THE EVOLVING SPIRIT: MORALS AND MUTUALISM IN ARABELLA BUCKLEY’S EVOLUTIONARY EPIC

by

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Contemporaries of Charles Darwin were divided on reconciling his theory of natural selection with religion and morality. Although Alfred Russel Wallace stands out as a spiritualist advocate of natural selection who rejected a natural origin of morality, the science popularizer and spiritualist Arabella Buckley (1840–1929) offers a more representative example of how theists, whether spiritualist or more orthodox in their religion, found reconciliation. Unlike Wallace, Buckley emphasized the lawful evolution of morality and of the soul, drawing from the theological tradition of traducianism. Significantly, Buckley argued for a mutualistic and deeply theistic interpretation of Darwinian evolution, particularly the evolution of morals, without sacrificing the uniformity of natural law. Though Buckley’s understanding of the evolutionary epic has been represented as emphasizing mutualism (Gates 1998) and spiritualist theology (Lightman 2007), here I demonstrate that her distinctive addition to the debate lies in her unifying theory of traducianism. In contrast to other authors, I argue that through Buckley we better understand Victorian spiritualism as more of a religion than an occult science. However, it was a conception of religion that, through her evolutionary traducianism, bridged science and spiritualism. This offers historians a more complex but satisfying image of the Victorian worldview after Darwin.

Keywords: science popularization; Arabella Buckley; Darwin; Wallace; spiritualism; uniformitarianism

In 1880, Charles Darwin complimented a science writer and popularizer for ‘treat[ing] evolution with much dexterity and truthfulness’.¹ This writer was the first to champion a Darwinian evolution of the mind and morals, while many prominent men of science publicized their doubts. Yet, the writer also penned books with titles like The fairy-land of science and Through magic glasses. She believed she could communicate with spirits of the deceased too. Her name was Arabella Buckley, and her advocacy of moral evolution, her

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authorship of science books for children and her belief in spiritualism—seemingly contradictory attributes—shaped her conception of the Victorian world and influenced the understanding of the spiritualists, scientists and laypeople around her.

Historians of the evolutionary epic have made clear that, in the aftermath of Darwin’s work, popularizers of evolution embraced Darwin’s ideas to make broader metaphysical points of their own, emphasizing either the theistic or materialistic version of the unfolding of life’s great drama. Most of Darwin’s early popularizers interpreted his theory of natural selection as a vindication rather than just a description of competition as the ruling law of nature. However, as Barbara T. Gates has shown, while the science writer and popularizer Arabella Buckley was the first to characterize Darwin’s theory of evolution as grounding an other-regarding morality in nature, she also aligned her views with her own spiritualist religion. While the influence of spiritualism has been noted by Bernard Lightman in his own work on Buckley, here I point out that it is significant that in framing her spiritualist and theistic evolutionary narrative, Buckley drew from traducianism, a theological tradition within Christianity that emphasizes the development of the soul across the generations.

Gates has pointed out that a commitment to the maternal tradition and social responsibility drove Buckley’s contribution to the evolutionary narrative, culminating in the emphasis on mutualism demonstrated through her numerous popular books on science for children and adults. While struggle and competition were certainly the conditions imposed upon animate life by the natural world, in Winners of life’s race (1883), her second book on evolution, Buckley contended that ‘one of the laws of life which is as strong, if not stronger, than the law of force and selfishness, is that of mutual help and dependence’. According to Gates, Buckley presented morality as a law that was ‘not a special gift to human beings, as Christians might like to believe, but a gradual development through the animal world’, a contention that served to distance Buckley from theistic popularizers of evolution in the minds of historians. However, subsequently, Lightman has drawn attention to Buckley’s belief in spiritualism, which, he has argued, shaped her understanding of the natural world and thus informed her portrayal of the evolutionary epic. Lightman argues that, although Gates provided a detailed account of Buckley’s narrative techniques and goals, her exclusion of Buckley’s religious convictions undermines her conclusions. Here, it is my intention to revisit Buckley and to look in detail at her spiritualist convictions. Building on Lightman’s critique of Gates’s work, I demonstrate that the significance of Buckley’s distinctive contribution to the debate on the evolution of morals does indeed lie in her spiritualist beliefs. However, going beyond Lightman, I argue that Buckley’s contribution to this debate lies in the specific variety of her spiritualist belief, namely, her adherence to the theory of traducianism, the controversial theological doctrine that a child owes both its body and its soul to its parents. In opposition to the spiritualist beliefs of her friend and correspondent Alfred Russel Wallace, Buckley’s conception of spiritualism was not deployed in order to bridge the gaps in an otherwise naturalistic Darwinian view of evolution. Rather, Buckley developed a deeply theistic view of life in which the spirit itself evolved through the processes of natural selection which was at once both natural and divine. Exploring Buckley’s views, and her relationship with Charles Lyell, Alfred Russel Wallace and others, provides us with a more complicated, but ultimately more satisfying, understanding of the development of Victorian science in the last decades of the century, as well as of the challenges that many men of science faced in light of accepting an
evolutionary account of human origins. Buckley’s case also demonstrates that the same challenges that faced many men and women with more orthodox religious commitments were no less problematic for spiritualists, but that, just as liberal theologians managed to accommodate Darwin’s uniformitarian account of life’s development with their religious views, not all spiritualists followed Alfred Russel Wallace in finding the most human of our attributes, our mind and morals, beyond the explanatory power of contemporary natural laws.

DARWIN AND WALLACE ON THE EVOLUTION OF MORALS

Given the broader implications of reading Buckley’s spiritualism correctly and placing it, and her, in the context of contemporary debates over evolution and spiritualism, it seems logical to begin with a brief recapitulation of the debate between Darwin and Wallace about the efficacy of natural selection. While this story is likely to be well known by Darwin scholars, it is necessary to revisit it here in order to draw out exactly how Wallace conceived the relation between the spiritual ‘supernatural’ world and the world of nature, and thus to make clear exactly how Buckley’s spiritualism differed. I will show that we are in error if we think that Wallace had the monopoly on interpreting the significance of spiritualism for evolution; indeed, there was a range of spiritualist conceptions of the history of natural history. Buckley chastised Wallace for the way in which he framed the relation between the natural and the supernatural, and argued that he was at fault to conceive the natural and supernatural as exclusive forces. A view of the spirit as itself an evolved phenomenon would align spiritualists with Darwin and not set them in opposition, as Wallace particularly believed early in his spiritualist career.

From the outset, Wallace, the co-discoverer of natural selection, was one of Darwin’s closest allies and one of natural selection’s strongest advocates. Their work had been jointly presented to the Linnaean Society in 1858, and the two were in accord as to the explanatory power of natural selection. Indeed, if anything, Wallace was the more enthusiastic of the two, having no time for Lamarckian mechanisms of the inheritance of acquired characters. However, by the end of the sixties Wallace significantly revised his opinion. In a letter to Darwin dated 24 March 1869, Wallace revealed that he had written a review article that was to be published in the forthcoming volume of the Quarterly Review in which he said, ‘I venture for the first time on some limitations to the power of natural selection’.6 ‘I shall be intensely curious to read the Quarterly’, Darwin responded. Clearly anxious, he added, ‘I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child’.7

The anticipated Quarterly article was a review of Charles Lyell’s Elements of geology and the latest edition of his Principles of geology. It was in the final pages of his review that Wallace disclosed his new-found doubt about the ability of natural selection to account for various aspects of human anatomy, but also of the human mind. Wallace argued that, while natural selection certainly had played a role in the natural history of humankind, there was much of significance that he believed it could not account for. In contrast to his earlier convictions, he stated that ‘the moral and higher intellectual nature of man is as unique a phenomenon as was conscious life on its first appearance in the world, and the one is almost as difficult to conceive as originating by any law of evolution as the
other’. Reading the article at his home in Downe, Darwin placed an emphatic ‘No!’ in the margin, underlining it three times.

