

THE APOLOGETIC STRUCTURE OF BUTLER'S ANALOGY

THE APOLOGETIC STRUCTURE
OF
BISHOP BUTLER'S ANALOGY

by

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To Ann,
my wife.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to ascertain the apologetic structure of Bishop Joseph Butler's Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.¹ As such, it is, at first glance, a rather simple project for it seeks nothing more than to delineate the general argument of a book, typify the assent that argument seeks to elicit, and establish the criticisms it is directed against. However, the matter is not so simple and straightforward as it first appears.

Butler's Analogy was first published in 1736. Thus, it is an old book and its age occasions difficulties. Its style, presuppositions, and concerns are somewhat removed from the contemporary scheme of things and if they are to be understood and appreciated the temporal gulf must be bridged. There is, however, another and greater problem. The Analogy is not only an old book, it is also a work of classical stature. It was, for a very long time, the standard theological work of the Anglican Church throughout a period in which theological works were still in the mainstream of intellectual endeavour and were the alembic in

¹Hereafter abbreviated Analogy. By apologetic structure is meant the framework of the argumentative defence of the Christian religion. cf. Appendix.

which cultural movements were distilled. Moreover, its author, Joseph Butler, Chaplain to the Lord Chancellor and later, Clerk of the Queen's Closet and Bishop of Bristol and Durham, is a classical figure both in the history of Anglican theology and English moral theory. Thus, the Analogy comes to us clothed in the accumulated commentaries and evaluations of over two centuries of criticism. If it is to be understood, it must be unfrocked for this thesis takes the position that the Analogy has, in large part, been misrepresented by its critics and commentators particularly in the past one hundred years.

It may be asked wherein, in the estimation of the present writer, have the critics gone astray? It is not an easy question to answer because while individual and highly personal mistakes may be cited, the question at root is very much a part of a much larger question: wherein did the nineteenth century go wrong in its assessment of the eighteenth? While there are still many who would hold that the eighteenth century was just what the historians of the nineteenth made it out to be, there is a growing body of evidence to be found in the works of such scholars as Ernst Cassirer, Alfred Cobban, Peter Gay and others which suggest that the nineteenth century in reaction against the

revolutionary excesses of its predecessor, thoroughly misrepresented its positive achievements. It is with this latter group of critics that the present author sides. Faced with social upheaval and dissolution and an attendant loss of faith, many nineteenth century critics sought and found their source of woe in the thinkers of the preceding era and most particularly in their estimations of the nature and use of human reason. Rationalism became a curse only to be followed by an accursed scepticism and so on. This way of treating the history of Western consciousness as so many rises and falls of human reason, in our opinion, has done little for individual thinkers and less for our understanding of contemporary problems: yet it remains, and in the present day has placed religion and the debate about God on rather artificial ground. Thus, we would suggest that the critics have gone astray because they have been motivated in their analysis of the Analogy more by the propagandistic needs of their period than by the actual contents of the work.

It may well be that no one, the present author included, can escape totally from the prejudices of his time. However, the present author hopes that it is possible to apply a somewhat more stringent analytic to the Analogy

than has been customary. Thus, this thesis attempts to return to a writing of one of the most significant and influential Anglican thinkers of the early eighteenth century and to recover his actual thinking about faith and reason, nature and supernature, and to establish the lines of his defence of religion against its critics in the most objective manner possible. This return is effected first through a survey of the criticism attending the work and then through an analysis of the work itself. It opens with a historical survey of Butler scholarship not because it wishes to set itself at variance with all other critics nor again because of a pretence to continuity with their contributions. Rather, it so begins because it is firmly convinced that it is only through such an approach that both the contours and importance of Butler's thought emerge and a fuller understanding of that thought is achieved. Previous criticism is valuable even when substantially incorrect for failures are often the best pedagogues. And this is all the more true when those failures have been motivated more by the desire to create than to destroy. It is perhaps indicative of the value of Butler's thought that with very few exceptions it has been more often acclaimed than declaimed by its critics no matter their interpretation of it. Following this survey, the Analogy is analyzed first

in terms of its statements of purpose and situation and secondly, in terms of its basal argument and structure. The first analysis attempts to reconstruct from these statements something of the religious climate Butler encountered and to delineate his reaction to it. Then, since this reaction takes the form of an apologetic program, the second analysis seeks to outline the argument of this program and to typify the assent it seeks to elicit. On the basis of these analyses, a reinterpretation is then offered and some conclusions affecting the contemporary situation are drawn up. Basic to all of this is the conviction that the Analogy is a Christian apology and must be read as such. The apology is a form of literature with deep roots in the Christian tradition and we have attempted to relate the Analogy to that tradition at several points.

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All references to the Analogy are taken from the Halifax edition of Butler's Works. Following current practice, references are included within the text itself. As an aid to the reader who is unfamiliar with Bishop Butler and his times, I have appended a short biographical and bibliographical note.

CHAPTER I

In his modest Guide to the Debate About God,¹ David Jenkins proposes "to take up some discussions from the eighteenth century as a means of illuminating and pin-pointing our problems of the twentieth" and thereby "make clear that 'The End of Theism?' is not a new question."² His investigation begins with Bishop Butler because in his words "Bishop Butler represents a method of apology and argument which goes right back into the Christian tradition"³ and which has a contemporary equivalent. What Jenkins finds of particular interest in Butler's Analogy, beyond the fact that it was written against 'people of discernment' who had written off Christianity two hundred years ago, is the shape Bishop Butler gave to the Analogy. Noting that it is divided into two parts 'Of Natural Religion' and 'Of Revealed Religion', Jenkins asserts that Butler holds

It is possible by directing the attention of reasonable men to reasonable arguments relating to the nature of the world, the nature of men, and the nature of men's life in the world, to show that something may be discovered and known about the existence of God and even

¹David Jenkins, Guide to the Debate About God, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966).

²Ibid. p.20

³Ibid. p.21

to some extent about His nature he believes that it is reasonably possible to direct attention to the data which any fair-minded person studying science or reflecting on morality would agree is data and which point to the discovery of God. It is not until he has drawn attention to this type of data that he goes on to the data of revealed religion. ⁴

This, he notes, "is the normal pattern of Christian apologetic, worked out in its most classical form in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas."⁵ Thus Jenkins claims that for Butler "there are two sources of data which can supply the actual contents of Christian belief or, at least, lead to its acceptance . . . Reason and Revelation"⁶ and that "from the world you can read off the existence of God and from the Bible you can read off the character of God."⁷

Now even while granting Jenkins a certain allowance for the crudities of over-simplification and while recognizing the orthodoxy and classicism of such an apologetic structure and indeed even while applauding him for attempting to see Bishop Butler as a primary guide in the contemporary debate about God at a time when Butler's thought is by and large in disrepute, the student of Butler must repudiate such a

⁴Ibid. p.22

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid. p.23

⁷Ibid. p.24

characterization. For him, Jenkins is right in pin-pointing the religious debates of the twentieth century in the eighteenth and in placing Butler at the centre of the eighteenth century debate; Jenkins is wrong only in his reasons for doing both. First, it is debatable whether Butler even held that there are two sources of data about God in the sense Jenkins maintains.⁸ Secondly, even granting that Butler held such sources of data, it must be denied that a consideration of these sources governs the Analogy. If such a consideration is present, it is present only secondarily and incidentally for even a quick perusal of the Analogy is sufficient to show that the work does not seek to establish the existence and character of God but rather to establish the credibility of the Christian religion. The distinction is not over-subtle: it is the distinction between establishing a theology and substantiating an ecclesiology. It is not to St. Thomas that one looks for classical antecedents but rather to the Apologists of the early church and it is within this tradition that Butler is as "original in apologetical method . . . as Francis Bacon in scientific, John Locke in philosophic, and Adam Smith in economic."⁹ Jenkins errs in his estimation of the Analogy's

⁸We will turn to this question in the following chapters.

⁹E.C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason, (New York: Macmillan, 1936) p. 79-80.

purpose partially, one must suppose, from an actual ignorance of the work itself, but more particularly and peculiarly from a conditioned response to its Table of Contents. From the vantage point of the mid-twentieth century any work which is distributed under the headings "Of Natural Religion" and "Of Revealed Religion" a priori appears to speak of two knowledges of God. The question of faith and reason or faith versus reason is so indigenous to theological discussion that it is impossible to conceive of a time when it could well have been absent from such discussion or of only secondary importance to it. Moreover, the spectre of Deism hangs over English theology of that period and is it not to be expected that the treatise which destroyed Deism met it on its own ground? It is this last question, the question of the Analogy's historical background and its relationship to Deism which brings us face to face with the Analogy's public and scholarly receptions in the English-speaking world. Jenkins has not been alone in seeking in this work a solution to the troubles of his times or, for that matter, in misinterpreting it.

Throughout the two hundred and thirty-two years since its first publication, the Analogy has been read, commented upon, and interpreted with, if not always perspicacity, at least, persistency. Although its public reputation has not always been great, it has in every generation attracted the

attention of scholars to write about it, and, it may be assumed, some public to read them. Public and scholarly disfavour cannot be equated with neglect.¹⁰ There is little need to chronicle these two centuries of criticism in detail: E. C. Mossner celebrated the bicentenary of the book's publication with an admirable account.¹¹ We will confine ourselves to drawing a general picture and to updating Mossner's account to the present.

It is, by now, as we noted above, an accepted fact that the nineteenth century in part misrepresented the thought, aspirations, and achievements of the eighteenth century. And perhaps this is nowhere more true than in the nineteenth century appreciation of the Analogy. The situation is not simple. The nineteenth century was variegated in its thinking on religion and certainly some of this variety is reflected in its thinking on Butler. Butler's is a provincial reputation and while German and French editions of the Analogy existed,¹² the debate was pretty much confined to England.¹³ And in England, the Analogy became in the first

¹⁰ It is curious to note how much energy is spent in Butler scholarship attempting to rehabilitate his works unnecessarily. English critics in particular seem woefully ignorant of much of Butler scholarship. cf. e.g. S. A. Graves, "Butler's 'Analogy'" Cambridge Journal, 6 (1952-3) p. 169-180.

¹¹ E. C. Mossner, op. cit. p. 177-230.

¹² The German translation appeared in 1756; the French in 1821.

¹³ For exceptions cf. Mossner op. cit. p. 190, 226.

third of the nineteenth century, the theological work of the Anglican Church. In concert with Paley's Natural Theology, it provided the impetus for the Bridgewater Treatises¹⁴ which proclaimed the marriage of science and religion. And thus, Robert Southey extolled its author:

Others had established the Historical and Prophetical
grounds of the Christian Religion,
And that sure testimony of its Truth,
Which is found in its perfect adaptation to the heart of man
It was reserved for him to develop
Its analogy to the constitution and course of nature,
And laying his strong foundations
In the depth of that great argument,
There to construct another and irrefragable Proof;
Thus rendering Philosophy subservient to Faith;
And finding in outward and visible things 15
The type and evidence of those within the veil.

