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Charles H. Smith

Western Kentucky University, [charles.smith@wku.edu](mailto:charles.smith@wku.edu)

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# Alfred Russel Wallace Notes 30. Wallace A Theist? Part I.

Charles H. Smith, PhD.<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Professor Emeritus, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY. Email: charles.smith@wku.edu

*Summary:* Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) has been portrayed as a ‘theist’ on a large number of occasions from his own time on to the present. In this, the first of a two part work, this assessment is questioned. In part one, the matter of Wallace’s personal philosophy and spiritual orientation is explored, the conclusion being that Wallace was a lifelong agnostic who can hardly be aligned with theism. *Key words:* Alfred Russel Wallace, characterizations, theism, spiritualism, cosmology, evolution, agnosticism

## **Introduction**

It has almost become routine for writers to refer to Wallace as a ‘theist,’ or, perhaps more particularly, a ‘theistic evolutionist.’ I do not agree with this assessment (Smith 2013, 2022). Nevertheless a large literature has been built on this foundation (see, for example, Fichman 2001, 2008 & 2015; Fichman & Keelan 2007; Flannery 2016 & 2020; Haller 2020; Rosen 2007; Ross 1989; Sera-Shriar 2020; Tierney 1992; Winder *et al.* 2017), so it is perhaps worthwhile to pause at this point for some additional comment.

Despite the trend, a few sources have come down on my side of the fence. Prasch (2015, pp. 23-24), for example, notes:

... Just as with Lyell’s response to Wallace’s review, among modern writers Wallace’s new position is routinely labeled a move toward “theism” ..., but that sort of misses what he is up to, and how his Spiritualism figures into the story. As he elaborated in a footnote to this section in the second edition of *Contributions*, denying that “I imagine that this ‘higher Force’ is the Deity,” Wallace noted: “I can only explain this misconception by the incapacity of the modern human mind to realise the existence of any higher intelligence between itself and Deity...” He also firmly distanced himself from the philosophical discourse of first causes, insisting that the words he selected “were purposely chosen to show, that I reject the hypothesis of ‘first causes’ for any and every *special* effect in the universe.” Wallace thus posited higher spirits, not gods, as guides of evolutionary progress. When he returned to the topic of Spiritualism, and provided a more forthright advocacy (over his earlier mere insistence that it deserved investigation), in “Defence of Modern Spiritualism” (1874), he distanced his position from theistic belief even more clearly. There, he first underlined the gap between his belief systems and conventional Christian orthodoxy... [then] he articulated his alternative, the “higher intelligences” he chose to see as the guiding forces of progressive change... Wallace may have been convinced of higher powers, but he remained still deeply unchurched, and “theism” does not quite describe this position.

In a similar vein, Barnes (2008, pp. 211-214) has stated:

...[Asa] Gray also apologized for admixing science and natural theology. In marked contrast, Wallace neglected these typical distinctions. He insisted that his argument for the

superintended development of human being was not less scientific than was the claim that natural selection could explain the non-human organic world... By classifying superintendence as scientific, Wallace implicitly denied that the natural world was scientifically unintelligible except upon the presumptions of uniformity and positivism... Wallace had clearly refused any explicit association with natural theology by employing his design argument in the interests of spiritualism and science rather than theism and Christian faith. Perhaps this was to be expected from a radical free-thinker whose concern was less for God and religion than for the natural existence and deathly predicament of the human spirit... By considering superintendence to be a "strictly scientific" argument, by categorizing intelligent immaterial agency among the laws of nature rather than the claims of theology, and by separating the life of the human spirit from the concerns of religion, Wallace was negating distinctions that were widely accepted in recognition of natural theology and the differentiation of science and religion in Britain... How far wrong would it be to say that Wallace's superintendental argument for spiritualism was natural theology without the theology? After decades of increasingly close association between natural theology and science, superintendental design argument was being removed from the realm of theology entirely and represented by Wallace as a scientific and spiritual rule of the universe... Wallace was alone in accepting natural selection as a "law" of organic nature – a scientific explanation so secure that aspects of nature exceeding its scope would demand a complementary explanation, not a rejection or modification of the law...

I believe Prasch and Barnes are precisely correct in these evaluations, and in this two-part study will endeavor to advance some arguments in defense of their surmise.