Darwin was deeply disappointed by Wallace’s review, and responded by revising the manuscript on which he was working on human evolution to stress more prominently his naturalistic account of the evolution of morals; his efforts would be reflected in the early chapters of what would be published as The descent of man in 1871. Here, he argued that it was ‘in a high degree probable...that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man’. In opposition to Wallace’s conclusions, he maintained that ‘difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not kind’.

Wallace’s belief in a creator that oversaw the workings of natural selection was not the cause of Darwin’s disapproval, as is evidenced not only by Darwin’s addition of his acknowledgement of the creator in the second and subsequent editions of Origin, but also by his support of theistic popularizers of evolution like the Anglican theologian, Charles Kingsley, and the Harvard botanist, Asa Gray. Rather, what Darwin rejected was Wallace’s human exceptionalism, his argument that the moral character of mankind was beyond the efficacy of natural selection and that it required an appeal to divine intervention to account for it. In Descent, Darwin dedicated a chapter to ‘Moral Sense’, and, as we have seen, pointed to the social instincts as the point of origin of the moral sense. In particular, of all the social instincts he highlighted the ‘parental and filial affections’, which raise offspring’s chances of survival and are thus preserved and further developed, gradually building up to human morality.

Darwin noted in Descent that he had written the work with the hope of shedding light on three related questions: ‘firstly, whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; secondly, the manner of his development; and thirdly, the value of the differences between the so-called races of man.’ Adrian Desmond and James Moore have highlighted this passage to substantiate their claims that Darwin was deeply motivated to pursue the natural history of mankind in order to establish the common humanity of all men in opposition to the claims of polygenist arguments embraced by defenders of slavery. While is it certainly true that Darwin’s family was deeply committed to the abolition of slavery, it is clear that Darwin had a broader agenda than this alone. As Piers J. Hale has pointed out in Political descent (2014), Darwin was in fact just as eager to respond to Wallace placing limits on natural selection. Following Robert J. Richards, Hale points out that Darwin had already written the first two chapters of Descent by April 1869, when he read Wallace’s review of Lyell in the Quarterly. In the following months, he noticed that not only had Wallace gone on to publish his objections at greater length, but that Walter Bagehot, William Rathbone Greg and even his own cousin, Francis Galton, had written on the inability of natural selection to account for the most worthy aspects of human morality. These authors implied that human ethics were derived from self-regarding principles, or else, like Wallace, they argued that human other-regarding sentiments must be the result of supernatural intervention. Either way, Darwin saw that he would have to engage the question. As he opened chapter three, which he dedicated to the origin and development of the human moral sentiments, he noted: ‘This great question has been discussed by many writers of consummulate ability; and my sole excuse for touching on it is the impossibility of here passing it over, and because, as far as I know, no one has approached it exclusively from
In doing so, he made *Descent* a significant contribution to the history of ethics. What is significant here, and what many historians have overlooked, is that Darwin had several different goals in writing *Descent*. He was determined not only to give a naturalistic account of the evolution of ethics to counter Wallace’s new-found doubts, but he also attempted to refute the accounts of the likes of Bagehot, Greg and Galton. This trio had argued that natural selection, which, all things being equal, would surely select the organism that best looked after its own interests, could only result in the evolution of self-regarding, rather than other-regarding moral sentiments. This emphasis upon self-regard may well have fit with the liberal capitalist politics of the day, but it was not a view that Darwin could bear to see naturalized. As Hale has pointed out, Darwin was reluctant to allow that ‘the most noble part of our nature’, our moral conscience, had its origin in what he called ‘the base principle of selfishness’.

Rather, Darwin appealed to the parental and filial affections as the natural instinct that had become the focus of natural selection. Here, Darwin contended, was the original other-regarding sentiment—a mother’s love for her offspring. Any organism that lacked this instinct would surely go extinct in a short time. Thus, maternal love would be nurtured and expanded by selection to the extent that it helped its possessor survive, reproduce and raise offspring.

From this point, Darwin conjectured that among early humans, who he was certain had always been a social species, the trait of caring for other family members might easily be expanded to include other members of the community as a result of selection acting on those characteristics that favoured one group against another. Although later biologists have questioned whether such inter-group competition might be a strong enough selective force to counter the selfishness that might be expected to arise as a result of intra-group selection, it is clear that Darwin thought it was. In particular, he argued that, even if the possessors of other-regarding sentiments were more likely to die as a result of acting on them compared to those who were more self-serving in their actions, other-regarders would also reproduce faster. Darwin pointed out, as an instance of sexual selection, that females preferred males who were brave and who showed a willingness to protect their offspring and their community. These males would tend to be selected as fathers of the next generation over and above those who showed cowardice and looked out only for themselves. ‘Thus the reproach of laying the foundation of the most noble part of our nature in the base principle of selfishness is removed’, Darwin concluded.

It was this aspect of *Descent* that drew the attention of Arabella Buckley. However, she did not see Darwin’s naturalistic theory of the origin and development of the human moral sentiments as a rebuttal to those who argued that morality was a subject only for theologians. Rather, she embraced Darwin’s work as showing that the mechanisms of the natural world functioned to develop the most laudable characteristics of human existence—the love of others and self-sacrifice.
had been the subject of Wallace’s significant review.\textsuperscript{26} Her time with Lyell influenced her place in scientific society, her ideas and the direction she would take in her professional life. She served as his secretary until his death in 1875, during which time she took his dictation, copied his texts for publication and managed his correspondence.\textsuperscript{27} Lyell’s work and friendship not only influenced Darwin, but their association also clearly helped to shape Arabella Buckley’s understanding of the then current debates in science and her conception of natural history.\textsuperscript{28}

Buckley’s introduction to the foremost men of science and exposure to their ideas were significant products of her association with Lyell, for, during this time, she became acquainted with Charles Darwin, T. H. Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace. Although we do not have a documented record of the extent to which she was present at the social and scientific meetings that Lyell hosted at his home, it seems reasonable to assume that she was present at, at least, some of them. It is clear, however, from her correspondence with Darwin, Huxley, Herbert Spencer and others, that during these years she had gained the respect of some of the most significant men of science of her day. They later applauded the work she took on following Lyell’s death, as a science lecturer, popularizer and writer.\textsuperscript{29}

We can derive a lot of information from Buckley’s own correspondence with Darwin, Huxley and Spencer. During her time as Lyell’s secretary, we might also profitably, if perhaps cautiously, look to Lyell’s correspondence and even to his notebooks to infer what Buckley may have perceived as the most pressing questions of the day, both in science and in its implications for theology. As Michael Bartholomew has argued, Lyell’s concern about any naturalistic account of the origin of new species was that it necessarily impugned what he called ‘the high genealogy of species’.\textsuperscript{30} While the exact nature of Lyell’s beliefs about religion and the status of humans remains difficult to discern from the historical record, it is evident that this aspect of an evolutionary account of the natural world worried him, and he struggled to retain a role for God in the creation of mankind’s most human qualities. Indeed, he filled seven private notebooks with his thoughts on transmutation, speculating in June 1859 that:

\begin{quote}
The sudden appearance of extraordinary talents or goodness or inventive powers sh.\textsuperscript{d} be regarded with adoring gratitude, sh.\textsuperscript{d} be looked to as direct emanations of the Divine Spirit, the first cause – that the origination of such ideas sh.\textsuperscript{d} be referred to a direct interference of the Great Spirit of the Universe.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

