

“Perplext in Faith”

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*Essays on Victorian Beliefs
and Doubts*

Edited by

Alisa Clapp-Itnyre
and Julie Melnyk

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
Introduction	1
Julie Melnyk and Alisa Clapp-Itnyre	
Part I: Beliefs, Doubts, and Victorian Society	
“All the strange facts”: Alfred Russel Wallace’s Spiritualism and Evolutionary Thought.....	6
Thomas Prasch, Washburn University	
Armageddon at Sebastopol: The Crimean War and Biblical Prophecy in Mid-Victorian Britain.....	39
Eric Michael Reisenauer, University of South Carolina Sumter	
Reforming Society: Missionary and Bands of Hope Hymns for Children	75
Alisa Clapp-Itnyre, Indiana University East	
Part II: Victorian Religious Diversity	
Faith and the Feminine in Victorian Christianity	116
Julie Melnyk, University of Missouri	
Jewish Angel in the House: Domesticity and Feminine Identity in Grace Aguilar’s <i>The Women of Israel</i>	132
Lindsay Dearinger, University of Central Oklahoma	
“Public Acts of Faith and Devotion”: Pilgrimages in Late Nineteenth- Century England and Scotland	149
Katherine Haldane Grenier, The Citadel	

Variations on the Grand Tour: Musical Seduction and Catholic Communion in the Italian Travel Diaries of Lady Anne Noel Blunt, 1853-4.....	168
Michelle Meinhart, Martin Methodist College	
For Isis and England: The Golden Dawn as a Social Network.....	209
Sharon E. Cogdill, St. Cloud State University	
Part III: Faith, Doubt, and Victorian Novelists	
Wrestling with their Father's Faith: Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Respond to Patrick Brontë's Christianity	236
Christine A. Colón, Wheaton College	
Dickens's <i>The Life of Our Lord</i> and the Problem of Jesus	268
Jessica Ann Hughes, University of Notre Dame	
Mode of Belief or Evidence of Doubt? George Eliot and the "Religion of Favourable Chance"	304
Robert C. Koepf, Illinois College	
Contributors	327
Index.....	330

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure Fig. 3.1. Heber's "From Greenland's icy mountains" in the <i>Methodist Sunday-School Hymn- and Tune-Book</i> (1879).....	82
Figure 3-2 Band of Hope fête, Aston Park, <i>Illustrated London News</i> , Sept. 4, 1858	92
Figure 8-1 Gephi Graph of Organization of the Golden Dawn	225
Figure 11-1 Edward Burne-Jones, <i>The Wheel of Fortune</i>	315
Figure 11-2 Karl Böker, <i>The Wheel of Fortune</i> , <i>Illustrated London News</i> , April 22, 1876	316
Figure 11-3 Jean Beraud, <i>The Casino at Monte Carlo</i> (1889).....	317
Figure 11-4 H. Winthrop Peirce, <i>Gwendolen at the Gaming Table</i> (1888).....	322

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3-1 Most frequently appearing songs or hymns in twelve British Band of Hope song books, 1860-1899	97
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INTRODUCTION

JULIE MELNYK AND ALISA CLAPP-ITNYRE

...I know not: one indeed I knew
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touch'd a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true;

Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds...
—*In Memoriam A. H. H* 96 (1833)

Alfred Lord Tennyson may have penned these words but the sentiment represents the struggles and concerns of many Victorians of the era who were “perplext in faith” and professed “honest doubt”— even as many clung to the creeds. In this interdisciplinary collection of essays by historians and literary scholars, we hope to explore some previously unrecognized aspects of religious belief and doubt in the Victorian period and contribute to a more nuanced view of Victorian religious life and thought.

While an earlier generation of scholars tended to downplay the significance of religion for the Victorian era, in the last twenty years there has been a growing recognition in academia and beyond of the centrality of religious beliefs to any adequate understanding of Victorian literature and society. The Bible and its importance in Victorian culture and literature has been established by a spate of recent works, including Timothy Larsen’s *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford UP 2011), Michael Wheeler’s *St. John and the Victorians* (Cambridge UP 2012), and Susan Colon’s *Victorian Parables* (Bloomsbury 2012). The work of Cynthia Scheinberg, among others, has thrown new light on Victorian Judaism and Jewish literature. Historians and literary critics continue to debate the role of women in Victorian religion, in works such as *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Routledge 2010), edited by historians Jacqueline

DeVries and Sue Morgan, and in the forthcoming multivolume *Cultural History of Women in Christianity*, edited by Lisa Isherwood and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Finally, the “secularisation hypothesis,” which underlies many treatments of Victorian doubt, has been problematized by works such as Callum Brown’s *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, second edition (Routledge 2009) and Timothy Larsen’s *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century* (Oxford UP 2008). As this recent work repeatedly testifies, Victorians’ attitudes toward gender, culture, education, and geopolitics were all influenced by their religious beliefs.

In April of 2013 the Midwest Victorian Studies Association sponsored a conference in Cleveland, Ohio, entitled “Victorian Faith/Victorian Doubt” to explore issues concerned with the significance and influence of Victorian religion and its crises. An interdisciplinary group of scholars—historians, art and music historians, and literary critics—gathered to present their work on many aspects of Victorian religious life and belief. This collection grew out of the conference and, like the conference itself, reflects the great diversity of religious beliefs and doubts in Victorian Britain, with essays on Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Unitarian, and Spiritualist topics. It also reflects the diversity of historical and literary sources that contribute to our understanding of Victorian faith and doubt, including journalism, hymns, paintings, travel writing, scientific papers, novels, and poetry.

The essays in Part I: Beliefs, Doubts, and Victorian Society explore the intersection of religious beliefs and doubts with important cultural and historical movements of the Victorian era. Historian Tom Prasch revisits the relation between science and religion in the career of evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace; Eric Reisenauer traces the influence of contemporary readings of the biblical book of Revelation on the popular understanding of the Crimean War; and, as part of her book-length study on children’s hymnody of the nineteenth century, Alisa Clapp-Itnyre examines the role that children and children’s hymns played in the missionary and temperance movements.