## **Definitions**

In my *The Real Alfred Russel Wallace* (Smith 2013/2020, pp. 87-89) I provide definitions for some terms that are helpful in coming to grips with the nature of Wallace's mature world view. These terms are 'teleology,' 'final causes,' 'first causes,' and 'theism.' As these concepts are fundamental to the present discussion as well, we begin here by drawing on this material, a bit tedious as this may be:

... Concerning "teleology," the *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Angeles 1981) defines "teleology" more simply: "the study of phenomena exhibiting order, design, purposes, ends, goals, tendencies, aims, direction, and how they are achieved in the process of development." It also gives a more detailed accounting under the entry "explanation, teleological": "1. Explanation in terms of some purpose (end, goal) for which something is done. 2. Explanation in terms of goal-directed or purpose-directed activity. Usually the goal or purpose is preset or planned. 3. Explaining the present and past with reference to something in the future (a goal, purpose, end, result) that is being striven for or for the sake of which the process takes place. Opposite to mechanistic explanation, which explains the present, and any future event, in terms of conditions prior to it. 4. Explanation in terms of the structures and activities of the parts of a whole being adapted (coordinated, adjusted, fitted suited) to each other toward the fulfillment of the purposes or needs of that whole." Under "causes, Aristotle's four" it defines "final cause" as "*that for the sake of which* an activity takes place; that end (purpose, goal, state of completion) *for which* the change is produced, or for which the change aims (strives, seeks). Its *telos* or *raison d'être*." "First cause" is defined as "1. The uncaused being usually called God, which is the initial cause of the universe's existence. Before this first causal event there was either (a) no universe in existence and God created the universe out of nothing, or (b) the universe existed statically without any causal series or interrelationships activating it. 2. That uncaused

being which is the continual causal ground for the particular cause-effect patterns that occur at any given time in the universe. This being may be as in 1, or it may be the support at each moment of events that stretch back infinitely..."

...There remains the term "theism." *Webster's* (1967) defines it as "belief in the existence of a god or gods; specifically belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of man and the world who transcends yet is immanent in the world." The *Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the term as "1. Belief in divine things, gods, or a God. Opposite to atheism. 2. Belief in one God (monotheism) transcending but yet in some way immanent in the universe. Contrasted with deism. Other characteristics usually associated with this monotheistic Deity of theism: God is personal, the creator, the sustainer of existence, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, supreme in power, reality, and value, the source and sanction of all values, and accessible to human communication."

Few would disagree that Wallace was a one-of-a-kind thinker, and a major difficulty in coming to grips with the progress of his thought lies both in some of the labels that have been applied to him, and, beyond that, what he fashioned *himself* to be. In both instances, the labels that have seen use do not quite fit the reality. We need a few more definitions, as follow:

1. *Materialism*. The *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Angeles 1981, p. 161) gives eleven "main views" connected to the concept of materialism. Of these, about half can be associated with Wallace's own views, at any period of his life – usually, however, he is regarded as a materialist up through the year 1865, and a theist thereafter, probably because of his embrace of spiritualism over the next few years, and subsequent increasing emphasis on final causes.

2. *Agnosticism*. Angeles (1981), p. 6: "1. The belief (a) that we cannot have knowledge of God and (b) that it is impossible to prove that God exists or does not exist. 2. Sometimes used to refer to the suspension of judgment such as about the soul, immortality, spirits, hell, extraterrestrial life."

3. *Deism*. Angeles (1981), p. 59: "For the most part, deism holds to the following beliefs: 1. God as the First Cause created the universe. 2. God created the unchangeable laws by which the universe is governed. 3. God is in no way immanent in his creation, but totally different from it, transcending it as for example a watchmaker transcends the watch he has made and set in motion. 4. Reason is in harmony with revelation (or revelation must conform to reason). 5. The Bible must be analyzed according to reason and its doctrines should not be made into mysteries. 6. God has a preordained plan for the universe; all things are predetermined. 7. The highest duty and sole aim of human life is to fulfill the purpose of the natural laws God has created. 8. In some versions: God occasionally suspends his physical laws in order to revitalize the natural system. 9. In some versions: God can intervene in the lives of humans, and provide grace and/or moral guidance."

We can now begin here, with a consideration of what Wallace thought of institutional, 'conventional,' religion, dwelling on his own words on the subject.

### ***Wallace's Rejection of Conventional Religious Belief***

While it is true that Wallace grew up in a household in which many of the basic practices of the Church of England were observed, it is quickly apparent from his treatment of that history in his autobiography *My Life* (1905) that the family was not much more than

going through the motions, and that Wallace himself soon divorced himself from any such manner of spiritual instruction as soon as he was out on his own. That he in fact had no use for the standard monotheism model throughout his life is evident from numerous writings, as in the following short passages:

...what little religious belief I had very quickly vanished under the influence of philosophical or scientific scepticism. This came first upon me when I spent a month or two in London [in 1837] with my brother John...; and during the seven years I lived with my brother William, though the subject of religion was not often mentioned, there was a pervading spirit of scepticism, or free-thought as it was then called, which strengthened and confirmed my doubts as to the truth or value of all ordinary religious teaching. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 227)