As Bartholomew records, in what we have of Lyell’s correspondence with Darwin, it is evident that Darwin was somewhat frustrated by Lyell’s acceptance of the argument he had laid out in \textit{Origin} only for him then to baulk at their logical implications for mankind.\textsuperscript{32} Across a number of letters, Lyell confessed his anxieties about the implications of human evolution for his conception of the dignity of mankind, not only to Darwin, but also to Huxley.\textsuperscript{33} To Darwin he had pressed the necessity of assuming the intervention of ‘a primeval creative power’ in accounting for the origin of man.\textsuperscript{34} On this last point, however, Darwin was adamant:

\begin{quote}
I entirely reject as in my own judgment quite unnecessary any subsequent addition ‘of new powers, & attributes and forces’; or any ‘principle of improvement’, except in so far as every character which is naturally selected or preserved is in some way an advantage or improvement, otherwise it would not have been selected. If I were convinced that I require such additions to the theory of natural selection, I would reject it as rubbish. But I have firm faith in it.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}
Lyell, it is clear, remained much closer to the position that Wallace later adopted in 1869 than he was to the position Darwin implied in *Origin*. Given Buckley’s position as Lyell’s secretary, and the frequency with which these topics came up between Lyell, Darwin and Huxley, we can legitimately assume her familiarity with all sides of the debate.36

In May 1871, just three months after its publication, a review of *Descent* entitled ‘Darwinism and religion’ appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine*. The author, who signed the essay with only ‘A.B.’, was Arabella Buckley.37 Despite Lyell’s reservations about the implications of human evolution, in her review Buckley maintained that the theory of the evolution of the moral sense Darwin had laid out in *Descent* did nothing to compromise belief in the existence of God, to undermine the nobility of human consciousness or to diminish the grounds for hope for the immortality of the soul. Further, she noted, Darwin had set the philosophy of utility on a new foundation: that of an evolved imperative to seek the greatest good for the community, favouring self-sacrifice over self-interest.38

Quite clearly in light of the concerns that she knew had occupied Lyell over the intervening years, Buckley began:

To some who have always ‘hoped against hope’, from the previous silence maintained on this subject [of human evolution] in successive editions of the ‘Origin of Species’, this [*Descent*] may come as a startling blow: but to the majority it will be nothing more than a direct statement of a conclusion which followed necessarily from the Darwinian theory.

Echoing Darwin’s comments to Lyell almost verbatim, she continued: ‘If the evolution hypothesis is to be received at all as regards the organic creation, there is no possibility of stopping short when we come to man, at least as far as his bodily structure is concerned.’39 This much, she wrote, had been conclusively established by Huxley’s 1863 work, *Man’s place in nature*. However, in *Descent* Darwin had gone beyond Huxley’s claims, about the mere morphology of man, to fulfil the promise of the few lines Darwin had dedicated to man in the last pages of *Origin*, where he had conjectured that his work had opened ‘far more important researches. Psychology will be placed on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.’40

After briefly recapitulating Darwin’s argument for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties from the social instincts, and highlighting the parental and filial affections as the origin of these social instincts, Buckley commented that ‘Mr. Darwin suffices to show that he derives not only our bodily but also our mental and moral nature by development from the lower animals’. Yet in doing so, far from reaching the conclusions she knew Lyell to have done, she argued that Darwin’s theory ‘elevates the unselfish virtues to the highest rank to which moralists have ever assigned them’.41 Clearly speaking with Lyell in mind, but also aware that others must share his views, she continued:

Many who would concede without hesitation the evolutionary origin of their bodily frame, shrink with great pain from such a derivation of their mental and moral nature. They fear that if the noble gift of conscience can be traced back in all its gradations to the humble instincts the human race will become the victim of a gross Materialism, and that all communion with God and all hope of immortality will be blotted out of existence. I believe that this fear, if it be founded upon the theory of the moral sense, as set forth in the ‘Descent of Man’, is a groundless one.42
Rather, she argued that simply because the most noble attribute of mankind, the human conscience, had developed across countless generations as a result of natural laws, this was no reason that it ‘will cease to be to us the voice of God’, for the existence of law implied ‘one great Source’, a law-maker. Further:

the foundation of our conscience is made to rest upon the purest of instincts – that of parental and filial affection; while the powers through which it has been developed – intelligence, reason, memory (and the consequent power of reflection), language, imagination, and self-consciousness – all arise out of a network of laws so infinite in their complexity, so immeasurable in their grandeur that, after all the utmost efforts of science we still stand like the ignorant savage in the presence of the thunderstorm, as he bows his head and exclaims, ‘It is the voice of almighty God’.43

Buckley supported Darwin’s theory of the evolution of morals through natural selection and asserted its dignity, denying that this origin leads to a materialistic worldview.

Addressing Lyell, Wallace and others who doubted natural selection’s ability to produce the higher faculties of intelligence and consciousness on one hand, and those who tended toward materialism, such as T. H. Huxley, on the other, she reconciled lawful evolution with theology. With this article, her first published work, Buckley positioned herself between Darwin and Wallace to advocate a middle-ground narrative of evolution. She defied materialists, describing the fallacy of their ‘supposition that evolution by law, whether organic or inorganic, can dispense with the necessity of a present overruling Creator’.44 Natural selection offered a mechanism for evolution, but did not provide a first cause, an origin of life. For Buckley, as for Lyell, a creator was necessary as the first cause, and even the scientific innovations of the Victorian era could not disprove the possibility of a deity. For Buckley, as for Lyell, a creator was necessary as the first cause, and even the scientific innovations of the Victorian era could not disprove the possibility of a deity. Continuing, Buckley asserted that neither did a theory of lawful natural selection disprove immortality. She argued that just as God indirectly created the human body by gradual development through the animal kingdom, so too has He indirectly created the human soul, which developed, and continues to develop, consciousness, morality and immortality along the way.45 For her, a spiritual first cause was necessary, echoing Darwin’s life ‘breathed by the Creator into’ the original forms, but divine interference in human development, which Wallace and Lyell resorted to, was not.46 Thus, she concluded, natural selection held as a consistent law of nature while remaining quite compatible with theism.

In the final section of ‘Darwinism and religion’, Buckley applauded Darwin’s novel exploration of morals through the lens of natural history, emphasizing his unification of the rival intuitive and utilitarian moralists through his philosophy of the natural selection of morals. Natural selection, she argued, follows a ‘principle of utility in the strictest sense, but of utility founded upon an instinct of unknown origin as pure and devoid of self-seeking as the intuitionist can desire’.47 If, as Darwin believed, morals are developed from parental and filial affections, mutualism is the rule of nature, not competition. Buckley assured theists and others that they need not worry about evolution’s selfishness and the sense of survival of the fittest being popularized by others, for the good of the community was and remained the origin and aim of our noblest moral nature. Publishing
her essay just three months following *Descent*, Buckley, as Gates has pointed out, was certainly the first to advocate a mutualistic reading of Darwin’s work, but she did so in a much more deeply theistic way than either Gates or, indeed, Lightman have acknowledged.