The Analogy is the proof par excellence of nature's proclamation of religious truth. The liberals, however, were not alone in claiming it: Newman and the Oxford Movement found it a prestigious confirmation of their appeal to authority and their repudiation of reason. They were at one with the liberals in hailing the ascendancy of faith over reason in Butler.¹⁶ Even so, the Analogy was much too rational for the succeeding generation

¹⁴The Bridgewater Treatises consisted of eight works on the power, wisdom, and goodness of God manifested in creation authored by Thomas Chalmers, John Kidd, William Whewell, Charles Bell, Peter M. Loget, William Buckland, William Kirby, and William Prout and were published between 1833 and 1836.

¹⁵Epitaph in Bristol Cathedral by Robert Southey (1834). Quoted in Mossner op. cit. p.204.

¹⁶cf. Mossner, op.cit. p. 205-211; E. C. Mossner, "Cardinal Newman on Bishop Butler: An Unpublished Letter." Theology, xxxii (Feb. 1936) p. 113.

and Matthew Arnold who had held a continuous and life-long interest in Butler felt constrained to urge his readers away from the failures of Butler and back to the Bible. In two lectures on "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist", Arnold attacked the full contours of Butler's thought in minute detail concluding with the observation that,

In times when everything is conventional, when no one looks very closely into himself or into what is told him about his moral nature, [Butler's] sort of natural history may, perhaps look likely enough, and may even pass for Newtonianism. But let a time come when . . . a man searches with passionate earnestness for something certain, and can and will henceforth build upon facts only, then the arbitrary assertions of such . . . as this of Butler's will be felt to be perfectly fantastic and unavailing. ¹⁷

With Arnold, Butler's work moves from the public sphere to the realm of the individual conscience. Its arguments are no longer measured against the course of nature or ecclesiastical polity but rather against the heart and inspiration of man and in this sphere it is unavailing, it is a failure. This approach to the Analogy came alive on paper and exerted a powerful influence on the most influential of all nineteenth century critics of Butler, Sir Leslie Stephen. Stephen's History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century is a classic in its own right and has exerted a decisive influence upon the history

¹⁷Matthew Arnold, "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist" Last Essays on Church and Religion, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1883) p. 271.

of ideas in the English world. Its account of the Analogy combined with Stephen's later article in the Dictionary of National Biography became one of the most respected and accepted interpretations of the Analogy ever written. Indeed, it has yet to be replaced in many quarters.¹⁸ In both, Stephen maintained somewhat paradoxically that the Analogy effectively and conclusively crushed its opponents without specifically referring to their works nor eliciting their counterattack. Indeed, even he found it remarkable

. . . that the greatest theological work of the time, produced little contemporary controversy . . . Butler's contemporaries were perhaps deterred by the fear of venturing into the profundities of his argument.¹⁹

The explanation he offered was of course purely gratuitous. This reading of the work's historical impact he supported with a rather lop-sided reading of Butler's life:

Joseph Butler belonged to that exceedingly small class of men who find in abstract speculation not merely their main employment but almost the sole enjoyment of their lives Butler stood apart from the world.²⁰

Stephen perhaps realized the shakiness of his position and therefore annexed to it a second and somewhat more substantial

¹⁸cf. e.g. George Watson, "Joseph Butler", The English Mind. Edited by H. S. Davies. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) pp. 107-122.

¹⁹Sir Leslie Stephen, "Butler, Joseph" Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885-1901) 63 vols. Vol. viii (1886) p. 71.

²⁰Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. Third edition (1902). Reprinted with a preface by Crane Brinton. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1962) 2 vols. Vol. I, v, 1. Subsequent references in text.

argument:

Though Butler is habitually described as amongst the ablest champions of Christianity, he has probably made few converts, and has clearly helped some thinkers towards scepticism.

(I, v, 2)

This statement mirrors another in the dictionary and brings us to one of the crucial points in Stephen's interpretation.

To some thinkers he appears as the most profound apologist of Christian theology while others have held that his argument leads to scepticism, because, while conclusive against the optimism of the deists, it really shows only that the difficulties in revealed theology are equalled by the difficulties of natural religion. ²¹

Stephen thereupon sided with the sceptical interpretation and while acknowledging the "impressiveness of [the] . . . argument, the candour of his reasonings, and the vigour and originality of his thought"²² asserted that Butler "was no philosopher in the strict sense of the word." and concluded

Even theologians should be slow to praise the philosophical acuteness of a writer whose defence of Christianity is so easily convertible into an attack upon theology. It is not upon this side that we must look for the secret of Butler's greatness. His attitude is impressive from the moral side alone . . . Duty is the last word . . . his doctrine thus becomes a lofty stoicism.

(I, v, 26)

²¹Stephen, Dictionary, loc. cit. p. 72.

²²Ibid.

In sum, Stephen saw the Analogy as a great and influential apology for Christian theology which was authored by a reclusive thinker and which while conclusive against optimistic rationalism, was essentially sceptical. In Butler himself, he saw an inferior Pascal, "an honest and brave man - honest enough to admit the existence of doubts and brave enough not to be paralyzed by their existence." (I, v, 28)

It is curious to note, is it not, how, as the nineteenth century wore on, there was a shift in the interpretation placed upon the purpose of the work and how there was a lessening in the assent demanded by it. The poet laureate and the authors of the Bridgewater Treatises confidently hailed it as a scientific proof that nature proclaimed religious truth, the Tractarians espoused it as an Anglican repudiation of reason in religion and a theological proof of the necessity of ecclesiastical authority, Arnold roundly condemned it as a failure on both counts, and Stephen analyzed it as an isolated attempt to replace metaphysics with stoical ethics, an attempt which failed but which had a historical repercussion: it dealt the death-blow to rationalistic optimism. The nineteenth century moved from generous avowal to disavowal, from eternal assent to historical interest, in its estimation of the work. With Sir Leslie begins historical reflection on the Analogy,

a process which begins when a book has lost its grip but retains its classical status. The others saw the Analogy through their own eyes in the light of their own times; Stephen attempted to see the Analogy through the eyes of its contemporaries and in the light of its own time. In so doing, he did four things of permanent import. First, he raised the spectre of Deism. Secondly, he labelled the treatise essentially controversial. Thirdly, he found the work essentially sceptical and moralistic. And fourthly, he read the book in terms of his own inner struggles and agnosticism. All four are somewhat interrelated. Stephen analyzed the Latitudinarian and Arminian controversialists of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century in terms of their rationalistic optimism. To them he applied the term 'Deist' and more or less gathered them into a school of thought. In applying the name Deist to these thinkers, Stephen simply followed respectable precedents. However, in his hands the term narrowed from a term nearly as broad as atheist and applicable indiscriminately to all forms of heterodoxy to a specific philosophical school. And it was against this school that he pitted Butler and the Analogy with the consequence that the work was subsequently interpreted as a refutation of a school of rationalism. This interpretation of course fitted nicely with Stephen's sceptical reading of the

work and beautifully established a rise and fall of reason in the Age of Reason. His reading of the intellectual history of that period becomes much clearer when one remembers that he was writing against the background of the Darwinian controversy, his own journey into agnosticism, and contemporary attempts to find in the Analogy the solutions to all contemporary difficulties. The period from 1883 to 1896 had seen a great flowering of works which proposed to reconcile the religion with the latest scientific developments through the Analogy²³ and Stephen felt constrained not only to write history but to substantiate the essential Agnosticism of the period.

It was not until the publication of E. C. Mossner's Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason in 1936 on the bicentenary of the Analogy's first publication that Stephen was challenged on purely historical grounds. With skill informed by exhaustive research Mossner disproved Stephen's contention that the Analogy was isolated in its own time. He established that the work was an immediate success with the general public, running through four editions and a Dublin reprint within twenty years; that it had been reviewed extensively and enthusiastically upon publication, provoking two refutations

²³Notably W. L. Collins, Butler (1888) and W. E. Gladstone's Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler (1896).

within a year.²⁴ And that, moreover, it had been accepted, augmented, imitated, and resuscitated by a series of apologists and divines throughout the century. Indeed, by the century's end, it had been enshrined in the theological pantheon.²⁵ He also noted that the charge of scepticism, namely, that it was more dissuasive than persuasive of religion began at the end of the eighteenth century with Coleridge and was continued in the nineteenth by William Hazlitt, William Pitt the Younger, James Mill and Sara Hennel. It was to these that Stephen owed his ethical appreciation of Butler.²⁶ Working with the limited material available to the biographer of Butler,²⁷ he exposed Stephen's 'hermit' for the fanciful fiction it was. Upon his body of evidence, Mossner constructed a new historical appreciation but an appreciation still indebted to Stephen, for Mossner quite agreed that as philosophy, the Analogy was a failure. However, Mossner did find the Analogy to be a work of impressive historical and apologetic merit. For him,

Butler's Sermons and Analogy present a cross-section of the later Age of Reason in England. In them appears distinctly a reaction against the hitherto prevalent doctrine of the sufficiency of reason in religion as

²⁴ Stephen had noted both Thomas Bott's (Philanthropus) Remarks Upon Dr. Butler's Sixth Chapter . . . and Thomas Chubb's Equity and Reasonableness of the Divine Conduct but dismissed both as worthless.

²⁵ Mossner, op.cit. p. 177-186.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 198-202.

²⁷ Butler ordered all his personal papers destroyed on his death.

in all other phases of human life, and also an indication of the direction in which that doctrine was to topple.²⁸

As such, the Analogy was an excellent index to the intellectual developments of the age particularly in the evaluation of the new role adopted by science and the emergence of scepticism.²⁹ Thus Mossner saw Butler in two lights: on the one hand he was the originator of a school of apologetics which sought to derive its basic principles from the observation of nature³⁰ and on the other he was the theologian in Hume's Dialogues.³¹ In the first light, his originality is strictly methodological.³² His actual ideas are borrowings and his conclusions are weak and limited.³³ In the second, he makes an interesting prelude to Hume. But in himself, he is an unimpassioned pleader peculiar to a generation.

Criticism of Stephen's philosophical critique of the Analogy pre-dated Mossner's historical refutation even though it left little trace on Mossner's evaluation. The charges levelled against Butler's religious thought by such eminent nineteenth century thinkers as Mill and Stephen and their

²⁸Mossner, op.cit. p.xii

²⁹Ibid. p.xi

³⁰Ibid. p.240

³¹Ibid. p.156 ff.

³²Ibid. p.79

³³Ibid. p. 100 ff.

concomitant espousal of his ethical teaching turned students of ethics to Butler and in particular to his Rolls Sermons. Some simply dismissed the Analogy unread as irrelevant; others turned their attention to it first as essential background, and then as valuable in itself. Perhaps the most influential of the latter was C. D. Broad, particularly through his essay "Butler as Theologian."³⁴

Broad felt that not only was Butler's work as a moralist on par with Kant's but that this resemblance carried over into their concerns with moral theology, an area in which he felt Butler was much more successful than Kant. He saw Butler attempting to prove that having granted an order of nature due to an intelligent being, one cannot consistently stop there but must pursue its religious implications and that in pursuing these implications Butler

. . . really has established a case for the characteristic doctrines of natural religion . . . The two chief points of criticism are (1) that he accepts without question the traditional arguments for the view that the world has been created by an intelligent being, and (2) that his arguments for survival of bodily death are weak . . . [but] a very great merit of Butler's arguments is that they are hardly, if at all, affected by the progress of natural science since his time. The facts about the world on which he bases his arguments remain facts, and no scientific discoveries are in the least likely to explode them . . .