Part II registers the diversity of religious belief and practice in the period. Julie Melnyk traces how Christian religious beliefs interacted with ideas about gender and how those ideas, in turn, influenced Victorian women’s experience of faith and doubt, while Lindsay Dearinger explores the gender ideology of Jewish author Grace Aguilar. Two essays then examine aspects of Roman Catholic religious practice and the role of travel: Katherine Haldane Grenier writes about the revival of religious pilgrimage in the period, while Michelle Meinhart discusses the impact of

Roman Catholic musical traditions on a Protestant traveler in Europe. Finally, Sharon Cogdill deploys new techniques in digital humanities to uncover the network of relationships within the occult religious society Golden Dawn.

The final section, *Faith, Doubt, and Victorian Novelists*, looks at religious belief in the writing of major Victorian writers, with an exploration by Christine Colón of how their clergyman-father's beliefs affected religious expression in the writings of the three Brontë sisters; an analysis by Jessica Hughes of the figure of Jesus in Charles Dickens's *Life of Our Lord*; and a detailed discussion of George Eliot's ongoing critique of the Victorian faith in "Favorable Chance."

As a group, these essays confirm both the continuing importance of religious belief through the Victorian period and, despite the plurality of faiths across the period, the continuing dominance of English Protestantism, whether Anglican or Dissenting. But several of the essays explore aspects and nuances of Protestant faith not frequently investigated. One such uncharted region is the intersection of biblical prophecy and geo-political conflict, as Victorians, persuaded that Anglican Protestantism would save the world, came to see the events of the Crimean War as a Biblically-validated, ethnocentric confrontation. Discussion of women's role in religious life has a much longer history, with recent work focusing on women as the main agents of religious acculturation in Victorian society, but essays in this collection, which treat writers such as Emma Jane Worboise, Grace Aguilar, and Lady Anne Blunt, provide a more nuanced picture, probing how this idea is embodied in these women's works and lives. Other essays reveal how integral children were to Christian propagation, both as recipients and disseminators of the faith. Charles Dickens and Patrick Brontë both sought to pass on what they saw as the fundamental values of Christianity to the next generation: Dickens taught his own children in his unpublished *Life of Our Lord* while Brontë published morality tales to influence youth in his shire, though they seem also to have influenced his own daughters. But, in an unexpected reversal, children could also disseminate Christian messages intended to revitalize the adult world, for example through their singing of missionary and temperance hymns.

While Protestantism remained dominant, however, Victorian England was not a religiously-homogenous nation. Through the century, legal restrictions on non-Anglicans were gradually eliminated, and social tolerance gradually expanded, creating a pluralistic religious climate. This multiplicity of faiths brought non-Protestant religious viewpoints to the fore and into print during the era, though writers often still defined

themselves against and tried to explain themselves to the Protestant majority. For instance, a Jewish writer such as Grace Aguilar published fiction both supportive and critical of Jewish feminine ideals and sought to contextualize those ideals within the mainstream Protestant views. After the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850, British Catholics asserted their identity against the Protestant consensus, bringing back Catholic traditions of pilgrimage and highlighting their continuing links to transnational Catholic culture, including religious art and music. Finally, some belief systems remained far enough out of the mainstream that adherents joined together in semi-secret societies such as the Golden Dawn, presenting a more conventional face to their Protestant neighbors.

While much of the collection focuses on varieties of religious belief, religious doubt was also a significant element in the Victorian cultural landscape. The era's religious unsettlement fueled social and personal challenges to faith, including the spiritualism of evolutionist Alfred Russel Wallace. Many women, too, experienced religious doubt as an existential threat, a crisis that inspired novelists including Elizabeth Gaskell, Olive Schreiner, and Mary Arnold Ward. Even those, such as George Eliot, who accepted and even welcomed the loss of Christian faith, struggled with what would replace such foundational beliefs; in her novels, Eliot inveighs against a belief in Fortune or Chance as a secularized Providence and tries to rescue a Christian ethos from the ruins of Christian doctrine.

We hope this volume will be a significant contribution to the post-secularist scholarship on the Victorian period that has seen increasing interest in these topics over the last decade.

Part I

Beliefs, Doubts, and Victorian Society

“ALL THE STRANGE FACTS”: ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE’S SPIRITUALISM AND EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT

THOMAS PRASCH

Alfred Russel Wallace had already established himself as a naturalist (known in biological circles for his work on butterflies in both South America and East Asia), evolutionary thinker (most famously in the 1858 essay on natural selection that prodded Charles Darwin into finishing his *Origin of Species* [1859]), and ethnologist (with contributions to thought about races in the Malay Archipelago as well as about early human forms) when he turned his attention to Spiritualism in the mid-1860s; *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural* (1866) was his first published work suggesting the validity of Spiritualist beliefs and practices. There, after cataloging a range of spiritual manifestations (clairvoyance, “magnetic” experiments, apparitions, séances), Wallace asserted:

It appears then, that all the strange facts, denied by so many because they suppose them ‘supernatural,’ may be due to the agency of beings of a like mental nature to ourselves—who *are*, in fact, ourselves—but one step advanced on the long journey through eternity (45).¹

Wallace explicitly labeled his investigation, it will be noted, “scientific,” which was not atypical of the claims of Spiritualist writers in the period. For instance, Alex Owen, using Wallace and another evolutionary thinker, George John Romanes, as examples, notes:

Both Wallace and Romanes distanced themselves from scientific naturalism while retaining a commitment to the idea of a rational ‘scientific’ religion that constituted part of the appeal of the occult. Indeed, far from occultism abandoning the field to science, it consistently referred to scientific inquiry as part of its legitimate domain (36).²

But Wallace presented a somewhat special case, as codiscoverer of natural selection with solid credentials in the natural and social sciences.