Arabella Buckley first revealed her evolutionary narrative through ‘Darwinism and religion’, in which she demonstrated an emphasis upon theism and mutualism while maintaining natural selection’s lawfulness. Following the publication of ‘Darwinism and religion’ and the ending of her service as Lyell’s secretary, Buckley became a science lecturer, popularizer and writer. Her works were well reviewed by her contemporaries, who noted their ‘liberal, while also reverential’ and ‘wholesome’ tone and recommended their use in schools. Buckley’s first book, *A short history of natural science* (1876), offered an outline of numerous branches of science with the characteristically evolutionary epic aims of educating and piquing the interest of readers. Her subsequent texts were more imaginative, though still dedicated to education, particularly to that of children. As Gates has pointed out, in *The fairy-land of science* (1879) and its sequel, *Through magic glasses* (1890), Buckley ‘instructs children in the wonders of a science that should seem to them as magical as the wonders of a fairyland, and far more accessible’. Buckley urged young readers to employ not only their observational skills but also their imaginations in the study of natural history; she paralleled the magic of fairies and magicians with the power of science and scientific understanding. Drawing upon the idea that contemporary scientific theory was based upon mankind’s best available knowledge and was thus revisable, and, like a fairy story, in a sense a fiction based in human imagination, she created narratives to describe to children the scientific phenomena that often transcend human sensory experience.

**MUTUALISM AND THE EVOLUTIONARY EPIC**

In ‘Darwinism and religion’, Buckley laid out her theistic evolutionary narrative account of life on earth. Gates has argued that Buckley’s evolutionary narrative, driven by a commitment to the maternal tradition, is principally mutualistic. In this section, however, after reviewing Gates’s position and recent literature on the genre of evolutionary epic, I will go on to suggest that an essential element has been omitted or misunderstood in both Buckley’s ideas and Victorian culture. That element is Buckley’s spiritualism.

Gates describes Buckley as ‘a knowledgeable and authoritative popularizer of science who also accepted the Victorian presumption that it was a woman’s social responsibility to teach morality to the uneducated and the young’. In addition to *The fairy-land of science* and *Through magic glasses*, Buckley penned *Life and her children* (1881), *Winners of life’s race* (1882) and *Moral teachings of science* (1891). These titles alone offer an idea of Buckley’s progressive, mutualistic comprehension of evolution, but Gates further demonstrates Buckley’s commitment to mutualism through both her content and literary conventions.

Though Darwin first suggested the evolution of morals from the social instinct of parental and filial affection, Gates has convincingly argued that Buckley was the first to overtly emphasize parenting and mutualism in shaping the higher faculties of man. In *Winners of life’s race*, the title referring to the vertebrate animals, Buckley wrote: ‘The great moral lesson taught at every step in the history of development of the animal world [is] that amidst toil and suffering, struggle and death, the supreme law of life is the law of SELF-DEVOTION AND LOVE.’ This sentence resembles Darwin’s concluding paragraph in
Origin, in which he stated: ‘[F]rom the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.’ This parallel provides more evidence of Buckley’s popularization of Darwinian evolution, with a ‘pioneering’ emphasis, as Gates would attribute to her, on mutualism. Buckley filled her books with stories of sympathy in nature, detailing, for example, the loyalty of pet snakes in an effort to educate children in both morals and natural history. With this goal of a moral and natural history education for children, Gates claims, Buckley follows in the Victorian maternal tradition of science popularization by women for children. Buckley modified this tradition, however, through her masterful use of the evolutionary epic.

While Darwin did much to shape the evolutionary epic, it was already a popular genre among Victorian science popularizers. In the introduction to The evolutionary epic (2011), David Amigoni and James Elwick reveal how ‘by telling stories about development, the epic format helped legitimate evolution with popular audiences’, particularly the children Buckley wrote for. Amigoni and Elwick outline the characteristics of the genre of evolutionary epic as progressive and rhetorical, featuring deep time, competition and the division of labour. Though Gates does not specifically use the term evolutionary epic, she describes Buckley’s use of its characteristics in her argument for Buckley’s mutualism.

With respect to progress, Buckley’s writing fits Amigoni and Elwick’s description. Gates details her narratives of nature, with the backboned animals cast as epic heroes, the winners of life’s race. Buckley, like Darwin, believed that human form and human consciousness are nobler than those of the lower animals, and did not focus on degeneration through evolution. Gates also makes a case for Buckley’s use of deep time. She argues that Lyell likely influenced Buckley’s incorporation of deep time and non-human narration because he played with scope and perspective in order to communicate the great expanses of geology. An account of evolution must address a long range of time and cover a wide range of disciplines, and Buckley achieved both by employing strategies of fiction, as in The fairy-land of science, and by shifting narration outside of the human perspective, as in Life and her children. While Buckley believed that mutualism, not competition, ruled nature, she acknowledged that competition drove progress. As part of the progressive evolutionary epic, competition presents the drama of a struggle resulting in triumph, similar to the narrative of literary epics. Amigoni and Elwick also point out the characteristic division of labour, and how some popularizers argued that the division of labour regarding sex played a role in the maternal development of sympathy, a sentiment Buckley would likely support based on her attribution of morality to parental and filial affection.

Buckley included each of these characteristics of evolutionary epic in her writing, but the one most pertinent to Gates’s argument for mutuality is the epic’s rhetorical nature. The rhetoric of epic is manifest in the personification of nature, use of metaphors and appeals to historicity. Gates describes how Buckley personified life, giving it a maternal, sympathetic quality in Life and her children. Similarly, parenting was a central metaphor for Buckley, and she found ways to express the parallel of mutualism in nature to mutualism in human society. Appealing to historicity, Buckley attempted to convince her readers of the value in learning about the development and origins of an object, convinced that an understanding of the origins of social instincts would lead to the comprehension and enhancement of morals. As Amigoni and Elwick reveal, utilizing the genre of evolutionary epic helped popularizers engage their audiences; Gates shows that the epic format also helped Buckley to demonstrate the mutuality of evolution and educate readers in the maternal tradition.
Arabella Buckley’s evolutionary narrative was decidedly mutualistic, but was it ‘pioneering’, as Gates claims? Thomas Dixon contends, in The invention of altruism (2008), that Buckley’s ‘moral categories and evolutionary explanations are essentially Darwinian’ and notes that he differs from Gates in her assertion that Buckley’s account of sympathy was innovative and corrective with respect to Darwin. He allows that Buckley went beyond Darwin in her emphasis on parenting and theology, but he denies her originality, stating, ‘like him, she did not offer any account of the primal origins of these affections’. However, Buckley’s unique contribution to the debate over the evolution of morals was the innovative way she related evolution to her religion and through it suggested origins. Dixon denies and Gates omits these topics. Though Gates offers a detailed account of Buckley’s evolutionary narrative, as characterized by mutualism and the genre of the epic, she fails to address the overwhelming influence of Buckley’s spiritualist religion.