[in the late 1830s] ...It must have been in one of the books or papers I read here that I met with what I dare say is a very old dilemma as to the origin of evil. It runs thus: "Is God able to prevent evil but not willing? Then he is not benevolent. Is he willing but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" This struck me very much, and it seemed quite unanswerable, and when at home a year or two afterwards, I took the opportunity one day to repeat it to my father, rather expecting he would be very much shocked at my acquaintance with any such infidel literature. But he merely remarked that such problems were mysteries which the wisest cannot understand, and seemed disinclined to any discussion of the subject. This, of course, did not satisfy me, and if the argument did not really touch the question of the existence of God, it did seem to prove that the orthodox ideas as to His nature and powers cannot be accepted. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, pp. 87-88)

[in the late 1830s/40s] ... I therefore thoroughly agreed with Mr. Dale Owen's conclusion, that the orthodox religion of the day was degrading and hideous... (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 88)

[by the 1840s] ... I was too firmly convinced of the incredibility of large portions of the Bible, and of the absence of sense or reason in many of the doctrines of orthodox religion to be influenced by any such preaching, however eloquent. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 240)

[in the 1840s] ... My brother never went to church himself, but for the first few years I was with him he sent me once every Sunday; but, of course, the only effect of this was to deepen my spirit of scepticism, as I found no attempt in any of the clergymen to reason on any of the fundamental questions at the root of the Christian and every other religion. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 228)

...by the time I came of age [in 1844] I was absolutely non-religious, I cared and thought nothing about it, and could be best described by the modern term 'agnostic.' (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 228)

[from an 1861 letter] ...In my early youth I heard, as ninety-nine-hundredths of the world do, only the evidence on one side, and became impressed with a veneration for religion which has left some traces even to this day. I have since heard and read much on both sides, and pondered much upon the matter in all its bearings. I spent, as you know, a year and a half in a clergyman's family and heard almost every Tuesday the very best, most earnest and most impressive preacher it has ever been my fortune to meet with, but it produced no effect whatever on my mind. (Marchant 1916, pp. 66-67)

[from an 1861 letter] ...I am thankful I can see much to admire in all religions. To the mass of mankind religion of some kind is a necessity. But whether there be a God and whatever be His nature; whether we have an immortal soul or not, or whatever may be our state after death, I can have no fear of having to suffer for the study of nature and the search for truth, or believe that those will be better off in a future state who have lived in the belief of doctrines inculcated from childhood, and which are to them rather a matter of blind faith than intelligent conviction. (Marchant 1916, p. 67)

...Soon after I came home [in 1862] I made the acquaintance of Mr. R. ...we were for some years joint investigators of spiritualistic phenomena. He was, like myself at that time, an agnostic, well educated, and of a more positive character than myself. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 2, p. 361)

[from an 1865 letter] ... I look upon the doctrine of future rewards and punishments as a motive to action to be radically bad, and as bad for savages as for civilized men. ...I cannot see that the teaching of all this [*i.e.*, respect, moralities, etc.] can be furthered by the dogmas of any religion, and I do not believe that those dogmas really have any effect in advancing morality in one case out of a thousand. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 2, p. 54)

[from 1894] ... [religion] has been one of the most important agencies in social development, and is closely bound up with that portion of our nature to which all recent social advance is due, and which will inevitably decide the course of our future progress. Of course this has nothing to do with dogmatic religion, but only with those great ethical principles which have always formed part of religious teaching, and whose influence is in great part due to it. (Wallace 1894a, p. 549)

[from 1894] ...Many persons, if asked why they go to church or chapel, will say that it is to save their souls or to please God, and yet they seem to think that they may break what they believe is God's own commandment week after week, without any chance of displeasing Him or of losing the souls they are so anxious to save. (Wallace 1894b, p. 605)

[from 1898] ... I do not hold any Christian doctrines whatever. (Anonymous, 1898)

[from a 1902 letter] ... I am not interested in the new theology or in any theology. I passed all that long ago, inasmuch as it presupposes a knowledge of God it is all vanity and vexation of the spirit. I agree with H.S. [Herbert Spencer] that the first cause is necessarily unknowable, even unthinkable. WCP3990 (letter to Mr. Bennett, 5 April 1902).

[from 1905] ...Of course, I do not adopt the view that each man's life, in all its details, is guided by the Deity for His special ends. That would be, indeed, to make us all conscious automata, puppets in the hands of an all-powerful destiny. (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 197)

[from 1908] ... But as one who from boyhood till middle age was a confirmed materialist, and in his later life has become a confirmed spiritualist – but at no time a believer in dogmatic Christianity – my growing impression of late years has been that [the teachings of] Jesus of Nazareth [have been] ... – notwithstanding the gross perversion of his teaching by priests and rulers – of *supreme value*. (Wallace 1908a)

These by no means exhaust the instances of such musings, which may be extended to numerous tirades against more particular subjects such as the sometime misbehavior of missionaries, and perceived misuses of the Church's vast monetary resources. In view

of this avalanche of evidence, that anyone can describe Wallace as being ‘a Christian’ – with the purpose of styling him a devoted or even casual follower of Christianity’s institutional worldview and dogmas – should immediately bring on a fit of head-scratching. Yet this is not a rare occurrence in both the professional and popular literature. Obviously, there are agendas afoot, and they are sometimes not so pretty ones. We will return to this subject later.