³⁴C. D. Broad, "Butler as Theologian" Hibbert Journal xxi (July, 1923) p. 637-56. Reprinted in Religion, Philosophy, and Psychological Research, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953) p. 202-219.

I think that the argument from analogy does lend some support to the doctrines of natural religion; but under the weight of specifically Christian doctrines it seems to me to show obvious signs of buckling. 35

The implications of this for studies of the Analogy have been that the Analogy is of a piece with Butler's ethical programme and is philosophically sound within the context of its presuppositions. Thus if one is willing to acknowledge a positive content in Butler's ethical writings, one is constrained to view the Analogy as philosophically viable. Broad's re-emphasis on the Analogy re-opened the study of its distinctively religious characteristics.

The only full length treatment to date in this area has been Anders Jeffner's Butler and Hume on Religion: A Comparative Analysis.³⁶ Jeffner seeks to disclose the relationship of religious philosophy to the emergence of the philosophy of religion in early empiricism. His analysis of the religious theories of Butler, which are taken to be representative of empirical religious philosophy, leads him to conclude that in the Analogy, Butler was attempting through the experimental method to describe certain regularities in the world and to show from this description that Christianity

³⁵Ibid. p.218-19.

³⁶Anders Jeffner, Butler and Hume on Religion: A Comparative Analysis. Translated from Swedith by Keith Bradford. (Stockholm: Diakonistytrelsens Bökförlag, 1966).

is as reasonable as nature and may be adhered to with the adherence due a scientific result. Thus the Analogy may be termed a valid attempt to show the theoretical content of Christian revelation to be an extension and clarification of the natural order.³⁷ Methodologically, Jeffner asserts that while the Analogy counters Deism at several points, over half the book is non-controversial and it is to this non-controversial material which he proposes to look for his illustration.³⁸ of the basic features of Butler's thought. Thus without acknowledging the work's historical context beyond a general portrait of some basal presuppositions, Jeffner proceeds analytically and concludes that in the Analogy, Butler aspires to a reasonable theology which accepts Christianity only on the basis of arguments which are valid irrespective of religious status and which proceed from scientific results which are independent of metaphysical or religious premises.³⁹

Jeffner's critique of the structure of the book and its author's aspiration is in striking contrast to the evaluation proposed by S. A. Graves in "Butler's 'Analogy'".⁴⁰

³⁷Ibid. p.256

³⁸Ibid. p. 19-20

³⁹Ibid. p. 20

⁴⁰S. A. Graves, op.cit. cf. footnote (10) above.

The specific arguments of both men will be presented in detail in the third chapter; here, it is sufficient to note that Graves, in contradistinction to Jeffner, views the Analogy not as an epistemological or theological treatise but as a point by point public refutation of Deist opinions which assays upon the economy of probability without speculative principles and finds "that religion cannot be known to be false, and even this will impose on anyone who admits as much the obligation to act as if it may be true."⁴¹ Butler is the Christian advocate par excellence.

In these twentieth century evaluations of the Analogy we witness two mutually contradictory attempts to assess the work's relevance in the face of nineteenth century criticism. On the one hand, confronted by the sceptical interpretation of the work best advocated by Stephen, critics such as Mossner and Graves have acknowledged the sceptical tendency and have sought in it a controversial character which indexes a period and elucidates a style of debate. For these men, that is sufficient: their historicism provides the necessary relevance. The Analogy is significant because it is history and reflects history. Inasmuch as its thought is sceptical, it is relevant to the history of scepticism and irrelevant to contemporary

⁴¹
Ibid. p.169

intellectual debate. But there have been some such as Broad and Jeffner, on the other hand, who have attempted to reach back beyond the sceptical consequences of Butler's thought and have sought the positive motive and mode of his argument and linked this to contemporary intellectual pursuits. The assessments are contradictory not only because they proceed from dichotomous starting points but also because their conclusions are mutually exclusive. Thus, in current scholarship, the Analogy is either a popular polemic against Deism or a rational theological program. The debate may now be more polite and restrained but it is no less radical than the opposition between Mathew Arnold and the Bridgewater Treatises, Sir Leslie Stephen and W. E. Gladstone.

While it is quite possible to view the more recent debate simply as a clash between the historical and philosophical points of view, there is at root a very fundamental issue which has intruded at several points and which must be dealt with in some detail. It has been asserted at several points that the nineteenth century misunderstood and misinterpreted the eighteenth. This general critique has in large part been spawned by the attempt to overcome the current dilemma of liberalism.⁴² Nevertheless, it is substantiable and has been substantiated to a very large extent.⁴³ Perhaps,

⁴²cf. in particular, Alfred Cobban, op.cit.

⁴³cf. in particular the works of Ernst Cassirer and his disciples, notably Peter Gay.

the words "misunderstood" and "misinterpreted" are unfortunate because they are the somewhat negativistic fruits of the demand for stringent factuality. Thus it may be more in order to speak of the nineteenth century critics applying a non factual critique. Phrased another way, it can be said that nineteenth century critics were too deeply implicated in their cultural reformation to analyze the past with the detachment many of us now hold so dear. Applied to the study of Butler, it has meant that Butler, being a classical author, was appropriated and interpreted more according to the cultural needs and visions of his critics and less in accord with his own perspective. This is manifest most sharply in the Bridgewater Treatises, the Oxford Movement, and Mathew Arnold. As we noted, Sir Leslie Stephen was the first to attempt a more objective analysis of Butler by situating him in his historical perspective. However, again, the treatment is coloured by Stephen's cultural persuasions. Gladstone, on the other hand, simply reaffirmed the viewpoint of the Bridgewater Treatises. In the twentieth century, scholarship has become somewhat more sophisticated with the consequence that the influence of propagandistic pursuits can be more readily ascertained in the past even if they cannot be totally recognized or overcome in the present. Moreover, we now allow scholars the choice of a viewpoint be it historical, philosophical, sociological, etc., which is fine as far as it goes. However, in the present

instance, the interpretation of Butler's Analogy, this choice of viewpoints has gone too far without going far enough. Historicism has pushed the Analogy to the extreme of irrelevancy, philosophism⁴⁴ has placed it four-square at the centre of most current theistic and theological debates. This thesis will seek a more moderate position. It is the opinion of the present author that the impasse has been created by attending too much to the consequences of Butler's thought and too little to its springs and causes. That is to say, this thesis contends that the Analogy must be evaluated in terms of its explicit theological program; that this program must be understood on the basis of the theological purpose which generated it and the historical situation which conditioned it in order that bifurcation may be overcome. Thus it intends to proceed from the historical conditions and personal motives adumbrated in the Analogy itself through the argument which establishes its theological program. Through this procedure, the actual apologetic structure of the Analogy will emerge.

⁴⁴By the philosophical viewpoint and philosophism I mean that intellectual pursuit which seeks to establish the truth and continuity of pure thought in intellectual endeavour.

CHAPTER II

In this chapter we propose to investigate Bishop Butler's theological purpose in writing the Analogy and the vital situation (Sitz im Leben) to which that purpose is related as a call which evokes a response. That is to say, we are herein concerned to elucidate the situation against which Butler reacted and to characterize the nature of his reaction to that situation. In both cases, our method of investigation consists in a close scrutiny of the data disclosed by the actual text of the Analogy itself. Moreover, since we have found that Butler's statements pertaining to his contemporary situation and his purpose within that situation occur either within the same text or within proximate texts, we have treated the two problems in conjunction with one another.

Our investigation has been narrowed to an examination of the actual text for several reasons. Principally, because previous scholarship has ignored Butler's own statements on these questions to a large degree and because those who have dealt with them, have dealt with them in isolation from one another.¹ It is our conviction that in all discussions of Butler's thought, no matter how broadly conceived, the text of the Analogy must occupy a position of centrality and that, moreover, Butler's situation, purpose, and argument, must be considered as distinguishable but

¹This statement rests on a close reading of the current literature on Butler. Numerous examples could be cited but for a good cross-section of methods cf. the introductory chapters of Mossner, Carlsson, and Jeffner in the works cited.

not distinct parts of an organic whole. The first conviction rests upon a series of indisputable facts. First, Butler ordered all his manuscripts and papers destroyed on his death. This provision of his will was carried out to the letter and only those works published in his lifetime are extant. Thus, beside the Analogy, recourse can be had only to some twenty-one sermons, several letters to Dr. Clarke, two dissertations, nineteen fragments, a Charge to the clergy of Durham, and portions of a Charge to the clergy of Bristol.² These writings, however, are occasional and widely disparate in terms of date of composition and, with the exception of the ethical sermons, thematic concern. As such, they provide few clues to the Analogy and occasion some very large problems.³ Second, the historical period in which Butler lived and wrote, the England of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, is in some sense an unknown quantity insofar as its religious component is concerned. While excellent monographs exist, we as yet await the critical editions and biographies of the major religious spokesmen of the period upon which to build a reliable general interpretation.⁴ In the absence of relevant and reliable secondary material, primacy must be

²The fragments are a series of memoranda discovered by Dr. Steere and published in 1852. They are included only in the Bernard edition of Butler's Works. The same is true of the portions of the Charge to the clergy of Bristol, printed in 1862 by Dr. Steere.

³Namely, the relationship between Butler's ethics and apologetics, a topic too large for the present dissertation but one which requires treatment from the religious rather than ethical side.

⁴cf. Peter Gay, The Enlightenment, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966) p.550 for a survey of the relevant literature and its weaknesses. cf. Appendix.

afforded the Analogy itself. The second conviction rests upon a close reading of the text and its validity, hopefully, will be borne out by our investigations. It suggests that the treatise has a unified construction to which everything is subsumed, with exception.⁵

Certain problems are raised by affording centrality to the Analogy and must be noted. The Analogy is composed in treatise style and while that literary form still remained open to the personal remonstrances of the antecedent Latin tractatus, Bishop Butler was not that sort of author who allows personal memoranda to intrude upon his arguments. Moreover, Butler refused to single out his opponents by name, with the exception of Descartes, and thus, recourse must be had to suggestive detail. However, Butler constantly maintained a strong remedial solicitude for his fellow men and, through the reflections of this pastoral concern, something can be ascertained of the religious problems of the age and his reactions to them. In our concluding chapter we will attempt to relate our findings to what external evidence does exist for further corroboration and, if necessary, modification.

Our present purpose then, is to reconstruct the religious situation and climate adumbrated in the Analogy and Butler's response to it. We will begin our investigation by an analysis of the advertisement of that work.

⁵cf. below p. 50 ff.

At the head of the first edition and subsequently reprinted in every edition appears an advertisement by the author dated May 1736. Today, its fame rivals that of the book it was intended to announce: no single passage within the Analogy has been cited with the frequency accorded it nor commented upon as extensively. Indeed, it sometimes seems that having read the advertisement, commentators have felt themselves exempt from reading the book. The advertisement, however, as its title indicates, is no more than a public notice of intention. As such, it is a concise statement; by nature, more descriptive than indicative. Within these limits, it is a valuable piece of documentation and is worth quoting in its entirety.