BUCKLEY’S TRADUCIANISM AND VICTORIAN SPIRITUALISM

As scientific innovations of the nineteenth century undermined the foundations of traditional religion, Victorians increasingly turned to spiritualism for comfort and answers about death and the afterlife. In An elusive Victorian, Martin Fichman defines spiritualism as a ‘belief that departed souls…could influence and communicate with humans, usually through a medium by means of physical phenomena or during unusual mental states such as trances’. While some Victorians viewed spiritualism as occult, radical and unscientific, numerous men and women of science and high society embraced it. Some men of science made it their mission to attempt to undermine spiritualism and expose prominent mediums as frauds, but others tried to marry science and spiritualism through psychical research, aiming to establish a scientific foundation for the phenomena and claims they witnessed at séances and from mediums, and ultimately the Society of Psychical Research was founded in 1882 to investigate these phenomena more rigorously. Fichman claims that spiritualism was a ‘vehicle for mediating between the often competing claims of traditional religions and modern science’, and could be ‘epistemologically significant, politically influential, and emotionally rewarding’.

One of the most notable, and certainly one of the most well known, spiritualists of the scientific world was Alfred Russel Wallace. According to Fichman, Wallace ‘considered spiritualism as a fruitful standpoint from which to explicate the broader meaning of evolution, particularly at the moral and intellectual level’, and he viewed natural selection and spiritualism as ‘mutually supportive elements in the grander scheme of things’. In his correspondence with Charles Darwin, he attributed his change of belief in natural selection’s pervasiveness to his encounters with spiritualism. The séances that he observed with a critical eye, he always noted, led him to maintain that a higher spiritual power guided human evolution, bridging the gaps he felt that natural selection alone could not account for. While throughout his later life, Wallace would adjust his ideas on natural selection and spiritualism, he appears never to quite shake his disbelief in the all-encompassing natural law of uniformity. In On miracles and modern spiritualism (1875), while he suggested that the existence of ‘sentient beings unrecognizable by our senses’ might fit under scientific laws yet to be discovered, he also stated that evolution through natural selection ‘is not the all-powerful, all-sufficient, and only cause of the development of organic forms’. However, a limiting of lawful natural selection did not always follow a belief in spiritualism, and this is where Buckley fits in.
While Gates’s examination of Buckley’s mutualism and rhetorical strategies provides a detailed argument for the evolutionary narrative Buckley constructed, Gates’s exclusion of Buckley’s spiritualism restricts her analysis. In his 2007 book, *Victorian popularizers of science*, Lightman investigates Buckley’s spiritualist religion and demonstrates that it informed and encouraged her work on popularizing and writing about evolution. He concludes that ignoring Buckley’s spiritualism was a mistake, for ‘if the subtext of Buckley’s works is connected to her spiritualist leanings, then her entire conception of the evolutionary epic will be seen in a different light’. Though Wallace was better known as a spiritualist, Lightman claims it was Buckley who played the leading role in uniting spiritualism and the evolutionary epic. Using the same details of Buckley’s work in which Gates demonstrates mutualism, Lightman makes a case for her spiritualism. Buckley infused her mutualistic epic with a theology of nature, evident in her stories of morals and virtues in animals. Her anthropomorphization of life, as in *Life and her children*, reflects her proposed process for the evolution of morals involving the spirit, or life principle, passed down from parent to offspring. This life principle takes the image of fairies in *The fairy-land of science*, with all living beings possessing a “fairy” life… governed by these same laws of nature’ yet reflecting ‘one and all the voice of the Great Creator’. In *Moral teachings of science*, she discussed immortality and referred to souls as spiritually uniting all life through evolutionary connections. This innovation was not something that she gleaned from Darwin and, Lightman observes, goes undiscovered in Gates’s work, and as a result Buckley’s religious life and thought are neglected. The influence of spiritualism on Buckley’s understanding of the place of humans within an evolutionary world view is evident, however, when she concludes, ‘we are indeed but individual fractions of One Universal Life’. Without an understanding of her spiritualism, as Lightman asserts, Buckley’s evolutionary narrative is incomplete.

In addition to writing about spiritual evolution, Buckley explored spiritualism through experiences with mediums and séances, as well as through correspondence with spiritualist family and friends like Wallace. However, Buckley also maintained correspondence with Huxley and Darwin, both of whom disapproved of spiritualism; she largely kept her spiritualist convictions out of her letters to them. Many members of the scientific community criticized Wallace for his active spiritualism and Lightman argues that Buckley concealed her beliefs from Lyell, Darwin and Huxley to maintain her credibility as a scientific author. Throughout *Victorian popularizers of science*, Lightman builds a case for Buckley’s ambiguity and her secrecy concerning her spiritualistic beliefs. Lightman refers to a letter that Darwin wrote to Buckley on 14 November 1880 to demonstrate Darwin’s conviction that Buckley held ‘ambivalent’ religious views similar to Darwin’s own at this point in time, and further to suggest that Buckley hid her true religious beliefs. In the letter, Darwin praises Buckley’s evolutionary epic *Life and her children* and goes on to say: ‘[I]t will be a very savage heretic-hunter who will persecute you. I daresay that you will escape, and you will not be called a dangerous woman.’ But this comment may not be enough to establish that Darwin understood Buckley’s religious tone to have been falsified for the sake of popular approval. After all, Buckley sent Darwin a copy of *Life and her children*, a text that Gates and Lightman have shown to be saturated with mutualism and spiritualism, respectively. In it, she explained to readers how ‘first into our planet from the bosom of the great Creator was breathed the breath of life — the invisible mother ever taking shape in her children’. While the first half of this quotation matches Darwin’s own insertion of ‘by the Creator’ into the conclusion to the second edition of the *Origin*, the
second half suggests Buckley’s commitment to a spiritual life force, a soul, running through the animal kingdom. Her works and correspondence demonstrate that she laid her spiritualism out quite openly and simply left it out of her personal correspondence if her correspondent did not engage with it.

**SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALISM IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

The scientific claims of spiritualists and mediums captured the attention of the most prominent Victorian men of science. Amateurs, women and religious leaders claimed scientific authority through spiritualism, challenging the work of professionalizers like Huxley who, during this time, worked to distinguish science as an honourable profession reserved for those with specialized training. Concerned by spiritualists’ rising authority, and often themselves interested in the phenomena and promises of spiritualism, a class of scientifically minded psychical researchers emerged. These men included the eminent physicists Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Crookes. Those interested in scientifically exploring spiritualism established the Society for Psychical Research. Its members believed psychical phenomena deserved serious scientific attention and might provide insight into the universe, but most remained sceptical of spiritualism. Lodge, however, a proponent of aether physics and the theory of electromagnetic radiation, became a convinced spiritualist as a result of his psychical research. Crookes, too, after failing to expose the mediums Douglas Daniel Hume and Florence Cook as frauds, admitted that they were perhaps genuinely communicating with the spirit world. Psychical research connected particularly strongly with the developing technologies and sciences of communication. Thomas Edison, Crookes and many physicists studying waves and transmission attempted to invent devices to test the possibility of speaking with spirits—the phonograph, for example, arose in part from this interest in spirit communication using science. As already noted, men belonging to the world of the natural sciences experimented with spiritualism as well. Some, such as Francis Galton, denied its legitimacy after their inquiry; others, such as Robert Chambers and Alfred Russel Wallace, adopted the doctrine. The substantial population of spiritualist men of science is evidence that spiritualism was marginal neither in society nor in science itself.