Despite the numerous statements tabulated above, the skeptic will ask whether Wallace’s actual substantive writings truly reflect such appraisals of himself. This is at the minimum a book-sized subject in itself, but it is possible to present at least one kind of evidence that he took this position quite seriously.

### ***Terms Used by Wallace to Describe the ‘Ultimate Cause’***

It will be noticed by the patient reader that throughout his voluminous published oeuvre Wallace almost never uses the word ‘God’ to express his personal concept of whatever higher powers there might be that find service in the execution of natural events. He manages to avoid the term, except when quoting or describing the words of others, to an extent that can only be described as ‘bending over backwards.’ Lest the reader think this an overstatement, I next alphabetically itemize a good portion of the terms he actually does use, painfully long though this list is (to save space Wallace’s writings are referred to by the numbers assigned them at my *Alfred Russel Wallace Page*):

*agencies, directive* (1910: S732, pp. 292 & 353); *agencies, distinct and higher* (1876: S257, p. 114); *agencies, more subtle [ ] than we are acquainted with* (1870: S716, p. 359); *agencies, new* (1910: S732, p. 357); *agencies, new powers and [ ] in the universe* (1875: S717, p. 28; 1870: S174, p. 116); *agencies, other [ ] in the universe than matter and force* (1875: S717, p. vii); *agencies, such unknown laws or [ ]* (1877: S268a, p. 2); ‘agencies/agency’: terms ARW frequently used in his natural and social science writings (>500 times); *agency of preter-human intelligences – in other words, of spirits* (1891: S434, p. 261); *agency of a mind or minds...enormously above and beyond any human minds* (1913: S734, p. xxxv); *agency of disembodied intelligences* (1891: S434, p. 274; 1896: S530, p. 4); *agency, action performed independently of human or visible [ ]* (1875: S717, p. 5); *agency [that] came into play...to develop the higher intellectual and spiritual nature of man* (1905: S729, vol. 2, p. 17); *agency, real spiritual* (1905: S729, vol. 2, p. 308); *agency, miraculous or supernatural* (1875: S717, p. 36); *agency of a spirit-world around us* (1896: S717, p. xv; 1893: S478, p. 441); *agency, directing* (1908: S712ab, p. 522); *agency of such a supreme mind* (1910: S732, p. 329); *agency of some high directive power* (1910: S732, p. 332); *agency, such far-reaching power and directive [ ]* (1910: S732, p. 338); *agency, directive* (1910: S732, p. 338); *agency, a never-ceasing, guiding [ ]* (1912: S700, p. 6); *agency, super-human* (1882: S356, p. 447); *agency of superhuman intelligences* (1870: S174, p. 114). [For those not yet impressed, continued as Note 1 on page 13.]

Now wouldn’t a genuine theist simply have replaced almost everything in this lengthy parade of descriptive terminology with the single word: ‘God’? Why the dance? Obviously, Wallace was doing everything he possibly could to distance himself from any association with the conventional theist brand. Sometimes he even specifically draws attention to the difference between his position, and the ‘common’ view:

...Some of my critics seem quite to have misunderstood my meaning in this part of the argument. They have accused me of unnecessarily and unphilosophically appealing to "first causes" in order to get over a difficulty – of believing that "our brains are made by God and our lungs by natural selection;" and that, in point of fact, "man is God's domestic animal." An eminent French critic, M. Claparède, makes me continually call in the aid of – "*une Force supérieure*," the capital F, meaning I imagine that this "higher Force" is the Deity. I can only explain this misconception by the incapacity of the modern cultivated mind to realise the existence of any higher intelligence between itself and Deity. (Wallace 1871a, p. 372)

...It has generally been the custom of writers on natural history to take the habits and instincts of animals as fixed points, and to consider their structure and organization as specially adapted to be in accordance with these. This assumption is however an arbitrary one, and has the bad effect of stifling inquiry into the nature and causes of "instincts and habits," treating them as directly due to a "first cause," and therefore incomprehensible to us (Wallace 1869, p. 274)

...He [Robert Dale Owen] writes with the earnestness suited to such a theme, and with the sense of responsibility of one who, by long and patient study, has arrived at important truths of the highest value to his fellow men. Rationalism, he tells us, cannot object to this belief, that it contravenes the doctrine of law; for its phenomena occur strictly under law: nor yet that it assumes the existence, in spiritual matters, of that direct agency of God which the naturalist finds nowhere in the physical universe; for its revealings come to man mediately only: nor yet that it is dogmatic, exclusive, or intolerant, as Infallibility is; for its adherents adduce experimental evidence, open to all men, and gleaned after the inductive method, for the faith that is in them. (Wallace 1872, p. 238)