Indeed, the methods of Wallace's first exploration of Spiritualism closely followed patterns familiar to any reader of nineteenth-century science. It can be compared with Wallace's sometime collaborator Charles Darwin, say, whose *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872)³ employed essentially the same structure: formulating a hypothesis, framing it against the literature (in this case, skeptical writing on the general category of "miracles"), countering obvious opponents to the position being advanced (the rejection of miracles by David Hume, John Tyndall, and William Lecky,⁴ here, in the place Charles Bell holds in *Expression*), expanding on the hypothesis (in the essay, by laying out the case to be proven—that "*intelligent beings may exist, capable of acting on matter, though they themselves are unrecognisable directly by our senses*" [4; italics in original]), suggesting a foundation for such an assumption in scientific speculation (conjectures about "etherial motion" [7] that, incidentally, place such "miracles" into the territory of "natural phenomena," since: "The nature of these acts is often such, that no cultivated mind can for a moment impute them to an infinite and supreme being" [7]), accumulating evidence (all those anecdotes), and reaching a conclusion: "The hypothesis of Spiritualism not only accounts for all the facts (and is the only one that does so), but it is further remarkable as being associated with a theory of a future state of being, which is the only one yet given to the world that can at all commend itself to the modern philosophical mind" (49). Case proven, to Wallace's satisfaction at least.

Wallace reached this position not long after his first experience with a séance, in 1865, and in the context of aggressive further investigation (including more séances) over the next year, although earlier interest in mesmerism and phrenology provided some of the groundwork for his interest.⁵ Over the course of the next decade, he would move from the sympathetic call for further investigation (the core argument of the 1866 pamphlet) to committed belief in Spiritualist phenomena, culminating with his "Defence of Modern Spiritualism" (1874). This was not a position shared by all of Wallace's fellow evolutionary thinkers. Huxley dismissed Wallace's pamphlet:

It may all be true ... but really I cannot get up any interest in the subject. I never cared for gossip, and disembodied gossip, such as these worthy ghosts supply... is not more interesting to me than any other" (Marchant 1916, 418).⁶

Joseph Hooker would later confess to Darwin: "Wallace has lost caste considerably ... by his adherence to Spiritualism" (qtd. in Shermer 2002, 274).

On the pamphlet itself, Darwin was silent, but his own distrust of Spiritualism is well documented. In an 1874 letter about a séance he attended, Darwin noted that “We had grand fun,” but also: “The Lord have mercy on us all, if we have to believe in such rubbish” (F. Darwin 1888, II: 364-65). We can presume Darwin remained unconvinced.

That Wallace believed that, even in his Spiritualist quests, he was continuing to pursue science points to the amorphous character of science itself in mid-Victorian Britain. The very training and background of prominent scientists of the era—both Darwin and Wallace among them—establishes the weakness of professionalization and the ambiguities over disciplinary boundaries in the period. Darwin, after all, joined on with the Beagle as a geologist, and Wallace (like Huxley) moved easily between biological work and the new social science of anthropology. As James Moore has pointed out, the very character of the debate over Wallace’s arguments underlined the ambiguities of science in the era. In answer to the question about Huxley vs. Wallace, “Which of them were being ‘scientific?’” Moore answers:

They *both* were, each according to his lights. Theirs was a dispute about what should *count* as science.... [Wallace’s] science included the super- or preternatural; Huxley’s denied its existence. Wallace saw himself as working on ‘*a new branch of Anthropology*'; Huxley remained loyal to Darwin’s. *Neither* anthropology, however, was seen as ‘scientific’ by older naturalists and the clergy. (Moore 2008, 364)

It is only in retrospect, from a later position in which the boundaries of science have been established more firmly, that it seems clear that Wallace’s position was on the losing side.

In 1869, Darwin, concerned about the direction of Wallace’s thought, wrote to Wallace: “I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child” (Marchant 1916, 197). But he was not, despite the claims some critics have made (see, for example, Dennet 1996, 67), talking about Wallace’s Spiritualism here. Rather, it was Wallace’s suggestion that natural selection could not entirely explain some aspects of specifically human evolution that prompted Darwin’s alarm. For Wallace, that assertion had something to do with his new interest in Spiritualism, as his letter responding to Darwin makes clear: “My opinions on the subject have been modified solely by the consideration of a series of remarkable phenomena, physical and mental” (Marchant 1916, 200). His rethinking of human evolution would come to dovetail, over the continued development of Wallace’s ideas in the 1870s and beyond, with his Spiritualist convictions, but it also followed his independent investigations into the

meaning of evolution for the human species, especially in relation to ideas about race.

And in this respect, disciplinary approaches, as much as ideas about spirits, determine the distinctions between Darwin's position and Wallace's. Anthropological investigations, in the specific context of the highly fraught debates about race and the antiquity of man in the mid-1860s, frame Wallace's work. As Peter Pels has noted: "To some extent, anthropology and Spiritualism shared a similar background," both rooted in phrenology, and both grounded in the thought of August Comte and Herbert Spencer (1995, 77)⁷; fieldwork, too, placed anthropologists into contact with alternative spiritual practices, and certainly played an explicit role in shaping Wallace's views.⁸ But beyond the connections between phrenology and Victorian anthropologists' obsession with crania, and beyond the place of fieldwork-observed "savage" rituals in the formulation of anthropological ideas about religion, it is, centrally, the issue of race, framed in developmental terms (with clearly demarcated rankings of races, always privileging whites, and a recurrent argument about the extinction of lower races) that shaped anthropological thought in the period, bridging the deep divides between polygenists and monogenists on the origin and antiquity of humans.⁹ Even as Wallace sought, in work on the antiquity of man from 1864 forward, to obviate the most extreme racial views of his era, he remained deeply involved in discussions of racial typology, firmly committed to notions of racial hierarchies that favored Europeans over "savage" races, and explicit in his endorsement of the view that lower races were doomed for extinction.¹⁰ For Darwin, in contrast, as Adrian Desmond and James Moore have so fully demonstrated in their magisterial *Darwin's Sacred Cause* (2009), a foundational anti-slavery discourse governed Darwin's extension of evolutionary theory to the case of humans. Not surprisingly, Darwin showed a deep distrust of "the Anthropologicals" (Desmond and Moore 2009, 332-357, 346-47; Browne 2002, 252-56), and he drew deeply different conclusions about human evolution.