If the reader should meet here with any thing which he had not before attended to, it will not be in the observations upon the constitution and course of nature, these being all obvious, but in the application of them: in which, though there is nothing but what appears to me to be of some real weight, and therefore of great importance; yet he will observe several things, which will appear to him of very little importance, if he can think things to be of little importance which are of any real weight at all, upon such a subject as religion. However, the proper force of the following Treatise lies in the whole general analogy considered together.

It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of enquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And, accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and

ridicule, as it were by reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world. On the contrary, this much, at least will here be found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reasonable man, who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured, as he is of his own being that it is not, however so clear a case, that there is nothing in it. There is, I think, strong evidence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reason, be satisfied to the contrary. And the practical consequences to be drawn from this is not attended to by everyone who is concerned with it.

(Italics mine - T.R.)

In most references to the book's historical situation the emphasis falls most frequently upon the sentence italicized. The situation therein described, a situation in which Christianity is considered to be fictional and not fit for serious enquiry, is taken to be central. To catch hold of the comment in this fashion is a complete misinterpretation. It is to suggest that the order of the two paragraphs should be reversed and indeed there are some who would favour that measure as a much smoother reading. While it has become commonplace in every age to credit Butler with obscurity, here, his meaning is clear. The first paragraph is to be read as a direct commentary upon the title. The full title, The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature, Butler assumes, is quite clear to his readers. He undoubtedly felt that the members of the Royal Society and the Boyle lecturers had made 'the constitution and course of nature' a household phrase to the literate public. 'Analogy' at least

in its poetic and literary signification of 'likeness' or 'similarity' if not in its precise philosophical sense could likewise be assumed to be understandable. Thus Butler begins by commenting that the analogy which he has constructed rests upon obvious and well-known observations of natural occurrence. Its novelty lies only in its application of these observations. Then, in what first appears to be a rather heavy-handed apology for his minor observations, Butler enunciates two methodological considerations of some importance; namely, that every application of natural observation to religion has a positive force and secondly, that the analogy's force lies in the totality of observations and applications taken altogether. Thus the analogy is central. Only after this direct appeal to the reader, a reader whom he assumes to be the possessor of a body of common knowledge, does Butler reflect upon the current situation and describe his work's possible meaning and merit for his time. His description is double-pronged and nuanced. It begins simply enough: Christianity has been discovered to be fictitious. This, however, as a description, is not exhaustive: the first two sentences are conjunctive and coordinate, that is to say, they are continuous as to subject. The contemporary situation, as Butler states it in its entirety is this: many people, crediting themselves with discernment, by common agreement hold that Christianity is a fiction and

not a fit subject for serious enquiry and consequently subject it to mirth and ridicule for having interrupted their pleasures. That is to say, the situation is not simply one of unbelief but one in which a positive disbelief flourishes and manifests itself in pleasure-seeking and mirth-making. Against this, Butler asserts that he will prove, to the satisfaction of any reasonable man, with a certitude equal to that of self-existence that Christianity is not contrary to reason and that it is of practical consequence to everyone. Thus, from the representations of the advertisement, we must contend that the situation which Butler faces consists of the following elements: the repudiation and ridicule of Christianity in common agreement by many discerning people who seek pleasure; and, that his response to this situation consists of a rational aspiration to prove the rationality and practical importance of Christianity. What must be particularly noted is that both the situation and Butler's response to it refers explicitly not to religion or virtuous living in general but specifically to Christianity. Secondly, that the proof to be advanced aims equally at intellectual and practical assent. Thirdly, and very significantly, that this purpose, the intellectual and practical vindication of Christianity, is to be produced through the analogy of religion and nature.

These three points are central to the Analogy itself and each must be considered in some detail. Taken together, they establish the work as a Christian apology which seeks to elicit practical and theoretical assent through the analogical method. At this point it is quite legitimate to ask what sort of assent does Butler seek to establish through this method? On the basis of this text, no firm answer can as yet be given. Butler states that he intends to establish a proof suggestive of the truth of Christianity and demonstrative of its non-falsity, however, this statement is somewhat equivocal. Does it mean that he intends to prove that Christianity is supported by reason or simply, that it is simply in conformity with reason and cannot be disproved by it? Again, we must forestall our answer until we have considered the principles of the analogical method in some detail. It is important to note, however, that the advertisement lays itself open to either possibility.

As we have seen, the advertisement centers its claim to originality upon its method, the method of analogy.

In his Introduction to the treatise, Butler explains his choice of this method and how the method proceeds. For the moment we are concerned only with the reasons underlying his choice of method.

Butler notes that "the generality of those who profess themselves dissatisfied with the evidence of religion" (I, lii) do not deny the existence of either an intelligent Author of Nature or a natural Governor of the world. That is, they are willing to accept regular laws in nature as divinely authored. They do not disavow nature, only Christianity. Therefore if they can be shown that

there be an analogy or likeness between that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which Revelation informs us of, and that system of things and Dispensation of Providence, which Experience together with Reason informs us of, i.e. the known course of Nature; this is a presumption, that they have both the same author and cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former's being from God, drawn from anything which is analogical or similar to what is in the latter, which is acknowledged to be from him . . .

(I, li)

then it must be held that Christianity is not a subject of derision unless nature is also. Butler willingly acknowledges that the conclusiveness of the argument is limited but he asserts that it is a normal human limitation. His choice and avowal of the epistemological viewpoint of Empiricism⁶ is due

⁶cf. below. p. 60 ff.

perhaps more than is commonly recognized to the pastoral repercussions of the idealist hypothesis.⁷ Butler affirms that he is equally opposed to those who formulate their notions of the world and of religion on the basis of hypothetical principles like Descartes and to those who proceed from certain principles but who apply them inappropriately such as those "who explain the structure of the human body, and the nature of diseases and medicines from mere mathematics" (I, liii). He finds both in error not only because men "have not faculties for this kind of speculation" (I, liii) but also because it issues in a train of folly and extravagance which lead men to render judgements upon the goodness and wisdom of God (I, liv). Thus Butler's denunciation of the hypothetical manner of thinking and advocacy of analogical reasoning, while rooted in the empirical prejudice, is likewise attributable to the conviction that any the former method aids and abets the despisers of Christianity whereas the latter vindicates and justifies it. Having chosen and established a method, Butler follows it and expounds its repercussions at length. The final estimation of his situation and purpose must await our analysis of the argument which reflects it in the next chapter. However, there are several references throughout

⁷Graves, op.cit. p. 175ff., I think, is right to insist upon the practical significance of Butler's probability theory. However his repudiation of an underlying epistemology cannot in my view be upheld in the face of Butler's explicit statements on the limitations of man's faculties and on the logic of analogy.

the treatise which throw a great deal of light on both. These references are scattered and somewhat incidental in the first part of the treatise since Butler is on the whole willing to allow his argument to build of itself.

It might be said that Butler's whole approach to the doctrines which he discusses under the heading "Of Natural Religion" is informed by the concern that

there is, in the present age, a certain fearlessness, with what might be hereafter under the government of God, which nothing but a universally acknowledged demonstration on the side of atheism can justify; and which makes it quite necessary, that men be reminded and if possible made to feel, that there is no sort of ground for being thus presumptuous, even upon the most sceptical principles.

(I, 83)

Butler construes the disavowal of religion as springing from a fearlessness of the hereafter. Lack of concern for the future renders religion irrelevant. Now although Butler is tempted to view the subjects of this attitude in Old Testament fashion as 'vessels of wrath' and as "examples of the woeful effects of vice and folly" (I, 83), he realizes that their presumption has intellectual roots and accordingly may be disproved and that once disproved, the situation which has arisen from it may be remedied. At root, Butler asserts, this extravagant fearlessness is attributable to the conviction that the Author of Nature is a simple, absolute

benevolence. This conviction in turn has arisen because men have objected against, and are unwilling to allow, divine punishment. (I, 77) Their objection is rash and thoughtless because they do not foresee its consequences: divine punishment is simply one aspect of final causation and the denial of this aspect constitutes a denial of all finality. (I, 77ff) Thus, Butler wishes to correct the situation by showing such men that the hereafter is dependent upon the present both in Nature and in religion and that consequently there is no ground for fearlessness and much reason for fear.

Although Butler asserts that the conception of the Author of Nature is the basic intellectual cause of fearlessness, he recognizes that this concept as well as the opinion of fatalism are, in many instances, simply rationalizations for licentiousness. In these cases the disavowal of a hereafter relevant to this life is in reality a shameless avowal of willfulness and pleasure as the law of life. (I, 109) By such opinions,

atheistical men pretend to satisfy and encourage themselves in vice, and justify to others their disregard of all religion.

(I, 148)

Against them, Butler wishes to show first, that their rationalizations cannot be justified and secondly that

their law of life leads to temporal ruination. These projects direct his argument throughout the first section and it is not until the opening chapter of the second section that Butler makes any truly significant comments upon the situation which confronts him.

The first chapter of the second section, "Of the Importance of Christianity", is in Butler's words an "introduction to a treatise concerning the credibility of it" (I, 166). Butler finds it necessary to preface his discussion of credibility with a discussion of the importance of the subject because revelation is under attack from two quarters:

Some persons, upon pretence of the sufficiency of the light of nature, avowedly reject all revelation, as in its very notion, incredible, and what must be fictitious. And indeed, it is certain, no revelation would have been given, had the light of nature been sufficient in such a sense as to render one not wanting and useless

There are other persons, not to be ranked with these, who seem to be getting into a way of neglecting, and as it were, overlooking revelation, as of small importance provided natural Religion be kept to. With little regard either to the evidence of the former, or to the objections against it, and even upon supposition of its truth; 'the only design of it,' say they, 'must be, to establish a belief of the moral system of nature, and to enforce the practice of natural piety and virtue. The belief and practice of these things were, perhaps, much promoted by the first publication of Christianity; but whether they are believed and practiced, upon the evidence and motives of nature or of revelation, is no great matter.' This way of considering revelation, though it is not the same with the former, yet borders nearly upon it, and very much, at length, runs up into it: . . .

(I, 165-166)

Here we have the full development of one of the components of the contemporary situation delineated in the advertisement, namely, the assertion that revelation is fictitious. It is to be noted that here, in contradistinction to the advertisement, Butler speaks of revelation rather than Christianity. The distinction between these two terms will be discussed in the following chapter. What must be attended to at present is the fact that Butler carefully distinguishes between a rejection of revelation and a neglect of revelation. The latter does not constitute a repudiation of Christianity nor issue from irreligious sentiment. Quite the contrary, the contemporary neglect of revelation issues from a strong concern to establish the practice of natural piety and virtue, to establish practical religion. The neglect of revelation, as such, arises within this concern from the conviction that the practice of religion is much more important than the principles upon which it is established and that since revealed principles are a stumbling block, they can be neglected as currently dysfunctional means. The rejection of revelation, on the other hand, does not reject a dysfunctional mode but repudiates an incredible fiction. And this repudiation does not issue from a practical concern for religion; it flows, rather, from a pretended sufficiency in nature for human

guidance. For Butler, the operative substantive is "pretence". It establishes their opinion as fallacious and as vicious. While Butler is primarily concerned to confront the repudiation of revelation, he feels it necessary to treat of the neglect because

though it is not the same with the former, yet borders nearly upon it, and very much, at length, runs up into it The consideration of it will likewise further show the extravagance of the [other] opinion . . .