What exactly was Victorian spiritualism for most Victorians: an occult science, or a novel religion? Historians are unsure how to categorize it, a testament to the diverse roles it played for Victorian people. However diversely Victorians applied spiritualism, though, categorizing it is useful in suggesting its purpose and thus its significance to the people using it to understand their world. Interwoven with the questions of morality and immortality during the Victorian period was the question of a mind–body dichotomy. What and where was the mind, or the soul, or the personality, if they existed? Two occult sciences, meaning sciences that apply scientific methods to spiritual, non-physical phenomena, permeated Victorian society before the rise of spiritualism: phrenology and mesmerism. Phrenology, mesmerism and spiritualism were alike in their efforts to answer this question of the mind, and many followers of spiritualism began as advocates of phrenology and mesmerism. Another similarity between the three doctrines was the opportunity to gain personal authority from their practice. John van Wyhe has pointed out that phrenology was not so much a reform science, using practices informed by Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics to improve personal morals and thus society, as many historians...
might be led to believe, following the work of Roger Cooter, but, rather, an opportunity for the individual to assert scientific authority and agency. Mesmerism and spiritualist mediumship similarly provided avenues for acquiring power and scientific authority, while questioning orthodox science. This held true for Arabella Buckley, as we will see in her attempts at mediumship: using spirit communication, she asserted the possibility for evidence of the afterlife against scientific professionalizers teaching otherwise.

Despite these similarities, categorizing spiritualism as an occult science is problematic. Spiritualists sought natural explanations for phenomena, denying the supernatural and inexplicable. Critics also often condemned phrenology and mesmerism for their materialism—the former attributing morals and personality to physical bumps, and the latter replacing the soul with material, magnetic fluid. Even though spiritualism adopted scientific vocabulary and claimed scientific legitimacy, at its core was an attempt to understand the afterlife and comfort family members of the deceased by ascribing higher meaning to our spiritual existence. For a movement defined by a push against scientific materialism, then, the label of occult science does not suffice in describing how most spiritualists viewed their practices and beliefs.

While spiritualism did not quite fit under the label of a science for most practitioners, the visible role men of science played in spiritualism, often as psychical researchers, suggests that it was nevertheless an arena for debating what could or could not be validated by science. Psychical researchers denied that spiritualist phenomena were beyond the scope of legitimate scientific concern. But sceptics, often also men of science, like Huxley, found psychic occurrences far outside the range of scientific inquiry. A lack of evidence and reproducibility concerning séance phenomena kept spiritualism on the margins of science, but the doctrine also served as a hotspot for debating rival notions of what was to be considered scientific, natural and lawful. Spiritualists and psychical researchers were thus entwined in the quite scientific problems of proof and demonstration, and addressed the most critical issues of science, philosophy and religion—the meaning of life and existence of higher powers.

Placing spiritualism in the context of Victorian science and religion is complicated, but, since the purpose of spiritualism for the majority of its followers depended upon employing what they perceived as the constructive aspects of scientific methods in their search for the philosophical or religious meaning of humanity, spiritualism may best be considered a religion. Indeed, Janet Oppenheim terms spiritualism a ‘surrogate faith’ precisely because of its influential push back against scientific materialism. However, if we are to make sense of the nature of spiritualism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, we must remind ourselves that the Victorian period is not best categorized as a time of war between science and religion; an understanding of higher universal laws did not necessarily undermine Christian belief, a point vividly illustrated by Buckley’s traducianism. Converts to spiritualism often maintained their Christianity, even while embracing the sciences of evolution, geology and physics. They were able to consolidate their beliefs by maintaining the uniformity of natural laws, a principle with a long history in both theology and science.

In his recent work on James Clerk Maxwell, Matthew Stanley has demonstrated that leading up to and during the Victorian period, both theist and naturalist men of science accepted that science was the search for and study of uniform, universal laws. Stanley describes how Huxley drew the dividing line between professional science and theological science as adherence to the philosophical commitment of consistency in nature’s laws, but this line was contrived rather than explicit. Natural theology had a long tradition of allying God and the
productive laws of nature, and principal men of science, such as William Thomson, Maxwell and Lyell, maintained that the consistency of natural laws over time pointed to God, not away from him. Even when tested on the question of miracles, theistic scientists did not sacrifice science or theology. Many believed miracles not to be violations of natural law, but, rather, phenomena following laws humans had yet to discover. Again, Buckley provides an explicit example, as she refused to compromise laws of evolution or physics in her essay ‘The soul, and the theory of evolution’, but, rather, endorsed a compatible traducianism. Thus, the uniformity of natural law served as a historical common space between science and religion, and allowed for both to adopt nearly identical scientific methodologies. While in some senses it was revolutionary, the Victorian shift from natural theology to scientific naturalism did not change scientific practice all that much.

During the Victorian period, the uniformity of natural law served as common ground between science and religion, not as ammunition for a war between the two. Likewise, uniformity bridged Victorian science and spiritualism. As noted, psychical researchers aimed to marry science and spiritualism—they did so because they believed that the phenomena of the séance could be reduced to natural laws, granting spiritualism scientific credibility. Most psychical researchers thus remained loyal to their professions in the sciences and argued that the universe followed natural law. Instead, they regarded spiritualist phenomena as lawfully adhering to uniform rules of nature not yet understood, but soon to be illuminated. Spiritualism worked for many of them as well as for other Victorians precisely because it sought to complement, and not to replace, the laws of physics and biology.

**Buckley’s Traducianism**

Amidst the late nineteenth-century Victorian preoccupation with psychical research and séances, Buckley shaped spiritualism to complement her popularization and comprehension of an all-encompassing evolutionary theory. Buckley’s correspondence with Darwin focused primarily on popularizing evolution, but fellow spiritualists Buckley and Wallace openly corresponded over spiritualism from 1863 to 1913. In their letters, they discussed séances, the skills of mediums and spiritual literature, and debated the scientific validity of spiritualism. Wallace credited Buckley as his closest friend during this period. He trusted her more than anyone else, Fichman reveals, and confided in her alone about his financial hardships. Buckley subsequently worked with Darwin to secure a civil service pension for Wallace. Their bond is particularly evident in a letter that Buckley wrote to Wallace in the wake of the death of his son, Bertie, as a result of a fatal bout of scarlet fever. Written on 25 April 1874, in it Buckley offered her condolences, and then shared a spiritual communication that she believed she may have had with Bertie. She was careful, prefacing her account, ‘I should hesitate to send so soon after your loss if I did not know that you are able to balance probabilities and take it for what it is worth’. She told Wallace that the communication she received as a medium suggested that Bertie was well and was being watched over by deceased relatives. She continued, respectful but optimistic: ‘How wonderful it is how completely Spiritualism alters one’s idea of death!’ This correspondence demonstrates the comfort spiritualism brought to family members of the dead and helps to explain the surge in spiritualism during and after war. Wallace and Buckley maintained communications until Wallace’s death in 1913.
Although they discussed spiritualism as close friends and admired each other’s work, it is important to recognize that Wallace and Buckley did not maintain the same spiritualistic beliefs. Their correspondence included some differences of opinion. Buckley gave a far more detailed account of her conception of spiritualism in an 1879 essay titled ‘The soul, and the theory of evolution’. In this significant article, she offered a more fleshed out position on spiritualism informed by science than anywhere else in her writings. Lightman points to this article as furthering her spiritual evolutionary epic, but not its importance in outlining a unifying theory for the evolution of the moral faculties.