Understanding the ways in which Wallace's Spiritualism aligns with his developing ideas about evolution requires, however, a full appreciation of the grounds: both the foundations of Wallace's belief and the trajectories of evolutionary thought in the period. Interfering with such an assessment has been the hostile dismissal of Wallace's position, both by his contemporaries and by more modern commentators. As Wallace's Spiritualist explorations became public knowledge after 1866, he faced mocking criticism from multiple sides in the evolutionary debates of the period. Thus, the London Anthropological Society's James Hunt, who had

already dismissed evolutionary approaches to the study of man (mostly for their firm commitment to monogenist ideas of human origin) as “wholly unwarranted either by logic or by facts” (Hunt 1866, 320), mocked: “But probably Mr. Wallace’s views have been communicated to him by some kind departed spirit, perhaps that of the ‘first man’” (Hunt 1867, 242). But Thomas Huxley, the other person attacked by Hunt in his assault on Darwinian ideas about man, was no kinder to Wallace; after (rather unfairly) lumping him in with “Darwin’s Critics,” he derisively remarked that even St. George Mivart “is more of an evolutionist than Mr. Wallace, because Mr. Wallace thinks it necessary to call in an intelligent agent—a sort of supernatural Sir John Sebright—to produce even the animal frame of man” (Huxley 1871a, 122).¹¹ As Malcolm Kottler has noted, of reviews of Wallace’s *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (1870), many “simply rejected outright his repugnant conclusions” and dealt with them through “*reductio ad absurdum* and ridicule” (Kottler 1874, 157, 158). And the pattern of derision continued throughout Wallace’s life. George Romanes, writing about Wallace in 1890, insisted on separating “the Wallace of Spiritualism and astrology, the Wallace of vaccination and the land-question, the Wallace of incapacity and absurdity”¹² from the still credible “Wallace of travel and observation, the Wallace of ingenuity and originality” (qtd. in Durant 1979, 32). In 1904, G. K. Chesterton labeled his Spiritualist convictions “fantastic, infantile, a laughing stock” (420).

If many of Wallace’s scientific contemporaries were uncomfortable with the drift of Wallace’s arguments from the mid-1860s forward, later evolutionary thinkers and historians, writing well after Spiritualism’s Victorian heyday and the consolidation of the neo-Darwinian synthesis, have often been even more dismissive. As James Moore has noted, Wallace’s Spiritualist beliefs underpinned the role he has played in the historiography: “he played the crank to Darwin’s correctness” (Moore 2008, 355). Some have treated it as an aberration, unrelated to Wallace’s continued contributions to evolutionary biology and anthropology. Miller Turner, for example, insists: “His most significant scientific articles and books displayed little or no trace of spiritualism” (1974, 94). Others take a more derisive view. H. Lewis McKinney, for example, resorted to a Jekyll/Hyde metaphor (while misremembering which is the doctor and which the monster) to explain Wallace’s Spiritualism: “the Jekyll side of his character has very deep roots,” McKinney argues, pointing to Wallace’s early “naïve” acceptance of Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) as proof (McKinney 1972, 138). John Durant asserts, of Wallace after 1870, “many scientists and intellectuals decided that, if not exactly insane, the brilliant naturalist was at the very

least of decidedly unsound frame of mind" (Durant 1979, 32). Derision continues to loom large in such analysis of Wallace's position.

Others seek to account for Spiritualist interests in biographical terms. Some imply that only loss and depression could explain Wallace's attraction to Spiritualism, as when Ross Slotten writes that Wallace penned his *Defence of Modern Spiritualism* (1874) at "certainly the darkest moment of his life" (Slotten 2004, 318), although the work came nearly a decade after Wallace's first pro-Spiritualist work. John Durant traces Wallace's scientific development to his "sense of alienation" from the scientific community, rooted in his lower-class identity and relative isolation (Durant 1979, 33). Such arguments dovetail, more or less explicitly, with the work of Alex Owen and Logie Barrow, which underline the radical working-class roots of much Victorian Spiritualism (Owen 1989, Barrow 1986). For others, Wallace's Spiritualism amounts to a character flaw, as when Michael Shermer diagnoses Wallace as having a "heretic personality" (Shermer 2001, ch. 7 or 2002 ch. 10),¹³ and asserts that his "temperament and personality drove him toward the temptation to transcend the Materialistic world" (201), or when Andrew Berry identifies Wallace as lacking "social empathy," arguing that "Wallace's openness to spiritualism—his gullibility on the subject—may have been exacerbated by the same lack of empathy" (Berry 2008, 61).¹⁴ Still others argue that Wallace never really was on board with Darwin, as when Daniel Dennett harrumphs that Wallace "never quite got the point" (Dennett 1996, 66) of natural selection, the theory he co-created. In a somewhat more sophisticated version of that argument, Stephen J. Gould has suggested that it was Wallace's "peculiarly rigid view of natural selection that led him, quite consistently, to reject it for the human mind," although he goes on to refer unequivocally to Wallace's "error on human intellect" (Gould 1980, 54, 55). Such are the costs of siding with history's losers, perhaps.

It is only within the last few decades that Wallace's position has been reassessed more sympathetically.¹⁵ First of all, this revaluation has come in the wake of a historical reappraisal of the place of Spiritualism in Victorian culture, which has insisted that we recognize how broadly Spiritualist influences ran in late Victorian Britain and along what axes, tracking, for instance, its gendered and class-based impact (Owen 1989, Barrow 1986) and its linkages with eugenic thought (Ferguson 2012).¹⁶ Second, such revision depends on the development of a more critical range of work in the history of science more willing to engage with the discredited pseudo-sciences of the age on their own terms rather than exclusively through the lens of their later rejection by the scientific academy. Thus, for example, Martin Fichman has used Wallace as "a

significant case study ... [of] how theism has affected the scientific thought" (Fichman 2001, 250). Peter Lamont has positioned Wallace's embrace of Spiritualism within a broader context of a crisis in scientific authority, linked to the growing divide between the direction of scientific thought and traditional religious belief (Lamont 2004). Peter Pels has moved toward understanding Wallace's Spiritualism on Wallace's own terms, insisting that "it might be more interesting to treat Wallace's occultism as science rather than religion" (Pels 1995, 86); Kottler similarly argues that "Spiritualism was, to Wallace, the science of the spiritual nature of man" (1974, 183). This approximates, as we have seen, Wallace's own understanding of it.

