrument the tongue, or in some other art unfamiliar to villagers, was in itself suspicious', for – following Feuerbach – that which was unknown would only be projected or objectified into '...the nature of conjuring'.<sup>104</sup>

The narrator breaks from the narrative to add: 'Such strange lingering echoes of the old demon-worship might perhaps even now be caught by the diligent listener among the grey-haired peasantry; for the rude mind with difficulty associates the ideas of power and benignity'.<sup>105</sup> When fear is involved, the mystery of the unknown certainly does not inspire awe, but a form of superstition that divides people from one another. Silas Marner – perhaps named for Silas, the early Christian missionary cast out by the people of Philippi and imprisoned<sup>106</sup> – is introduced into this world as an object of alienation and distrust, a settler and weaver with no history, who had '...contracted the eccentric habits which belong to a state of loneliness'.<sup>107</sup>

This theme of superstition-driven division constitutes a significant aspect of the Straussian thought-experiment that Eliot is attempting to construct. Clare Jackson asserts that one of Eliot's primary themes is that of the danger of unquestioning belief: '...one of Eliot's central purposes is to offer a clear warning of the dangers of such belief to her readers'.<sup>108</sup> In the ongoing Victorian debate concerning the relationship between private and public, Eliot foreshadows William K. Clifford's (1845-1879) *The Ethics of Belief* (1877),<sup>109</sup> by suggesting that private beliefs that supervene on the public sphere can have harmful consequences. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes:

The connection between private and public life remains one of George Eliot's constant themes... For her, however, privacy belongs by definition to a thoroughly public conception of human circumstances and is not to be confused with secrecy, a disorder that cripples both private and public life by introducing into individual consciousness a dissociation between thought and action.<sup>110</sup>

This is the notion that ‘thought’ and ‘action’ cannot be neatly separated into ‘private’ and ‘public’, because private thought is the source of all public action.

This thought-experiment begins with an exploration into Marner’s past, fifteen years prior in Lantern Yard and the betrayal of his false friend, William Dane. Summoned to Lantern Yard, Marner finds himself accused of stealing church money, after his knife has been found planted where the money had lain. Marner’s belief in this episode appears to be a form of ‘God Hypothesis’, complete with testable predictions, and therefore the possibility of being falsified. This ‘God Hypothesis’ involves the auxiliary assumption of a benevolent universe; an assumption making a prediction that is – at least for Marner, who knows that he is innocent – testable: ‘God will clear me’.<sup>111</sup> The community resorts to ‘praying and drawing lots’,<sup>112</sup> an experiment that tests the auxiliary assumption by leaving chance to determine Marner’s innocence or guilt. And in what might be read as the story of the apostle Peter in reverse, Marner affirms this faith no less than three times before he is denied by the randomly drawn lots, and found guilty by the community. For Marner, the ‘God Hypothesis’ is falsified, and in a single outburst he seals his alienation:

The last time I remember using my knife, was when I took it out to cut a strap for you. I don’t remember putting it in my pocket again. You stole the money, and you have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door. But you may prosper, for all that: there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.<sup>113</sup>

Marner only now learns, the hard way, the age-old theological problem that bad things can happen to good people, and good things can happen to bad people; the universe is not benevolent, and Marner does not know how to reconcile this with theism. Yet there is ‘a general shudder’ at Marner’s ‘blasphemy’, and Dane simply uses it to alienate Marner further: ‘I leave our brethren to judge whether this is the voice of Satan or not. I can do nothing but pray for you, Silas’.<sup>114</sup> Marner is broken, carrying ‘...that shaken trust in God and man, which is little short of madness to a loving nature’.<sup>115</sup> Soon after, Marner’s fiancé Sarah breaks off the engagement; and within the month, Sarah marries Dane, and Marner leaves town.

It is for circumstances like this that Eliot criticises unquestioning belief:

We are apt to think it inevitable that a man in Marner's position should have begun to question the validity of an appeal to the divine judgement by drawing lots; but to him this would have been an effort of independent thought such as he had never known... If there is an angel who records the sorrows of men as well as their sins, he knows how many and deep are the sorrows that spring from false ideas for which no man is culpable.<sup>116</sup>

Marner does not necessarily lose his belief, despite his outburst; nevertheless it is certainly 'shaken'. The 'sorrows that spring from false ideas', the consequences of the community's moral inaction in finding the true causes of and solutions to a bad occurrence, based on belief in a benevolent universe where only good things happen to good people, is used to suggest that if a private belief is wrong, then a public action based on that belief will also be wrong. In this view, even a utilitarian analysis - where happiness would be valued above reality - might dictate that happiness is endangered *without* an honest attempt to adhere to reality. In any analysis, Tennyson's 'honest doubt' becomes not just important to existential value, but to moral value. The dangerous 'false idea' in question, then, might simply be the idea of determining facts through methods inappropriate to the realm of fact, which - much like determining questions of value through methods inappropriate to the realm of value - is represented as superstition antithetical to 'pure, natural human relations'.<sup>117</sup>

The above episode also illustrates how the methods appropriate to the realm of fact are themselves a matter of community consensus rather than strict correspondence with reality; such methods can only be ascertained *within* the confines of Plato's cave. This appears to be line with Richard Rorty's thought.<sup>118</sup> While a correspondence theory of knowledge may correctly hold that a community (such as Lantern Yard) can agree about their description of the facts and still be wrong, and that a single individual (such as Marner) can be right in their description of the facts in the face of unanimous opposition, human *knowledge* of fact, and of the method most appropriate for determining fact, is always hostage to the dictates of community consensus. If people cannot agree on epistemic values, then they will be unable to agree on much else, and discussion is pointless (Lyell's and Philip Gosse's disagreement on the value of parsimony being a case in point). There can be no appeal to argument or evidence to resolve the matter, for it is the very nature of what *constitutes* argument and evidence in

the first place that is under dispute. Therefore, the importance of community in arriving at the most appropriate method of determining fact becomes an integral part of the more general importance of community in achieving 'pure, natural human relations' in the public sphere; indeed, the latter could drive the former.

Eliot explores the issue in episodes such as the debate over the existence of ghosts, as David Carroll comments: 'The lengthy discussion there about the existence of ghosts runs, in its own idiomatic way, through the whole gamut of arguments, from historical evidence, experience, experiment, to analogy and belief'.<sup>119</sup> Efraim Sicher notes that this episode is: '...more entertaining than serious in the gentle fun it pokes at the ignorance and superstitions of country folk',<sup>120</sup> but the humour carries a serious point. The point is to discern, in accordance with Bacon's 'two truths'<sup>121</sup> doctrine, exactly what is public fact and what must remain private judgment; empowering a discourse that would demarcate science and religion in a manner which would mean that they would not conflict.

Anna Neill has also suggested that Eliot is only censuring the kind of religion that steps beyond its bounds by attempting to arbitrate questions of fact: 'Although her [Eliot's] narrators are sometimes sceptical of their more spiritually-oriented characters, the narrative voice seldom directly condemns expressions of spiritual rapture'.<sup>122</sup> Such expressions are manifest in the novel, particularly if Marner's uncontrollable catalepsy is interpreted, as Neill suggests, as analogous to spiritual rapture:

We are offered no rational explanation for the attacks that render him as incapable of psychological as of physical movement. The possibility that they are the result of divine inspiration, however, is immediately removed by Silas's honest testimony that he had no vision from God; ...The story apparently sides neither with scientific enlightenment nor with Protestant awakening. Instead, it provides a bare-bones depiction of a sudden, inexplicable suspension of the inner life, 'a mysterious rigidity and suspension of consciousness' that only the rudest-minded of its characters interpret as signifying either divine or demonic influence.<sup>123</sup>

Neill's observation that the story '...sides neither with scientific enlightenment nor with Protestant awakening' seems to parallel Strauss' mode of thought, where myth is neither false (as Enlightenment rationalists held) nor literally true (as

orthodox Christians held). Eliot may be suggesting that the same might be said of religious experience itself; it is neither an illusion, nor a pointer to the literal existence of any divinity. Doubt in regard to religious belief does not render the power of religious experience any less valuable; a notion supporting the survival of practical religion.

In fact, Eliot seems to hold literal belief to be inhibitive of such experience, as she suggests immediately following Marner's loss of faith:

To people accustomed to reason about the forms in which their religious feeling has incorporated itself, it is difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection.<sup>124</sup>

Eliot's 'religious *feeling*', being a 'simple, *untaught* state of mind', is deeper than cultural learning. Humans are universally predisposed to this feeling, even if they lack any conscious concept of that feeling due to it being 'untaught', or undescribed. Perhaps this is why 'we are offered no rational explanation' for Marner's rapture. The attempt to 'reason' and 'reflect' about the religious feeling is the attempt to describe it, and words themselves differentiate that feeling as something external to the individual, disposing them to reason that the religious feeling is the result of external design, incorporating the feeling into the outward form of literal belief. Like Lyell and Darwin, Eliot appears to be aware of the limits of language. In the Feuerbachian analysis, it is projected or objectified, thereby alienating the genesis of that feeling from humanity. And so, from universal religious experiences are inferred non-universal religious beliefs. As Darwin suggested,<sup>125</sup> transcendent experience within the context of a given religious tradition is taken as confirmation of the beliefs of that religion, in a move that suffers a relativity thesis.

Eliot morally objects to religion's outward 'forms', takes issue with the description of transcendent experience in terms of design, and critiques the 'God Hypothesis' and the God of the Established Churches. However, she is not criticising them in order to debunk religion, but rather to save the universal 'religious feeling' from being debunked along with the literal beliefs that people have grown 'accustomed' to associate with that feeling. Marner becomes an existentialist, his journey a thought-experiment of a very Victorian quest to find a

new God, a new source of moral and existential value in life: ‘He has to be reconstructed virtually *ex nihilo*, from nothing. All he carries with him into exile is his skill in weaving, but around this a miniature creation myth is enacted as he weaves himself back into existence’.<sup>126</sup> Susan Stewart observes that: ‘Spinning, weaving, and tailoring are frequently distinguished as the work of folktale protagonists’, drawing a connection between literal weaving and the weaving of an identity or a tale; which are often the same thing.<sup>127</sup> It can be added that if weaving is to be associated with the three Fates – Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos – then Marner’s work as a weaver makes him something like another Prometheus, stealing the power to ‘spin, measure, and cut’ the thread of his own life.

***‘He seemed to weave, spider-like...’***

Marner’s taking of his fate into own his hands creates a journey of trial-and-error. Having lost everything he is set adrift and alone, and his only solace is work and money: ‘Every man’s work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life’.<sup>128</sup> Yet unlike in the factory life of Dickens’ *Hard Times*, Marner’s period of grief, and work as an end-in-itself, is marked not by the rule of the clock, but by alienation from time altogether; as Kate E. Brown contends: ‘Grief... is an experience of time out of joint’.<sup>129</sup> Once again, this is *grief* at the threshold of the describable.

Lawrence Jay Dessner, investigating Silas Marner alongside Eliot’s biographical material, suggests that this episode is Eliot’s way of dealing with her own circumstance:

George Eliot and George Henry Lewes moved back to London from Holly Lodge on September 24, 1860... It was, for George Eliot, a time of isolation, depression, poor health, discomfort, debility, hard work, bitterness, anxiety, and anguish. ...Friends and acquaintances shunned her. Her sister Chrissey, dying in her prime, had written to her, but with intimations that ‘ploughed up my heart’... Her niece, Katie Clarke, had died in March of 1860, in her ninth year’.<sup>130</sup>

Eliot had suffered a very personal understanding of solitary existence.

Susan R. Cohen, examining how the text struggles with questions of disorder and discontinuity, emphasises the need to prevent solitary individuals from seeing themselves in reductionist terms: ‘Silas has lost virtually all

connections, and his suffering dramatises the human need for connections, however artificial, to fill in the gaps of experience and keep individuals from seeing themselves as nothing more than ‘...miserable agglomerations of atoms’.<sup>131</sup> Yet from the level of ‘miserable agglomerations of atoms’, Marner barely succeeds at rising to the level of either an arachnid or an insect, a type of description that appears repeatedly: ‘He seemed to weave, spider-like...’; he reduces his life ‘...to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect...’; and he cannot be rescued from ‘...the insect-like existence into which his nature had shrunk’.<sup>132</sup> In this mind-set, values have been reduced to money as the only end-in-itself:

He had seemed to love it little in the years when every penny had its purpose for him; for he loved the *purpose* then. But now, when all purpose was gone, that habit of looking towards the money and grasping it with a sense of fulfilled effort made a loam that was deep enough for the seeds of desire.<sup>133</sup>

He does not want the money for anything in particular; he simply wants the money itself: ‘Gradually the guineas, the crowns, and the half-crowns, grew to a heap’.<sup>134</sup>

As David Carroll notes, ‘Having lost his god, Silas has turned himself into a machine for making gold’.<sup>135</sup> The coins even became substitutes for human company, the objects of Marner’s social instincts: ‘...he would on no account have exchanged those coins, which had become his familiars, for other coins with unknown faces’.<sup>136</sup> His coins are his friends, his family; and he would not trade beloved friends and family for strangers with ‘unknown faces’. When touching and counting his coins, he becomes wistful: he ‘...thought fondly of the guineas that were only half earned by the work in his loom, as if they had been unborn children’.<sup>137</sup> Jeff Nunokawa has even read into this episode nineteenth century ideas surrounding ‘self-love’:

The pleasure that Eliot’s miser takes in this illicit atmosphere (‘only in the night’; ‘at night came his revelry’; ‘at night he closed his shutters, and made fast his doors’) resembles a condensed catalogue of sexual deviance... Eliot’s account of the revelry of this ‘pallid, undersized’ man... reads like a case study of the solitary practice... of self-abuse imagined by nineteenth-century sexology... The miser’s self-love suggests one that dares

not speak its name, a love whose definition is glimpsed in the shadow of Sodom... that hovers over 'the city of Destruction'.<sup>138</sup>

Eliot summarises Marner's moral condition: 'In his truthful simple soul, not even the growing greed and worship of gold could beget any vice directly injurious to others'.<sup>139</sup> It is another comment on the relationship between private and public; even if private *beliefs* can affect the public sphere, at least private *actions* cannot.

In any case, Marner has found his new religion, such as it is:

The light of his faith quite put out, and his affections made desolate, he had clung with all the force of his nature to his work and his money; and like all objects to which a man devotes himself, they had fashioned him into correspondence with themselves.<sup>140</sup>

Marner has begun to identify with his money, and so to lose it would inevitably be to lose himself; again. Marner's working and hoarding becomes the epitome of the consumerist slogan: 'He who has the most toys when he dies, wins'.<sup>141</sup> Except that Marner does not even bother with 'toys', just the money; which only renders the tone of nihilistic futility in the word 'wins' all the more keen.

It is at this point that the reader is introduced to the rich, landowning family of Squire Godfrey Cass. While critics have agreed that the novel's two plots, alternating between Marner and Godfrey Cass, are '...unquestionably related',<sup>142</sup> this relation might be best expressed in terms of a Marxist discourse of class struggle and alienation. This discourse combines issues of belief with issues of class struggle within the industrial capitalist system to create the Straussian thought-experiment appropriate to a capitalist generation. In this light, Marner represents the largely atheistic working class, and Godfrey Cass the largely orthodox Christian bourgeois class. Marner works hard, but he is a man with no history, a man from 'distant parts', and therefore a man who '...hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust'. Godfrey Cass, on the other hand, is the son of a man who 'kept all his sons at home in idleness', and worse, he seems to be '...going along the same road with his brother [Dunstan Cass]' a '...spiteful jeering fellow...' whose '...taste for swopping and betting might turn out to be a sowing of something worse than wild oats',<sup>143</sup> and yet because the family is 'understood to be of timeless origin', he is trusted.<sup>144</sup> Briefly put, Marner

has earned the trust of the community, but does not have it; Godfrey Cass has the trust of the community, but has not earned it.

The concept of alienation within *Silas Marner* has been written on before,<sup>145</sup> but mostly in reference to Feuerbachian, rather than Marxist, alienation. Nevertheless, the Marxist discourse, indicting industrial capitalism as ardently as Dickens for its reduction of values, seems apparent. The familiar, orthodox Christian middle class is unfairly respected more than all others, while the alien, atheistic working class is unfairly distrusted more than all others. Just as workers within industrial capitalism are held to be (according to the labour theory of value) alienated from the profit of their labour and therefore their humanity, so is Marner alienated from the trust of the community that he has rightfully earned, and therefore alienated to the level of an insect whose work is an end-in-itself. Just as Friedrich Engels wrote that money is ‘...the god of this world...’,<sup>146</sup> so Marner, because he is distrusted, alienated, and oppressed, places his entire sense of existential meaning in money. And just as Engels wrote that ‘...the bourgeois takes the proletarian’s money from him and so makes a practical atheist of him’,<sup>147</sup> so the bourgeois Dunstan Cass takes Marner’s money and so makes an existential nihilist of him: ‘Again he put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild ringing scream, the cry of desolation’.<sup>148</sup>

However, Marner does have it within his power to decide to place his sense of existential meaning in something more valuable than money, revealing the power of the individual to accept or reject the system and create his or her own meaning, in defiance of either an indifferent universe or of socio-economic determinism. Eliot’s answer to the ‘...spiritless conditions...’<sup>149</sup> of class struggle and existential nihilism, an answer that continues from Carlyle’s own, is not a literal revolution to dethrone the place of money as ‘the god of this world’ throughout society, but a spiritual revolution to dethrone the place of money within an individual’s own value-system. Only then can the value of money as ‘god’, or end-in-itself, be replaced with the ‘remedial influences of pure, natural human relations’.