...I have no difficulty in conceiving an ascending scale of being rising up into what the Christian means by 'God,' but the idea of a Supreme Being does not, of course, explain the mystery of the universe. The child's questions as to when God began and where He came from still remain unanswered. The fundamental problem is, Why does anything exist at all? Why was there not an absolute negation--nothing but empty space? Infinite time or space or matter alike are unthinkable by us. (Dawson 1903, p. 177)

...Its [evolution's] essential idea is that of the continuity of all the phenomena of nature – that everything we see on the earth or in the spaces around us is not permanent, but has arisen out of something that preceded it. It is thus opposed to the old, and to some extent still prevalent, idea of creation – that things as we now see them have existed from some remote but definite epoch when they came into existence by the act or fiat of a supreme power – the great First Cause. (Wallace 1908b, pp. 1-2)

One of the suspicious agendas I alluded to earlier is connected to scapegoat attempts to view Darwin as an objective thinker, contrasting him with 'spiritualist Wallace.' In this differentiation, Darwin is recognized as a conventional agnostic, while the assumption is made that the spiritualism of Wallace represents just another brand of religious belief. But this is *not* a good assumption.

Most sources I have come across seem to portray Darwin as a rather typical agnostic, or even an atheist, who was unwilling to publicly admit this for fear of troubling his wife, who held strong religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Darwin's appreciation of the *concept* of God was a rather ordinary one, as his use of language involving the word 'God' clearly shows. In his personal letters, for example, he uses phrases like 'God knows' or 'God



willing' rather frequently; and one should not ignore the following quote from Wallace (Wallace 1880, p. 93) focussing on Darwin's vision of the place of "the Creator" in nature: "people are surprised and almost incredulous when told that Mr. Darwin himself, in the latest edition of his celebrated work, still refers that origin to divine agency. Such however is undoubtedly the case, as shown by the following passage which concludes the volume: 'There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one...'"

The important point to draw from the above is the extent of the difference between Darwin's concept of God, and Wallace's nonconcept of same. People criticizing Wallace's philosophy assume that his interest in spiritualism and the 'supernatural' imply he began with the same basically 'real/unreal' position that Darwin held regarding the concepts of nature and God. Darwin's use of terms like 'God' and 'Creator' reveal an almost caricaturish understanding on his part: even when some of his words seem to signify he does not actually believe in the existence of God, he goes out of his way (as just above) to pay lip service to contemporary 'outside of nature' portaits of the Deity. Wallace as an adult – especially after his first experiences with mesmerism in 1845 – was entirely uninterested in any understanding in which there was anything more out there beyond an all-compassing nature (see quote below).

### ***Materialism, Agnosticism & Deism***

Wallace's own appraisal of his point of view, evidenced above in the last two 1905 passages quoted, places him as an agnostic, as defined earlier. Consider this late statement:

...Whether this 'Unknown Reality' is a single Being, and acts everywhere in the universe as direct creator, organiser and director of every minutest motion in the whole of our universe, and of all possible universes, or whether it acts through variously conditioned modes, as H. Spencer suggested, or through 'infinite grades of beings' as I suggest, comes to much the same thing. Mine seems a more clear and intelligible supposition as stated in the last paragraph of my 'World of Life,' (Marchant 1913, pp. xxxv-xxxvi).

The materialism question is a more difficult one to deal with. As mentioned earlier, Wallace is often viewed as a materialist up to the point he endorsed spiritualism, and a theist thereafter, but there are complications. First, the full entry for 'materialism' given in *The Dictionary of Philosophy* (Angeles 1981, p. 161), alluded to earlier, waffles on the matter of causality as a part of materialism, giving no consistent picture of how a laws-based view of causality within a nonphysical environment might be related to the term. If one accepts *a priori* that to be a materialist one must believe that only physical causalities exist, then Wallace falls outside of that realm. But this is reasoning by exclusion. If instead one adopts the position that causality is universally laws-based, as Wallace (and for that matter, Spinoza) believed, then some other pigeonhole must be found, and that pigeonhole is certainly not theism. Nor is it deism, as the description given earlier clearly shows.

### ***Why, Then ??***

In view of the definitions of 'theism' given earlier, and Wallace's actual usage of related terminology, I submit that there is nothing in his written record to merit the tag of 'theist' often given him. The first definition of theism given earlier, involving a "belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of man and the world who transcends yet is immanent in the world," certainly does not fit, one iota, the span of Wallace's referrals to ultimate causation. Neither do the ideas that "God is personal, the creator, the sustainer of existence, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, supreme in power, reality, and value, the source and sanction of all values, and accessible to human communication," as expressed in the final definition given in that section.