Recent revaluations have thus tended to underline the interconnections between different strands of Wallace's belief system. David Stack has linked both the occultist strand of Wallace's thought and his developing evolutionary ideas to foundational political commitments, evident most clearly in his advocacy for land reform:

land reform assumed a centrality in Wallace's thought in the 1860s as part of a package of ideas that including his developing social Darwinism [which Stack identifies in Wallace's embrace of Spencer] and his embrace of spiritualism (Stack 2008, 282).

Fichman similarly suggests that "Wallace viewed seemingly disparate domains, such as human evolution, spiritualism, land reform, and medical ideas about man's natural habitat, as interconnected" (Fichman 2008, 307). Charles Smith has insisted that we see the deeper roots of both Wallace's ideas about natural selection and his Spiritualism:

the fundamental principles of Wallace's approach to the study of man/nature had been set in his mind well before he finally stumped onto natural selection, and ... it is extremely difficult to believe that either his natural selection or spiritualism had any profound effect on re-directing them (Smith 2003-2006, 1:27).¹⁷

Whether commentators see Wallace's development in terms of a sequence of separate stages (as does Ted Benton, mapping out a three-phase chronology of his development [2008]), or as a single arc from a set of basic roots (the approach taken by Smith [2008 a and b, 2003-2006]), the point of such revaluations is clear: Wallace's Spiritualism, rather than being an anomalous aberration, was founded on a range of earlier beliefs (Owenite socialism, phrenology, Swedenborgian ideas, mesmerism), each

of which, if never quite mainstream ideas, had a place in Victorian ideologies.

Even with this fuller understanding, many contemporary writers insist on seeing Wallace's "conversion" to Spiritualism as a fundamental break from Darwinism. This follows a long line of critical commentary, going back at least to G. K. Chesterton, who asserted that Wallace "has been the leader of a revolution [which he identifies as the "Darwinian Movement"] and the leader of a counter revolution [which Chesterton labels "Psychical Research"]" (Chesterton 1904, 420). Robert Richards puts the words into Wallace's own mouth (without actually quoting him, for good reason): "Wallace forthrightly claimed that a conversion to spiritualism proximately caused his rejection of natural science as an adequate principle to explain human evolution" (1987, 181). Janet Browne writes that Wallace "backtracked on his commitment to natural selection" (2002, 317). Similarly, Moore, discussing Wallace's "parting with Darwin" and subsequent "ostracism," describes the passage that prompted Darwin's "murdered too completely" remark: "Now Wallace threatened worse—to backslide," and "Infanticide it was. The review was brutal" (Moore 2008, 364-365). Desmond and Moore list Wallace among the "defections" (1991, 571), and later insisted that, as Darwin moved forward to take account of man in evolutionary processes, "Wallace was now more hindrance than help" (2009, 357) because of his Spiritualist convictions. Kottler, although tracing the development of Wallace's thought more carefully, similarly concludes that he "was persuaded by his scientific as well as spiritual arguments against natural selection" (Kottler 1974, 192). Fichman insists that "Wallace's volte-face with respect to man was motivated primarily by his growing belief in spiritualism during the period 1865-1869" (Fichman 1981, 111).¹⁸ Gould similarly speaks of how Darwin was "aghast at Wallace's abrupt about-face at the finish line itself" (1980, 53). Søren Løvtrup wonders: "How can we explain Wallace's 'treason' to the cause of 'Darwinism'?" (1987, 228). But such views misunderstand Wallace's position on at least two grounds: both in terms of his understanding of natural selection and the Darwinian movement, and in terms of the development of evolutionary thought in relationship to man.

Most centrally, the premise that Wallace departed from Darwin ignores the trajectory of the development of evolutionary thought, especially between 1864 and 1871 (when Darwin published *Descent*). The central argument that Wallace diverged from Darwin ignores the inconvenient fact that there was not yet a Darwin from which to diverge when it came to the question of human evolution. Over the course of the 1860s, both Darwin and Wallace were beginning to explore the meaning of natural

selection for humans. They came to differ, especially on the issue of the evolution of higher faculties and about sexual selection, but Wallace published his own “divergent” view in 1870, before *Descent*. Critics take Darwinian thought as a composite, completed whole in assessing Wallace’s “heresy” in relation to it, but at the time it was an evolving, still unfinished project, like Wallace’s. And indeed, Wallace had been excavating the territory for a full half decade before Darwin established his place in the field.

Wallace himself certainly recognized his divergence with Darwin, over a number of topics (higher powers and higher human faculties, sexual selection and female choice, the exact dynamics of mimicry, sterility and the related issue of group evolution¹⁹), but he also saw himself as a firm proponent of Darwin’s thought. He wrote to Darwin in November 1870—after the publication of his *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (with its closing essay making clear his beliefs on the limits of natural selection in relation to man)—“I am doing nothing just now but writing articles and putting down anti-Darwinians” (Marchant 1916, 209). And certainly any review of Wallace’s output in these years confirms the amount of work he was generating in defense of Darwin’s theory. Clearly, too, Wallace still considered himself a part of the fold when, in 1889, he titled a collection of his essays on evolution *Darwinism*, or when, in *A World of Life*, he proclaimed of criticisms of Darwin’s work: “Most of these objections have been shown to be fallacious” (1910, 271). As Wallace wrote to Darwin in that same letter of 1870, “We still agree, I am sure, on nineteen points out of twenty” (Marchant 1916, 209). For Wallace, this was less a matter of full break than of minor difference.