(I, 166)

Therefore Butler proposes to consider the commands of revelation and to establish whether obedience or disobedience to those commands is an indifferent matter. In pursuing this task, Butler is much more influenced by objections arising from the contemporary situation than he was in the first half of the Analogy. He finds that he must first overcome presumptions against the very motion of revelation, objections against miracles and objections

. . . against the whole manner in which it is put and left with the world; as well as against several particular relations in Scripture: objections drawn from the deficiencies of revelation: from things in it appearing to men foolishness; from its containing matters of offence, which have led, and it must have been foreseen would lead, into strange enthusiasm and superstition, and be made to serve the purposes of tyranny and wickedness: from its not being universal; and, which is a thing of the same kind, from its evidence not being so convincing and satisfactory as it might have been It would be tedious, indeed impossible, to enumerate the several particulars comprehended under the objections here referred to; they being so various, according to the different fancies of men.

(I, 186)

Then having overcome this diversity of objections, a diversity which reveals that the Christian world view with its miraculous view of the world, its immoralities, enthusiasms, and schisms is rapidly losing its hold over men in the face of scientific homogeneity, polite morality, toleration, and cosmopolitanism, Butler finds the very goodness and wisdom of God in dispute. Again, after having considered the system of religion, Butler finds himself constrained to answer another series of objections against its particular character and deficient proofs.

Butler's reading of the situation and the full contours of his response to it will emerge with greater clarity once we have considered his actual arguments somewhat more closely. However, on the basis of the evidence considered thus far some preliminary conclusions may be drawn. First, Butler finds himself in a situation in which many people accept and uphold a creator and governor of a natural order which proceeds according to a system of laws but in which the moral government posited by Christianity is dismissed as fictional. This disavowal of Christianity flows on the one hand from a fearlessness for the future which is rooted in the conception that the Author of Nature is a simple absolute benevolence and on the other hand from an incredulity over the Christian revelation and its contents. Second, Butler

responds to this situation with the acknowledgement that although in many instances these objections are mere rationalizations for licentiousness, the objections themselves are unjustifiable and may be countered through a comparison of the system of religion to the system of nature, a comparison which will prove that the acceptance of the natural order demands the acceptance of the religious order. It is to be noted that Butler nowhere asserts he is either going to read off the existence of God from nature or the character of God from Scripture à la Thomas Aquinas and everywhere asserts that no presumption can be urged against Christianity from nature and indeed that nature substantiates Christianity. The similarity to Augustine's attempt to see the historical order substantiating the Christian religion in The City of God is obvious. Butler like Augustine before him and Schleiermacher after him is more concerned to vindicate the ecclesiastical order against its cultural despisers than to establish a theology. And it is this concern, this polemical concern, rather than theoretic presuppositions which governs the distribution of material under the headings "Of Natural Religion" and "Of Revealed Religion". The first section is directed against those who deny a moral providence; the second against those who deny a revealed religion. This contention

namely, that the Analogy is subdivided on the basis of pedagogical requirements, is substantiated by Butler's personal conception of Christianity which we will now investigate. Thus, while it is not yet clear whether Butler intends to establish a positive proof of reason's support for Christianity or simply, a proof of its non-irrationality, it is clear that he does not intend to prove the theistic hypothesis but rather, taking that hypothesis for granted, he intends to substantiate the theistic system, the system of religion.⁸

⁸ Inasmuch as Butler equates religion with Christianity and considers Christianity reducible in large part to the system of theism, it is not improper to equate the terms 'theistic system' and 'system of religion' in a discussion of Butler's thought. However, it must be noted that the 'system of religion' is broader than the 'theistic system' and comprehends not only divine government in all its ramifications but also the promulgation and institution of that government with additional norms of behaviour. cf. p.50ff.

CHAPTER III

Thus far, we have attempted to recover from the Analogy itself the basic features of the situation Butler was faced with and, also, the basic features of his confrontation with that situation. We noted that Butler saw his contemporary religious climate as a clime of positive disbelief in which many held Christianity to be a fiction. Assaying this situation, Butler found that the disavowal of religion was rooted primarily in a fearlessness of the hereafter which in turn was rooted in a conviction that the Author of Nature was a simple, absolute benevolence and secondarily in a rejection of revelation as, by nature, incredible. However, Butler further noted that these intellectual criticisms were neither borne nor existed in isolation. On the contrary, they were at all points intimately linked with the moral aspirations and endeavours of their authors and, as such, functioned in many instances as mere rationalizations for licentious behaviour. Confronting this situation and its criticisms, Butler proposed to construct an analogy of religion and nature. This analogy was to be positive in force and aimed at eliciting intellectual and moral assent.

It presupposed the existence of a natural order under an Author of Nature and sought to establish the similarity of Christianity to that natural order. In choosing a method through which to proceed, Butler repudiated the a priori or idealist hypothesis in favour of empirical realism.

In the present chapter, we will attempt to ascertain the basal suppositions of the method employed, the principles of analogy, and to delineate their function in the general argument of the treatise, an argument which we call the similarity of Christianity to the constitution and course of nature. Our overriding purpose in this pursuit is to discover the type and degree of assent the Analogy seeks to elicit. In this task, a task which is central to current Butler scholarship, a proper understanding of Butler's theory of religion is crucial. Thus, a good part of the chapter will be given over to the discussion of this topic. In our final chapter, we will draw the conclusions of these two chapters together and discuss them in terms of some of the questions raised by previous scholarship as the first step toward our reassessment of the Analogy and its meaning for the modern world.

The Analogy while structured in two parts under the headings "Of Natural Religion" and "Of Revealed Religion" and divided by virtue of separate sections of conclusions nevertheless contains a single basic construction which might be termed 'the similarity of Christianity'¹ and which proceeds according to Butler's principle of analogy. According to Butler, man is a being of limited capacities and, as such, is incapable of discerning absolute objects of knowledge. Man therefore, must direct his life on the basis of probable evidence, an evidence which is distinct from demonstrative evidence inasmuch as it permits of degrees of certainty and is obtained by arguing from the likeness or similarity of matters of fact.² The principle of analogy, simply stated, is that probable certainty, the certainty by which we live, increases in direct proportion to the number of entities which are observed to be commonly shared by matters of fact

¹Jeffner, op.cit. p.72 terms it "the similarity of religion". This, however, is less exact and introduces unnecessary complications. Butler, as we will see more fully below, always equates the system of religion with Christianity.

²Butler like Locke is willing to admit the epistemological category of intuitive perception, that is, an absolutely certain knowledge which proceeds from either abstract truths or the abstract relation of things. However, Butler maintains that such knowledge is restricted in scope and is inadmissible in both ethics and theology. cf. Jeffner, op.cit. p.37ff.

and secondly, increases in direct proportion to the number of respects in which the entities involved are similar.

Thus Butler proposes to

turn our thoughts to what we experience to be the conduct of nature with respect to intelligent creatures; which may be resolved into general laws or rules of administration, in the same way as many of the laws of Nature respecting inanimate matter may be collected from experiments. And let us compare the known constitution and course of things with what is said to be the moral system of Nature and see whether they are not analogous and of a piece.

(I, liv)

While the analogy itself is "of pretty large extent, and consists of several parts; in some more, in others less exact" (I, lv), the proposed comparison is of a whole to a whole: the natural order to the religious order. On one side are ranked the laws regulating the conduct of nature and, on the other, are ranked the laws of religion but both series of laws are subsumed within organic entities or systems. . . . Beside the teleological universe presided over by the Author of Nature accepted by the critics of Christianity, Butler places a regulated moral system of religious laws under the authorship of God. Butler is not therefore concerned to show that the law of nature bespeaks the law of God but rather that the law of Nature and the law of Christianity are the same indivisible law. Within this

comparison the function of the principle of analogy will be to render religion probable on the basis of the similarities shown to exist between the principles asserted by religion and the principles observed in nature. That is to say, to show that the Author of Nature authorizes the system of Christianity and that because of this authorization, man must act in conformity with both.³ Within this framework, the division of the treatise into "natural religion" and "revealed religion" is logical rather than real. In the preceding chapter we noted the differing schools of opinion Butler was seeking to overcome and implied there that it was this polemical concern rather than theoretic presuppositions that governed the distribution of the material under the two headings. This implication is borne out by the actual argument.

The divine government of the world, "implied in the notion of religion in general and of Christianity" (I, lv) maintains that man is appointed to live in a future state where he will be rewarded or punished for his good or evil, virtuous or vicious behaviour in this life. However, because this life is apostate, the Author of Nature has provided an

³Probability is not only intellectual evidence but also the rule of practical guidance. For Butler, action follows upon knowledge and is informed by it. Thus Graves as I remarked earlier, is wrong to divorce moral precepts from their epistemological foundations in Butler's thought.

additional dispensation attested by miracles and prophecies which constitute a new and unexpected system mediated by a divine person for the recovery of the world. (I, lv-lvi). This system, the system of divine government, Butler terms "religion in general" or "Christianity". When he comes to discuss it in detail, he does so under the titles "Natural Religion" and "Revealed Religion". Under the first, he incorporates the following five elements:

- (1) Mankind is appointed to live in a future state,
- (2) that there every one shall be rewarded or punished,
- (3) rewarded or punished respectively for all that behaviour here which is comprehended under the words, virtuous or vicious, morally good or evil, (4) that our present life is a probation, a state of trial, and of discipline for a future one (5) and this [moral plan] stands . . . imperfectly made known to us at present.

(I, lvi; enumeration
mine - T.R.)

His purpose in presenting these doctrines is to show that "this little scene of human life, in which we are so busily engaged, as having a reference, of some sort or other, to a much larger plan of things." (I, 158) The words are imprecise and susceptible of varying interpretations. Following David Jenkins,⁴ we could say that Butler intends to show that the world, mankind, and man's life in the world bespeaks the existence of God. But consulting the actual argument of the

⁴ David Jenkins, op.cit. p.22

Analogy, we must say that Butler intends rather to show that these doctrines, none of which speak of the existence of God which is presupposed by the treatise as we have seen and all of which speak of the nature of man, are paralleled in the natural world. For example, in speaking of the immortality of the soul, Butler notes that just as the same insect exists both as worm and fly, the same man exists as foetus, child, and adult. Moreover, although each part of a man's body is exchanged during his lifetime, his mind remains unaffected and continues to be the same mind. Thus, in nature, the destruction of the body does not necessarily imply the destruction of the living agent and it is probable that man can live after death under widely different conditions of being. But Butler takes the argument a step further: he asserts that "there is in every case a probability, that all things will continue as we experience they are." (I, 58) That is to say, he asserts that Newton's first law of motion holds in the existential realm: we must assume things will continue in existence unless there is any reason for them to cease existing:

"This is that kind of presumption or probability from analogy, expressed in the very word continuance, which seems our only natural reason for believing the course of the world will continue tomorrow . . .