Why, then, is he so often labelled a 'theist'? Is it because he commonly refers to himself as a theist in his writings? Well no, he doesn't. A search of Wallace databases reveals only one such usage, part of a private letter: "'Thus,' as [Wallace] ... writes: ... 'the completely materialistic mind of my youth and early manhood has been slowly moulded into the socialistic, spiritualistic, and theistic mind I now exhibit – a mind which is, as my scientific friends think, so weak and credulous in its declining years, as to believe that fruits and flowers, domestic animals, glorious birds and insects, wool, cotton, sugar and rubber, metals and gems, were all foreseen and foreordained for the education and enjoyment of man'" (Marchant 1913, p. xxxiv). This passage, glowing with Wallace's self-deprecating sense of humor, can hardly be taken seriously as representing an objective self-appraisal of his character on his part. What are we left with?

A first suspicion would be his frequent association with teleological thinking. As the definitions given earlier suggest, teleology is, generally speaking, the notion that ordered change is a function of some kind of predetermined outcome. More often than not, this implies the assistance of some manner of activating supranatural force, usually a Creator figure, who brings about the outcome through interjections of first causes – that is to say, influences that do not come about through the usually-perceived-as-conventional forces of nature. Wallace indeed believed that evolution was directional, but, as several of the quotes given earlier show, did not support the notion that it was being channeled in some manner by forces arising from outside the realm of nature. As part of a recent presentation I noted:

...many observers are content to characterize Wallace's worldview of a directional evolution as a simplistic form of teleology in which an omnipotent Godfigure dispenses first causes as initiating acts. But the notion of God-originated first causes was anathema to Wallace, who instead postulated a cosmological progression more closely akin to the Aristotelian doctrine of final causes. Thus, there was something in the constitution of existence which caused a general tendency to evolve toward more complex and self-aware systems; it should therefore not be surprising that he is sometimes considered to be one of the fathers of the Anthropic Principle in astronomy. Still others have identified this tendency to self-invent with what has been termed 'teleonomy'... [Wikipedia defines [this] as "the quality of apparent purposefulness and of goal-directedness of structures and functions in living organisms brought about by natural processes like natural selection. ...Teleonomy is sometimes contrasted with teleology, where the latter is understood as a purposeful goal-directedness brought about through human or divine intention. Teleonomy is thought to derive from evolutionary history, adaptation for reproductive success, and/or the operation of a program."] (Smith 2023)

Even the avowed materialist August Weismann admitted that final causation was not necessarily antithetical to scientific understandings, and for those who doubt this I offer as evidence some of my own work, which, building on thoughts originating with Spinoza, suggests that systems tend naturally to self-organize to higher levels of order through a generalizable process of constrained subsystemization (Smith 2012, 2014, 2015).

Beyond the 'teleologist' tag, and in the absence of other *a priori* evidence, one quickly comes to the conclusion that it was Wallace's adoption of spiritualism that has linked him to theism. But there are some real problems in trying to make this association, especially in his case.

To begin with, 'modern' spiritualism is not at its core a belief that rests on the posed presence of a monotheistic god or even gods; again, it doesn't fit within a Christianity style of monotheism. True, it has evolved from its 'modern' mid-nineteenth century roots in ways that have sometimes joined with ones that do (e.g., the 'Christian spiritualists'), but there is no evidence that Wallace ever bought into these re-directionings. In his autobiography he writes of how in his early years: "my growing taste for various branches of physical science and my increasing love of nature disinclined me more and more for either the observances or the doctrines of orthodox religion..." (Wallace 1905, Vol. 1, p. 228) By 1871, several years after his full adoption of spiritualism, he wrote:

...The declaration so often made or implied, that facts witnessed thousands of times by honest and intelligent men, and thousands of times carefully examined to detect fraud or delusion which has never been discovered, can not exist, because they imply a subversion of the laws of Nature, is a most weak and illogical objection, since all we know of the laws of Nature is derived from the observation of facts. No fact can possibly subvert the laws of Nature; and to declare that it does so is to declare that we have exhausted Nature, and know all her laws. (Wallace 1871b, p. 29)

Actually, it is beside the point as to whether there may be a reality called the 'Spirit Realm' by its advocates; what is more important is that its alleged presence is defended in a manner distinctly different from the worship of supreme deities, or any acknowledgment they are capable of producing first causes. Instead, it is viewed, especially as taken by Wallace, as a formerly undescribed element of the natural world (as is apparent from the quotes provided earlier, and some to follow). At most, and even if it is eventually entirely debunked as such, we are left with an overextended, scientific understanding falling within the realms of hypernaturalism. It would not be the only historical instance of a failed 'scientific' theory of nature based on bad assumptions or interpretations of what constitutes 'evidence' (for example, Lamarckian biology or late nineteenth century imaginings of the 'ether').