The same could be said of Darwin, too. Certainly they differed, sometimes significantly. As Darwin put it in 1870, of Wallace’s “remarks on Man”: “As you expected, I differ grievously from you, and I am very sorry for it” (Marchant 1916, 199). But they also continued to correspond; their last letters were exchanged in 1881, just the year before Darwin’s death.²⁰ Darwin continued to appreciate Wallace’s contributions in defense of their theory, from his “crushing review” (Marchant 1916, 223) in *Nature*, “The Last Attack on Darwinism” (Wallace 1872c), to his assault on Saint George Mivart’s critique (Wallace 1876b), of which he wrote: “I thank you most cordially for your generous defence of me against Mr. Mivart” (Marchant 1916, 238). Darwin had high praise for Wallace’s *Island Life* (1878): “It is quite excellent, and seems to me the best book which you have ever published” (Marchant 1916, 252). And of Wallace’s re-engagement with the issue of speciation in “Origin of Species and Genera” (Wallace 1880), Darwin insisted: “you must allow me to express

my lively admiration of your paper" (Marchant 1916, 249). Such expressions of praise seem more than merely polite.

As Darwin was preparing *Descent of Man*, the volume which would air his differences with Wallace most fully, he worried in a letter to Wallace: "I hope to God there is nothing disagreeable to you in Vol. II., and that I have spoken fairly of your views" (Marchant 1916, 211). As Ross Slotten points out, in *Descent*, Darwin "made more references to Wallace's views than to those of any other source." Slotten misrepresents the case, however, when he goes on to argue: "This was not mere flattery, however. Darwin countered every issue that Wallace had addressed" (Slotten 2004, 289). A careful examination of references to Wallace in *Descent* suggests, in addition to notable difference—over the utility of natural selection for explaining higher faculties (855) and, most extensively, over sexual selection (1108 ff.)—a broad range of agreement, including not just points about butterflies and observations of nature, but also over Wallace's early arguments about ancient man (detailed below; in *Descent*, 778) and his framing of the question of natural selection (978). The following year, Darwin considered employing Wallace to do editing and corrections for a new edition of *Descent* (Marchant 1916, 231,2), a striking sign of Darwin's confidence in Wallace's work (eventually, Darwin's son George would be recruited to do the job). And Darwin worked assiduously to ensure Wallace's financial security by getting him a Crown pension in 1881 (Desmond and Moore 1991, 646-48); the next year, Wallace would be a pallbearer at Darwin's funeral.

With this as context, then, it is worth recalling the broader dimensions of Wallace's growing interest in Spiritualism, less in biographical terms than within the framework of the developing arguments of evolutionary thought and the racial politics of the 1860s. Both Wallace and Darwin had carefully elided the application of evolutionary principles to humans in their initial public revelation of natural selection in 1858-59. Both were beginning to fill in that hole during the following decade, and again, Wallace got there first, with his 1864 work on human races; indeed, it has regularly been argued that Wallace's work, in this case as in that of *Origin*, pushed Darwin to publish his own account (Schwarz 1984; Desmond and Moore 2009, 358-60).²¹ Their explorations in the 1860s culminated in works that firmly situated man within an evolutionary framework: Wallace's *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (1870) and Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871), along with its book-length postscript *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* the next year. The divergence between their positions, despite their shared commitment to natural selection as a foundational mechanism, is clear in these works, and

they are separated by more than just Spiritualism (and Wallace's associated claims about the limits of natural selection as an explanatory mechanism); in particular, in terms of scientific ideas, Wallace also rejected Darwin's account of sexual selection, both insofar as it conflicted with his own accounts of animal mimicry and because he was unconvinced by Darwin's arguments on behalf of female choice in mate selection. For Wallace, the 1860s was also the decade during which he got involved with the fraught world of London's battling anthropological associations (it was the decade, too, of the great struggle between monogenists and polygenists over human origins), as he began to work through the implications of evolution for man. Darwin, as noted, was engaged in the latter project at the same time, and once again Wallace was in the lead in terms of readying material to present to the public.

The turn to human evolution presented special, but essentially parallel, challenges to Wallace and Darwin. First, and most obviously, talking directly about humans in an evolutionary framework presented a more foundational challenge to conventional Victorian (and pre-Victorian) attitudes, especially about man's unique place. Both proceeded cautiously, continuously rooting their arguments in what they took to be already established facts about the animal kingdom; Darwin's argument for sexual selection in *Descent*, for example, begins with eleven chapters of discussion of the phenomenon in varied animals before offering two chapters on man, and similarly only the final two chapters of Wallace's *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* concern men. Furthermore, focus on human evolution radically pushed the boundaries of evolutionary thought on the issue of complexity, one of the core problems for critics of the theory (then and now); the general problem had, of course, been anticipated by Darwin, and addressed in *Origin* (in the famous account of the eye [1859, 569-71]), but the turn to the human amplified the challenge. In particular, for both Darwin and Wallace, the key issues were the development of "higher powers" in man: intellectual capacity, consciousness, moral and ethical behavior, altruism. All these issues were dealt with by Darwin in the fifth chapter of *Descent*, and returned to with a vengeance in the treatment of emotional expression in *Expression*; they are treated by Wallace in the final chapter of *Contributions*, and again in his Spiritualist writings, and typically in final chapters from then on (for instance in *Darwinism* in 1889 and *The World of Life* in 1910). It is on this terrain that the divergence between Darwin and Wallace becomes clear.

Wallace began, somewhat tentatively, to raise the issue of human evolution in a paper presented at the British Association in 1863 (and re-

presented for the Ethnological Society the following year), focusing on races in the Malayan Archipelago. In that paper, he argued that the broad divide of human races corresponds to a similar break in zoological species (“This line will separate the Malayan and Asiatic from the Papuan and Pacific races, and though along the line of junction intermigration and commixture have taken place, yet the division is on the whole almost as well defined and strongly contrasted as are the corresponding zoological divisions of the archipelago” [1863/1864, 211], a dividing line which, however contentious, is still called the “Wallace line” [Fichman 2004, 46; Michaux 2008, 179–81]), took as basic ground the ancient origins of man (“we now have to place of origin of man at an indefinitely remote epoch” [210]), and employed Darwin’s *Coral Reefs* to construct an account of the peopling of the archipelago (212–13). He also snuck in an assertion about the capability of “savage” peoples for civilization, in his discussion of the northern Celebes and what he sees as the positive results that came when the Dutch “took them in hand” [206] and imposed a colonial/plantation regime: “Here I think, we have a proof that the absence of civilization does not necessarily imply the want of capacity to receive it” (Wallace 1863/1864, 206).²² But at this stage he drew no broader conclusions.