Like many psychical researchers, both among her contemporaries and those who were to come, Buckley attempted to legitimize spiritualism through science. In ‘The soul, and the theory of evolution’, she first noted that materialists were unable to show how molecular action can produce consciousness, an argument similar to the one she had made in her ‘Darwinism and religion’ essay eight years earlier. The mechanism of natural selection reinforced the theory of evolution, but many questions about the origin of life and consciousness remained unanswered, she wrote. She quickly established that the spiritualist ‘assumes that man has a dual nature, consisting of a soul or spirit united to a bodily organism’, and proceeded to discuss how the spiritualist accounts for the origin and nature of consciousness. Buckley, well versed in scientific discourse, noted that tests may only help eliminate error rather than provide a positive conclusion. Spiritualists, Buckley noted, have no more evidence of a first cause than materialists and, consequently, various doctrines explaining the nature of consciousness must be tested to eliminate erroneous theories. Buckley offered three options for the origin of the soul, each considered at some point within the Christian Church: creationism, metempsychosis and traducianism.

The first mechanism for the origin of the soul, creationism, declared that a deity created a soul to be joined to each new body. Creationism was the doctrine endorsed by the Church of England and most Christians worldwide at this time, and it was also the doctrine that both Wallace and Lyell appeared to favour with their shared belief that the origin of human morality and conscience required divine intervention. However, Buckley swiftly found fault with it. For her, the special creation of individual souls did not hold with a beneficent God nor the laws of evolution or thermodynamics. A beneficent God would not create an impure soul with original sin and mental deficiencies; creationism was thus, she argued, incompatible with theodicy, another tenet of the church. In an additional appeal to scientific authority, Buckley maintained that the theory of the divine creation of souls does not align with the laws of thermodynamics, specifically the conservation of energy, because individual existences cannot continue to increase. Further, neither did it fit with evolution, for, she asked, at what point could the soul be attached to the newly created child, and how could a child resemble its parents in ability and temperament if a deity specially created each soul? Buckley concluded that ‘the whole series of facts which were incomprehensible on the theory of soul creation now find their natural explanation in evolution, as a compound of the inheritance and accumulated experiences of each new individual’. Hence, she rejected creationism as the mechanism for the origin of the soul.

The next option Buckley presented was metempsychosis, the belief that souls ‘existed from the beginning of all things, and have passed successively through many bodily forms, being released from an organism at its dissolution only to enter after a time into another and newly-born creature’. This originally Eastern doctrine found favour with the ancients as well as some contemporary philosophers, including William Knight, professor of moral philosophy at St Andrews in Scotland. In the previous year, Knight...
had argued that the transmigration of souls, or renewal of existence, was the only explanation for the origin of souls compatible with theodicy, immortality and science. Reincarnated souls suffer or thrive based on how they lived their past life; however, although an immortality founded on the transmigration rather than constant increase of new souls might fit with thermodynamics, metempsychosis failed Buckley’s test concerning the laws of inheritance. She argued: ‘The necessity of a previous existence to account for the peculiarities and weaknesses of our nature ceases to exist... if we assume that the whole of our being at birth is the result of the inheritance of the experiences of all who have gone before us.’ Metempsychosis might connect the future state of the soul with its past performance, paralleling evolutionary adaptation on the individual scale, but, as Buckley maintained, Darwin’s theory demonstrated that inheritance is a necessary mechanism of evolution, and reincarnation of the individual soul was simply incompatible with reproduction and an inheritance of characteristics from parents to their offspring. The evolution of the soul through metempsychosis, then, does not fit parsimoniously with the evolution of the body.

By elimination, Buckley concluded that traducianism, the inheritance of the life principle, or soul, from one’s parents, remained as the only viable mechanism for the origin of the soul and the evolution of the moral sense. Buckley united evolution and theology by proposing that the life principle, or spirit, is passed from one generation to the next, drawing experience from each incarnation. As she explained, ‘if we allow the whole being of a child to be inherited from his parents, the possible combinations are so infinite that we have a sufficient explanation of all sudden varieties; and it is not only unnecessary, but irrational, to call in a previously developed soul to account for mental characteristics’. Like the organs of the body, particular ‘organs’ of the soul may be separately affected by natural selection, creating differences in mental characteristics, including morals. These mental characteristics are localized and transmitted through the soul and evolve through lawful natural selection. Buckley supported her conviction, first stated in 1871, that Wallace need not reject the lawful development of human morality through evolution. The key, as she explained in 1879, was her acceptance of traducianism and the evolutionary embellishments she added to it. She had already argued that parental love and cooperation drove evolution and, in championing traducianism, she similarly highlighted parental contribution to the soul.

Traducianism passed Buckley’s scrutiny because, in her version, it was compatible with the sciences of evolution and thermodynamics, as well as theodicy, although it required a spiritual immortality gradually developed through the evolution of the animal kingdom. She also appealed to religious authority, stressing that early fathers of the church held beliefs in traducianism too. Tertullian, St Gregory and St Augustine had each advocated it, though the church later condemned the idea for implying the materiality of the soul. She admitted that the early church would not favour traducianism’s alliance with evolution because evolution only slightly differentiates the moral and mental nature of humans and lower animals. But she contended that the modern church should find no fault with traducianism, particularly because it requires a first cause that she believed was spiritual and theistic, in the same way that Darwin had asserted that life had ‘been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one’ in the second edition of the Origin. While Buckley’s spiritualism did not align with typical Christian creationism, she demonstrated that traducianism was compatible with both religion, Christian or otherwise, and evolution, while maintaining the pervasive lawfulness of natural selection.
As addressed above, not all spiritualists nor men of science accepted the evolution of the mind and morals through natural selection. But neither was Buckley the only spiritualist to do so. While the doctrines of metempsychosis and traducianism far predate the Victorian period, the late nineteenth century appears to have brought a renewed interest in them. Buckley’s article responded to Knight’s promotion of metempsychosis as the most likely doctrine for the evolution of the soul. Knight did not deny the evolution of the soul, but, rather, argued that the immortal, transmigrating soul evolved, and not as early or as gradually as Buckley argued the soul did. J. P. Bryce, an English jurist, historian and politician, in turn responded to Buckley, also favouring reincarnation but maintaining the ‘law of continuity’ of evolution. The British periodical Light, a ‘journal of psychical, occult, and mystical research’, contains multiple articles on traducianism dating from this period as well. In one article from 1888, spiritualist author M. B. pointed out, as did Buckley, the materialism of contemporary science. Though he considered traducianism, M. B. ultimately favoured reincarnation as the best fit with the laws of heredity because it better accounts for the extreme variation of souls. In another Light article from 1891, C. C. M. outlined numerous theories of the soul, including materialism, creationism and traducianism. An 1875 text called The tripartite nature of man: spirit, soul and body also used the vocabulary of this debate, its author applying natural selection for the body, traducianism for the soul and creationism for the spirit. These examples of other Victorian writers engaging with evolution and spiritualist doctrine provide context for Buckley’s traducianism and suggest that she was joining a lively conversation. Evidence of other traducianists does not abound, indicating that Buckley’s application of the doctrine to evolution by natural selection may have been quite novel. While her application of traducianism in the context of Darwinian natural selection may have been novel, it was not isolated, for it bridged science and spiritualism under uniformity to address Victorian concerns about morality and immortality.