(I, 58-59)

Butler, as one can plainly see, is not here concerned to prove that the soul is immortal but rather to show that nature does not imply destruction by death and, indeed, manifests continuance.⁵ Thus his otherwise curious remark that atheism can equally well account for a hereafter is easily understood. (I, 73) The probability of religion demands not only the mere existence of a future state but also that that future state be dependent upon present behaviour. The same pattern of parallelism is repeated over and over again in reference to the next three doctrines.⁶ Thus the ultimate conclusion which Butler has sought to establish throughout this section is that this world by self-confession is a school and that its schooling is not destroyed by death.

In viewing the world in this fashion Butler generates many difficulties. For instance, there are many evils which do not readily conform to the school system for they are equally unsuitable either as moral pedagogues or as punishments

⁵cf. S. A. Graves, op.cit. p. 171

⁶Thus Nature distributes pleasure and pain according to a supervisory principle identical to that exercised by fathers over their families, societies over their members, and God over man. (I, 80) Nature rewards virtue and punishes vice (albeit in a limited fashion but sufficiently "to give us the apprehension that it shall be completed . . . to that degree of perfection which religion teaches us it shall.") (I, 85). Man is born undeveloped and is perfected by gradual development in which he progresses from one stage to the next.

for vice. Such evils constitute an objection against the wisdom and goodness of the government. However, for Butler, this objection is illusory rather than real. Man is a limited creature immersed within a great law-bound system. Owing to the limitations on his knowledge, he can ascertain only a few of the laws which bind the system together. And in the absence of insight into all relations, the wisdom and goodness of the system cannot be ascertained. Faced with these circumstances, some fly to the opinion of necessity or fatalism for succour. But fatalism does not offer any account of the constitution of nature, that is, its origin and continuance: it offers only an account of a circumstance within the constitution. As such it does not destroy the proof of an intelligent Author of Nature but simply overturns all experience: it destroys nature. Rather than destroy nature, man must accept it in silent awe.

Butler's argument is curious if it is taken either as a proof of those doctrines which have traditionally been held to constitute natural religion or if it is taken as an interpretation of those doctrines. It does however make a great deal of sense if it is taken as Butler intended it to be taken, that is, as a general argument for the probability of the religious system drawn from the similarity of that system to the natural order; a proof that

it cannot but be, acknowledged, that the analogy of nature gives a strong credibility to the general doctrine of Religion, and to the several particular things contained in it, considered as so many matters of fact; and likewise that it shows this credibility not to be destroyed by any notions of Necessity.

(I, 148)

and that this probability "arising from experience and facts here considered, is fully sufficient in reason, to engage us to live in the general practice of all virtue and piety" (I, 162). Religion is thus vindicated against those who dismiss the concept of moral government. Nature is a moral system which in part corresponds exactly with the teaching of religion and suggests the fulfillments predicated by religion. The acceptance of natural order demands the acceptance of the religious order as a necessary consequence. And while objections may be urged against the wisdom, equity, and goodness of the religious order, these objections must likewise be urged against the natural order. But all such objections are foolish for they are simply the cries of man in his ignorance faced with an overpowering mystery. Man stands in the middle of an incomprehensible scheme connected with a past and a present but progressing toward an unknown future. This situation rather than provoking objections

ought, in common sense, to awaken mankind; to induce them to consider in earnest their condition, and what they have to do. It is absurd, absurd to the degree of being ridiculous, if the subject were not of so

serious a kind, for men to think themselves secure in a vicious life; or even in that immoral thoughtlessness which far the greatest part of them are fallen into.

(I, 162)

Thus far, Butler has been concerned to defend religion against the denial of moral providence; in the second part, "Of Revealed Religion", his concern is to defend religion against the denial of revelation. His exposition of this topic falls upon six heads:

(1) this world being in a state of apostasy . . . this gave occasion for an additional dispensation of Providence; of the utmost importance; (2) proved by miracles; (3) but containing many things . . . not to have been expected; (4) a dispensation of Providence, which is a scheme or system of things; (5) carried on by the mediation of a divine person, the Messiah, in order to the recovery of the world; (6) yet not revealed to all men, nor proved with the strongest possible evidence

(I, lv-lvi; enumeration mine - T.R.)

As we noted earlier, this disposition of the material bears the strong impress of determinate controversies. 'The similarity of Christianity', strictly so called, occupies a position within the schema rather than controlling it as previously. However, this looser framework allows him the opportunity to expound his basic approach to religion at greater length.

Christianity or the system of religion is

First, . . . a republication, and external institution, of natural or essential Religion, adapted to the present circumstances of mankind, and intended to promote natural piety and virtue: and Secondly . . . an account of a dispensation of things, not discoverable by reason, in consequence of which several distinct precepts are enjoined us. For though natural Religion is the foundation and principal part of Christianity, it is not in any sense the whole of it.

(I, 167)

Christianity, then, is a whole which comprehends within itself natural religion and revealed religion. In discussing natural or essential religion, Butler is orthodox in the extreme. For Butler, essential religion is that part of the religious system which promotes natural piety and virtue and which in principle is accessible to reason. In fact, however, it required republication and is nowhere operative outside Christianity except in those places which have borrowed the light of Christianity as can be seen by a consideration of " . . . the state of Religion in the heathen world before revelation, and its present state in those places which have borrowed no light from it." (I, 165) The greatest men have remained in doubt of things of the greatest importance and mankind in general has remained ignorant and inattentive of the basic doctrines of religion. Thus, were it not for the republication of essential religion in Christianity, it is impossible to say

who would have been able to have reasoned out that whole system, which we call Natural Religion, in its

genuine simplicity, clear of superstition: but there is certainly no ground to affirm that the generality could. If they could, there is no sort of probability that they would. Admitting there were, they would certainly want a standing admonition to remind them of it, and inculcate it upon them.

(I, 165)

This system of Natural or essential religion republished by Christianity teaches that the world is a moral system created and governed by an infinite, perfect Being, that virtue is his law, and that he will "judge mankind in righteousness, and render to all according to their works, in a future state." (I, 167)

Revelation, or revealed religion, is first and foremost the republication of the teachings of essential religion. Secondly, it is the authoritative publication of these teachings affording evidence for the truth of them and instituting them in the world through a visible church which instructs, admonishes, disciplines, and exercises the world in the belief and practice of these truths. And thirdly, it is an account "of a particular dispensation of Providence . . . for the recovery and salvation of mankind." (I, 172) in consequence of which, distinct precepts are enjoined upon mankind. (I, 173ff)

Basically then, for Butler, the system of religion in general or Christianity - the terms are equivalent - is a revealed system consisting of a republication, an authoritative publication, and a particular dispensation. Thus Christianity may be termed revelation or revealed religion. Natural or

essential religion, on the other hand, is that part of Christianity or revelation which lies at the bases of the entire system of religion and which in principle is accessible to reason: it is a residual concept.⁷

Viewing religion in this fashion, Butler is in a position to argue that Christianity posits the "really real" and that far from being incredible, it is the natural order revealed. Thus far, we have seen him argue that those aspects of Christianity which are subsumed under the title "Natural Religion" are all exhibited in the constitution of nature, that the laws of nature and the laws of religion comprehended under the title Natural Religion are identical. It is this mode of argument and no other that is pursued

⁷Butler is maintaining that what is generally termed "Natural Religion" is in reality those doctrines of Christianity which remain once the dispensation through Jesus Christ and the ecclesiastical structure are removed. These remnants, he admits, can be found both in the non-Christian world and in the non-Christian heart of man but in both instances they exist in an accreted and disfigured form. Thus Christians can speak of a natural religion only because they are enlightened to its existence by the light of Christianity. Therefore, he cannot argue that nature bespeaks God but only that what religion says of God is substantiated by nature. I have termed Butler's position orthodox in the extreme because of its insistence upon the role of revelation in the actual knowledge of natural religion: in this insistence it places itself squarely in the Pauline-Augustinian tradition on nature and grace. cf. K. Rahner, Nature and Grace (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964).

throughout the treatise. The revealed religion which he now undertakes to discuss is none other than that selfsame Christianity or general religion which he has been discussing but now it is viewed inasmuch as it is a particularized dispensation established by a particular method and supported by particular evidences. His view is once again determined by polemical considerations. He remarks that although religion consists of many and divers things and has occasioned objections as multifarious as men's fancies, the contemporary objections to Christianity fall most heavily upon "the evidence for it", "the whole manner in which it is put and left with the world" (I, 187) and "the mediation of Christ, in some or other of its parts." (I, 208).

Approaching these objections Butler is most concerned to show that Christianity as a particular dispensation is

a particular scheme under the general plan of Providence, and a part of it, conducive to its completion, with regard to mankind.

(I, 202)

that is, that it constitutes a system which proceeds according to general laws and that this system occupies a place within the larger moral order. It is the failure to recognize this vision of the Christian dispensation as a whole within the greater whole of the moral order which has occasioned more than a few difficulties with Butler's thought.

In the preceding section, Butler read off a moral government from the distribution of happiness and unhappiness in the world. At that point, he noted that while certain facts did not correspond entirely to that view, they did however indicate the general credibility of the view and pointed to a future completion. Now, in his consideration of the particular dispensation of Christianity, he takes up these facts again and illustrates how they correspond to the laws predicated by Christianity. Man in his present existence is indebted to the instrumentality of his fellow men for his birth, upbringing, and subsequent satisfactions. Rewards and punishments are mediated through others. Moreover, evil consequences do not always follow upon actions and are at times prevented through the intervention of a third party and, often, through such interventions, the good take upon themselves evil consequences and suffer accordingly. The ends and purposes of such acts are beyond our comprehension but the regularity with which they occur seemingly points to some sort of general law. Thus nature indicates the existence of laws corresponding to the laws of mediation and Atonement predicated by Christianity. Similarly, the other general laws of the Christian dispensation are evidenced by laws in nature and to a greater degree than we can ascertain for the laws to which both realms may be reduced can be ascertained "but a little way, and in a very few respects." (I, 209)

A similar sort of correspondence between nature and religion is exhibited in the promulgation of Christianity and in its supporting evidence. It is often objected that a system which touches all men should not be disclosed to only a few and that a system of such importance should not stand on such dubious foundations. According to Butler, neither objection has any practical significance because they rest upon the assumption that

. . . it cannot be thought God would have bestowed any favour at all upon us, unless in the degree, which we think, he might, and which, we imagine, would be most to our particular advantage; and also that it cannot be thought he would bestow a favour on any, unless he bestowed the same favour upon all; suppositions which we find contradicted, not by a few instances in God's natural government of the world, but by the general analogy of nature together.