In 1864, Wallace stretched his arguments significantly in “The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the theory of ‘Natural Selection,’” a paper first presented before the breakaway (and largely polygenist) Anthropological Society of London in 1864; indeed, Wallace hoped the framework he proposed would, as Fichman notes (2004, 153–55), provide a solution to the vexed debate between polygenists and monogenists over human origins. It did no such thing, of course; polygenists like James Hunt rejected it wholesale, in part because it gave too much credit to “lower races” in terms of their level of development and potentialities, and in part because of resistance among anthropologists to Darwinian thought (Stocking 1987, 248–257). Wallace’s argument separated phases of human history, from an early phase (monogenist), in which natural selection operated on humans, to a later one (coincident with the divergence of races), in which it ceased to play a role because of the evolution of the human mind and the operation of culture:

As the earth has gone through its grand cycles of geological, climatal and organic progress, every form of life has been subject to its [natural selection’s] irresistible action.... At length, however, there came into existence a being in whom that subtle force we term *mind*, became of greater importance than his mere bodily structure.... From the moment when the first skin was used as a covering, when the first rude spear was

formed to assist in the chase, the first seed sown or shoot planted, a grand revolution was effected in nature ... for a being had arisen who was no longer necessarily subject to change with the changing universe (1864, clxviii).

Thus civilized progress works through mechanisms that depart from the law of natural selection that holds for the animal world.

Within that framework of culture Wallace located the continued development with which he explained the divergence of races:

From the time, therefore, when the social and sympathetic feelings came into active operation, and the intellectual and moral faculties became fairly developed, man would cease to be influenced by “natural selection” in his physical form and structure.... But from the moment that his body became stationary, his mind would become subject to those very influences from which his body had escaped ... and that rapid advancement of mental organisation would occur, which has raised the very lowest races of man so far above the brutes (although differing so little from some of them in physical structure), and in conjunction with scarcely perceptible modifications of form, has developed the wonderful intellect of the Germanic races (Wallace 1864, clxiii-clxiv).

In the ensuing and continuing contest among races, Wallace argued, the “great law of ‘*the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*’ ... leads to the inevitable extinction of all those low and mentally undeveloped populations with which Europeans come in contact” (clxiv-clxv), a position showing the deep influence on Wallace’s thinking of extinctionist discourse, especially prominent in polygenist writings on race by the likes of Hunt and Richard Burton, and also illuminating Wallace’s reading of Thomas Malthus’s population studies (Brantlinger 2003, 184-85).

At the same time, the close of his paper offered a vision of future racial amalgamation and improvement:

While his external form will probably ever remain unchanged, except in the development of that perfect beauty ... refined and ennobled by the highest intellectual faculties and sympathetic emotions, his mental constitution may continue to advance and improve till the world is again inhabited by a single homogenous race (Wallace 1864, clxix).

While this one-race future is, indeed, predicated on extinction (since “it must inevitably follow that the higher—the more intellectual and moral—must displace the lower and more degraded races”), it also imbeds a

progressive utopian-socialist future in which “Each one will then work out his own happiness … perfect freedom of action will be maintained … [and] compulsory government will have died away as unnecessary” (Wallace 1863, clxix).²³ Members of the London Anthropological Society were, not surprisingly, displeased; the paper prompted extensive, mostly sharply critical discussion, incorporating, in addition to Hunt’s amusing insistence that the Neanderthal skull “is simply the skull of an idiot” (clxxviii) rather than a separate species, broad-based attacks on Darwinian evolution, Wallace’s reading of racial questions, and Wallace’s progressive vision of the future (clxx-clxxxvii).

Darwin, however, praised the essay in a letter to Wallace: “The great leading idea is quite new to me, viz. that during late ages the mind will have been modified more than the body; yet I had got as far as to see with you that the struggle between the races of man depended entirely on intellectual and *moral* qualities. The latter part of the paper I can designate only as grand and most eloquently done,” although he went on to note “I am not sure that I go with you on all minor points” (Marchant 1916, 127). In particular, Darwin wanted to argue for a continuing operation of natural selection in some respects, especially in relation to racial differences, and employed sexual selection as the mechanism for its continuance (128). Wallace conceded, in a letter in reply: “I therefore no doubt overlook a few smaller points in which Natural Selection may still act on men and brutes alike” (Marchant 1916, 129), but countered Darwin’s alternative argument: “The sexual selection you allude to will also, I think, have been equally uncertain in its results” (130). The differences here portend the divides that will mark Darwin’s and Wallace’s approaches to the question of human evolution in 1869-71 in several respects: their differences over sexual selection were already becoming apparent, and Wallace’s argument for the operation of something other than natural selection in human populations both moved him toward group selection in ways Darwin had not yet embraced (Richards 2003, 103, 114 n. 37) and opened the door to alternative explanations.

Still, those divides were more minor and less apparent at this phase of the development of their respective ideas. Even when, in 1870, Darwin was writing to Wallace that “I groan over Man” (in reference to Wallace’s claims about higher powers and human development), he added, referring back to this work: “and you the author of the best paper that ever appeared in the *Anthropological Review!*” (Marchant 1916, 206). And in *Descent*, referring to Wallace’s “admirable paper,” Darwin wrote:

The case, however is widely different, as Mr. Wallace has with justice insisted, in relation to the intellectual and moral faculties of man.... Of the

high importance of the intellectual faculties there can be no doubt, for man mainly owes to them his pre-eminent position in the world (Darwin 1871, 867-88).

Darwin granted divergence between races in terms of “intellectual faculties” (although to less a degree in his account), and even conceded the extinction point, noting that “civilized nations are everywhere supplanting barbarous nations,” but insisted nevertheless that it was “highly probable that with mankind the intellectual faculties have been gradually perfected through natural selection” (Darwin 1871, 867-88) rather than that evolutionary processes were superseded by some other mechanism. Wallace’s account still provided a starting point for him.