***‘You’re a deal better off to ha’ lost your money...’***

The theft of the money turns out to be a positive thing. The loss of money is the only thing that compels Marner to seek out his Raveloe neighbours, who

distrust him so much, and to seek their aid and thereby form a sense of meaning from community and solidarity:

This strangely novel situation of opening his trouble to his Raveloe neighbours, of sitting in the warmth of a hearth not his own, and feeling the presence of faces and voices which were his nearest promise of help, had doubtless its influence on Marner, in spite of his passionate preoccupation with his loss. Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us any more than without us: there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud.<sup>150</sup>

The ‘smallest sign of the bud’ appears to be the bud of basing meaning on values at the threshold of the describable that Dickens so vigorously defended. The people of Raveloe themselves begin to notice the providential side of Marner’s loss, as they accept him into the community. Mr Macey comments: ‘Come, Master Marner, why, you’ve no call to sit a-moaning. You’re a deal better off to ha’ lost your money... I used to think, when you first come into these parts, as you were no better nor you should be.’<sup>151</sup> Now, Mr Macey thinks well of Marner; even if Marner himself remains lost and without meaning or purpose, still in a similar position as when he lost his faith in Lantern Yard:

He had a sense that the old man meant to be good-natured and neighbourly; but the kindness fell on him as sunshine falls on the wretched – he had no heart to taste it, and felt that it was very far off him’.<sup>152</sup>

But with the theft turning out to be a providential stroke of good fortune, in terms of it causing Marner to finally enter the community and find greater meaning there than he had had in money, it is one of the novel’s events that have led many critics to accuse *Silas Marner* of relying too much on providential good luck for a novel centred on the theme of finding meaning in a non-providential, Darwinian world. Courtney Berger, in particular, has explored how critics have alleged that there is an irreconcilable contradiction within Eliot’s project of seeking to simultaneously depict a realistic world *and* a morally just world.<sup>153</sup> David Sonstroem comments that critics have decided that it is this ‘unrealistic’, ‘fable’-like, ‘fairy-tale’ quality that renders the novel ineffective, even self-contradictory, in its particular attempt to assert that moral and existential value can be found in a Darwinian world:

Many see the chance events as flaws, charging George Eliot with inconsistency, either in deactivating chance after introducing it or in relying on chance to resolve what she herself has declared should be resolved by character. Other readers, granting that the novel is unrealistically arbitrary, exonerate it nevertheless, calling the book – or at least the story of Silas – a fable rather than a novel, thereby freeing it from the obligation that its plot reflect events realistically.<sup>154</sup>

This charge of ‘inconsistency’ in Eliot’s portrayal of a non-providential universe requires exploration; for although the reader might ‘exonerate it nevertheless’ by calling it a moral fable, the moral that meaning can be found in a non-providential universe *does* hang upon that universe being consistently non-providential.

Marner’s search for meaning in a non-providential universe does, at first, seem to be resolved by a stroke of providential good luck, through his accidental meeting with an orphan girl. This girl arrives from the mess that Godfrey Cass has made of his relationships by attempting to base them not on love, but on class status. Godfrey Cass, wishing to marry the high-born, bourgeois Nancy, is haunted by his past marriage to the low-born, opium-addicted Molly. Molly has a child to Godfrey Cass and, resenting his wealth, threatens to expose his secret and ruin his chances with Nancy. A Marxist reading here is clearly possible:

It is seldom that the miserable can help regarding their misery as a wrong inflicted by those who are less miserable. Molly knew that the cause of her dingy rags was not her husband’s neglect, but the demon Opium to whom she was enslaved, body and soul... She knew this well; and yet... the sense of her want and degradation transformed itself continually into bitterness towards Godfrey. *He* was well off, and if she had her rights she would be well off too’.<sup>155</sup>

The narrator acquits Godfrey Cass of responsibility regarding Molly’s condition, and the true culprit, ‘opium’ – despite the Marxist reference – is nevertheless represented as being Molly’s own responsibility.

Molly’s condition can even be analysed in terms of Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887).<sup>156</sup> In contrast to the ‘master morality’ created by the bourgeoisie who have seized power and projected their values as ‘good’ – and who subsequently regard the values of dominated groups as ‘evil’ – Molly exhibits the ‘slave morality’ of viewing the dominant group as ‘evil’, and herself

as a helpless victim of socio-economic circumstance; she attributes her misery to a 'wrong inflicted by those who are less miserable'. When Molly takes opium on her journey with the child in order to expose Godfrey Cass, she feels a 'longing to lie down and sleep';<sup>157</sup> she becomes docile, loses the 'will to power', and dies. Whether Eliot is echoing Marx or pre-empting Nietzsche, with Marx believing Christianity to be an 'opium' and Nietzsche believing Christianity to be a 'slave morality' (created, as it was, in the context of Roman domination),<sup>158</sup> both interpretations of Molly's addiction and docility work here. Molly represents the resentment felt by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, but this class struggle where 'masters' and 'slaves' each demonise the other as 'evil' is presented as antithetical to 'pure, natural human relations'.

But for Marner, the providential good luck resulting from this class struggle is the orphan girl wandering into his house. The child's golden hair, resembling Marner's lost gold, marks her as money's replacement in Marner's value-system:

...to his blurred vision, it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold! – his own gold – brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently... The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger... He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls.<sup>159</sup>

The revelation does not bring disappointment, but 'utter amazement'.<sup>160</sup> And upon following the child's tiny tracks back through the snow, Marner learns of her mother's fate, and knows he must adopt and care for her. He names her 'Eppie', which is a name that arguably suggests 'Epicureanism'. This creates a double meaning, whereby in finding and adopting the child, Marner also finds and adopts a new philosophy or existential meaning for his life that is humanistic in character. In the place of gold coins, which were hard, cold, and the value of which could be counted and quantified in rational terms, Eppie's gold hair is 'soft' and 'warm', and its value cannot be counted or quantified in rational terms; and so whether Eliot is speaking of Eppie or Epicureanism, Marner's new orientation is based upon that which is beyond the limits of language.

What is important to note is that Marner's reaction upon first seeing Eppie is a very religious one, resembling a devotional act of prayer or worship: 'Silas fell

on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel'.<sup>161</sup> Here, as with Darwin's Romantic awe in the face of nature, the religious expression is the only appropriate expression. The narrator even makes a similar comparison:

She was perfectly quiet now, but not sleep – only soothed by sweet porridge and warmth into that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we fell before some quiet majesty or beauty in the earth or sky – before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway.<sup>162</sup>

The religious awe at something as humble as a child is depicted as being as powerful as religious awe at something as grandiose as the universe itself; perhaps precisely because – as with the indescribability of the magnitude of the universe – the limits of language dictate that adults find it difficult or impossible to describe a small child's 'wide-gazing calm' or lack of 'inward turmoil', a Buddha-like state of mind at which many religions aim, as per Jesus' command to '...become as little children'.<sup>163</sup> If a child's mind exhibits pre-linguistic awareness, without conceptualisation and differentiation between things created by names, labels, and categories, then this state of mind is indescribable; and again, this is precisely what makes that state of mind a transcendent state of mind. So even with Marner basing existential value on a child, he is still basing it in part on awe at the threshold of the describable. It is here that Robert H. Dunham notes the influence of Wordsworthian psychology, particularly with regards to the idealisation of children, not least because Eliot quotes Wordsworth's *Michael* for her novel's epigram: 'A child, more than all other gifts/ That earth can offer to declining man,/ Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts'.<sup>164</sup>

The religious expression is also indicative of Carlyle's influence, suggesting a spiritual revolution is taking place, overthrowing the place of money in Marner's value-system and leading him out of his '...insect-like existence...' and into his own personal version of Carlyle's '...brighter spiritual era'. Through Eppie, Marner regains: 'The sense of presiding goodness and the human trust which come with all peace and joy'.<sup>165</sup> As with Dickens, Tennyson, Darwin, and Arnold, morality – rather than greed – is inspired by the search for personal happiness, for personal happiness depends on caring about the happiness of

others. Marner has found existential value in Carlyle's '...dynamic...' <sup>166</sup> religion, Dickens' imaginative 'fancy', <sup>167</sup> Tennyson's religion of '...human love', <sup>168</sup> and Arnold's 'morality touched by emotion'. These forms of religion are not belief in non-universal, mechanised, objectified, projected 'forms' like the 'God Hypothesis'; rather, they are the 'untaught state of mind' of 'religious feeling', provided by the limits of language, and which precede all outward linguistic 'forms'. Eppie is the angel who leads Marner out of 'the city of destruction', <sup>169</sup> and into the community.

However, this spiritual revolution is yet to be tested. Godfrey Cass is unwilling to acknowledge the child, but he does vow to support Eppie with money: '...he would not forget it [the child], he would see that it was well provided for'. <sup>170</sup> When Eppie is grown, Nancy, having discovered the truth, feels that Godfrey has a responsibility to acknowledge her. Yet their values in this regard are those of the bourgeois 'master-morality', oriented toward concerns of class, with Godfrey Cass censuring Marner: '...she may marry some low working-man'. <sup>171</sup> Carroll adroitly summarises well the class-tension in this episode:

This analysis of 'moral stupidity', one of George Eliot's favourite subjects, proceeds magnificently... Godfrey's brutality here is the more dreadful for not being conscious; it is a class reaction only, not personal. We look to see Nancy's reaction to this test. But she notices no insult, and this comes as a shock to us because Nancy has been shown as superior to the rest of her world in delicacy of feeling. We are forced to realise that insulation by class destroys the power of imaginative sympathy in everyone. <sup>172</sup>

Eppie rejects the offer of a better life in a '...passionate affirmation of class solidarity'. <sup>173</sup> Godfrey Cass's money is inferior to the gift that Marner provides.

The providential good luck continues in a final social comment on bourgeois industrial capitalism. Marner finds that his old home, Lantern Yard, has been converted into a factory to rival Mr Bounderby's for its resemblance to a dark, sunless vision of hell, as expressed by the grown Eppie: 'Oh, what a dark ugly place! ...How it hides the sky! It's worse than the Workhouse'. <sup>174</sup> As with Dickens, it is 'progress' in scare quotes. Lantern Yard, once a symbol of all that was bad about the superstitious past, is now a symbol of all that is bad about the

profit-driven industrial present; the very condition that Dickens held to be reducing values to the easily describable, and human beings to numbers and means of production. This raises a serious question: If Marner had not been expelled from Lantern Yard, would that town's industrialisation have rendered him obsolete as a weaver, and forced him to become a drone factory worker?

The good luck begins to culminate in a providential happy ending when Eppie marries Aaron, a gardener and therefore the very image of the 'low working-man'. The religious and soteriological significance of Eppie as an alternative to all that Lantern Yard represents, past and present, is apparent; yet that significance is humanistic, finding paradise not in the sky with celestial beings, but on earth with an orphan child. Marner's new life is a return to the Garden of Eden; as Anne Katherine Monaghan asserts:

A further important symbol in the book is that of the garden which Eppie longs for, emblematic of order, harmony, and fertility... Towards the end of the novella – pushing towards comedic closure – a garden is built around the cottage and a wall erected to keep out the disorder of the wild surroundings. And it is no mere coincidence that Eppie should marry the gardener.<sup>175</sup>

Although the theme is religious, it is the 'Religion of Humanity' that is being found, and it is based upon the self-transcendent awe beyond the threshold of the limits of language. As Joseph Wiesenfarth notes, despite the 'fairy-tale'-like qualities of *Silas Marner*, the novel's point is human, not supernatural.<sup>176</sup> And indeed, the best things in life are depicted not as supernatural, but natural: family, friendship, and community. Much like the contrast between cultivated garden and wild nature, any order and meaning to be found in this 'stochastic' world is that which is created by humans themselves.

In some ways – providentially enough – elements of the 'Religion of Humanity' come through even in the Raveloe church, represented by Dolly Winthrop. Although the Raveloe church is depicted as superstitious, with Jackson noting that 'both Dolly and Nancy exemplify the idea of unquestioning belief',<sup>177</sup> Winthrop also emphasises that the true importance of church is the sense of community, as a way of feeling well.<sup>178</sup> Marner had been ambivalent, the narrator saying: 'Poor Dolly's exposition of her simple Raveloe theology fell rather unmeaningly on Silas's ears, for there was no word in it that could rouse a

memory of what he had known as religion'.<sup>179</sup> Winthrop, troubled by Marner's story of the drawing of lots, delivers a theodicy: '...them as prayed and drawed the lots, all but that wicked un, if they'd ha' done the right thing by you if they could, isn't there Them as was at the making on us, and knows better and has a better will?'<sup>180</sup> The intentions of the Lantern Yard community – bar Dane – were good, and in Winthrop's theology, goodness itself comes from 'Them': 'And that's all as ever I can be sure on, and everything else is a big puzzle to me when I think on it'.<sup>181</sup>

Susan R. Cohen raises caveats concerning the idea that Winthrop's theodicy is the 'novel's moral':

Eliot identifies in Silas's life, and in the responses it elicits from other characters, a basic human impulse to fill in blanks, deny gaps, create continuities – to convert inexplicable metamorphoses into rationally understandable history. It is the same impulse in the critics which leads them to take Dolly's theodicy as the novel's moral.<sup>182</sup>

This 'impulse' is another case of the limits of language imposing an orderly narrative upon what otherwise seems like chaos. It is true that Eliot depicts Marner himself doing this when reflecting upon his life.<sup>183</sup> And as Clare Jackson notes, Eliot does not advocate belief in a higher power: 'Eliot's atheism is a given, as essential a part of her non-conformity to the Victorian ideal of womanhood as her cohabitation with George Lewes, or her intelligence'.<sup>184</sup> Jackson even criticises Winthrop's theodicy as falling back on 'blind acceptance', and therefore indicts Eliot for *not* filling in the 'blanks' by leaving the burning issue of unquestioning belief 'unresolved'.<sup>185</sup>

The validity or otherwise of Winthrop's theodicy is for the individual to decide. But, either way, Winthrop's point that the Lantern Yard community's intentions were good surely does go some way towards dousing the fires of resentment toward that community. If there is a resolution here after all, it is that family, friendship, and community are what are important. In which case, however problematic the 'false ideas' that the people may hold, Marner must learn to be understanding; for as he knows all too well, lack of understanding can lead nowhere but to solitary, 'insect-like' existence. And at least Marner has found himself in a place where he can learn to develop such understanding.

However, the criticism that Eliot relies too much on providential good luck for a novel attempting to find meaning in a non-providential Darwinian world seems trenchant. By way of comparison, Eliot's non-providential universe differs sharply from the Marquis de Sade's. As John C. O'Neal observes, de Sade's novels of sin rewarded offer a vision of the world embracing Hobbes' vision of nature, where: 'Nature's order... constantly opposes society's attempts to make the weak equal to the strong'.<sup>186</sup> De Sade's *Justine* (1791) depicts the innocent Justine seeking only to gain help or to help others, but falling into horrifically abusive situations every time that she does so by almost everyone she meets, with her chances at escape attained solely through terrible misdeeds; a story that ends with her being freed, only to be struck by a bolt of lightning.<sup>187</sup> If this is a non-providential universe, then would Marner have been so fortunate as to have his money stolen, thereby leading to his engagement with the community? Would he have been so fortunate as to find Eppie wandering into his home – of all homes – and changing his life? Would he even have been so fortunate as to be expelled from Lantern Yard, which in the final analysis is the only reason he escaped the dire prospect of early nineteenth century factory life?

Each answer is a resounding no; but then, de Sade's depiction of a non-providential universe is rather far-fetched. In fact, de Sade's depiction may itself be the result of the limits of language in being capable of describing all the circumstances behind fortunate events, and therefore of the limits of language in describing those events without design in order to fill the 'blank'. It may not be 'fable' or 'fairy-tale' or 'unrealistic' to depict a few fortunate coincidences in a non-providential universe. An indifferent universe cannot be malevolent any more than it can be benevolent, and the world cannot be expected to contain only bad luck any more than it can be expected to contain only good luck. It should be expected to contain a random assortment of both, of which Marner – by simple probability theory – certainly receives his fair share. It is not Eliot's depiction of a non-providential universe that lapses into design, but de Sade's; it is simply that de Sade's depiction is one of an evil design. Eliot's message might simply be, that when bad luck strikes, individuals must not hide away and stagnate, but rather must seek consolation in the community; and when good luck strikes, individuals must recognise the opportunity and not let it pass them by. David Sonstroem's

analysis elaborates on the role of good luck and bad luck in a non-providential universe:

Bad luck renders its victim more vulnerable to further bad luck, for it makes protective ‘human relations’ more difficult. Too much good luck does so as well. It leads to foolhardiness and, like bad luck, self-absorption. The victim of good luck, coasting through life heedlessly, fails to develop a healthy respect for the world’s dangers. Feeling no need to rely on his fellows, he undervalues them. Good luck, too, stifles ‘human relations’. Those who experience a more representative assortment of life’s good and bad breaks are best able to exercise warmheartedness and lead thereby the healthiest lives.<sup>188</sup>

For Sonstroem, too much bad luck simply destroys a person, and too much good luck gives them no need for others, depriving them of a greater source of happiness and meaning; and Marner gets both.

In any case, it is possible to argue that Eliot’s entire view of the world, of the human condition, of the relationship between science and values, and of the true sources of moral and existential value in a non-designed, non-providential, Darwinian world, is expressed in the single act of Marner’s adoption of Eppie. Jonathan Smith has already argued that Eliot’s message may have been to repudiate the common tendency to equate ‘natural’ with ‘good’:

Though a supporter of the Development Hypothesis, Eliot was uncomfortable with the equation of ‘development’ or ‘evolution’ with ‘progress’, especially moral progress. ‘Natural Selection is not always good’, she once wrote, ‘and depends (see Darwin) on many caprices of very foolish animals’.<sup>189</sup>

To this it can be added that, with *Silas Marner*, Eliot identifies what remains, to this day, one of the most defiantly anti-Darwinian examples of human behaviour: adoption, the act of an individual diverting time and resources away from their own reproductive success and into that of an unrelated individual. It is an act that can be said to be every bit as good as it is ‘unnatural’. Sonstroem has stressed the significance of this act in a Darwinian world:

In her [Eliot’s] demonstration, loving-kindness does not necessarily promote survival in strictly Darwinian terms: after all, Godfrey’s genes, not Silas’s, are perpetuated. But she presents the case that loving-kindness maximises the

possibility for a happy, rich existence. She argues that warmheartedness still matters in a world not only alien and indifferent (as Feuerbach presents it) but also predatory and, at least from the human perspective, haphazard (as Darwin presents it).<sup>190</sup>

It might be argued that a 'happy, rich existence' would indeed promote survival and reproduction; but the point can be taken that while survival and reproduction might be the end-in-itself as far as natural selection is concerned, it is not the end-in-itself as far as people are concerned; the facts of nature are mute on questions of values. The fact that it is Godfrey Cass' genes that are propagated make him the 'winner' in Darwinian terms, but the relationship with Eppie makes Marner the winner in the terms that actually matter. The existentialist theme applies: however objectively indifferent a Darwinian world might be, and however powerful the impulse to describe the world in terms of design, a 'happy, rich existence', can still be created through human fellowship or 'loving-kindness' at the threshold of the describable.

### *On Anthropology*

The question of whether moral and existential value can be preserved through the sense of transcendent experience alone, and without the limits of language that lead to either design or antipathy to science, was answered in the positive for some. Religion could limit itself to values as creative acts, rather than values dependent on discovered or revealed facts that could potentially conflict with science. Far from being the mere 'Iscaiotism of our days', Eliot's 'Religion of Humanity', whose basic elements had precursors in Carlyle, Tennyson, Arnold, and the anthropologies of Strauss and Feuerbach, fulfilled the role of practical religion, and these writers were not alone in their contention. Hugh Graham asks: 'Can there be such a thing as religion with all its urgency, profundity, and grandeur, but without the shackles of doctrine?', and quotes Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) in what seems to be a humanist variant of Voltaire's adage: 'If God did not exist, religion would be none the less holy and divine'.<sup>191</sup> J. S. Haldane, reflecting in 1927 on nineteenth century developments of religion, offered this form of religion as a primary explanation for religion's survival:

To those who believed that religion is dependent on a belief in supernatural intervention it seemed to be dying

the death of other superstitions. Yet as a matter of fact religion continued to appeal to men as strongly as before, or perhaps more strongly... I think that [I can] make clear the underlying explanation of this. If my reasoning has been correct, there is no real connection between religion and the belief in supernatural events of any sort or kind.<sup>192</sup>

According to Haldane, 'religion' was to be distinguished from 'supernatural events' by virtue of 'religion' being defined as moral and existential value-systems.