(I, 225)

and secondly, that the evidence for revealed religion is less than that upon which temporal actions are undertaken, an area in which the greatest uncertainty and doubtfulness abounds (I, 226ff). Both assumptions, as he says, are repudiated by life itself: neither uniformism nor demonstrative evidence exist.⁸ Moreover the evidence for Christianity is

⁸ Leslie Stephan, History cit. p. 246ff. has argued from this that Butler's God makes man liable to sin, makes certain they sin, and then condemns them for sinning. Such an accusation is unfounded. Butler clearly states (I, 229ff) that the charge of injustice cannot be levelled against the world or religion because no more is required than can reasonably be expected from the circumstances.

no less than the evidence upon which we normally proceed and in fact, is greater. The external evidences for Christianity, miracles, prophecies, and the Biblical view of history have been denigrated without just cause and may be substantiated through analogy to natural evidences.⁹

To summarize, Butler has argued that all the doctrines of Christianity presently disputed are evidenced in nature to a greater or lesser degree and that therefore all objections which may be urged against Christianity must likewise be urged against nature. But since man is equally unenlightened in regard to both systems, the objections are foolish. Rather, since the total weight of evidence points to a correspondence of the two systems, the assertion that the Author of Nature authorizes Christianity is probable. In pursuing this argument, Butler has broken Christianity down into "material" and "revealed" components and argued successively for the analogy of nature to each. This procedure, we noted, was demanded by

⁹While Butler terms his arguments in support of this contention 'arguments from analogy', he has in mind the correspondence between natural and religious evidences rather than nature and religion. As such, these arguments while referring to the main line of argument fall somewhat outside it. For a full account of the logical structure of Butler's arguments and Hume's critique of them cf. Jeffner, *op.cit.* p. 112ff. What must be noted, however, is that Butler considers the external evidences to obtain full force only when viewed in their total profile, that is, as constituting a historical frame work and that he asserts this framework to be the best scheme yet devised for the incorporation of all known historical detail cf. I, 242 ff.

the character of the objections waged against Christianity rather than by Butler's own theoretical convictions. Through this line of argument Butler has removed objections against Christianity; the question may be asked whether he has also established positive grounds of belief. At present, the answer is in some dispute.

S. A. Graves has argued that Butler employs his principle of analogy in two distinct ways, positively and negatively, and

Positively: the important similarities between the systems of nature and religion suggest that the Author of Nature authorizes the system of religion. Negatively: (a) If certain features in the systems of nature and religion seem to conflict with God's goodness, wisdom, and power, our experienced incapacity to judge of the propriety of means adapted to ends, where some of these ends are known only vaguely and others are quite unknown, shows analogously that we must be incompetent critics of the perfection of divine providence. (b) If certain features in the system of nature are after all admitted to be consistent with the goodness, wisdom and power of God, similar features in the system of what is claimed to be revealed religion cannot be held incompatible with these attributes. ¹⁰

From these two useages arise an apologetic structure which is "negatively, the refutation of objections to orthodox religion; and positively, the establishment of some probable grounds of belief. ¹¹ However, in Graves view, " the strength

¹⁰ S. A. Graves, op.cit. p. 170

¹¹ Ibid. p. 171

of the positive argument is accidental to the apologetic of the Analogy. For the Analogy is an apologetic of understatement, of reduced evidence."¹² Butler is a practical and pragmatic preacher who assays on the economy of probability without speculative principles and finds "that religion cannot be known to be false, and even this will impose on anyone who admits as much the obligation to act as if it may be true."¹³ According to Graves, Butler is the public preacher par excellence engaged in a point by point refutation of Deist opinions, opinions which "had no future" and "were not autonomous speculation but stages in the unfinished decay of faith which had been going on for two hundred years."¹⁴ A. Jeffner,¹⁵ on the other hand, argues that the principle of analogy is applied throughout the treatise in a general argument which corresponds to Graves "positive useage." This general argument attempts to establish the coincidence between a series of eleven laws of religion and eleven laws of nature and thereby to establish positive grounds for belief.¹⁶ In his view, this argument proceeds from the empirical starting point enunciated

¹²Ibid. p.174

¹³Ibid. p.180

¹⁴Ibid. p.169

¹⁵A. Jeffner, op.cit.

¹⁶Ibid. p.69ff.

by Locke and moves through a rigorous positive methodology.¹⁷
 At various points, however, he asserts that this general line of argument is applied negatively to refute objections. This negative application he terms "ignorance arguments".¹⁸ For Jeffner, Butler represents a religious philosopher who constructs an argument for the truth of religion upon empirical grounds. The objections he refutes are primarily objections from within. Both sides have overstated their cases.

In advancing the primacy of the negative over the positive, Graves completely misrepresents Butler's method and intention. In discussing Butler's notion of probability, Graves asserts,

I think it is a mistake to interpret Butler as meaning that since (rather than when) knowledge is impossible for us we must put up with the probability that belongs to our condition Apart from the fact that in Butler's philosophy agnosticism is balanced by equally strong certainties, any general theory of the speculative limitations of the human intellect is irrelevant to the Analogy, resting as it does, not on an epistemology, but on an economy of probability. So that when Butler says that probability is the guide of life he is proposing no speculative principle but a practical maxim¹⁹

This clearly runs counter to Butler's explicit statements in the Introduction that he is equally opposed to Descartes

¹⁷ Ibid. p.36ff.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.42ff.

¹⁹ Graves, op.cit. p.175

and all others who proceed in matters of religion on the basis of hypothesis because "we have not faculties for this kind of speculation." (I, liii) Against such speculations he asserts a more limited methodology; the method of analogical reasoning. And this method clearly rests upon determinate epistemological foundations. Butler states,

It is not my design to inquire further into the nature, the foundation, and the measure of probability; or whence it proceeds that likeness should beget that presumption, opinion, and full conviction, which the human mind is formed to receive from it, and which it does necessarily produce in every one; or to guard against the errors, to which reasoning from analogy is liable. This belongs to the subject of logic; and is a part of that subject which has not yet been thoroughly considered.

(I, i)

The method of analogy implies an empirical starting point.

One moves from matters of fact to the correspondences between them. And these correspondences, similarities, or likenesses beget evidence in the mind, probable evidence. An evidence that

admits of degrees; and of all variety of them, from the highest moral certainty, to the very lowest presumption . . . that the slightest possible presumption is of the nature of a probability, appears from hence; that such low presumption often repeated, will amount even to moral certainty.

(I, xlviiii)

The influence of Locke is evident at every point. Knowledge arises from things; evidence from the relations between them.

Customary conjunction creates moral certitude. However, it is likewise erroneous to limit the methodology to its purely epistemological component, for it is, as Graves asserts, an economy of action. In Butler, there is at every point a close link between thought and action: thought is to be acted upon and action must proceed according to thought. The inter-relationship is so strong that it is not only the man who refuses to acknowledge the logical consequences of his intellectual premises but also the man who acts wrongly who may be termed thoughtless. (I, 122ff.) It is the very strength of this interrelationship that both Graves and Jeffner fail to recognize. The negative use of analogy or the ignorance arguments are both epistemological and pastoral. Recalling Butler's statements in the first paragraph of the advertisement, his treatment of the external evidences for belief, and the series of conclusions which he draws, it seems certain that he sought to establish a total effect, a total probability for Christianity, a total effect which is achieved through a methodology which establishes both right thought and right action. The question as to whether this is achieved through negative or positive means is in some sense irrelevant to Butler for he denies the possibility of absolute certitude and implies

that probability rests not only on the existent similarities but equally upon the perceived similarities (I, 229ff.) Thus his methodology attempts to evince proof that Christianity is at the very least not untrue and perhaps that it is true. His conviction is that his arguments prove the latter. He is willing to recognize that for others they may evince only the former.

In sum, the Analogy seeks to vindicate Christianity from the attacks of its despisers by exhibiting the congruity of Christianity to the order of nature through one continuous argument which creates a cumulative effect. That argument proceeds on the principles that human knowledge is relative not absolute, that its evidence is probable not demonstrative, and that its certitude is directly proportioned to similarity. The argument itself seeks to exhibit the congruity of the two orders by paralleling them in their organic totalities in such a way as to show forth their similarities. However, in order that objections to Christianity in some of its parts may more directly be refuted, Butler explicitly singles out several religious doctrines for particular parallelism, considering Christianity first under its aspect of "Natural Religion", then under its aspect of "Revealed Religion". The effect of his argument is to show that Christianity is

probable, that it is the key to both right thought and right action. In the next chapter, we will discuss the implications of this argument.

CHAPTER IV

As we saw in the last chapter, Butler's Analogy seeks to vindicate Christianity by exhibiting its congruity with the order of nature. It argued, in effect, that the religious and natural orders are identical with the attendant conclusion that the religious order is as natural as nature herself. Indeed, it argued that the religious order is more natural than nature inasmuch as that aspect of the one system, which is termed 'the system of religion', reveals the other aspect, 'the system of nature', in a fuller light. By so arguing, Butler's Analogy removes all objections to religion drawn from the course and constitution of nature and urges religion as the key to a proper understanding of that order. This argument fulfills two of the basic aspirations of the traditional Christian apology: the removal of objections to religion and the urging of religion itself.

Butler characterized the religious climate of his day as one in which both practical and theoretical irreligion flourished and one in which criticism of Christianity fell upon both its underlying concept of divine government and the particularities of the Christian dispensation. However, it was likewise a period in which the existence of natural

order regulated and founded by an Author of Nature was taken for granted and assumed. What was criticized and denied was the attribution of a moral quality to that order and the conformity of the Christian scheme of things to the dictates of that order. In the interests of historical accuracy, it is worthwhile to ask to what extent does this situation designate the doctrine of Deism?

The question is complicated by the fact that the doctrine now comprehended under the title Deism was never formulated in a classical creed nor adhered to by a determinate group of disciples. Deism was never a formal doctrine, much less a school of thought. In its own time it was, on the contrary, an epithet hurled against all who held heterodox opinions in religion. Samuel Clarke, writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, classified as Deists all those (1) who admitted a Creator but denied a Governor, (2) those who admitted natural providence but denied moral providence, (3) those who admitted both natural and moral providence but denied an afterlife, (4) those who admitted all of these but denied revelation.¹ Inasmuch as Butler considers all these positions to a greater or lesser degree in the Analogy, it can be said that the Analogy counters Deism. But Clarke's

¹Samuel Clarke, The Obligations of Natural Religion, 7th edition, p. 155-173 quoted in Graves, op.cit. p. 170.

classification is somewhat broad and includes almost all forms of heterodoxy with the exception of atheism. The currently accepted definition of Deism is somewhat narrower and it is debatable to what extent the Analogy designates it. If Deism is taken to mean the denial of revelation in the name of the sufficiency of reason, as it is normally defined,² then it must be insisted that Butler points to a much broader situation for the Analogy is much wider in scope. Its defence of the Christian revelation forms but one part of a larger and more fundamental defence of Christianity, a defence which confronts the entire perspective of early eighteenth century irreligion and counters it with a full scale apology not only for revelation itself but for the entire philosophical underpinnings of the religious vision of man. One of the strongest reasons for the continuing narrow interpretation³ of the Analogy as a polemic against Deism is the myth created by Sir Leslie Stephen and fortified by others⁴ that the Analogy is the isolated work of an isolated thinker. This theory suffers from a high degree of romantic portraiture and not only cannot be supported by any unequivocal evidence but indeed is more readily refuted by whatever evidence does exist. Pointing to

²This is the definition given by the Oxford Dictionary and with only minor emendations is the definition to be found in the usual handbooks and encyclopedias.