It seems clear to me that Wallace's central interest in the subject of spiritualism was not that it offered a communication vehicle for reliving the company of departed relatives, but instead (1) that it suggested an understanding of how the individual and social consciousness could evolve in a manner continuing/superseding the more material processes linked to natural selection, and (2) it seemed to provide a moral and ethical framework consistent with an elevation of human purpose. Concerning the first point there is the following statement, drawn from his very first publication on spiritualism in 1866:

...Neither punishments nor rewards are meted out by an external power, but each one's condition is the natural and inevitable sequence of his condition here. He starts again from the level of moral and intellectual development to which he has raised himself while on earth. Now here again we have a striking supplement to the doctrines of modern science. The organic world has been carried on to a high state of development, and has been ever kept in harmony with the forces of external nature, by the grand law of "survival of the fittest" acting upon ever varying organisations. In the spiritual world, the law of the "progression of the fittest" takes its place, and carries on in unbroken continuity that development of the human mind which has been commenced here. (Wallace 1866, pp. 49-50)

As to more particularly how this might take place, consider these words from twenty-five years later:

...In every case that passes beyond simple transference of a thought from one living person to another, it seems probable that other intelligences co-operate. ... The powers of communication of spirits with us, and ours of receiving their communications, vary greatly. Some of us can only be influenced by ideas or impressions, which we think are altogether the product of our own minds. Others can be so strongly acted on that they feel an inexplicable emotion, leading to action beneficial to themselves or to others. In some cases, warning or information can be given through dreams, in others by waking vision. Some spirits have the power of producing visual, others audible hallucinations to certain persons... (Wallace 1891, pp. 272-274)

Indeed, and concerning this second point, large sections of several of Wallace's treatments of spiritualism are devoted to this subject (see, for example, Wallace 1874, 1887, 1894c, 1898), which is entirely consistent with the idea of evolutionary direction. In another he states:

...With very few exceptions those who quit this world have not obtained from it all that it is intended to supply of intellectual and moral training, and until they have done this they are unable to quit the earth and set out on the path of purely spiritual advancement. In order to obtain such training it is necessary that they should attach themselves to some person with whom they are both physically and mentally in harmony, and through him obtain the new ideas and ever growing knowledge of the earth-life. To this person they impart, by mental impression, ideas and impulses connected with matters of which they may have a more extended knowledge. These impressions can be best communicated while the recipients are in a somewhat passive mental state, and I was much struck by the remark that while our *first* ideas and impulses are usually our own (as no impression can be given while our minds are actively engaged), our *second* thoughts on the matter are often those of our spirit guides, such thoughts appearing to come to us, we know not how, at a time when we had ceased to think actively on the subject. (Wallace 1878, p. 43)

In short, a good deal of our individual mental reinventions – and beyond this societal change in general – is viewed by Wallace as originating with subtle mental impressions mediated by this supposed nonphysical realm of nature.

I submit that all evidence points to a conclusion that Wallace's interest in spiritualism centered on his efforts to understand the mediation role of human consciousness in the evolutionary process, and not some perverse affection for the ghosts of his ancestors, or

the musings of mediums. That is to say, he fully believed that the natural world showed evidence of there being nonmaterial elements associated with it, and that the relationships involved were connected to that overarching evolutionary program: “Equally absurd is the allegation that some of the phenomena of Spiritualism ‘contradict the laws of nature,’ since there is no law of nature yet known to us but may be apparently contravened by the action of more recondite laws or forces.” (Wallace 1885)

Nevertheless, and importantly, he doesn’t entirely reject all notions of God: it is just that he believes that if there is some kind of overarching operating force, it does not operate through unexplainable first causes, but instead through intervening, natural, causalities. So we see:

...My first point is, that the organising mind which actually carries out the development of the life-world need not be infinite in any of its attributes – need not be what is usually meant by the terms God or Deity. The main cause of the antagonism between religion and science seems to me to be the assumption by both that there are no existences capable of taking part in the work of creation other than blind forces on the one hand, and the infinite, eternal, omnipotent God on the other. (Wallace 1910, p. 392)

And:

...Some such conception as this – of delegated powers to beings of a very high, and to others of a very low grade of life and intellect – seems to me less grossly improbable than that the infinite Deity not only designed the whole of the cosmos, but that himself alone is the consciously acting power in every cell of every living thing that is or ever has been upon the earth. What I should imagine the highest intelligence engaged in the work (and this not the Infinite) to have done would be so to constitute the substance of our universe that it would afford the materials and the best conditions for the development of life; and also, under the simple laws of variation, increase, and survival, would automatically lead to the maximum of variety, beauty, and use for man, when the time came for his appearance; and that all this should take place with the minimum of guidance beyond that necessary for the actual working of the life-machinery of all the organisms that were produced under these laws. Some such conception seems to me to be in harmony with the universal teaching of nature - everywhere an almost infinite variety, not as a detailed design (as when it was supposed that God made every valley and mountain, every insect and every serpent), but as a foreseen result of the constitution of the universe. The vast whole is therefore a manifestation of his power – perhaps of his very self but by the agency of his ministering angels through many descending grades of intelligence and power. (Wallace 1910, pp. 395-396)

Again, a possibly anthropomorphic and likely hypernaturalistic or scientific position, but not a theistic one. Peter Pels has written: “But for historians of anthropology, it might be more interesting to treat Wallace’s occultism as science rather than religion. To this end, we should pay more attention to an aspect of Spiritualism largely ignored by its historiographers.” (Pels 1995, p. 86) One of my reviewers here offered the following interesting comment on this: “I think this raises the key point that we should not think so rigidly about the so-called boundaries of science and religion. The very fact that we are even referring to it as ‘Wallace’s occultism’ indicates that there is a fluidity here.” He goes

on to suggest Wallace's point of view "is not necessarily a conventional religious" one, "but it is still esoteric." That there are definitional boundaries in play here is apparent, especially as to whether esoterism necessarily implies a theistic/religious starting point.