Regardless of whether 'religion' can be defined in this way, for others there are problems; for others, the literal beliefs are not mere private belief atop a deeper public sense of human solidarity, but instead are central to human solidarity in the first place. The need to describe transcendent experience, along with moral and existential value, in terms of a literal design did remain for many. The 'Religion of Humanity' is part of the story explaining the forms in which religion survives, but it is certainly not the whole.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Kolenda, 'Humanism', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edn, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> Kolenda, p. 397.

<sup>3</sup> Sue Zemka, 'Erewhon and the End of Utopian Humanism', *ELH*, 69.2 (2002), 439-472.

<sup>4</sup> Auguste Comte, in *Critical Theory*, by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 303. The 'Religion of Humanity' was originally formulated as the utopian end of a Positivist grand narrative, which traced human progress through three states: the past 'theological stage', where unverifiable deities explain all, and where society moves from primitive fetishism, to polytheism, to monotheism, the number of deities diminishing with 'development'; the present 'metaphysical stage', where deities are replaced by secular yet still unverifiable abstract forces; and a future 'positive stage', when humanity abandons unverifiable metaphysical propositions in favour of positively verifiable scientific inquiry, in a society based on human love and the celebration of secular saints and achievements. - Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*, 1830-1842 ed. by Frederick Ferre (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), pp. 2-3. However, it is true that individuals from all across the belief-spectrum united against him, and that: 'The many ridiculous details of Comte's religion made the task of his opponents even easier'. - Michel Bordeau, 'Auguste Comte', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comte/#RelHum>> (2011) [3 March 2011].

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Borg, 'David Friedrich Strauss: Miracle and Myth', *The Fourth R*, 4.3 (1991), updated 2012, <[http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R\\_Articles/strauss.html](http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/strauss.html)> [accessed 30 July 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach', 1867, in *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* ed. by Christopher Ricks (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 305.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Morden, 'Fossils, Apes and Supermen: Evolution and the Literary Text', *The English Review*, 20.1 (2009), 2.

<sup>8</sup> David Carroll, 'Introduction', in *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, 1861, by George Eliot (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. xii.

<sup>9</sup> Josef L. Altholz, 'The Warfare of Conscience with Theology', 1976, *The Victorian Web*, updated 2010, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/altholz/a2.html>> [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>10</sup> Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>11</sup> Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004), 897-920.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Neve, 'Introduction', in *Charles Darwin: Autobiographies*, 1887, by Charles Darwin (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. xxii.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Dickenson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 1896 (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>15</sup> Darwin, *Autobiography*, ed. by Nora Barlow (London: Collins, 1958), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Jowett, 'Essay on Atonement and Satisfaction', in *Theological Essays of the Late Benjamin Jowett*, ed. by Lewis Campbell (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Jowett, p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>20</sup> Plato, 'Euthyphro', in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 1-16.

<sup>21</sup> John Stuart Mill, in Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].

<sup>22</sup> A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral* (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Borg, [accessed 30 July 2012].

<sup>25</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. by W. Montgomery, 1906 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> Borg, [accessed 30 July 2012].

<sup>27</sup> Borg, [accessed 30 July 2012].

<sup>28</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, 1, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, trans. by George Eliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. ix.

- <sup>29</sup> Marilyn Orr, 'Incarnation, Inwardness, and Imagination: George Eliot's Early Fiction', *Christianity and Literature*, 58.3 (2009), 451.
- <sup>30</sup> Carroll, p. xiv.
- <sup>31</sup> Strauss, p. ix.
- <sup>32</sup> Strauss, p. xi.
- <sup>33</sup> Strauss, p. 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Strauss, p. 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Strauss, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>36</sup> Strauss, p. 5.
- <sup>37</sup> Strauss, p. 6.
- <sup>38</sup> Strauss, p. 22.
- <sup>39</sup> Strauss, p. 22.
- <sup>40</sup> Strauss, p. 23.
- <sup>41</sup> Strauss, p. 22.
- <sup>42</sup> Strauss, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>43</sup> Strauss, p. 23.
- <sup>44</sup> Strauss, p. 23.
- <sup>45</sup> Edwina G. Lawler, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Critics: The Life of Jesus Debate in Early Nineteenth-Century German Journals* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1986), p. 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Karl Marx, in Stephen P. Thornton, 'Facing up to Feuerbach', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 39.2 (1996), 103-120.
- <sup>47</sup> Friedrich Engels, in Thornton, 103-120.
- <sup>48</sup> Ernest Renan, *Studies of Religious History and Criticism* (New York: Carleton, 1864), pp. 331-341.
- <sup>49</sup> Thornton, 103-120
- <sup>50</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 56.
- <sup>51</sup> Howard W. Bischoff, 'Ludwig Feuerbach's Concept of the Alienation of Human Essence Through Religion', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 6.1-2 (1985), 28-32.
- <sup>52</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Feuerbach's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics', in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, 1888, ed. by C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1935), pp. 43-51.
- <sup>53</sup> Rodney Taylor, 'Ludwig Feuerbach on Being as Death', *Michigan Germanic Studies*, 19.1 (1993), 46-61.
- <sup>54</sup> Robert Banks, 'Ludwig Feuerbach: Still "A Thorn in the Flesh of Modern Theology"?', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 44.1 (1972), 30-46.
- <sup>55</sup> Peter Preuss, 'Feuerbach on Man and God', *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, 11.2 (1972), 204-223.
- <sup>56</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, trans. by George Eliot, 1835-1836 (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855), p. 7.
- <sup>57</sup> Feuerbach, in Banks, 30-46.
- <sup>58</sup> Feuerbach, p. 6.
- <sup>59</sup> Feuerbach, pp. 6-7. A parallel may be drawn between Feuerbach and his 'key to the cipher' and Edward Casaubon in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, 1871 (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), who attempts to write a work entitled *The Key to All Mythologies*. Katharina M. Wilson notes: 'The battle over the possible historic identity of Edward Casaubon... still rages on', and argues for that identity being the sixteenth century Isaac Casaubon - Katharina M. Wilson, in Michelle Faubert, 'A Possible Source for George Eliot's Edward Casaubon', *ANQ*, 18.2 (2005), 46. The major caveat to Feuerbach being Casaubon, of course, is that Feuerbach actually finished his book; if Casaubon is Feuerbach, he is a failed Feuerbach.
- <sup>60</sup> As Francis Schuessler Fiorenza points out, it is with the term 'projection' that the English translation differs somewhat from the German: '*Vergegenständlichung* (objectification or reification) and *Entäusserung* have been translated as 'projection'. This word, however, is associated with Freud's technical expression 'projection' (a translation of *Projektion* and not *Vergegenständlichung*), rather than with Hegelian vocabulary'. - Francis Schuessler Fiorenza, 'Feuerbach's Interpretation of Religion and Christianity', *Philosophical Forum*, 11.2 (1979), 161-181. But if 'projection' is how Eliot interprets Feuerbach, then 'projection' is, perhaps, the most useful term for understanding Eliot herself.

- <sup>61</sup> Feuerbach, p. 6.
- <sup>62</sup> Feuerbach, p. 56.
- <sup>63</sup> Feuerbach, p. 56.
- <sup>64</sup> Feuerbach, p. 439.
- <sup>65</sup> Feuerbach, p. 57.
- <sup>66</sup> Feuerbach, pp. 58-59.
- <sup>67</sup> Feuerbach, p. 62.
- <sup>68</sup> Feuerbach, pp. 67-68.
- <sup>69</sup> Patrick Masterson, *Atheism and Alienation: A Study of the Philosophical Sources of Contemporary Atheism* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1971), pp. 63-78.
- <sup>70</sup> William Blake, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 60.
- <sup>71</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), p. 28. The novel epitomising Freud's theory is undoubtedly Edmund Gosse's (1849-1928) *Father and Son* (1907). Edmund Gosse recalls his childhood: 'I believed that my father knew everything and saw everything'. He then recalls his father saying something that he had heard about a given event, and the son, having been present at said event, knew it to be false: 'Nothing could possibly have been more trifling to my parents, but to me it meant an epoch. Here was the appalling discovery... that my father was not as God'. - Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, 1907 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 56.
- <sup>72</sup> Freud, p. 21.
- <sup>73</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. xiii.
- <sup>74</sup> Feuerbach, p. 81.
- <sup>75</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, 1873 (Aurora: BiblioLife, 2010), p. 18.
- <sup>76</sup> Carl Woodring, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>77</sup> Feuerbach, p. 351.
- <sup>78</sup> Feuerbach, p. 351.
- <sup>79</sup> Matthew 25:40, *King James Bible* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 1582.
- <sup>80</sup> Feuerbach, in Banks, 30-46.
- <sup>81</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'God's Funeral', 1910, in *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems*, ed. by James Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 327.
- <sup>82</sup> Altholz, [accessed 20 August 2010].
- <sup>83</sup> Susan E. Hill, 'Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65.3 (1997), 635-653.
- <sup>84</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. xiii.
- <sup>85</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 1859 (London: Penguin Classics, 1980).
- <sup>86</sup> David Sonstroem, 'The Breaks in Silas Marner', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 97.4 (1998), 545- 567.
- <sup>87</sup> Pierre-Simon de Laplace, in *A History of God*, by Karen Armstrong (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 396.
- <sup>88</sup> Brian Swann, 'Silas Marner and the New Mythos', *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 18.2 (1976), 101-121.
- <sup>89</sup> Orr, 451.
- <sup>90</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. xii.
- <sup>91</sup> Edwin Fairley, 'The Art of George Eliot in 'Silas Marner'', *English Journal*, 2.4 (1913), 221-230.
- <sup>92</sup> Felicia Bonaparte, 'Carrying the Word of the Lord to the Gentiles: *Silas Marner* and the Translation of Scripture into a Secular Text', *Religion and Literature*, 23.2 (1991), 39-60.
- <sup>93</sup> Robert H. Dunham, 'Silas Marner and the Wordsworthian Child', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 16.4 (1976), 645-659.
- <sup>94</sup> Rochelle Gurstein, 'The Case of Thomas Carlyle', *American Scholar*, 70.3 (2001), 77.
- <sup>95</sup> Gurstein, 77.
- <sup>96</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', 1829, in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 53.
- <sup>97</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 5.

- <sup>98</sup> Joseph Wiesenfarth, 'Demythologizing Silas Marner', *ELH*, 37.2 (1970), 226-244.
- <sup>99</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 5.
- <sup>100</sup> Peter Schock, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Blake's Myth of Satan and its Cultural Matrix', *ELH*, 60.2 (1993), 441.
- <sup>101</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 5.
- <sup>102</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 5.
- <sup>103</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 5.
- <sup>104</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>105</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 6.
- <sup>106</sup> Acts 16:19-24, p. 1714.
- <sup>107</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 6.
- <sup>108</sup> Clare Jackson, 'Affection towards a Baseless Opinion', *The English Review*, 19.2 (2008), 34.
- <sup>109</sup> William K. Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999).
- <sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, 'Secrecy and Confession: Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>111</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, pp. 12-13.
- <sup>112</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 13.
- <sup>113</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 14.
- <sup>114</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 14.
- <sup>115</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 14.
- <sup>116</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 14.
- <sup>117</sup> This theme in *Silas Marner* is extended in *Middlemarch* to include delusions about people. Many of the *Middlemarch* characters believe falsehoods about other people in their lives, and these false beliefs bring them to bad consequences; from Dorothea, who falls in love with an idealistic view of Casaubon; to the naïve Tertius Lydgate, who discovers his wife is not what he expected; to Rosamond Lydgate, who cannot see her own faults. - Ermarth, [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>118</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- <sup>119</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. xi.
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- <sup>129</sup> Kate E. Brown, 'Loss, Revelry, and the Temporal Measures of *Silas Marner*: Performance, Regret, Recollection', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 32.2 (1999), 222-249.
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- <sup>140</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 42.
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- <sup>153</sup> Courtney Berger, 'When Bad Things Happen to Bad People: Liability and Individual Consciousness in *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 33.3 (2000), 307-327.
- <sup>154</sup> Sonstroem, 545-567.
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- <sup>156</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals, 1887* (Mineola: Dover Thrift Publications, 2003).
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- <sup>162</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 118.
- <sup>163</sup> Matthew 18:3, p. 1571.
- <sup>164</sup> Dunham, 645-659.
- <sup>165</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 143.
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- <sup>168</sup> George Eliot, 'Belles Lettres', *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, 64.126 (1855), 596-615.
- <sup>169</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 131.
- <sup>170</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 133.
- <sup>171</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 170.
- <sup>172</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, pp. 229-230.
- <sup>173</sup> Carroll, in Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 230.
- <sup>174</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 178.
- <sup>175</sup> Anne Katherine Monaghan, 'Silas Marner: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>176</sup> Wiesenfarth, 226-244.
- <sup>177</sup> Jackson, 34.
- <sup>178</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 84.
- <sup>179</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 84.
- <sup>180</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 145. Winthrop refers to the higher power as 'Them'; Sonstroem notes that this may be a reference to pre-Christian polytheism. This would suggest that the Raveloe religion was, in terms of Comte's Positivist grand narrative, mired in a more 'primitive' stage of development. Yet the text itself states that this was '...only her way of avoiding a presumptuous familiarity'. - Eliot, p. 84.
- <sup>181</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 145.
- <sup>182</sup> Cohen, 410-426.

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<sup>183</sup> Eliot, *Silas Marner*, p. 143.

<sup>184</sup> Jackson, 34.

<sup>185</sup> Jackson, 34.

<sup>186</sup> John C. O'Neal, 'Sade's *Justine*: A Response to the Enlightenment's Poetics of Confusion', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 21.3 (2009), 345-356.

<sup>187</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Justine*, 1791 (Paris: The Olympia Press, 1963).

<sup>188</sup> Sonstroem, 545.

<sup>189</sup> Jonathan Smith, 'The "Wonderful Geological Story": Uniformitarianism and *The Mill on the Floss*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 27, 4 (1991), pp. 430-452.

<sup>190</sup> Sonstroem, p. 545-567.

<sup>191</sup> Hugh Graham, 'Baudelaire: Avatar for an Age of Avatars', *The Antioch Review*, 68.1 (2010), 141.

<sup>192</sup> J. S. Haldane, 'The Sciences and Religion', in *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, by Stephen Jay Gould (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 91.

## CHAPTER 6

### ‘ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE’

...for a season he inclined to the materialistic doctrines of the *Darwinismus* movement in Germany, and found a curious pleasure in tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain, or some white nerve in the body, delighting in the conception of the absolute dependence of the spirit on certain physical conditions, morbid or healthy, normal or diseased.<sup>1</sup>

This fickle phase in the life of Oscar Wilde’s (1854-1900) Epicurean protagonist Dorian Gray, captures the impact of science on ideas of the human self, and on perceptions of a ‘Religion of Humanity’<sup>2</sup> that attempts to eschew the language of design. The psychological self, long believed to be safely in the domain of a ‘spirit’ that transcends ‘physical conditions’, was, by the end of the nineteenth century, increasingly described in terms of physical determinism, ‘tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain, or some white nerve in the body’. William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) line ‘All the world’s a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players’,<sup>3</sup> was about to take on new meaning; nothing is free, nothing is real, and nothing matters except the aesthetic of the performance.

This chapter will provide an insight into how the limits of language assist the sense of divine design, self-transcendence, and antipathy to science, this time in reference to debates surrounding psychology and determinism. In particular, I will explore Walter Pater’s (1839-1894) Conclusion to *The Renaissance: Studies in the History in Art and Poetry* (1873), and contemporary reactions to it, as an attempt at a deterministic psychology. Pater’s ‘Conclusion’ will be compared with an analysis of Oscar Wilde’s (1854-1900) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) as an assessment of how contemporary reactions to psychology could lead to religious belief in the moral and intellectual necessity of dualism and libertarianism. This analysis will demonstrate the caveats held against a ‘Religion of Humanity’ that attempts to eschew the language of design, explaining the survival of cataphatic religion.

*‘Man’s physical organism is played upon...’*

Physical determinism is usually defined as the thesis that a complete description of the present state of phenomena can predict, with absolute certainty, all future states, and that any characterisation of phenomena as ‘probable’, ‘improbable’, ‘random’, or ‘chaotic’, is simply evidence of an incomplete description. As Elliott Sober notes, physical determinism had long been a cornerstone of the Newtonian description of the physical universe:

Newton’s laws of motion, for example, are deterministic in character... those laws don’t make use of the concept of probability. For example,  $F=ma$  says that if a billiard ball of mass  $m$  is acted on by a force of magnitude  $F$ , the ball will have an acceleration equal to  $F/m$ . It doesn’t say that this will ‘probably’ happen, as if there are other possibilities that could happen instead. Rather, the law says what must happen if the object is acted on in a certain way.<sup>4</sup>

Here, it can be seen that scientific descriptions of phenomena tacitly imply physical determinism; phenomena are described in terms of determining causes, which are themselves described in terms of determining causes, ad infinitum. The only alternative, P. L. Luisi notes, is to: ‘...invoke a miracle, as expressed by Hoyle in a famous metaphor: the casual building of an airplane by a tornado whirling through a hangar full of spare parts’.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the idea of applying physical determinism to the human self, whereby a complete description of the individual in any given moment could predict – again, with absolute certainty – every thought, action, and choice that that individual will make, was largely anachronistic in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Determinism was held to apply only to the physical – the scientifically describable – and the self had long been believed to be the domain of a divinely designed soul that transcended the physical. In this view, the soul could exert ‘free will’, not just in Hume’s ‘Compatibilist’ sense of the term (where the will is said to be ‘free’ just so long as it is in line with the individual’s beliefs and desires),<sup>6</sup> but in the sense of freedom from physical determinants – such as genes and environment – entirely.