³Cf. S.A. Graves, op.cit. p.169; A. Carlsson, op.cit. Introduction.

⁴Cf. E.C. Mossner, op.cit. p.10ff.

the stylistic deficiencies and obscurities of the work, some critics⁵ have argued that the Analogy was produced through long and arduous intellectual labourings, and labourings of a man isolated from his times. In fact, these very same deficiencies are more easily explained as the loose expressions of rapid composition without revision: Butler can enunciate difficult ideas easily enough when called upon to do so.⁶ As Watson himself has noted, most of the difficulties in the Analogy can be removed easily through judicious editing.⁷ This romantic myth was further heightened by stationing Butler at a lonely desk in his parsonage at Stanhope for the entire period of composition. In fact, there is some doubt that this was the actual situation. It is known that the Analogy was composed sometime during the period 1725-1736. Now, while Butler was stationed at Stanhope throughout this period, the last four years of this period were divided between Stanhope and London. From 1732-1736, Butler served for six months each year at the Court of George II as personal chaplain to the Lord Chancellor, Charles Talbot, to whom the Analogy

⁵cf. Among others, G. Watson, op.cit. p.110ff.

⁶cf. Rolls Sermons 1-3, II 25-53.

⁷G. Watson, op.cit. p.112-113.

was affectionately dedicated.⁸ In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is these latter years which must be urged as the period of composition. The treatise betrays an easy familiarity with the opinions and behaviour of the upper classes of the period. Butler remarks with some frequency that by and large the critics of Christianity are licentious men who support their willfulness through recourse to philosophic rationalization.⁹ No where were such men more in evidence than at the court of George II, a court equally renowned for the epicurean courtings of the King's attendants and the philosophic musings of the Queen's circle. Religious debate was as much in evidence as the misbehaviour that generated it.¹⁰ It is here rather than among the country people of Stanhope that Butler undoubtedly found not only the spirit of opposition to religion which he strove against but also the stimulus to attack it. Thus, in our opinion, the Analogy addresses itself to the religious discussions of its day from within that climate of opinion with full familiarity with the situation. Far from being the personal manifesto of an isolated intellectual, it is rather the impassioned argument and pastoral plea of a high-ranking ecclesiastic. It is a confrontation with

⁸ cf. E.C. Mossner, op.cit. p. 3

⁹ cf. above p. 33

¹⁰ E.C. Mossner, op.cit. p. 4

all the roots and branches of a full-blown denigration of religion undertaken in the name of ecclesiastical piety.

As we noted earlier, Butler construed the contemporary disavowal of the basic principles of religion as the fruit of a fearlessness of the future which, in turn, he saw rooted in the conception of God as a simple, absolute benevolence¹¹ and he construed the denial of the Christian dispensation as the repudiation of an incredible fiction based upon the pretended sufficiency of nature in the guidance of human behaviour.¹² However, beyond these intellectual premises he saw psychological and moral dispositions which ruled the intellect and reduced its reasonings to rationalizations. That is to say, he saw moral causes for the intellectual disavowal of Christianity.¹³ Thus, while he was motivated to disprove the intellectual foundations of irreligion, he was motivated to disprove them in a way which would simultaneously urge loftier moral sentiments. He was, therefore, moved to create an argument which would suggest the truth of Christianity, demonstrate its non-falsity, and urge its practical application.

Butler's argument assumed the existence of a natural order ordered by an Author of Nature and it assumed the existence

¹¹cf. above p. 32ff.

¹²cf. above p. 36ff.

¹³cf. above p. 33

of the religious order of Christianity. In so doing, it simply accepted the pre-suppositions of its time. However, that is not to say that it accepted them as hypotheses. Butler viewed both as empirically derived facts. The existence of natural order and an Author of Nature was a conclusion from the observation of nature accepted by all. (I,li) The existence of the religious order of Christianity was an equally well manifested conclusion from the observation of human history. (I, 222ff.) His argument did not seek to prove their existences but only to exhibit their conformity with one another. In constructing that argument of their conformity, Butler dismissed a priori or hypothetical reasoning as radically untenable and advocated an empirical methodology proportioned to human capacities. The starting point for that method was the denial of absolute objects of knowledge. From this denial, it followed that certitude is probable rather than demonstrative and proportional to the existing similarities or likenesses between objects. Butler's method, thus, advanced according to the principle of analogy and sought to derive the probability of Christianity by exhibiting the similarities between the system of nature and the system of Christianity. Ultimately, it concluded that although man was radically ignorant and could ascertain very little, he could nevertheless ascertain the congruity of Christianity and nature to a sufficient degree

to act upon the propositions of the Christian system. Let us examine this a little more closely.

Butler's argument sought only to exhibit the conformity of two systems. By denying the existence of absolute objects of knowledge, it effectively denied the possibility of absolute conformity: since neither can be fully known, neither can be fully compared. Man cannot achieve demonstrative certitude and consequently cannot know Christianity to be absolutely true. The question, then, is to what degree may Christianity be morally certain or relatively true. For Butler, certitude is proportioned to the number of instances and respects in which two things are similar. Butler consigned the study of this topic to Logic and does not investigate it further. (I, 1) It is unfortunate that he did not say more because there is some ambiguity in his thinking. He did not resolve the question as to whether similarity is essentially existent or perceptual and seemingly argues for both. He definitely attributed a positive value to all similarities and by and large seemed to adopt the common sense view that perceived similarities correspond exactly to existent similarities. However, he likewise seemed to give a great deal of weight to Berkeley's "esse est percipi" principle, at least in the moral realm: all men who thoroughly consider the matter can see that Christianity is not untrue and may be true, but only the individual can see that it

is true through personal experience. That is to say, Butler seemed to construct a probability scale on which each and every evidence of similarity registers positively but one in which there is a hiatus between public acknowledgement of congruity and private experience of it. Truth, like natural gifts, is dispensed unequally among individuals. Thus, it is our contention, that for Butler both nature and Christianity are simply likely stories and their conformity is a likely story, that is, a certitude sufficient to act upon and it is only through action that its full truth is derived. Man, his world, and his religion are enigmas wrapped in mystery in the midst of an incomprehensible whole. Man's task is to penetrate their curtains by following the most likely routes into them.

We have continually maintained that Butler's argument is an apologetic argument, that is, that it seeks to remove objections to Christianity and to urge Christianity itself. But we have likewise maintained that it differs in several important respects from the tradition represented by St. Thomas Aquinas. Perhaps, it would now be in order to finalize these differences. Like all earlier apologists, Butler sought to vindicate Christianity against the attacks of its cultural despisers. To this task, he brought the full weight of pastoral concern and not only knowledge of the actual objections but also a vision of their underlying causes in the heart and

mind of man. But, whereas, earlier apologists had, in the words of Southey:

. . . established the Historical and Prophetical
 grounds of the Christian Religion,
 And that sure testimony of its Truth,
 Which is found in its perfect adaption to the heart of man.¹⁴

Butler attempted to develop its similarity to the constitution and course of nature. This program, as we have seen, was, in large part, dictated by the criticisms and presuppositions of his age, by its acceptance of nature and her Author and its concomitant disavowal of religion and its Governor. However, in arguing for the conformity of Christianity to the natural order, Butler chose to establish their similarity to one another rather than to prove their truth. That is not to say, however, that he repudiated the Thomistic achievement but only that he was more concerned to substantiate its conclusions than to discuss its premises. What did this program accomplish? What is its meaning for today?

Perhaps Butler's greatest accomplishment was to unify the religious and natural orders, to establish them as two sides of one coin, that is to say, to unite our knowledge of nature with our knowledge of religion and the natural mystery of the universe with the mystery of God. With Butler, religion and

¹⁴Quoted above, p.6.

nature come together to occupy the same realm. The major repercussion of this synthesis of two heretofore distinct spheres was the subjugation of religious data to human judgement. This was not the repercussion Butler himself intended. He had hoped rather to subjugate natural data to religious judgement but in attempting this, he created the possibility of the other. Historically, some attempted to follow Butler along his own path and subject science to the Bible. Unfortunately, they often lacked the good sense Butler possessed. Others followed the other possibility in his thought and subjected the Bible to science. Butler truly fathered both movements. But for our own day, Butler's real importance is that he homogenized human experience and rendered all experience subject to the same type of judgements. In so doing, he gave impetus to the development of the philosophy of religion.

APPENDIX

Bishop Butler and His Age

Joseph Butler was born in 1692 in Wantage, Berkshire, the son of a Presbyterian linen merchant. After persuading his father to allow him to conform to the Established Church, he went up to Oriel College, Oxford in 1713. At Oxford he took the B.A. degree in 1718, the B.C.L. in 1721, and the D.C.L. in 1733. In 1719 he was ordained and appointed preacher at the Rolls Chapel, London. In 1725, he was appointed to the rectorship of Stanhope and took this occasion to publish Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel (1726). In 1732, he was appointed Chaplain to the Lord Chancellor and in 1736 published his major work, The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature. He was appointed Clerk of the Queen's Closet in 1736 and in 1738 was named to the bishopric of Bristol. In 1750 he accepted the bishopric of Durham after refusing the primacy of England in 1747. He died of a stomach disorder in 1752. The earliest life of Butler is that of Andrew Kippis in the Supplement to the Biographia Britannica (1767); the fullest is Thomas Bartlett's Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings of Joseph Butler (1839).

The religious dimension of the age in which Butler lived and wrote has in recent years come under closer scrutiny.

It is not as yet well understood. Much work has been done on the development of the Established Church and its influence on its time since the late 1920's when Norman Sykes started his series of masterpieces: Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century, Edmund Gibson: Bishop of London 1669-1748, William Wake: Archbishop of Canterbury and From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History, 1660-1768. There have likewise been, in recent years, an increasing interest in the study of the dissenting churches and churchmen and a concomitant investigation of radical dissent and secular religious thought of the period as witnessed by the numerous articles in the Journal of the History of Ideas and elsewhere. However, much work remains to be done and what is particularly needed is a series of critical editions and biographies of the leading secular religious thinkers.

On the basis of the evidence so far compiled, it would seem that the era in which Butler lived and wrote can be characterized as a period in which anticlericalism and skepticism, heightened by the internecine conflicts of the reformation movement, joined forces with an emergent naturalistic world view, a secular ethical system, and the new scientific methods and became political and vied for

power with increasingly established ecclesiastical structures. It was a period in which the churches energetically attempted to continue reforming themselves and the state in the face of a growing attack on their fundamental principles in the name of pristine pure Christianity and cultural development. It was from within this situation that Butler wrote.

We have characterized Butler's Analogy as an apology and have sought to delineate its apologetical structure. Both these terms are well-known to the student of Western religion but perhaps require further amplification for the lay reader. Most simply, an apology is a writing in defence of a person, doctrine, or thing. It is a Greek literary genre which was appropriated and perfected by Christian writers of the first two centuries and has continued as a distinctive genre throughout the course of Christianity. An apologetic structure is the framework within which such a defence operates.

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