In traducianism, Buckley finally found a mechanism for the reconciliation of the evolution of morals and religion. Just as the human body had evolved gradually from the lower animals, she theorized, so too had the soul been evolving and individualizing, gradually progressing in moral and mental power and in its capacity for immortality. Her theory is timely and comprehensive, addressing numerous scientific and social questions of the Victorian period. However, the term traducianism appears nowhere in modern scholars’ analysis of Buckley, and most discount her spiritualism. Extending the analysis of Gates and Lightman, I suggest that the significance of Buckley’s distinctive, mutualistic addition to the narrative on the evolution of morals, initiated by Darwin, lies in her theory of traducianism, neatly unifying mutualism and spiritualism in her unique conception of the evolutionary epic. Christine Ferguson, in her work relating spiritualism and science in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, has demonstrated that ‘eugenic utopianism found receptive audiences in British and American spiritualist communities’, but Buckley’s spiritualist work seems rather to answer the question of theodicy by justifying the struggle for progress more than to advocate for a biodeterministic utopia of perfect souls. As Buckley concluded in ‘The soul, and theory of evolution’:

If, then, we can conceive permanent impressions accumulating through countless generations of animals, leading to developed instincts, emotions, and passions, and thus on to the complex nature of man, who through savage life gains new experiences; then the upward struggle, with all its difficulties and pain, finds an explanation and a moral justification.
Arabella Buckley bridged the gap between Victorian science and spiritualism through her novel evolutionary version of mutualism. By considering Wallace as a representative of the portion of the evolutionist community that believed in spiritualism, historians of science miss evidence of a deeper integration of Victorian science and spiritualism. The Victorian period may have seen a ‘crisis of faith’ and a rise in agnosticism coinciding with a decline in religion, but the thousands of followers of spiritualism demonstrate a far more representative response to this crisis than do agnostics. Instead of dismissing spiritualism as marginal by reference to Wallace’s scientifically inconsistent example, historians might look to Buckley for a demonstration of the rich connections between science and spiritualism. I propose that her work is a better example of this connection in the Victorian period. It also offers greater insight into how Victorians viewed their changing world, and suggested that they understood spiritualism to be a religion rather than a science.

Most psychical researchers who adopted spiritualist beliefs stressed the continuity of natural law throughout their encounters with spiritualism, with an important exception. Janet Oppenheim, Sherrie Lynn Lyons and Richard Noakes each cite Alfred Russel Wallace as their example of a man who ‘managed to reconcile a Darwinian view of nature with the belief in the efficacy of spirit agents’, yet we know from Wallace’s now infamous review of Lyell’s *Principles of geology* in 1869 that he came to deny the universality of natural law. Indeed, not only did Wallace’s approach alienate him from his more materialist colleagues, but he was also viewed with some scepticism by those psychical researchers who were also men of science because of his tendency to accept at face value the sensations and experiences of others, and thus to defend the authenticity of mediums, placing the burden of proof upon spiritualism’s challengers. Oliver Lodge and other psychical researchers were wary of Wallace; the former even wrote a letter to a spiritualist colleague complaining about Wallace’s lack of critical judgement concerning spiritualist phenomena. Historians have suggested that perhaps Wallace diverged from both the standard of science and the standard of psychical research (which, as we have seen, were quite similar) because he had other political motives, namely to challenge or rectify the social imbalance that he saw in the world. What is certain, though, is that Wallace rejected both the uniformity that linked Victorian science with spiritualism and the standard of evidence for psychical research, and thus historians cannot take him as representative of the spiritualist movement’s interconnectedness with science.

To date, Wallace has received most if not all of historians’ attention as the resident spiritual evolutionist of the Victorian period, but here I think that I have demonstrated that our attention would be better spent on Arabella Buckley, at least as a starting point, if our goal is to grasp Victorians’ lawful consolidation of spiritualism and evolution. She became a science writer, popularizer and lecturer beginning in the 1870s, a decade Owen terms the golden years of spiritualism. As a successful science popularizer and writer, she reached a more inclusive audience—men and women of science as well as children and spiritualists—than did either Darwin or Wallace, and thus she provides a more accurate idea of how Victorian people reconciled changing notions of science, religion and spirituality. In contrast with Wallace, Buckley maintained the uniformity of natural law in evolution, fought materialism and justified theism in her writing, all tenets of the scientific spiritualist movement. For her, the scientific innovations of the Victorian era could not disprove the possibility of a deity or immortality, ideas she shared with thousands of other spiritualists.
CONCLUSIONS

While Buckley reconciled traducianism with contemporary science largely by maintaining the uniformity of natural laws from the start, her more famous spiritualist colleague cast aside these laws. Taking Wallace as an example of how to consolidate evolution and spiritualism has misled historians into believing that most spiritual evolutionists followed his lead, and hence that Victorian spiritualism was a marginal, occult activity. In contrast, Buckley helps us understand how authoritative men (and women) of science came to believe in spiritualism, how it served the purpose of dematerializing science and instilling a positive view about life after death. Her example, more accessible to many Victorians, helps us locate spiritualism as serving the role of a religion for most spiritualists, and should be categorized as such rather than an occult science.

Traducianism also spoke to the Victorian concern with the mind–body dichotomy, suggesting a mechanism for the transference of the soul and personality that followed the uniformity of inheritance of physical characteristics while maintaining the nobility of religion. Buckley’s evolutionary epic is an impressive consolidation of Darwin’s theory of the evolution of morals with an emphasis on mutualism and spiritualism’s theistic metaphysics. The key to this consolidation is her revival of traducianism, which provided a mechanism for many of the greatest questions humans pose about their place in the world. Her success as a writer and lecturer reveals that her views were neither marginal nor, we might presume, a minority position. Through her evolutionary traducianism, Arabella Buckley bridged science and spiritualism, and in doing so has offered historians of the period a more complex, but also more deeply satisfying, picture of the Victorian worldview in the years after Darwin.

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NOTES

1 Charles Darwin to Arabella Buckley, 14 November 1880, Cambridge University Library, Darwin Papers, DAR 143:184.
3 Ibid., p. 60.
4 Ibid.


Ibid., p. 105. For a detailed account of this exchange and of the political implications that Darwin and his contemporaries read into cooperation and competition in nature, see P. J. Hale, *Political descent: Malthus, mutualism and the politics of evolution in Victorian England* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).


Darwin, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 3.


Ibid., p. 110.

Ibid., *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 71.

Ibid., *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 111.

Ibid., *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 82.


Ibid., *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 86.


Ibid.


Gates, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 239.

Darwin, *op. cit.* (note 1).


Indeed, these are also topics that Lyell doubtless discussed with the Anglican theologian Charles Kingsley, to whom he was related by marriage.


Buckley, *ibid.*

Ibid., p. 47.

Ibid., p. 50.


Ibid., p. 57.

Ibid., p. 51.

Ibid., p. 50.

Ibid., p. 61.


Ibid., p. xv.


Ibid., p. xix.


Ibid., p. 64.


Ibid., p. 140.

Ibid., p. 159.


Ibid., p. viii.
Lightman, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 239.


Lightman, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 239.


Noakes, *op. cit.* (note 64).


Noakes, *op. cit.* (note 64).


Buckley, *op. cit.* (note 99).
115 M. B., ‘Heredity’, *Light* 404 (29 September, 8), 479 (1888).
122 M. B., ‘Heredity’, *Light* 404 (29 September, 8), 479 (1888).