However, as Heather Seagroatt notes, evidence for physical determinism with regard to the self had cumulated by the mid-nineteenth century:

Victorian society's basic assumption was that the soul, divinely created and endowed, was qualitatively different from the crude matter around it and was thus exempt from determinism... Retaining faith in this simple exceptionalism became increasingly difficult for [James Clerk] Maxwell's generation... The work of Hermann Helmholtz and colleagues... began to provide dramatic evidence the human mind was subject to the same laws as the material world. It seemed that animals, including humans, were constrained by the same energy laws that explained steam engines and waterwheels.<sup>7</sup>

The doctrine of dualism was coming into doubt, for the self was increasingly being found to follow the same deterministic laws as the rest of the Newtonian universe. This idea, long dismissed as political sedition in line with French Revolutionary ideology, was increasingly applied in the form of a science of psychology in Britain itself. James A. Harris concisely summarises the nineteenth century debate on free will:

[Thomas] Huxley took 'psycho-physiology' to its logical extreme when he identified scientific progress with "the extension of the province of what we call matter and causation, and the concomitant banishment from all regions of human thought of what we call spirit and spontaneity". To many of Huxley's contemporaries, this looked like an elimination of the mind from the domain of science... W. B. Carpenter [wrote]... "I cannot regard myself, either Intellectually or Morally, as a mere puppet, pulled by suggesting-strings; any more than I can *disregard* that vast body of Physiological evidence, which proves the direct and immediate relation between Mental and Corporeal agency".<sup>8</sup>

Here, the Copernican Revolution, by culminating in psychology, takes on the appearance of a trap; something that could be neither morally condoned nor rationally denied. While Darwinism is often viewed as *the* theory upon which accommodation between science and religion rests, Carpenter's comment suggests that physical determinism was an even deeper problem; it struck to the heart of an individual's view of their own thoughts and actions. And, much like Darwinism, the debate surrounding physical determinism's implications for humanity is far from resolved.<sup>9</sup> All that has changed in this debate since the nineteenth century is the development of quantum theory, which suggests that quantum particles are indeterministic: it is impossible in *principle* to predict their

future state from their present state. This would mean that the universe is ruled by determinism *and* chance, making its laws merely *statistical* rather than certain. Peter Atkins (2003) points out that debate continues over whether the behaviour of particles is actually indeterministic or constrained by ‘hidden variables’.<sup>10</sup> But Sober suggests that even if the universe is ruled by determinism *and* chance, the issue simply becomes the relationship between *causality* and free will; for chance affords no more freedom from cause than determinism.<sup>11</sup> Yet because contemporary discussions (including Sober’s) still frame the debate in terms of *determinism* and free will, I will use these terms.

The ‘psycho-physiological’ discourse regarding the self is evident in Pater’s controversial ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance*. Indeed, Christine Ferguson has even contended that aesthetic decadence was: ‘...the fulfilment and logical conclusion of the most fundamental of all Victorian values, scientific Positivism’.<sup>12</sup> *The Renaissance* can be regarded as an extension of the humanist discourse of Matthew Arnold and George Eliot into the realm of art. Laurel Brake argues that this work is of historical importance for its: ‘...impressive negotiation of aestheticism and Victorian science and philosophy’, noting that it ‘...fits so uncertainly into our later, institutionalised separation of art, philosophy, and literature’ and is, for these very reasons, apt at capturing the intersect between science and the Pater’s aesthetic humanism.<sup>13</sup>

This work originally appeared as *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*; changed in later additions to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ‘...after a sceptical reviewer in the *Westminster Review* denied its claim to ‘the historical element’.<sup>14</sup> Essentialism is prominent in Pater’s work. In Paul Barolsky’s words: ‘...Pater’s suggestions were the first general indications of the extensive role of Neoplatonism in Renaissance theology, philosophy, poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture... Himself a Platonist, Pater constantly writes in pursuit of an ideal beauty’.<sup>15</sup> But although Pater is certainly inspired by the ‘genius of Plato’,<sup>16</sup> Nathan A. Scott Jr. also notes that Pater ‘...remained always convinced that the noumenality of the world – what things are *in themselves* – must forever surpass the reach of the human mind’.<sup>17</sup>

Yet however distant from comprehension Pater believed ‘true’ essence to be, he is not prevented from using science to at least discover that which is *non-essential*, thereby defining essence through an apophatic discourse of negation.

And it may be argued that, in so doing, Pater reveals both how the limits of language assist transcendent experience, and why Victorian orthodoxy would view this experience – when given without reference to design – as promoting a lack of moral responsibility. Scott summarises Pater's state of mind well:

One does not 'weep' or 'shriek' over the collapse of a received tradition: what is requisite is 'a kind of humour' that permits one urbanely to remark the passing of what must pass... since he conceived 'metaphysical questions ... [to be] unprofitable', he chose rather to embrace 'the wholesome scepticism of Hume and Mill'... But he despised as heartily as did the Arnold of *Culture and Anarchy* the new secular ethos of his time that seemed everywhere to be in the ascendancy and to be promoting the superstition that human welfare lay in some new arrangement of 'the mere machinery of life' in some new mode of *doing* rather than *being*. And he had no sympathy at all for the Mr Gradgrinds of the world... [he] saw it as a matter of 'duty' to chart 'a ... sort of religious phase possible for the modern mind ... the conditions of which phase it is the main object of my design to convey'.<sup>18</sup>

Scott presents Pater as epitomising the change from doctrinal religion to practical religion, rejecting both a literal belief in the divine and the '...nothing but facts'<sup>19</sup> mentality of a Mr Gradgrind. According to Scott, Pater declines plaintiveness about the loss of literal belief, and aligns himself with the sceptical position of declining 'metaphysical questions' – such as what happens after death – as ultimately unknowable one way or the other; yet in seeking not new ways of 'doing' but new ways of 'being', he seems to join Carlyle's and Eliot's spiritual revolution where change and existential contentment must first begin within, preserving what Eliot called the universal 'religious feeling'<sup>20</sup> that lies deeper than non-universal literal beliefs. Despite the 'secular ethos' that 'seemed everywhere to be in ascendancy' – echoing Darwin's observation about the 'remarkable' spread of 'scepticism and rationalism' in his lifetime – Pater would not use psychology to subvert religion so much as promote a new 'religious phase possible for the modern mind'.

Although Pater declines to answer metaphysical questions, he appears to attempt not only to restore moral and existential value in *spite* of a scientific reductionist description of the self, but *because* of a scientific reductionist description of the self, as the inspiration of religion and art. Bacon's 'two truths'<sup>21</sup>

may be separate, but they can still inform each other. As Ian Fletcher puts it: ‘The aim of life [for Pater] ...is not an inert sensuousness, but the pursuit of an ideal in which the material and the spiritual are fused’.<sup>22</sup> Content and form become one, with Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898) demonstrating how the unity of content and form in art for art’s sake could assist the survival of religion. As Mallarmé wrote in a letter: ‘Yes, I *know*, we are merely empty forms of matter, but we are indeed sublime in having invented God and our soul’.<sup>23</sup> For Mallarmé, the actual *content*, or belief, is not so important as the *form*, or effect, of belief. Henry Weinfeld writes of Mallarmé: ‘The magic is all the more powerful in that its effect is not dependent upon belief’.<sup>24</sup> William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) would later put it: ‘How can we know the dancer from the dance?’<sup>25</sup> Essence, here, is to be found not in the ‘dancer’, an individual, but in the ‘dance’ itself, of which the individual is simply a symbol. This deemphasis of the subject/object division, the ‘...separation of self from other’,<sup>26</sup> creates both the art for art’s sake mentality, and the ‘fused’ spirituality born of it, where even doctrines are de-emphasised as external objects of belief, and emphasised instead – as per David Friedrich Strauss – for their internal value. As Eliot insisted, the loss of religious belief does not render religious experience any less valuable.

It was because of such controversies that the ‘Conclusion’ ignited debate between aesthetic humanism and traditional Christian views. The controversy was such that Pater removed the ‘Conclusion’ from the second edition, but he restored it in the third, and its influence was prominent into the twentieth century. Pater’s own influence can be detected in his *Essay on Style* (1889), where he delivers a sentiment in line with a scientific description of the self:

Man’s physical organism is played upon not only by the physical conditions about it, but by remote laws of inheritance, the vibration of long past acts reaching him in the midst of the new order of things in which he lives.<sup>27</sup>

Here, physical determinism is revealed to be a natural outgrowth of Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics, which are invoked to demonstrate that biology exerts a powerful influence over ‘man’s physical organism’. If the ‘long past acts’ above are the effect of ‘remote laws of inheritance’, then they can be read as being the actions of humanity’s ancient ancestors. Whether these actions are those of the Precambrian worm, the Devonian fish, the Cretaceous rodent, or the Pleistocene

hominid, they determined the genetic traits that triumphed in the Malthusian ‘struggle for existence’,<sup>28</sup> and therefore the traits that ‘vibrate’ along the genetic chain to determine an individual’s behaviour in the ‘new order of things’. Although the human brain has also evolved to be able to counter-act some genetic influences, the brain, too, is a physical organ that is in any case determined by the ‘physical conditions around it’: physics, chemistry, and the environmental influences of an individual’s upbringing. Here, the effect of nineteenth century science on religion can be seen to culminate, and it is an effect vividly seen in Pater’s ‘Conclusion’. Yet an investigation of this text in terms of either physical determinism or the limits of language does not yet exist; which is strange, as this work and physical determinism move hand-in-hand.

***‘That strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves’.***

The deterministic view of the self’s relationship with the rest of nature appears to underwrite Pater’s ‘Conclusion’ from the outset:

Let us begin with that which is without – our physical life. Fix upon it in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat. What is the whole physical life in that moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? ...Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them... processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces.<sup>29</sup>

Analysing the experience of the ‘moment’, Pater describes the system of nature as being not so much a finished product, so much as an ever-changing, ever-evolving *process*. Nothing has an existence that is independent of everything else, but rather only exists in a state of flux and change, dependent on ‘simpler and more elementary forces’. Like Lyell, Darwin, and Eliot, Pater exhibits awareness of the limits of language; pointing to the ‘natural elements’ prior to the ‘names’ that ‘science gives’, Pater reminds the reader that such names are linguistic conventions only, implying that they do not truly describe reality. The ‘names’ that ‘science gives’ may lend a belief in fixed, independent essences to phenomena. Yet this essentialism does not accord with the non-essentialist, indivisible, ever-changing reality of nature.

In Pater's vision, the self is inseparable from the system of nature, rather than above and apart from it and simply living in it: 'Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us'.<sup>30</sup> 'We' – all individuals – are composed of the same 'elements' and driven by the same 'forces' that are in a state of flux and interdependence with the rest of nature, extending 'beyond us':

Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations... the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways...<sup>31</sup>

As per the thermodynamic Law of Conservation, energy is never destroyed, only transformed; everything flows into everything else in a constant stream. The elements of which the self is composed are 'broadcast' into the fluxing system of nature, locked in a system of trade and exchange with the elements composing everything else, leading to 'ten thousand resultant combinations'. Upon 'birth', the elements composing the individual derive from the elements that once composed other things, and upon death, the elements composing the individual go on to become the elements composing yet other things. The result of natural law, this process is not random, but rather is an endless chain of deterministic cause and effect, stretching into the past and the future.

Pater subjects the mind itself to the same analysis. Beginning with 'the inward world of thought and feeling' that responds to impressions from the external world, Pater argues that 'the whirlpool is still more rapid... a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought'.<sup>32</sup> Experience without reflection is deceptive: 'At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects... but when reflexion begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence'.<sup>33</sup> Without reflection, the mind cannot see past, and simply accepts, the world of appearances; intuition alone is no guide for determining the facts of how the world *is*. Guided by reflection, experience begins to perceive not 'objects in the solidity with which language invests them',<sup>34</sup> not the essentialism suggested by language, but rather 'impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent'.<sup>35</sup> The mind's impressions are also in a perpetual state of flux and change, its 'consciousness of' not a product but a process.

Ian Fletcher comments on Pater's ideas of the self:

An early paper... announces the theme of transforming finite self, fragmented according to the witness of the contemporary sciences of observation, into the self in history... For Pater, then, the personalities behind the art works he discusses in the *Renaissance* are 'fragmented selves' held together merely by his own luminous memories of aesthetic experience. The 'Conclusion' is dangerously near to solipsism.<sup>36</sup>

As John J. Conlon writes, Pater promotes '...the instrumentality of the critic' which Wilde calls '...the place of the Critic as Artist';<sup>37</sup> in Pater's words: '...the first step toward seeing one's object as it really is [Arnold's dictum], is to know one's own impression as it really is...'.<sup>38</sup> However, it can be argued that Pater is simply acknowledging that the mind cannot reach beyond itself to see if its beliefs correspond to the external world the way it 'really' is, and therefore that memory of the 'self in history' is in some manner constructed within the individual's own mind. Possibly, Fletcher could argue that Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) *cogito*: 'I think, therefore I am'<sup>39</sup> – claiming that an individual can doubt the existence of everything including their own body, but not the existence of their own self (a distinction used to support dualism) – draws 'dangerously near' to the solipsistic view of believing that only the self exists. But it is difficult to say the same of Pater, who questions even the essence of Descartes' 'I' by suggesting that it is a form of creative fiction, an ever-changing story or narrative that people tell themselves about themselves; not even the self truly exists. Once again, the dancer is inseparable from the dance. The 'world of thought and feeling', constrained by the essentialism implied by language, simply *defines* into existence the word and concept of an essential 'I' that is separate from the world: 'Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality'.<sup>40</sup> Language, just by naming the 'mental' and the 'physical', automatically defines 'them' as separate and dualistic.

For Pater, this division is a 'thick wall' behind which the accurate perception of nature appears to be represented as almost captive: 'Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world'.<sup>41</sup> The 'dream of a world', or the construction of the world within the mind, is a world composed of

fixed, independent phenomena as implied by words, names, and labels. Yet the ‘thick wall of personality’ or the ‘the individual in his isolation’ is also revealed to be not a product but a process:

Analysis goes a step farther still ...those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is.<sup>42</sup>

All impressions and experiences of the external world, and the perception of the self as a real, separate essence, dwindle down to the remotest point in time between the past and the future, ‘gone while we try to apprehend it’.

What is left is not a fixed self that is separate from nature in the form of a soul, but an ever-changing stream of consciousness inseparable from the stream of natural phenomena:

To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.<sup>43</sup>

The mind is described as dependent on perishable physical causes. The self is continually ‘vanishing away’, perpetually ‘weaving and unweaving’; the self that exists in one moment is not the same self that existed in a past moment, or that will exist in a future moment. Much like the distinction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the idea of an essence of self – implied in the very word ‘I’ – is discovered to be just another ‘dream’ born from the ‘names’ given by language, and from ignorance of the physical determinants that compose it; along with everything else within the system of nature. Here, ‘what is real in our life fines itself down’; analysis clears away the non-essential to reveal consciousness itself, deeper even than the concept of ‘I’. It may be said that it is whether consciousness itself terminates upon death that remains the open question.

It is at this point that ‘analysis leaves off’. The belief in an essence of self upon which all anxiety, greed, envy, arrogance, and hatred are centred in its preoccupation with either past or future – and which, therefore, usually fogs the experience of the present moment in the form of what Eliot called the adult’s ‘inward turmoil’<sup>44</sup> – gives way to synthesis; the indescribable experience of the self’s unity with nature, leaving ‘consciousness itself’ free of the heavy fog of the self’s troubles. The present moment is experienced all the more calmly and acutely:

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face;  
 some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest;  
 some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement  
 is irresistibly real and attractive to us, - for that moment  
 only.<sup>45</sup>

Pater’s removal of the non-essential ends in this literally self-less ‘moment’. In this ‘moment’ there is almost a sense that time itself is slowing down, lengthening experience of the ‘moment’ through a greater awareness that notices each little thing. As with Blake’s imagery, the object of the moment need not, itself, be grand, complex, or difficult to grasp in order for *experience* of that object to be indescribable. Indeed, the ‘form... perfect in hand or face’ and ‘tone on the hills or the sea’ are ordinary things that usually escape notice amidst the ‘inward turmoil’ that so often results in innumerable ‘moments’ racing futilely by unregistered. But the point is to rescue these ordinary, everyday things through a shift in the individual’s perception that renders them extraordinary; a shift that occurs at the limits of language.

Pater’s vision is nothing less than a scientific reductionist description of the self. And yet, its fusion of spiritual and material, and subject and object, are related to Blake’s ‘...eternity in an hour’,<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth’s ‘...spots of time’,<sup>47</sup> Carlyle’s ‘...dynamic...’<sup>48</sup> religion, Dickens’ imaginative ‘fancy’,<sup>49</sup> Tennyson’s experience of ‘...what is highest in us’,<sup>50</sup> Darwin’s ‘...sense of sublimity’,<sup>51</sup> Arnold’s location of value in the simple present,<sup>52</sup> and Eliot’s ‘...religious feeling’. Alongside being inspired by science, it is also, as Pater’s critics noted, distinctly ‘pagan’ in the sense of conforming not to orthodox doctrinal religion but to the values of practical religion, apophatic mysticism, Buddhism, and even Martial Arts schools, in a Bohemian middle ground where West and East meet. It

is this ‘new mode of... *being*’, this transcendence of the ‘separation of self from other’, which embodies the spiritual revolution against Hobbesian self-interest and consumer materialism more effectively than changing ‘the mere machinery of life’ alone.

***‘But sin that dwelleth in me...’***

A single line encapsulates Pater’s justification for his quasi-religious experience: ‘Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end’.<sup>53</sup> The present ‘moment’ is more important than future goals. The case for Pater’s argument can be made regardless of what an individual believes about life and death. If death is final, then the purely goal-oriented individual will find that death undoes all their goals, rendering their life pointless. In fact, even if death is not final, then the purely goal oriented individual is still forever postponing happiness until their goal is reached, and with the moment of happiness derived being impermanent, they must postpone happiness again on yet another goal, ad infinitum; they are never fulfilled, again rendering their life pointless. But it can certainly be said that many people do live as though they will live forever, dwelling on past or future at the neglect of the present; like an individual who reads a book only to find that they have not taken in a word for the past two pages, even while their eyes had continued scanning lines of text.

Pater’s cure for this state of living, his advocacy of the present ‘moment’, seems to be based upon a scientific conception of everything within the system of nature to be ever-changing and finite; it is a conception of death being final, at least for the composite ‘I’:

A counted number of pulses only is given to us... How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.<sup>54</sup>

The finitude of the ‘number of pulses’ that individuals have in life creates a sense of pressing urgency to see in every moment ‘all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses’. In the manner of the proverb attributed to Hippocrates (460-400 BCE), ‘art is long, life is short,’<sup>55</sup> the idea of the finality of death creates an

urgency for discipline of a kind. It is a discipline whereby individuals must train themselves to be able to ‘burn always with this hard, gemlike flame’ by deliberate intention, rather than to only experience it now and then by accident. To ‘maintain this ecstasy’, and to not let it fade upon contact with mundane concerns is true existential ‘success in life’. The finality of death given by a scientific description of the self entails that life is to be treasured more, not less; and that meaning in life is to be found not in goals, but in the happiness of the ‘moment’ inherent in consciousness prior to the rising of ‘I’; or consciousness concerned not with ‘the fruit of experience, but experience itself’.

The discipline Pater suggests is to avoid ‘habits’:

...our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend.<sup>56</sup>

The idea that ‘all melts under our feet’, everything constantly changing and therefore doomed to the finality of death, becomes less a depressing thesis than a constant motivator of novel experiences; each of which is all the more intensely grasped in the ‘moment’ precisely because they are *momentary*. It is a very Epicurean view of death, which John Martin Fischer has criticised by dryly defending the claims that ‘...death can be a bad thing’, and that ‘...immortality might conceivably be a good thing’.<sup>57</sup> Conceding these commonsense claims, Pater’s view can still be defended as deriving the best from a bad situation, should death be discovered to be truly final.