It is in 1869 that Wallace makes his next step, at the tail end of a review of Charles Lyell’s work (and Lyell’s long-awaited embrace of natural selection). After an extended overview of Lyell’s geological principles (Wallace 1869a, 360-80), and a discussion of Lyell’s move from opposition to support of Darwin’s theories that is as much capsule summary of Darwin as treatment of Lyell (380-90), in his closing pages he presents his challenge:

But if the researches of geologists and the investigations of anatomists should ever demonstrate that he [man] was derived from the lower animals in the same way that they have been derived from each other, we shall not be thereby debarred from believing, or from proving, that his intellectual capacities and his moral nature were not wholly developed by the same process. Neither natural selection nor the more general theory of evolution can give any account whatever of the origin of sensational or conscious life (391).

Not surprisingly, it is the brain that Wallace first notes as exceptional, arguing that “Natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to the ape, whereas he actually possesses one but very little inferior to that of the average members of our learned societies” (392). But he goes on to argue that other features—man’s hand, “his erect posture, his delicate yet expressive features, the marvelous beauty and symmetry of his whole external form” (392), his naked skin, and speech—similarly belie, in Wallace’s account, merely selective advantages. This leads him to conclude:

While admitting to the full extent the agency of the same great laws of organic development in the origin of the human race as in the origin of all organized beings, there yet seems to be evidence of a Power which has

guided the action of those laws in definite directions and for special ends (393).

And this, in turn, led Darwin, who marked the passages in his own text and wrote a firmly underlined “No” in the margins (Desmond and Moore 1991, 569), to fear that Wallace had “murdered too completely your own and my child.” Lyell, interestingly, would take Wallace’s part in this argument, writing to Darwin: “I rather hail Wallace’s suggestion that there may be a Supreme Will and Power which may not abdicate its function of interference but may guide the forces and laws of Nature” (qtd. in Kottler 1974, 153 n. 22). Lyell, however, here takes Wallace’s position as essentially a form of Paleyite natural theology, as indeed Darwin himself might have done, too, when he wrote to Wallace that, in the section on man in the review, “you write like a metamorphosed (in retrograde direction) naturalist” (Marchant 1916, 206). But Wallace was up to something decidedly different.

In 1870, in an added closing chapter of *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*, Wallace began to articulate his argument and specify a mechanism more clearly. He asserted first that: “The utilitarian hypothesis (which is the theory of natural selection applied to the mind) seems inadequate to account for the development of the moral sense” (Wallace 1870a, 352). Wallace then further developed his list of human traits that, he argues, were shared by uncivilized and civilized men alike (although Wallace also insisted that the traits had no use among “savage” tribes), and that created no evolutionary advantage to the holder: on the “higher” plane honesty, altruism, “pure morality” (356), and the “power of conceiving eternity and infinity, and all those abstract notions of form, number, and harmony” (357), but also, somewhere below that, the nakedness of human skin, the perfect form of the human foot, and the complexity of sound-producing capacities of the larynx (including the capacity for musical sound, 356-57). For Wallace, these attributes were “utterly inconceivable as having been produced through the action of a law which looks only, and can look only, to the immediate material welfare of the individual or the race,” and it therefore followed “that a superior intelligence has guided the development of man in a definite direction, and for a special purpose, just as man guides the development of many animal and vegetable forms” (359). Moving on to challenge Huxley’s materialist assertion that “thoughts are the expression of molecular changes in that matter of life which is the source of our other vital phenomena” (Wallace 1870a, 362; Huxley 1868, 154), Wallace proposed a far less materialistic counterhypothesis: “matter, as popularly understood, does not exist,” and it followed first, “that force or forces are all that exist in the material universe,” and then that “all force is

probably will-force" (Wallace 1870a, 366). From this in turn it followed for Wallace: "the whole universe, is not merely dependent on, but actually *is*, the WILL of higher intelligences or of one Supreme Intelligence" (Wallace 1870a, 368).²⁴ This relocated the basic engine for human development from the realm of the material entirely, and made the driving force behind the development of humankind a spiritual one ("intelligences" or "Intelligence"; Wallace leaves the two alternatives open).

Both Darwin and Huxley challenged Wallace's new position. Darwin took it on, rather briefly, in *Descent*. He undermined Wallace's view of savage intelligence as a means to undercut his argument by insisting on the wide range of human invention even of "Man in his rudest state," concluding: "I cannot, therefore, understand how it is that Mr. Wallace maintains, that 'natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an ape'" (1871, 854-55). In effect, by narrowing the chasm in Wallace's account between primitive and civilized man, Darwin questioned Wallace's claims for superfluous brain capacity in the former. He followed this up with an account of hands and voice among primates that sought to undermine Wallace's list of special human characteristics by insisting they were not so special after all (856). Far more extensive, however, is Darwin's debate with Wallace over sexual selection later in the volume (1108 f.). Huxley similarly undercut Wallace's argument by insisting on the complexity of "savage" knowledge, partly by quoting Wallace back at him, in "a remarkable passage which occurs in his instructive paper on 'Instinct in Man and Animals'" (Huxley 1871, 174), and then adding: "But it is incomplete. Add to all this the knowledge which a savage is obliged to gain" about plant and animal life, culture, language, and much else (174). For Huxley, this meant: "In complexity and difficulty, I should say that the intellectual labour of a 'good hunter or warrior' considerably exceeds that of an ordinary Englishman" (175). With the gulf between savage and civilized again narrowed, Huxley could conclude:

If we admit, as Mr. Wallace does, that the lowest savages are not raised 'many grades above the elephant and the ape,' and if we further admit, as I content must be admitted, that the conditions of social life tend, powerfully, to give an advantage to those individuals who vary in the directions of intellectual or aesthetic excellence, what is there to interfere with the belief that these higher faculties, like the rest, owe their development to natural selection?" (178-79).

For Huxley as for Darwin, sexual selection provided a mechanism as powerful as any spirits.