## Conclusions

The main conclusion to be drawn here is not that we should try to think of nineteenth-century concepts of spiritualism as a directly exploitable foundation for twenty-first century efforts to understand nature, but instead that for subjects as complex and abstruse as consciousness, causation may not be as simple a matter as is often assumed. The same 'rules' as pertain to biogeochemical and physiological processes may or may not apply (at least, in the same way) to conscious awareness, and/or its interaction with the more rotely physical of processes. I suggest that Wallace's general view of the evolution of conscious thought – involving feedback from 'messaging' – may be a legitimate way of looking at the matter, whether the source of that messaging is from the brain itself, or from outside influences (a position not so far from Rupert Sheldrake's 'morphic resonance' hypothesis: Sheldrake 1988). We should not think that an 1859 version of Darwinism is necessarily the end of the matter.

As far as Wallace himself goes, I believe, along with the Prasch (2015) and Barnes (2008) positions stated earlier, that the existing evidence clearly separates him from any grouping of 'theistic' evolutionary thinkers. As to why Wallace has been persecuted in this regard a good number of reasons and agendas might be suggested, but this subject is worthy of a separate work – perhaps a long paper, or even a full book. For the moment, and to help contextualize Wallace's actual beliefs as he presented them, I prefer to move on to a separate subject: to what source or sources did Wallace turn in coming up with his own, unique, cosmological model? That topic will be treated in Part 2 of this study.

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## Note 1

The list goes on: *cause, final* (1910: S732, p. 324); *cause, intelligent* (1913: S706, p. 863); *cause, primary intelligent* (1907: S646, p. 92); *cause, a new* (1904: S742, p. 75) *Cause, some Intelligent* (1903: S602, p. 474); *cause, some new [ ] or power* (1889: S724, p. 474); *Cause, the First* (1910: S746, p. 4; 1911: S748a, p. 8); *Cause, the Great First* (1913: S753, p. 621); *cause, ultimate* (1870: S165, p. 363; 1912: S751, p. 1); *cause, unknown* (S724, plus several more conventional usages); *causes, new* (1889: S724, p. 474; 1904: S742, p. 75); *causes of a higher order* (1889: S724, p. 476); *causes, the ultimate* (1889: S724, p. 472); *design, some general* (1856: S26, p. 31); *force, a new* (1904: S742, p. 75); *God, the ultimate/Ultimate* (1910: S746, p. 4; 1911: S748a, p. 8); *God, the infinite, eternal, omnipotent* (1910: S732, p. 392); *Head, one supreme* (1903: S741, p. 177); *intelligence, a controlling* (1870: S165, p. 359); *intelligence, a superior* (1870: S165, p. 359); *Intelligence(s), Higher/higher* (1866: S118, p. 55; 1870: S165, pp. 359-360); *Intelligence, one Supreme* (1870: S165, p. 368); *intelligences, preter(-)human* (1866: S118, pp. 4, 6, 7, 12; 1891: S434, p. 261); *intelligences, super(-)human* (1866: S118, p. 11; 1870: S174, p. 115);

*intelligences, superior* (1866: S118, p. 7); *intelligences, unseen* (1866: S118, p. 5); *life, origin and cause of* (1910: S746, p. 4); *mentality, far higher* (1910: S732, p. 197); *Mind, Great* (1871: S716, p. 372); *mind, all-pervading* (1910: S732, p. 361); *mind, a higher* (1913: S752aa, p. 9); *Mind, eternal* (1910: S732, p. 284); *mind, origin of (the)* (1885: S383, p. 352; 1889: S724, p. 466); *mind, supreme* (1866: S118 p. 7; 1869: S146, p. 394; 1910: S732, p. 323); *power, some intelligent* (1870: S165, p. 350); *power, some new* (1889: S724 p. 474); *power, some other* (1870: S165, p. 334); *power, some vast intelligent* (1907: S646, p. 92); *power(s), superhuman* (1882: S356, p. 448; 1903: S726, p. 195); *power, unknown* (1889: S724 p. 464; 1907: S646, p. 97); *power, unseen* (1866: S118, p. 32); *Spirit, unseen universe of* (1889: S724 p. 478); *unseen universe of forces* (1885: S379, p. 810).

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