This concept of death is epitomised in the concept of a ‘habit’, which as a deed so easily done that it is often done without conscious thought is the very definition of the easily describable, and therefore of the dull, the mundane, and the valueless. Yet the idea that ‘it is only the roughness of the eye’ that makes any two things appear the same, a roughness noticed only upon experience of its antithesis in the ‘moment’, suggests that such a mundane description of the world is less a necessary perception of the world than it is something along the lines of a personal defect. This defect is remedied through the ‘strange’, the creation of new

memories, something that can only be brought about if the old does eventually die and allows the new to take its place, and which indicates that the experience of self-transcendent awe in the 'moment' occurs beyond what the limits of language have hitherto described.

With the finality of death rendering experience of the 'moment' the only essential goal in life, all systems are conceived as only having purpose to the extent that they facilitate this experience. Having already said that 'the service of philosophy... towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation',<sup>58</sup> Pater continues:

Philosophical theories... may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. 'Philosophy is the microscope of thought'. The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience... or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.<sup>59</sup>

Pater does not condemn science and philosophy in the manner of Keats or Poe, acknowledging the importance of scientific and philosophical analyses of the system of nature beyond that which the limits of language might otherwise have described nature being, gathering up 'what might otherwise pass unregarded by us'. Yet science, with its theories of nature involving 'names' given by language, only has a point insofar as it is ultimately in service of the *experience* of nature beyond a language's ability to describe it. By dealing with experience, Pater deals with psychology; and psychology almost becomes the queen of the sciences, for it is as psychological beings that individuals filter and interpret their experience of the world. Any system – scientific, philosophical, religious, artistic, or social – that 'requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience', or any system that limits individuals to nothing more than that which is suggested *within* the limits of language, and therefore which is 'only conventional', has 'no real claim upon us'.

Although Pater must have acknowledged that there are many mundane, and yet useful and necessary, systems in the world that make life easier, he believed that they ultimately must make life easier in order to facilitate the 'moment'. And because of the finality of death, people literally do not have time to waste on systems that inhibit this experience:

We are all under sentence of death... we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this

interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest...  
in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that  
interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the  
given time.<sup>60</sup>

Pater's meditation on a scientific description of the self and the finality of death declares 'habit' and 'listlessness' a vice, and makes a virtue of 'getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time'. Here lies Pater's aesthetic theory:

Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty,  
the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to  
you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest  
quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those  
moments' sake.<sup>61</sup>

Here, the purpose of art is not necessarily for achieving some future goal or product, but to create the present experience of the *essential* 'moment'. It was art for art's sake, or at least, art for the moment's sake, where subject and object become one.

Pater's views are undoubtedly open to the criticism that the art for art's sake movement itself has a *philosophical* point, advocating the pursuit of the ecstatic 'moment' as its *goal*. Nevertheless, that point can be taken with regard to what Pater considered to be the relationship between art, the self, and transcendent experience. And what is revealed in Pater's 'Conclusion' is that the limits of language, particularly in the form of language's inherent essentialism, dictate an innate difficulty in describing the self as anything but separate from nature. These limits may suggest why the transcendent experience is often described and objectified into a literal deity; for if the self is described as separate from nature and finite, then experience of the infinite can only be attributed to something beyond the finite self. Yet the limits of describing the self as part of nature also suggest how descriptions of human nature can be affected, creating a belief in a necessity to describe it in terms of dualism. This might be seen in the apostle Paul's memorable and often cited statement on the subject:

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but  
sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I  
would do good, evil is present with me... I see another law  
in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and  
bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my  
members.<sup>62</sup>

This passage seems to locate sin in the physical body, which is ‘warring’ with his well-intentioned mind. Although Christian tradition often holds the ‘spiritual’ sins to be the worst sins of all, there is clearly also the view that: ‘...the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’.<sup>63</sup> Paul cannot describe his inner war without the essentialism inherent to language differentiating between ‘sin’ and ‘I’ as *essentially* separate; where if one is of the physical body, the other must transcend the physical body and its ‘sinful’ physical determinants; a description resulting in dualism.

The only difference in the late Victorian period is that, post-Darwin, the ‘sin that dwelleth in me’ had evolved along the lines of the ‘inner ape that dwelleth in me’. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) is indicative of this development with his theory of the atavistic criminal, which drew from Social Darwinism to state that physical characteristics could be used to identify those who were most a throwback to ape ancestry, and therefore those who were genetically determined to commit theft and murder: ‘There is a distinct class of criminal beings which constitutes a degenerate or morbid variety of mankind, marked by peculiar low physical and mental characteristics’.<sup>64</sup> Such characteristics included deformity, asymmetry, prognathism, and hairiness.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the physical determinants that must be transcended are the ‘long past acts’ of distant ancestors fighting for survival, who had reproduced the traits that benefited survival; traits that reside in the reptilian brain and which exert a powerful influence over individuals ‘in the midst of the new order of things’. Yet because evolution has also selected for a cerebral cortex with a capacity to reason and reflect, the reptilian brain may be in conflict with what the cerebral cortex considers moral. However, without terms like ‘reptilian brain’ and ‘cerebral cortex’ to differentiate between regions of the brain, the limits of language may well dictate a description of this situation in terms of a conflict between ‘sin’ and ‘I’. In this description, every impulse to do ill is attributed to the physical body, and the body can only be mastered by the self if the self is something of real essence and *separate*; for example, in the form of a soul, something that can exert a will that is free of the body’s physical determinants.

This vision of an essential self at war with the sinful flesh is evident in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), where the Ego (true self) is torn in a psychological tug-of-war between the Superego (higher self) and the Id (lower

self).<sup>66</sup> Although the ‘monster’ of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was often depicted as more human than its creator, the monsters of late nineteenth century Gothic literature usually embody the Freudian ‘Id’. This is particularly evident in Robert Louis Stevenson’s (1850-1894) *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), with Dr Jekyll’s discovery that ‘...man is not truly one, but truly two’,<sup>67</sup> and Mr Hyde’s resemblance to Lombroso’s atavistic criminal, exhibiting the ‘...impression of deformity... hardly human... something troglodytic’,<sup>68</sup> his actions ‘...like a monkey...’.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to the positive descriptions of human nature that developed in the Enlightenment and Romantic movement, and are manifest in the literature of Dickens, Tennyson, Darwin, Arnold, and Eliot – where personal happiness is found in selflessness – this description of human nature reaffirmed the Hobbesian doctrine that personal happiness is found only through pure selfishness, and therefore reinforced the idea that human nature requires a literal God and a literal design not only for fulfilment, but also to restrain its selfish impulses. In this view, there is no mystery why Eliot’s ‘Religion of Humanity’ was believed to be not enough, and why Pater’s ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance* proved controversial enough for him to omit it in later editions: ‘This brief “Conclusion” was omitted in the second edition of this book, as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall’.<sup>70</sup> As Fletcher comments: ‘This timidity sprang from the very popularity of the book, especially with the younger generation, whose general misunderstanding of *The Renaissance* was to Pater as painful as it was surprising’.<sup>71</sup>

Pater attempted to set his views straight in *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (1885),<sup>72</sup> a tale of a young man searching for a philosophy of life in Aurelian Rome, and finding it not just in humanistic Epicureanism but in the simpler form of Christianity that existed prior to the Church; albeit with less interest in the religion’s literal beliefs than in its aesthetic and transcendental value. Nonetheless, Pater realised too late that his ‘Conclusion’ might be misinterpreted as endorsing the ‘inner ape’, and this misinterpretation seems to be the interpretation that prevailed; Victorian orthodoxy revolted at it, while others – including Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) – did champion art for art’s sake as a license for depravity.<sup>73</sup> The limits of language made it difficult to describe the impulse to do good and the impulse to do ill in any way other than

dualism, with the physical body being left with only the impulse to do ill. This created the sense that if only the physical body exists, then only the impulse to do ill exists. In this mode, individuals could abandon what they regard as the futile idea of controlling their apish impulses, and instead embrace them; they would banish their Superego and embrace, wholly and completely, their Id. Simply put, it was believed that the consequences of a scientific description of the self are individuals like Dorian Gray.

***‘All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment.’***

The influence of Pater’s *The Renaissance* on Wilde is well known, as Naomi Wood notes: ‘Wilde called Pater’s *The Renaissance*... his “golden book” and declared that he never travelled anywhere without it; he described it as “the very flower of decadence; the last trumpet should have sounded the moment it was written”’.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps Wilde’s comment is hyperbole; but even so, to the sense that this ‘golden book’ is the very culmination of human knowledge and wisdom that renders all further thought superfluous, gives an insight into Pater’s importance to Wilde.

Yet *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is, itself, the very image of the strawman version of the aesthetic religion attacked by Pater’s critics, depicting the ‘moment’ as not just what *ultimately* matters, but as *all* that matters:

Walter Pater’s favourable review... is of particular interest because the occasion of Wilde’s book afforded him the opportunity to demonstrate his moral concerns in literature... Pater, like Wilde’s detractors, recognised in the main character of *Dorian Gray* a moral uncertainty, in inauthentic ‘Epicureanism’.<sup>75</sup>

Through *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Pater and Wilde alike could demonstrate the absurdity of the strawman created of them. As Wilde claims of the three main characters: ‘Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry is what the world thinks me: Dorian is what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps’.<sup>76</sup> With Dorian Gray (as the Freudian Ego) drifting away from Hallward’s way of thinking (as the Superego) and towards that of Lord Henry Wotton (as the Id), Gray’s character development becomes a thought experiment of what would happen if he was to truly live by the strawman – represented by Wotton – of the aesthetic religion dreamt up by ‘the world’. Yet, the strawman itself simultaneously

demonstrates why a scientific description of the self was viewed as dangerous, and therefore why a description of the self in terms of design and essentialism was viewed as a moral necessity.

Wilde's desire 'to be' like Gray in 'other ages' is evident in the title character's name: 'The name Dorian Gray... is a double reference – referring to 'Greek' or 'Dorian' love... and to a young man with whom Wilde was then seeking such a relationship, the poet John Gray'.<sup>77</sup> Yet Wilde clearly does not want to be like Gray in *every* way. Wilde protested against *The Daily Chronicle's* analysis of his novel when they wrote: 'Mr. Wilde's book has no real use if it be not to inculcate the 'moral' that when you feel yourself becoming too angelic you cannot do better than rush out and make a beast of yourself'.<sup>78</sup> Michael Buma points out how Wilde, like Pater, expressed surprise that he could be so misinterpreted. Although Wilde is interested in the art of the novel, he thought that the moral therein is so obvious that it should not even need to be mentioned, let alone require its very existence to be defended.<sup>79</sup> Yet, since mention it he must, Wilde spells it out plainly:

...the moral is this; All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment ... Yes; there is a terrible moral in *Dorian Gray* – a moral which the prurient will not be able to find in it, but which will be revealed to all whose minds are healthy. Is this an artistic error? I fear it is.<sup>80</sup>

The search for the ecstatic 'moment' should not entail wanton excess and lack of moral responsibility. Although Wilde views moralising as 'artistic error', only those who are truly 'prurient', truly that which the world believes Wilde himself to be, would be unable to see the moral.

However, Wilde does appear to deny a moral to his work in the preface to the 1891 edition: 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written'.<sup>81</sup> This is more the view of art evident in Wilde's *Salome* (1891), where the stepdaughter of Herod Antipas – who requested the head of John the Baptist as the reward for her Dance of the Seven Veils – becomes the epitome of art for art's sake.<sup>82</sup> Buma explains Wilde's apparent about-face as the result of his fear that he was straying far too close to the merely conventional, conformist, and mainstream for his own comfort, calling Wilde's earlier stated moral a 'massive understatement of the novel's essentially orthodox

morality' and adding that: 'It can be inferred from the great efforts Wilde took to cultivate an outlandish persona that the last thing he wanted to appear was orthodox'.<sup>83</sup> This is what Buma refers to with his article's title: 'The Embarrassing Orthodoxy of Oscar Wilde'. Radicalism was an intimate aspect of Wilde's self-identity and value-system. Debora Hill comments that Victorian society was '...one of the most rigidly directed societies the world has ever known', and that Wilde's '...mission in life was to break through the barriers of this society in every possible way'.<sup>84</sup> Wilde's works follow a similar ethos as that expressed by Joyce Carol Oates: 'We are stimulated to emotional response not by works that confirm our sense of the world, but by works that challenge it'.<sup>85</sup> This is implicit in Wilde's essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1895): 'Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion'.<sup>86</sup> And it is *explicit* in Wilde's praise of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, which – influenced by Romanticism – protested against the alleged corruption and mechanisation of art by classical Renaissance painters (especially Raphael); Wilde declares: 'To disagree with three-fourths of all England on all points is one of the first elements of sanity'.<sup>87</sup> Any perception that Wilde was conforming to the establishment could certainly have been viewed by him as 'embarrassing'.

Because of the apparent contradiction, Joseph Bristow argues that the 1891 edition is not merely an improvement on the original, but rather is a completely distinct work altogether.<sup>88</sup> However, Maureen Moran insists that that the novel's purpose remains difficult to pin:

...even in this edition the novel remains stubbornly ambivalent. At the same time as Wilde reconceptualizes the novel so that it more forcefully champions beauty rather than ethics as the principal concern of art, he also introduces features that draw the novel back into the ambit of the moralistic realist tradition. These include its broader social settings and the creation of the vengeful James Vane.<sup>89</sup>

While overtly emphasising art, Wilde is covertly emphasising the moral thought experiment. Yet Philip K. Cohen wrote in 1978 that there is nothing covert about it: 'The structure of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is unambiguously, rigorously

moral';<sup>90</sup> and David A. Upchurch (1991) simply takes Wilde's apparent contradiction as an extension of the moral whereby extremes must be avoided:

These principles [those of the Preface] were opposite to what the novel itself demonstrated. Again Wilde balances opposites by extremes. Extreme aestheticism cannot be lived, but neither can one live solely in reality. Consequently, truth must lie somewhere on the plane between pure aestheticism and pure reality.<sup>91</sup>

I will use the 1891 edition both because it emphasises art for art's sake and the moral issues surrounding the concept, treating this text as a thought experiment for moral and intellectual issues surrounding the limits of language in describing the self without dualism and libertarianism. While this novel is usually treated as either a moral treatise or a 'hedonistic' manifesto, few have examined it as indicative of science and psychology. Seagroatt notes that Philip Smith, Michael Helfand, and Bruce Haley once argued that the role of science in Wilde's work had long been ignored: '...although literary critics overlook his [Wilde's] engagement with scientific issues and discourses, science played a crucial role in Wilde's aesthetic theory'.<sup>92</sup> Seagroatt discusses Wilde more specifically in the light of '...the relatively new science of human psychology', examining how science had transformed views of the relationship between mind and body, and how this transformation is manifest in Wilde's work. Yet none have deeply examined the role of the limits of language on the issues of dualism, libertarianism, and determinism in the novel.

***'Soul and body... how shallow were the arbitrary definitions...'***

If Wotton is truly 'what the world thinks' of Wilde, then what the world thinks of Wilde is that he is making an attempt to be a scientist, sparing no chance to issue long diatribes identifying laws and physical determinants regarding the psychology of the self. The fear of reductionism is apparent, for while Wotton is certainly the main vehicle through which Wilde delivers his epigrammatic social commentary, the novel also has Gray, in the context of learning a painful moral, saying to him: 'You cut life to pieces with your epigrams'.<sup>93</sup> Wotton believes himself to be simply logical: 'It was clear to him that the experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions'.<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to Pater, but perhaps consistent with the public caricature of the detached scientific observer, Wotton is merely a spectator in the theatre of life: 'Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes'.<sup>95</sup> As a scientist, he experiences the world vicariously: '...how delightful other people's emotions were!'<sup>96</sup> Wotton's purpose with this attitude foreshadows all that is to follow:

He had always been enthralled by the methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject-matter of that science had seemed to him trivial... Human life – that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating.... There were poisons so subtle that to know their properties one had to sicken of them. There were maladies so strange that one had to pass through them if one sought to understand their nature... What matter what the cost was? One could never pay too high a price for any sensation.<sup>97</sup>

Physics, chemistry and biology seem 'trivial', or at least important only insofar as they illuminate 'human life' itself, just as Pater thought all systems were important only insofar as they lead to experience of the ecstatic 'moment'. This again privileges psychology as the queen of the sciences. Yet because psychology deals with the human individual, moral questions arise; and here, the amorality of the search for knowledge as an end-in-itself, rather than as a means to some higher moral end, becomes an issue. Wotton, in his search to 'know' and 'understand' the highs and lows of psychological experience as an end-in-itself, exhibits no qualms about subjecting others to them, no 'matter the cost'. To Wotton, people are little more than laboratory rats: '...Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results'.<sup>98</sup> Everything that follows is Wotton's scientific experiment, permitted by a twisted view of Pater's deterministic psychology.

Wotton's scientific determinism is revealed synonymously with the effect this determinism has had on his values, or lack thereof:

'What a fuss people make about fidelity! ...Why, even in love it is purely a question for physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will. Young men want to be faithful, and are not: old men want to be faithless, and cannot'.<sup>99</sup>

Along with the aesthetic movement's repudiation of the dualism of content and form, or subject and object, goes the dualism of mind and body. As Wotton later

muses: ‘Soul and body, body and soul... who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased... How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists!’<sup>100</sup> Dualism is an illusion: “‘...we have given up our belief in the soul’”;<sup>101</sup> as is libertarianism: “‘Life is not governed by will or intention. Life is a question of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells in which thought hides itself and passion has its dreams’”.<sup>102</sup> Since the self cannot transcend the physical order, it is not possible to live in any way except that which conforms to the physical order. Wotton defines ‘goodness’ as ‘...to be in harmony with oneself’, in harmony with natural impulses or physical determinants. This does appear to reflect Wilde’s own views on individualism. However artificial the self may be, Wilde believed that the self that is to be created must be unique: ‘Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation’.<sup>103</sup> Pater maintains: ‘A true Epicureanism aims at a complete though harmonious development of man’s entire organism’.<sup>104</sup> Yet as Pater continues it is evident that he is no Wotton: ‘To lose the moral sense therefore . . . is to lose or lower organization, to become less complex, to pass from a higher to a lower degree of development.’<sup>105</sup> Yet because of the limits of language in describing the impulse to do good and the impulse to do ill in any terms other than a Pauline division of ‘I’ and ‘sin’, whereby the impulse to do good is attributed to an essential self that transcends the physical body, the notion of being in ‘harmony’ with physical determinants is represented as being in harmony with only the impulse to do ill. In this way, the limits of language in describing the self without dualism and libertarianism lead to every bad consequence in the novel.

According to Wotton, it is futile for people to resist their physical determinants: “‘Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws’”.<sup>106</sup> Instead, people can only become hypocrites:

‘Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification... The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself... It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain... that the great sins of the world take place also’.<sup>107</sup>

‘Sin’ is synonymous with ‘the body’, implying that goodness is synonymous with an essence of self that transcends the body. Yet because Wotton believes that there is no such part of the self that can resist the body – for the self *is* the body – the attempt to resist an impulse only makes that impulse stronger; a thesis with clear parallels to Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and with Freudian psychology. Wotton derides those who would attempt to deny it:

‘People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one’s self... They feed the hungry, and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve... The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion – these are the two things that govern us’.<sup>108</sup>

Wotton warns Hallward: “‘Conscience and cowardice are really the same things... Conscience is the trade-name of the firm. That is all’”.<sup>109</sup> Whatever the source of ‘terror’ – society or God – Wotton believes it is better to simply embrace and indulge his physical determinants rather than futilely attempt to deny his own nature; in the words of John Milton’s Devil: “‘Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n’”.<sup>110</sup>

Wotton, as the Id, does seem to play a similar role to the Devil as a metaphor for the influence of selfish impulses or the body’s physical determinants, regardless of whether the novel passes moral judgement on him in this role as ‘evil’ or simply as a mirror held up to Victorian hypocrisy. As Wilde has Wotton say in response to Wilde’s own critics: “‘The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame’”.<sup>111</sup> Like the Devil, Wotton seeks dominion over others: “‘He would seek to dominate him [Gray]... He would make that wonderful spirit his own’”.<sup>112</sup> Like the Devil, Wotton does not seek mere dominion over the unwilling, but the far more subtle and complete totalitarianism of dominion over the willingly converted. Like the Devil, Wotton rationalises goodness into sin: “‘I can sympathise with everything, except suffering... It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain’”;<sup>113</sup> and he rationalises sin into goodness: “‘To get back one’s youth, one has merely to repeat one’s follies... Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one’s mistakes’”.<sup>114</sup>

He makes the shallow deep: "...you should not say the greatest romance of your life. You should say the first romance of your life... I think your nature so deep";<sup>115</sup> and he makes the deep shallow: "...the people who love only once in their lives are really the shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination".<sup>116</sup> There is no good or evil, only beauty and ugliness, regardless of whether this can withstand the probe of reason: "I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable".<sup>117</sup> Wotton's approach even pre-empts a negative analysis of his character (including, of course, this one): "It is perfectly monstrous... the way people go about nowadays saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true".<sup>118</sup>

If Wotton values science, it is not for its reasonableness but for its lack of emotion:

'But as the nineteenth century has gone bankrupt through an over-expenditure of sympathy, I would suggest that we should appeal to Science to put us straight. The advantage of the emotions is that they lead us astray, and the advantage of Science is that it is not emotional'.<sup>119</sup>

Emotions are good so long as they 'lead us astray', but science must be there to veto them the moment they threaten to ignite too much empathy for fellow humanity. And finally, Wotton says something that, once again, could just have easily been put in the mouth of the Devil: "...you will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you have never had the courage to commit".<sup>120</sup>

Basil Hallward, being who Wilde thinks himself to be, is starkly different to Wotton. Significantly, Gray thinks of the two men: 'They made a delightful contrast'.<sup>121</sup> Although Hallward in turn makes attempts at psychology, evidently seeing value in it, he is also deeply wary of its limits and its consequences. He exhibits 'the terror of society' that Wotton in his 'extreme aestheticism' derides. This makes Hallward the moral conscience or Freudian Superego of the novel, and his 'terror' is partially the fear that scientific descriptions will reduce that which the limits of language have made indescribable to the readily describable, stripping them of their capacity to awe.

This is evident when he explains why he did not intend to disclose Gray's name to Wotton:

‘When I like people immensely I never tell their names to any one. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us’.<sup>122</sup>

If, as Pater wrote, the ‘names’ that science gives renders phenomena describable, the ‘names’ of individuals render them likewise, ‘surrendering a part of them’, and robbing them of the ‘mysterious or marvellous’. In *The Critic as Artist* (1891), Wilde is only ‘too conscious’ of this: ‘I am but too conscious of the fact that we are born in an age when only the dull are treated seriously, and I live in terror of not being misunderstood’.<sup>123</sup>

Hallward, painting the portrait of Dorian Gray, fears that the ‘orbit’ of his own soul has been exposed in the portrait: ‘...I really can’t exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it’.<sup>124</sup> He does not mean by this that he has painted his own likeness, as Wotton mistakes him as saying; instead, he worries that he has revealed the ‘secret’ of his soul:

‘Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul’.<sup>125</sup>

This follows Pater’s dictum that: ‘...the first step toward seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is’. Hallward’s impression of Gray is that of a beauty which empowers him to see beauty in everything else, whereupon he can paint like never before: “I see everything in him”.<sup>126</sup> Wotton’s observation delves deeper into what Hallward must be seeing: ‘One felt that he [Gray] had kept himself unspotted from the world. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him’.<sup>127</sup> Gray is pure innocence, producing much the same effect on Hallward as Eliot’s description of a child who lacks an adult’s ‘inward turmoil’. Because of this ‘feeling’, Hallward is not painting Gray as he ‘really is’, he is painting his own ‘impression as it really is’.

Yet the idea that the mind cannot reach beyond itself, beyond its own biases, desires, or ‘feeling’, derives from the notion that the mind is *not* dualistic. Hallward exclaims: ‘The harmony of soul and body – how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an

ideality that is void.’<sup>128</sup> Here, Hallward seems less inclined towards modernist ‘realism’ and Platonist ‘ideality’ than towards the postmodernist instrumentalism, constructivism, and conceptual relativity of the era to follow. This is ironically *because* of the nineteenth century advance of science against the traditional metaphysical supports of realism: essentialism and dualism; the products of at least some form of belief in design. Yet the limits of science are also delineated by postmodernism, as seen in *The Critic as Artist* in which Wilde articulates the thesis of the Linguistic Turn: ‘Language... is the parent, and not the child, of thought’.<sup>129</sup> This specifies what Eliot identified as the importance of community consensus in establishing epistemic values, as being the importance of *linguistic* consensus. By pointing to the power of words and names, ‘vulgar’ realism, and ‘void’ ideality, Wilde is expressing a language-based critique of psychology itself, with the definitions of ‘sanity’ and ‘insanity’, or ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’, so difficult to pin (even if he thought disagreement with ‘three-fourths of all England on all points’ was a requisite of sound mental health).

Wilde’s scepticism of the scientific attempt to describe the self is indicated elsewhere: ‘When one has weighed the sun in the balance, and measured the steps of the moon, and mapped out the seven heavens, there still remains oneself. Who can calculate the orbit of his own soul?’<sup>130</sup> Here, psychology becomes reminiscent of Gradgrind, ‘...ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature’.<sup>131</sup> And in what could be a retort to the ancient inscription over the Temple of Delphi which enjoins the individual to ‘Know Thyself’,<sup>132</sup> Wilde declares: ‘Only the shallow know themselves’.<sup>133</sup> Wilde pre-empts Michel Foucault’s contention that sanity and insanity are non-essential categories, with ‘madness’ not existing until the Enlightenment when ‘reason’ was exalted as the defining trait of an individual, but which was itself defined by the dominant discourses of power (an idea which builds upon Nietzsche’s master/slave morality).<sup>134</sup> Foucault’s declaration of the ‘death of man’ – an allusion to Nietzsche’s declaration of the ‘death of God’<sup>135</sup> – suggests the difficulty of identifying an essence of humanity known as ‘human nature’. Even if genes have an influence on human behaviour, the mind can counter-act their influence; rendering the human self composed largely of socially creative acts of the imagination, rather than discovered facts. This is a notion that works against discourses of power that reduce *all* behaviour to descriptions of human nature that define people within boundaries and justify

power relations. The frontiers of religion and science are both delineated by the limits of language, and art becomes that which reveals the hidden or secret truth not of how things really *are*, but of how things really *seem* to each individual – including their experience of the Paterian ‘moment’ – in the context of their values; the context of the shadows on the wall of Plato’s cave. This is a cornerstone of Wilde’s critique of Victorian society.

Yet Hallward’s deep suspicion of attempts – artistic or scientific – to describe the self and expose its secrets goes deeper than all this, relating not only to how things *seem* to him, but also to his fear that science might be able to know his mind after all. However difficult it may be to identify the specific genetic and environmental influences that determine an individual’s psychology, this does not mean that those influences do not exist:

‘Without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry... he knows nothing about it... but the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope’.<sup>136</sup>

The empirical observation of art through a metaphorical ‘microscope’ renders his hidden self scientifically describable and known, and perhaps less valuable for it: ‘We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography’.<sup>137</sup> This may be Wilde’s own fear, if his novel involves ‘artistic error’. As Steven Marcus argues: ‘If there ever was a writer whose life is inseparable from his work that person is Oscar Wilde’.<sup>138</sup> This is a violation of Wilde’s preface, which states that: ‘To reveal art and to conceal the artist is the artist’s aim’.<sup>139</sup> Elana Gomel has already succinctly commented on how this dictum is made problematic by the novel’s own plot:

...in the novel the fatal picture is revealed as an independent and autonomous *objet d’art* only when both its creator and its model are dead. The violence that separates art from the artist indicates a strain and hostility in their relationship. ‘Art’s aim’ suddenly sounds like an implicit personification that credits ‘art’ with scheming against the artist, perhaps to the point of murder.<sup>140</sup>

Indeed, Wilde, too, put ‘too much’ of himself in his art, creating a tension between himself and his art by exposing the ‘secret’ of his own soul, requiring it to be suppressed in the 1891 edition; including: ‘...the painter Basil Hallward’s

homoerotic feelings for Dorian'.<sup>141</sup> Christopher Craft has written of the alienation-effects created by technologies of duplication,<sup>142</sup> and in this context the author is alienated from their own secrets. Wilde, too, exhibits 'curious artistic idolatry' regarding his own sex, in an age when, as Craft comments, homosexuality was branded by the dominant discourses of power with connotations of '...disease, dysfunction, and disorder'.<sup>143</sup> As Julian Mitchell puts it: 'Pater and Wilde had to tip-toe round the subject of gayness'.<sup>144</sup> Homosexuality was feared by Victorian orthodoxy to be one of the 'sins' that Hallward and Gray alike lack 'courage to commit'.

In fact, Hallward's fear of alienation from his secrets through a scientific description of the self may be further explained by his earlier claim that he would be 'sorry' if he *did* look like Gray:

'There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction... The ugly and the stupid have the best of it... They can sit at their ease and gape at the play. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat. They live as we all should live, undisturbed, indifferent, and without disquiet'.<sup>145</sup>

In Hallward's view, the 'ugly and the stupid' have no aspirations, and therefore no possibility of envy or failure; they can only be content. Not only is ignorance bliss, but stupidity is bliss. This view itself has a 'fatality' about it, with Hallward believing that he, Wotton, and Gray will all live to regret their distinctions: "Your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains, such as they are – my art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray's good looks – we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly".<sup>146</sup> Physical determinism is lurking between these lines; all individuals, from the undistinguished to the highly distinguished, are locked into their fates by genetic or environmental circumstances beyond their control, beyond their power to freely choose otherwise. At least the limits of language render individuals unable to describe all of the genetic and environmental determinants that shape their personalities and rule their lives; any such knowledge thereof is, indeed, necessarily 'shallow'. These limits keep those determinants 'secret', and the fact that they are beyond what language can describe also serves to preserve the sense of value in the concepts of libertarianism and dualism. But with knowledge of determinism itself, and a

scientific attempt to describe the determining factors, the secrets of what the self is constructed are reduced to the ‘...dull catalogue of common things’.<sup>147</sup>

Hallward’s (or Wilde’s) fear of distinction may be part of the secret truth that has been exposed by his art. By painting into Gray’s portrait his own ‘curious artistic idolatry’ of Gray’s beauty, he illuminates the fact that people with such distinctions tend to define their self-identity by those distinctions. In light of Pater’s philosophy, such people are attempting to cling to a perfect, unchanging essence of self which does not in fact exist, and its unchanging appearance in a portrait only emphasises this fact. As Wotton says, following Malthus and Darwin: ‘In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the silly hope of keeping our place’.<sup>148</sup> Individuals cling to the hope of distinguishing themselves by something permanent and essential; yet because the things that distinguish a person are also impermanent and non-essential, those things will one day pass. Gray’s own genetic and environmental determinants include being beautiful, and having an upbringing where he need not define himself by any other virtue than beauty. Already, Gray’s physical determinants are preparing him for future misery regarding age taking its toll; and for his need to cheat the aging process.

***‘Was it really under his control?’***

Hallward, as the Superego, seeks to prevent the Id from having any determining influence on the Ego: ‘He [Gray] has a simple and a beautiful nature... Don’t spoil him. Don’t try to influence him. Your influence would be bad’.<sup>149</sup> Wotton exhibits the ironic inconsistency permitted by his aesthetic philosophy by dismissing Hallward’s plea as ‘nonsense’<sup>150</sup> and attempting to influence Gray regardless, tempting Gray to partake of the fruit of forbidden pleasures. This influence is repeatedly described in terms of physical determinism, as Gray attempts to recover from Wotton’s words:

He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil’s friend had said to him... had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious impulses.<sup>151</sup>

The physical determinants are ‘really from himself’, latent within all along, yet are only becoming manifest through the external influence of Wotton. The appeal to the physical senses, with the ‘secret chord’ now being ‘touched’, making him feel he is ‘vibrating and throbbing’, suggests the inability to separate the self from the physical determinism of nature anywhere but in the language describing the relationship.

The power of language in the novel is evident:

Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?<sup>152</sup>

Again, language becomes ‘the parent, and not the child, of thought’, giving ‘a plastic form to formless things’, actively creating the concept of a thing rather than simply passively labelling that thing, and giving it the impression of essentialism and realism. There is a seeming paradox here, where that which had once been beyond the limits of language – that which had once fallen into the category of ‘formless things’ – is now being made manifest through language; this suggests the deterministic influence of language in creating the internal narrative of the self, the internal narrative of how the world appears, and the internal narrative of the self’s place in that world. The ‘subtle magic’ of Wotton’s words – a description that itself implies the limits of language in describing the power of language – has rewritten Gray’s internal narratives, determining his future course. Although these physical determinants are ‘really from himself’ and latent all along, now language, simply in the act of *naming* them, had awakened conscious awareness and knowledge of them: ‘...there had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood. He understood them now. Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him. It seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?’<sup>153</sup> Yet the seeming paradox may be an illusion; for in being reduced to language, those things that Gray ‘not not understood’ are arguably warped into something different than what they were. After all, Gray’s behaviour does not change until after the words are spoken, and if those qualities had truly been ‘latent’ all along, then his behaviour ought to always have been that way. In

an almost frightening sense, it is language itself that actually emerges as the determining force. And Wotton, the speaker whose words had the determining influence, again adopts the role of scientific observer: ‘Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing’.<sup>154</sup>

That which the limits of language had once declared unknown – enabling belief in an essence of self that transcends physical determinants, exerting free will over those determinants – is now known; the terrible ‘secret’ of the portrait is exposed. The feared immoral consequences of this view behind the curtain is apparent in its role in Wotton’s aestheticism, in which the urgency to cling to the thing by which an individual defines their identity is exacerbated by the impermanence of that thing, causing that individual to ‘suffer terribly’ when that thing passes; people cannot be happy with what they already have, they just want more of what they already have. With Gray’s self-identity defined by beauty, fear of aging and death is only intensified.

This is all made explicit when Gray removes himself to the outside garden, Wotton following. The Abrahamic parallel is obvious: Wotton is the serpent in the Garden of Gray’s personal Eden. If Eliot’s image of the garden is symbolic of the humanist attempt to existentially create order out of chaos without appeal to divine design, then Wotton’s role as the serpent is symbolic of the temptations of the physical determinants or Id that threaten the humanist project. The serpent speaks: “‘...youth is the one thing worth having...’”<sup>155</sup> In raising the value of beauty he raises the fear, tempting Gray to commit the fallacy of clinging to something impermanent and non-essential, assuring him of his downfall: “‘But what the gods give they quickly take away... When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it... Every month brings you nearer something dreadful’”.<sup>156</sup> Just as the finality of death given by a scientific description of the mind strengthened Pater’s urgency in seeking the ‘moment’, so does it strengthen Wotton’s commitment – which is ‘what the world thinks’ is Pater’s and Wilde’s commitment – to be a selfish ‘hedonist’:

‘Don’t squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious... or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sickly aims, the false ideals, or our age. Live! ...A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants’.<sup>157</sup>

These words could have come from de Sade himself. Wotton, in his role as a strawman of Pater's views, gives the impression that without a dualistic and libertarian description of the self, without eternal life, there is no time to waste on unpleasant experiences like shame, remorse, or the philanthropic struggle to alleviate the suffering of others. Otherwise, people "...degenerate into hideous puppets", controlled by physical determinants but unable to enjoy them, rendering them "...haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid...".<sup>158</sup> This particular secret of the portrait is now evident to Gray, and his subsequent actions appear inevitable; or, rather, causally determined:

‘I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that... I would give everything! ...I would give my soul for that!’<sup>159</sup>

Art is long and life is short, but instead of inspiring engagement with the aesthetic moment, this proverb only intensifies the wish for it to be the ‘other way’. Pater's use of the finality of death to put life in perspective motivates the call for hedonism and superficiality. Gray becomes another Faustus, tempted into selling his soul to the Devil. But in Wotton's eyes, he has done nothing but remove the influence of others from Gray, enabling him to embrace his own physical determinants or Id: “It is the real Dorian Gray – that is all”.<sup>160</sup>

This is the most obvious secret truth exposed by art in the novel – whether the modernist truth of how things really *are* or the postmodernist truth of how things really *seem* to each individual beneath surface appearances – with Hallward's portrait bearing not only Gray's age but the scars of his sins, in an extension of Lombroso's theory where immoral thoughts and actions, derived from the inner ape, create an atavistic appearance over time. Although Wotton claims this is merely the ‘real Dorian Gray’, he also believes that, through the power of words, he has become a God and Gray his Adam: ‘...through certain words of his... Dorian Gray's soul had turned to this white girl [the actress Sibyl Vane] and bowed in worship before her. To a large extent the lad was his own creation’.<sup>161</sup> Dominic Manganiello points out that Hallward and Wotton both do this to Gray: ‘Basil through his portrait and Lord Henry through his word painting both recreate Dorian in their own image and likeness’.<sup>162</sup> But in this instance, it is

the power of words that wins. There is symmetry between Wotton, Victor Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll; all are Promethean scientists usurping the role of designer and creator, and their creations – although sometimes more human than their creator – are ultimately destructive. Yet where Frankenstein’s monster and Mr Hyde are hideous and atavistic, Gray remains the epitome of beauty. As Linda Dryden argues:

...the deviant in society exhibiting regressive tendencies is not a monster whose degeneracy is figured in his repulsiveness, as in Hyde, but rather a monster whose deviancy is caused by his extreme narcissism, a decadent Gothic subject whose beauty is the wellspring of horror.<sup>163</sup>

Although Wilde’s novel also exhibits the belief that an individual’s sins are evident in their appearance, Gray nevertheless becomes a ‘monster’ embodying the notion – like Coleridge’s *Christabel* (1800),<sup>164</sup> or Keats’ *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820)<sup>165</sup> – that the truth of an individual’s character lies deeper than superficial appearances.

Gray loves Vane for her artistic genius as an actress, yet upon her falling in love with Gray she finds herself unable to feign emotion on the stage; she becomes a terrible actress who hates the stage for its artificiality, no longer subscribing to art for art’s sake. This is, no doubt, a comment on the importance of genuine experience. If, as Gray later says, “...life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation”<sup>166</sup>, then Vane, knowing genuine love, no longer has need of artistic ‘preparation’ concerning love. Yet Vane’s exit from the stage can be interpreted another way, for plays in this novel can be viewed as symbolic representations of a deterministic world where no one can be said to choose their own words and actions, and simply perform the roles given to them by their determinants; confirming the declaration of Shakespeare’s character Jaques that: ‘All the world’s a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players’.<sup>167</sup> Vane’s exit from the stage can be characterised as her tearing up the deterministic script. Gray’s cold condemnation of this act – where he embodies the strawman version of the aesthetic movement – is the first step on the path laid by Wotton to self-destruction: “You have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don’t even stir my curiosity... You are shallow and stupid... You are nothing

to me... I will never see you again. I will never think of you.”<sup>168</sup> In his twisted view of what is ‘shallow’ and what is ‘deep’, and of what love is, the portrait changes; and this picture’s thousand words could compose the Devil’s Gospel:

...his eye fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward had painted of him. He started back as if in surprise... the face appeared to him to be a little changed... One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth... taking up from the table an oval glass... [he] glanced hurriedly into its polished depths. No line like that warped his red lips. What did it mean?<sup>169</sup>

Gray remembers his wish that the portrait would bear his scars, and he becomes conscious of just how cruel he had been: ‘For every sin that he committed a stain would fleck and wreck its fairness’.<sup>170</sup> Once again, here is the individual alienated from their secrets through the empirical observation of art. Gray resolves to make amends to Vane: ‘...he would not sin... He would resist temptation’.<sup>171</sup>

Buma may be correct that this novel describes a thoroughly orthodox Christian universe, where individuals cannot resist sin no matter how noble their resolution; they can only confess and hope for forgiveness. The portrait may well represent the aesthetic movement’s fusion of subject and object, as well as Wilde’s criticism of the Christian rite of confession for absolving individuals from moral responsibility: ‘Not “Forgive us our sins”, but “Smite us for our iniquities”, should be the prayer...’<sup>172</sup> Yet the portrait can also represent the basic distrust of determinism, which also seems to renounce moral responsibility by repudiating the power to choose otherwise. This criticism begins with the theory that mind and body are one, in which there may be certain logic in the belief that an unhealthy mind produces unhealthy effects on the body. The picture, absorbing these effects on the body, becomes a comment on the mind/body relationship: ‘Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what the soul thought, they realised?’<sup>173</sup>

Carolyn Lesjak, analysing the influence of Victorian science on Wilde, reads political messaging in lines such as these: ‘...the politics that emerge out of Wilde’s ecumenical aesthetic practice draw their energy from the complex interplay of different notions of affinity, influence, and transmutation, some of which are richly congruent with scientific thinking of the time’.<sup>174</sup> This can be

taken further; Gray, recalling his callousness, wonders: ‘Why had he been made like that? Why had such a soul been given to him?’<sup>175</sup> These questions place responsibility not on Gray’s own free will, but on his physical determinants instead. But the second question also suggests that free will is elusive even if individuals *do* have a soul, for the individual cannot choose which soul had been ‘given’ to them, or how it had been ‘made’; and the soul had been ‘made’ to obey the laws of physical determinism. Here, Thomas Huxley’s contention, in 1874, that: ‘The soul stands to the body as the bell of a clock to the works...’<sup>176</sup> could be taken literally.

The abdication of moral responsibility is more pronounced after Vane commits suicide. Upon speaking with Wotton, Gray’s deep remorse seems to transform into shallow musing about how “‘...extraordinarily dramatic life is... too wonderful for tears’.<sup>177</sup> The world’s suffering is “‘...the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy’”,<sup>178</sup> a mere game of puppets. With physical determinism applied to the mind, the world is exactly as Wotton describes it: “‘Suddenly we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. We watch ourselves...’”<sup>179</sup> Wotton sets Gray back on the deterministic course; or, rather, he simply makes Gray realise that he cannot resist the deterministic course: ‘He felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life’.<sup>180</sup> Gray’s life’s circumstances and even his own ‘infinite curiosity’ occur beyond his power to choose them, like lines in a play. And of course, a mere spectator can have no responsibility for what occurs on stage:

Besides, was it really under his control? Had it indeed been prayer that had produced the substitution? Might there not be some curious scientific reason for it all? ...without thought or conscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love of strange affinity?<sup>181</sup>

With acceptance of the scientific description of the self, where free will is repudiated in favour of the view that things are not ‘really under his control’, Gray accepts his inability to choose otherwise, and therefore abdicates all responsibility.

***'Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him'.***

Years pass, and Gray, obsessed by the same book that had influenced Wotton himself (identified in the 1890 edition as *Le Secret de Raoul*), becomes master of the 'new Hedonism', the inspiration of which is apparent:

It [the new Hedonism] was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience... it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.<sup>182</sup>

Gray indulges in various theories and systems, from Catholicism, to mysticism, to the materialistic *Darwinismus* movement; he studies music, then jewels, then embroideries. He never becomes attached; he simply experiences whatever is to be experienced in the 'moment', as he believes is justified by the scientific description of the self: 'He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations...'<sup>183</sup> What was probably, to Pater, a sensible claim that the ideas of self and self-identity are subject to change, becomes to Gray a license for wearing multiple different masks, as if he can attribute his crimes – because they were committed under previous masks – to the actions of *someone else*.

Hallward's confrontation with Gray over the many rumours of lives destroyed, culminates with Gray presenting to him the art exhibition that Hallward never wanted: 'An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips...'<sup>184</sup> At one point he muses of Gray's portrait: 'The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful.'<sup>185</sup> Gray himself remains a mere spectator: 'Watching him [Hallward] with that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are absorbed in a play... There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy...'<sup>186</sup> Yet as Hallward attempts to change Gray, Gray loses control: 'Suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas... The mad passion of a hunted animal stirred within him...'<sup>187</sup> The physical determinants are vibrating along the genetic chain from distant animal ancestors, agonisingly formed in the primordial 'struggle for existence' and determining behaviour in the present;

taking up a knife, he turns: 'He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again'.<sup>188</sup> Gray kills the embodiment of conscience in the novel, the avatar of the Freudian Superego; and now there is no hope of ever turning back.

In his efforts to purge the '...memory of old sins... by the madness of sins that were new',<sup>189</sup> destroying the narrative of self that he has created, Gray degenerates into little more than his animal instincts: '...he was conscious that the sense of terror he thought he had strangled had come back to him'; 'A mad craving came over him. He lit a cigarette...'; 'His fingers moved instinctively...'; 'The hideous hunger for opium began to gnaw at him'.<sup>190</sup> These animal instincts are merely the result of physical determinism: 'From cell to cell of his brain crept the one thought; and the wild desire to live, most terrible of all man's appetites, quickened into force each nerve and fibre'.<sup>191</sup> Wilde makes explicit the fear of physical determinants, uncontrolled by a description of the self that transcends the physical order:

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin... so dominates a nature... Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as automatons move... When that high spirit, that morning-star of evil, fell from heaven, it was as a rebel that he fell.<sup>192</sup>

Gray comes to epitomise the popular caricature of what is believed will become of an individual if they accept the doctrine of physical determinism. It is a caricature that makes sense only if people have 'freedom of their will' to lose in the first place; only if thought itself is simply *defined* into something entirely unrelated to the physical, leaving mere animal instinct for the physical; only if the limits of language render it difficult to describe 'thought' and 'animal instinct' in terms other than completely separate.

Yet the punishment that visits Gray seems to apply regardless of what an individual believes about physical determinism. This punishment is based on conceptual relativity and the individual knowing their own 'impression as it really is'. For if the limits of language involve the fact that it is as psychological beings that individuals filter and interpret all sensory information from the external world, the question becomes how will that information be interpreted if it is

filtered through a psyche dominated by *negative* thoughts, desires, and impressions? This may shed further light on Gray's declaration that: 'Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him'<sup>193</sup> (besides being another pointer to the idea of the dualistic self). With poetic justice, the ugliness of Gray's soul reflects back to him not just from the portrait, but in his every experience of the present 'moment'; and it is here that it may be argued that the portrait reflects not just the modernist truth of how Gray really *is*, but the postmodernist truth of how Gray really *seems* to himself.

This conceptual relativity can be demonstrated in a moment foreshadowed earlier in the novel, after Gray's cruel denouncement of Vane:

He remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts.<sup>194</sup>

The shadows, houses, and street people would always have been there, of course, but just as Arnold's perception of the night over Dover Beach transforms from 'tranquil' and 'sweet' to a symbol of ignorance and terror, so do all the above transform into an image of damnation. These limits of language in describing the world beyond filtered impressions form the ultimate lesson of Wotton's experiment in deterministic psychology: negative thoughts and actions determine a negative state of mind, which in turn determine more negative thoughts and actions, in a vicious cycle; the very definition of the Buddhist concept of *karma*, in its technical form.<sup>195</sup> Heaven and Hell become abodes to be experienced here and now, and anti-Wordsworthian imagery makes clear in which one Gray now walks: 'The moon hung low in the sky like a yellow skull'; 'The way seemed interminable, and the streets like the black web of some sprawling spider'.<sup>196</sup> The Biblical lake of fire is brought to mind: '...the strange bottle shaped kilns with their orange fan-like tongues of fire'.<sup>197</sup> The sounds of life are accompanied by the noises of suffering: '...in the darkness a seagull screamed. The horse stumbled in a rut'.<sup>198</sup> The sight of life is accompanied by the imagery of monsters: '...fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamp-lit blind... They moved like monstrous marionettes... He hated them'.<sup>199</sup> The description of the abode in

which Gray enters even gives a sense of poverty caused by industrial capitalism: ‘...he reached a shabby house, that was wedged in between two gaunt factories’.<sup>200</sup> Gray despairs: ‘He wanted to escape from himself’.<sup>201</sup>

Although Gray – like Wotton – attempts to be a spectator or scientific observer who voyeuristically watches others act out the play written by their physical determinants, Wilde’s own characterisation of Wotton’s lesson in this regard is that ‘...those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it.’<sup>202</sup> As Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar says: “‘Cowards die many times before their deaths’”.<sup>203</sup> Although Gray has the chance to live forever, he dies in every moment. The role of ugliness in art stands revealed: ‘Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason’.<sup>204</sup> Only through ugliness is Gray learning what he needs to learn. And what he learns appears to be Wilde’s own life lesson:

I wanted to eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world... And so, indeed, I went out, and so I lived. My only mistake was that I confined myself so exclusively to the trees of what seemed to me the sun-lit side of the garden, and shunned the other side for its shadow and its gloom.<sup>205</sup>

If Wilde was ever anything like Wotton, he had come to view that as a ‘mistake’. Wilde’s ‘garden of the world’ may reflect the humanist symbol of the existential creation of order out of chaos, or the Judeo-Christian theme of Eden. In any case, if ‘life itself’ is ‘the first, the greatest, of the arts’, for which all other arts are ‘preparation’, then even if the purpose of art is made to be about the ecstatic ‘moment’ it must still prepare for life in its wholeness; it must not shun the lessons to be learnt from the dark side of the ‘garden’.

In the 1891 edition, Gray’s enemy is not just himself, but those vengeful individuals whose lives he has almost destroyed. James Vane, brother of Sibyl Vane, arrives as justice incarnate, elaborating the moral thought experiment in a manner that, as Cohen notes, contrasts Hallward’s New Testament mercy with Old Testament wrath, smiting ‘us for our iniquities’:

By rejecting Basil, the spokesman for New Testament mercy, Dorian forces the confrontation with an angry God who judges and punishes... In the added chapters Wilde therefore introduces James Vane, an agent of the Old

Testament code who replaces Basil to become the living moral force in the novel's second half.<sup>206</sup>

Although James Vane is fooled at first by Gray's youthful face, reasoning that the real Gray must be 'nearly forty', it is not long before he learns the truth and is on the hunt once more. This spirit of vengeance exacerbates the lesson of ugliness, rendering Gray's state of mind even worse; now Gray is: '...sick with a wild terror of dying, and yet indifferent to life itself. The consciousness of being hunted, snared, tracked down, had begun to dominate him'.<sup>207</sup> He startles at the wind, and at the gardener;<sup>208</sup> a figure whose occupation is, perhaps, no coincidence in light of the garden metaphor. Gray's worst enemy is his own imagination:

Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination. It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen brood. In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the good rewarded. Success was given to the strong, failure thrust upon the weak.<sup>209</sup>

Echoing Dickens' *Hard Times*, Wilde depicts the artistic, creative imagination, at the threshold of the describable, as the foundation of moral value; for it is the source of both empathy and the fear of reprisal.

Although Cohen argues that James Vane, the embodiment of justice, is only included in the novel because conscience has failed, it can also be argued that this character is included to show that even when the individual escapes justice, they cannot escape themselves. For even when James Vane is shot and removed as a threat, and Gray '...knew he was safe',<sup>210</sup> his relief proves momentary; for his imagination simply continues to 'dog the feet of sin'. Taken far enough, it is not difficult to see how this use of imagination could even create belief in providence, with Gray's view of the world through the lenses of Hell creating fear of reprisal around every corner. It is fitting that imagination should be represented by an artwork, the symbol of imaginative creativity, and therefore that which Gray seeks to destroy: 'He looked round, and saw the knife... As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant'.<sup>211</sup> The servants hear a cry and a crash and rush to the room, only to find a '...withered, wrinkled, and loathsome...' <sup>212</sup> corpse with a knife in his heart, and a beautiful portrait staring

serenely over him. In the end, art remains long and life remains short, and the portrait – ‘and all that that meant’ – proves to have absolved Gray of nothing.

### ***On Psychology***

The limits of language in describing experience without reference to an essentialist, divinely designed self that is independent of physical determinism, where every impulse to do good is attributed to that self and every impulse to do ill is attributed to the physical body, can also lead to the survival of belief in both the moral and intellectual necessity of dualism and libertarianism. These limits can inhibit a practical ‘Religion of Humanity’, like that of Arnold, Eliot, or Pater, that attempts to eschew the language of design; while at the same time affirming the role of the creative imagination, at the threshold of the describable, as the safeguard of moral and existential value.

The alternative point of view can also be argued, with Wilde’s moral that ‘all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment’ applying even if determinism *is* true, and the existence of the soul had no bearing on the matter one way or the other. Just as the portrait does not prevent all the consequences of sin, neither would determinism; and this moral could itself be a determinant influencing the reader’s thoughts and actions. If ‘all the world’s a stage’, then Gray simply had an unfortunate deterministic life-script. He could not have chosen to have a shallow, naïve, impressionable mind susceptible to Wotton’s influence, for no one can choose their wants, or what they want to want. Genes, environment, or both, gave rise to it. Acknowledgement of this could even have a positive effect on morality. Much like the change of attitude that an individual might have towards a serial killer if it was learned that that killer had suffered a brain tumour that had compelled them to do what they did, if the reader feels more empathy for either Wotton or Gray for knowing that they were compelled by determinants, it is because those determinants are named, described, and known. It is only when determinants are unknown, barred by the limits of language, that actions are attributed to free will, leading to individuals being described simply as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. This view need not mean that the individual should escape moral and political justice. Fischer has argued that moral responsibility might not require the ability to have acted otherwise,<sup>213</sup> but it can be further contended that the absence of this ability simply means that the focus of justice should be restraint

and rehabilitation as opposed to revenge and retribution. This, it can be said, is a focus that is more moral – and more in line with many of the world’s religions – in any case. Some concept of free will may indeed remain necessary to make sense of moral and political freedoms; and towards this end, the Compatibilist project of reconciling determinism and free will, by reconceiving the latter as *freedom from the will of others*, might suffice.<sup>214</sup> Pater’s humanistic religion of the ‘moment’ may be interpreted less extremely, negotiating a middle-way between ‘all excess’ and ‘all renunciation’.

Yet as long as the limits of language in describing the self without some measure of essentialism and design exist, issues surrounding descriptions of that self without a soul endowed with free will may persist also; assisting the continuation of cataphatic belief in some form or another regardless of what can, or cannot, be known.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

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- <sup>2</sup> Auguste Comte, in *Critical Theory*, by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 303.
- <sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, in *The Alexander Text of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Ackroyd, 1951 (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 289.
- <sup>4</sup> Elliott Sober, *Core Questions in Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), p. 308.
- <sup>5</sup> P. L. Luisi, 'Contingency and Determinism', *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 361.1807 (2003), 1141-1147.
- <sup>6</sup> David Hume, in Sober, pp. 317-318.
- <sup>7</sup> Heather Seagroatt, 'Hard Science, Soft Psychology, and Amorphous Art in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 38.4 (1998), 741.
- <sup>8</sup> James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 231-232.
- <sup>9</sup> For the debate in contemporary form, see: Gary Watson, *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael S. McKenna, 'The Limits of Evil and the Role of Moral Address: A Defense of Strawsonian Compatibilism', *The Journal of Ethics*, 2.2 (1998), 123-142.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter Atkins, *Galileo's Finger: The Ten Great Ideas of Science* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 231.
- <sup>11</sup> Sober, p. 310.
- <sup>12</sup> Christine Ferguson, 'Decadence as Scientific Fulfilment', *PMLA*, 117.3 (2002), 465-478.
- <sup>13</sup> Laurel Brake, 'The Renaissance: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>14</sup> Brake, [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>15</sup> Paul Barolsky, 'Walter Pater's Renaissance', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 58.2 (1982), 208-220.
- <sup>16</sup> Walter Pater, 'The Genius of Plato', *Contemporary Review*, 61 (1892), 249-261.
- <sup>17</sup> Nathan A. Scott Jr., 'Pater's Imperative – To Dwell Poetically', *New Literary History*, 15.1 (1983), 93-118.
- <sup>18</sup> Scott, 93-118.
- <sup>19</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1854 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, 1861 (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 14.
- <sup>21</sup> Patrick J. Callahan, 'Frankenstein, Bacon and the "Two Truths"', *Extrapolation*, 14.1 (1972), 39-48.
- <sup>22</sup> Ian Fletcher, 'Walter Pater: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>23</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Henry Weinfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 171.
- <sup>24</sup> Weinfeld, p. 194.
- <sup>25</sup> William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1996), p. 217.
- <sup>26</sup> Carl Woodring, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
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- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798 (Boston: IndyPublish, 2002), p. 16.
- <sup>29</sup> Walter Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, 1873 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 150.
- <sup>30</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 150.
- <sup>31</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 150.
- <sup>32</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>33</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>34</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>35</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.

- <sup>36</sup> Fletcher, [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>37</sup> John J. Conlon, 'Walter Pater and the Art of Misrepresentation', *Annals of Scholarship*, 7.2 (1990), 165-179.
- <sup>38</sup> Pater, 'Preface', in *The Renaissance*, p. xix.
- <sup>39</sup> Renes Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, 1641 (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), p. 24.
- <sup>40</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>42</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 151.
- <sup>43</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, pp. 151-152.
- <sup>44</sup> Eliot, p. 118.
- <sup>45</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 152.
- <sup>46</sup> William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', 1803, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 69.
- <sup>47</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850, in Bloom and Trilling, p. 223.
- <sup>48</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 44.
- <sup>49</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words*, 1850, in 'Hard Times: Fancy as Practice', by Christopher Barnes, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 34 (2004), 233-258.
- <sup>50</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, in Gerald L. Bruns, "'The Lesser Faith": Hope and Reversal in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77 (1978), 247-264.
- <sup>51</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Nora Barlow, 1887 (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958), pp. 75-76.
- <sup>52</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna*, 1852, in *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 60.
- <sup>53</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 152.
- <sup>54</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 152.
- <sup>55</sup> Hippocrates, in Gary Saul Morson, *The Words of Others: From Quotations to Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 86.
- <sup>56</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 152.
- <sup>57</sup> John Martin Fischer, 'Epicureanism about Death and Immortality', *The Journal of Ethics*, 10.4 (2006), 355-381. The Epicurean view of death also usually involves debates about the well-known view given by Epicurus himself:

Death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.

Epicurus, in David B. Hershenov, 'A More Palatable Epicureanism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 44.2 (2007), 171-180. The standard objection, of course, is that the Epicurean view of death renders murder morally unproblematic. But Hershenov contends that this criticism confuses the distinction between death as an *event* and death as a *state*; the former of which is bad, but the latter of which Epicurus was actually writing about. Yet debate continues over this view.

- <sup>58</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 152.
- <sup>59</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 153.
- <sup>60</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 153.
- <sup>61</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 153.
- <sup>62</sup> Romans 7:20, *King James Bible* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 1739.
- <sup>63</sup> Matthew 26:41, p. 1584.
- <sup>64</sup> Robert Mighall, 'Diagnosing Jekyll: The Scientific Context to Dr Jekyll's Experiment and Mr Hyde's Embodiment,' in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. 151.
- <sup>65</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (Wellington: Montclair, N. J., Patterson Smith, 1972).
- <sup>66</sup> Gerald Levin, 'A Short Account of Freud's Ideas', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>67</sup> Stevenson, p. 55.
- <sup>68</sup> Stevenson, p. 16.

- <sup>69</sup> Stevenson, p. 42.
- <sup>70</sup> Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance*, p. 150.
- <sup>71</sup> Ian Fletcher, 'Walter (Horatio) Pater', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>72</sup> Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005).
- <sup>73</sup> A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral* (London: Abacus Books, 1999), p. 267.
- <sup>74</sup> Naomi Wood, 'Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty, and Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales', *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, 16.2 (2002), 156-170.
- <sup>75</sup> Donald H. Ericksen, 'Chapter 5: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>76</sup> John M. L. Drew, 'Introduction', in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde (Ware: Wordsworth's Classics, 1992), p. xviii. Drew does caution that while Wilde's comment is of interest to critics, in '...his first letter to the editor of the St. James Gazette... there is no suggestion that Wilde saw in them any positive aspects of himself or his public image'. Yet Drew further adds: 'Such inconsistencies are not accidental, however: they are bound up in Wilde's anti-essentialist conception of character/identity as something superficial and plastic'. What may be said, then, is that Wilde's comment was at least true for the moment in which he said it.
- <sup>77</sup> Richard Gibson, 'Artist of the Portrait', *Books and Culture*, 17.4 (2011), 35.
- <sup>78</sup> Michael Buma, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray, or, The Embarrassing Orthodoxy of Oscar Wilde', *Victorian Newsletter*, 107 (2005), 18.
- <sup>79</sup> Buma, 18.
- <sup>80</sup> Oscar Wilde, in Buma, 18.
- <sup>81</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. xiii.
- <sup>82</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Plays of Oscar Wilde*, 1891 (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p. 133.
- <sup>83</sup> Buma, p. 18.
- <sup>84</sup> Debora Hill, 'Oscar Wilde: Overview', in *Gay and Lesbian Biography*, ed. by Michael J. Tyrkus and Michael Bronski (Detroit: St. James Press, 1997), p. 112.
- <sup>85</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, in Robert Phillips, 'Overview of an Extraordinary Mind', *Commonweal*, 108.15 (1981), 475-476.
- <sup>86</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, 1891 (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 130.
- <sup>87</sup> Oscar Wilde, in Sophia Andres, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 4.
- <sup>88</sup> Joseph Bristow, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray: The 1890 and 1891 Texts*, by Oscar Wilde, 1890-1891 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- <sup>89</sup> Maureen Moran, 'OUP's Dorian Gray', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 49.3 (2006), 326.
- <sup>90</sup> Philip K. Cohen, *The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1978) pp. 123-127.
- <sup>91</sup> David A. Upchurch, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>92</sup> Seagroatt, 741.
- <sup>93</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 94.
- <sup>94</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 57.
- <sup>95</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 56.
- <sup>96</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 12.
- <sup>97</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 55.
- <sup>98</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 57.
- <sup>99</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 28.
- <sup>100</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 56.
- <sup>101</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 215.
- <sup>102</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 216.
- <sup>103</sup> Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings*, 1905 (Ware: Wordsworth's Classics, 1999), p. 73.
- <sup>104</sup> Ericksen, [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>105</sup> Ericksen, [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>106</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 97.
- <sup>107</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 17.

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- <sup>108</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>109</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 6.
- <sup>110</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667 (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 9.
- <sup>111</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 217.
- <sup>112</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 35.
- <sup>113</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 38.
- <sup>114</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 39-40.
- <sup>115</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 47-48.
- <sup>116</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 48.
- <sup>117</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 38.
- <sup>118</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 175.
- <sup>119</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 39.
- <sup>120</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 76.
- <sup>121</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 16.
- <sup>122</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 4.
- <sup>123</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*, 1891 (New York: Mondial, 2007), p. 16.
- <sup>124</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 2.
- <sup>125</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 10.
- <sup>127</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 15.
- <sup>128</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 10.
- <sup>129</sup> Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*, p. 32.
- <sup>130</sup> Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 84.
- <sup>131</sup> Dickens, p. 3.
- <sup>132</sup> Plato, 'Philebus', in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 438.
- <sup>133</sup> Oscar Wilde, in *The Wit and Wisdom of Oscar Wilde*, by Ralph Keyes (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 11.
- <sup>134</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York, Toronto: Random House, 1965).
- <sup>135</sup> Thomas Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 484.
- <sup>136</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 10.
- <sup>137</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 11.
- <sup>138</sup> Steven Marcus, 'He Resisted Everything Except Temptation', *The New York Times Book Review*, 17 November 1985, p. 7.
- <sup>139</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. xiii.
- <sup>140</sup> Elana Gomel, 'Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the (Un)death of the Author', *Narrative*, 12.1 (2004), 74-92.
- <sup>141</sup> Gibson, p. 35.
- <sup>142</sup> Christopher Craft, 'Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', *Representations*, 91.1 (2005), 109-136.
- <sup>143</sup> Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 46.
- <sup>144</sup> Julian Mitchell, 'The Aesthete's Missionary Position', *Spectator*, 290 (2002), p. 62.
- <sup>145</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 3.
- <sup>146</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 3.
- <sup>147</sup> John Keats, *Lamia*, 1819, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Duncun Wu (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 1078.
- <sup>148</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 11.
- <sup>149</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 13.
- <sup>150</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 13.
- <sup>151</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 18.
- <sup>152</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 18.
- <sup>153</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 18.
- <sup>154</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 18.
- <sup>155</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 20.
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- <sup>157</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 21.
- <sup>158</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 22.
- <sup>159</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 24.
- <sup>160</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 25.
- <sup>161</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 55.
- <sup>162</sup> Dominic Manganiello, 'Ethics and Aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 9.2 (1983), 25-33.
- <sup>163</sup> Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Basingtoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 110-114.
- <sup>164</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Christabel', in Bloom and Trilling, p. 257.
- <sup>165</sup> John Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', in Bloom and Trilling, p. 524.
- <sup>166</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 125.
- <sup>167</sup> Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, p. 289.
- <sup>168</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 84.
- <sup>169</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 87.
- <sup>170</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 89.
- <sup>171</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 89.
- <sup>172</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 220.
- <sup>173</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 92.
- <sup>174</sup> Carolyn Lesjak, 'Oscar Wilde and the Art/Work of Atoms', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 43.1 (2010), 1.
- <sup>175</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 88.
- <sup>176</sup> Thomas Huxley, in O. J. Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 7.
- <sup>177</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 96.
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- <sup>179</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 97.
- <sup>180</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 102.
- <sup>181</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 102.
- <sup>182</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 127.
- <sup>183</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 138.
- <sup>184</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 152.
- <sup>185</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 154.
- <sup>186</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 152-153.
- <sup>187</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 154.
- <sup>188</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 155.
- <sup>189</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 182.
- <sup>190</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 179-183.
- <sup>191</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 184.
- <sup>192</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 188.
- <sup>193</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 153.
- <sup>194</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 86.
- <sup>195</sup> The Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness at Work* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), pp. 143-144.
- <sup>196</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 182-183.
- <sup>197</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 183.
- <sup>198</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 183.
- <sup>199</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 183.
- <sup>200</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, pp. 184-185.
- <sup>201</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 186.
- <sup>202</sup> Wilde, in Drew, p. xviii.
- <sup>203</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, Act II, Scene II, in Ackroyd, p. 1029.
- <sup>204</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 184.
- <sup>205</sup> Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 68.
- <sup>206</sup> Cohen, pp. 123-127.
- <sup>207</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 199.
- <sup>208</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 203.
- <sup>209</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 199.

<sup>210</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 208.

<sup>211</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 223.

<sup>212</sup> Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, p. 224.

<sup>213</sup> John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1994). Fischer's thesis has since been pushed more forcefully; see John Perry, 'Can't We All Just Be Compatibilists?: A Critical Study of John Martin Fischer's *My Way*', *The Journal of Ethics*, 12.2 (2008), 157-166.

<sup>214</sup> The degree to which individuals can truly be 'free' from the will of others – peers, family, colleagues, employers, or society at large – certainly does not escape its own hard questions. But whatever incremental freedom can be gained from the Compatibilist ideal might suffice for moral purposes.

## CONCLUSION

In 1914, at the close of the long-nineteenth century, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was supplanting Newton's conception of absolute space and time, which had taken the form of a universal clock wound by a cosmic clock-maker. The light of distant stars takes time to reach earth, so that the further an individual looks into space, the further they look back in time; therefore, 'space' and 'time' become one thing, 'space-time'. Einstein, far from accepting 'space-time' as absolute, reconceived of it as a fabric that can be warped and distorted through the drag wrought on it by any given mass. The heavier the mass to which an individual is in close proximity, or the heavier the mass created by an individual's speed of travel, the slower is that individual's passage through time relative to another. And so, gravity is explained as the effect of a very heavy mass (such as a planet or a star) warping space-time completely around itself, simultaneously giving that mass a spherical shape, keeping objects upon its surface, and capturing anything moving in a straight line through the nearby distorted space-time into circular orbit. If heavy enough, a mass can collapse under its own weight and not merely warp space-time but tear through it entirely, creating a black hole where space-time itself begins to unravel.<sup>1</sup> The key development to arise from this cosmology was Quantum Theory, which suggests a restoration of chance to the universe that renders its laws merely statistical rather than absolute.

Special Relativity (1905), General Relativity (1916), and Quantum Theory (1900-1925), which dispose of Newton's orderly universe that ran upon absolute laws, appeared contemporaneously with the outbreak of the First World War, which dampened the hopes of similarly orderly grand narratives of historical progress, through a vivid demonstration of the dark side of technological innovation. Certainly, T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) *The Waste Land* (1922)<sup>2</sup> epitomises the disruption and fragmentation of linear thought and form. As physicist Lee Smolin suggests, the new cosmology parallels changes in the culture at large:

I do think that there are connections between the kinds of ideas that those of us who work on cosmology are thinking about and the ideas that one hears now being spoken about in philosophy, art, theology, and political and social theory... Perhaps not surprisingly, we are all, in one way or another, trying to understand what it means to construct

a description of a complete universe, from the inside, without reference either to fixed external structures, a single fixed point of view, or absolute imperatives. In the words of painter Donna Moylan, we are all trying to construct cosmologies of survival.<sup>3</sup>

It is this very shift in the culture to which religion had had to either evolve to adapt, or resist. At the beginning of the long-nineteenth century, religion had dominated both the scientific realm of fact, as well as the realm of value. It then came under criticism in the scientific domain – from philosophy, geology, biology, anthropology, and psychology – for claims to doctrinal absolutism, literalism and inerrancy in regard to fact. Yet, as Mark Knight and Emma Mason note, only the authority of the Established Church had declined; religion itself remained.<sup>4</sup>

As this thesis has demonstrated, the survival of doctrinal and cataphatic religion was assisted by the limits of language in describing phenomena without design. These limits could have been formed by the evolution of language itself, which had only evolved to describe time on the scale of years and decades, in which the only complex forms to arise were indeed those of design; human design. This was aided by the fact that fixed, essentialist distinctions, implied by words, names, and labels, created the discourses wherein social and power relations were described in terms of essentialist distinctions of ‘I’ versus ‘other’, ‘us’ versus ‘them’, this ‘race’, ‘nation’, or ‘species’ versus that; which also happened to better support Pope’s ‘Great Chain of Being’<sup>5</sup>, with its pro-authority discourse positing top-down hierarchy as necessary for natural and moral order, than the alternative of non-essentialist Darwinian gradualism. This explains Paine’s and Paley’s attribution of design to nature, Rousseau’s attribution of design to the transcendent experience itself, and Wordsworth’s attribution of design to the combination of nature and self-transcendence. It explains what Lyell combated in the form of young-earth geology – a more manageable length of time for language to describe – which subsequently requires design to explain geological formations. It explains why Tennyson despaired at the prospect of attempting to describe moral and existential value without a goal, teleology or purpose attributable to design, why Darwin used the language of design, and why Darwinism itself was confused with design. It even explains why descriptions of the self in terms of an essentialist, divinely designed soul, endowed with

libertarian free will, prevailed in the minds of Walter Pater's and Oscar Wilde's critics. With everything of moral and existential value being attributed to design, the belief that any scientific description devoid of design would entail an immoral world, seems to have been assured.

As this thesis has also demonstrated, the survival of practical and apophatic religion was assisted by the limits of language in the context of a discourse that defined religion's role as values dependent on creative acts, rather than discovered or revealed facts that could conflict with science; so that J. S. Haldane, by 1927, would comment that '...there is no real connection between religion and the belief in supernatural events of any sort or kind'.<sup>6</sup> Einstein's definition of 'religion' encapsulates the manner of its survival:

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed... To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness.<sup>7</sup>

It was in the context of this definition of religion that Einstein delivered his famous line: 'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind'.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, at the heart of religious movements during Britain's long-nineteenth century is the 'experience of the mysterious' beyond what humanity's 'dull faculties' – including language – have evolved to adequately describe. It entails the transcendence of words, names, and labels, and therefore the linguistic and essentialist '...separation of self from other',<sup>9</sup> the original act of alienation from which so much anxiety, envy, greed, and hate arises. This is the source of Blake's '...eternity in an hour',<sup>10</sup> Wordsworth's '...spots of time',<sup>11</sup> Carlyle's '...dynamic...'<sup>12</sup> religion, Dickens' imaginative 'fancy',<sup>13</sup> Tennyson's experience of '...what is highest in us',<sup>14</sup> Darwin's '...sense of sublimity',<sup>15</sup> Eliot's 'Religion of Humanity',<sup>16</sup> and Pater's experience of the '...moment'.<sup>17</sup> These limits also explain how reactions to science can still range from Heidegger's 'wonder that things *are*',<sup>18</sup> as the inspiration of all science and philosophy, to Keats' antipathy to science through the fear that describing phenomena will reduce them to '...the

dull catalogue of common things'.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of particular belief, the transcendent experience became the basis of creating moral and existential value, whether in the face of social conditions such as those of the Industrial Revolution, or the human condition more generally. In such a view of religion, values may no longer be said to be absolute and imposed from without, yet it is precisely because values are created by the individual that their values can be said to be more genuinely their own.

The debate about science and religion might be improved by recognising the limits of language, which can be achieved by attempting to identify their presence in all discourse. Doing so in every respect is outside the scope of this thesis, as there are undoubtedly many more lines of inquiry into the limits of language beyond Britain's long-nineteenth century. But it is in this sense that individuals can endeavour, as far as possible, to open '...the doors of perception'.<sup>20</sup>

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**NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION**

- <sup>1</sup> Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, 1916, trans. by Robert W. Lawson (London: Really Simple Media, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922, ed. by Michael North, 1<sup>st</sup> edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> Lee Smolin, *The Life of the Cosmos* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 295-296.
- <sup>4</sup> Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth Century Religion and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man and Other Poems*, 1734 (Philadelphia: Empire Books, 2012), p. 4; p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup> J. S. Haldane, 'The Sciences and Religion', 1927, in *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, by Stephen Jay Gould (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 91.
- <sup>7</sup> Albert Einstein, in 'Einstein on Religion', by Donald A. Crosby, *The Midwest Quarterly*, 35.2 (1994), 186.
- <sup>8</sup> Albert Einstein, 'Science and Religion', in *Einstein and Religion: Physics and Theology*, by Max Jammer (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 135.
- <sup>9</sup> Carl Woodring, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood: Overview', in *Literature Resource Centre*, updated 2013, <<http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>> [accessed 17 January 2013].
- <sup>10</sup> William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', 1803, in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 69.
- <sup>11</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850, in Bloom and Trilling, p. 223.
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', 1829, in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. by G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 44.
- <sup>13</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words*, in 'Hard Times: Fancy as Practice', by Christopher Barnes, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 34 (2004), 233-258.
- <sup>14</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, in 'The Lesser Faith': Hope and Reversal in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', by Gerald L. Bruns, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 77 (1978), 247-264.
- <sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, 1887, ed. by Nora Barlow (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958), pp. 75-76.
- <sup>16</sup> Auguste Comte, in *Critical Theory*, by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 303.
- <sup>17</sup> Walter Pater, 'Conclusion', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, 1873 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 152.
- <sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, in Macey, p. 177.
- <sup>19</sup> John Keats, *Lamia*, 1819, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Duncun Wu (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 1078.
- <sup>20</sup> William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1789-1805, in Bloom and Trilling, p. 40.

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