

May 2005

## Who Reads Bishop Butler?

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### Recommended Citation

White, David (2005) "Who Reads Bishop Butler?," *Verbum*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.  
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol2/iss2/11>

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### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The work of the Bishop Butler Historical Society is, informally, "to spread the word by and about Bishop Butler." The Society takes Bishop Butler's work to be a paradigm of philosophy. None of his works were written for purely academic reasons. All his publications derived either from the discharge of his duties as a priest in the Church of England or from an attempt to advance himself in that career. Thus, by the pragmatist standard, they made a difference in the world."

# Faculty Essay



# Who Reads Bishop Butler?

By David White

The work of the Bishop Butler Historical Society is, informally, “to spread the word by and about Bishop Butler.” The Society takes Bishop Butler’s work to be a paradigm of philosophy. None of his works were written for purely academic reasons. All his publications derived either from the discharge of his duties as a priest in the Church of England or from an attempt to advance himself in that career. Thus, by the pragmatist standard, they made a difference in the world.

**Butler Studies** aim to determine the extent and the shape of the difference Butler made and to illuminate why he made that difference. The Society does this by looking at the sources Butler used or seems to have used, at what was going on around him while he lived, at the texts he produced (in original and in schematized form), and at the whole range of readers who came in touch with Butler and his works, and what the reception was. Thus, our title might have been expanded to ask, “What Did Butler Read, Whom Did He Know, What Did He Say, and How Was It Received?”

**Joseph Butler** was born in Wantage, the birthplace of King Alfred, in 1692. The house that was shown as the Butler birthplace during the nineteenth century is certainly the family home, but there is no solid proof that Butler was born there. It is a beautiful house and is now in some danger of being sold to developers. Butler’s first career move came while he was a student in Tewkesbury, at a Dissenting Academy kept by Mr. Jones. He sent letters to Samuel Clarke regarding a proof of God’s existence Clarke had presented in his Boyle lectures (1704-05). The exchange continued, and Clarke was so impressed that he included Butler’s letters with his replies in the next edition of his works (1716). The letters were sent anonymously, and we cannot be sure when Clarke first found out who Butler was, but he certainly knew by the time Butler had enrolled at Oriel

College, Oxford, and engaged in some more correspondence. It is in these later letters that Butler complains about how terrible Oxford University is and how he is not learning anything. He considered transferring to Cambridge, but did not want to have to repeat any credits, so he decided to finish up at Oxford. Of course, to pursue a career in divinity at Oxford or Cambridge, Butler had to conform to the Church of England. His family is said to have been Presbyterian, but that designation does not tell us a great deal about what his early life was like.

Again with the help of Clarke and of Bishop Talbot, the father of one of his college chums, Butler landed a very good first job. Butler became preacher at the Rolls Chapel. This was in the legal district of London on the estate of the Master of the Rolls, the third most senior judge of England. The office of Master of the Rolls still exists today, but the chapel was pulled down about a century ago since it was in such poor repair. Visitors to King's College in London can still see some glass that was saved from the chapel. Most of the sermons Butler preached during his tenure at the Rolls have been lost, but he did publish fifteen of them, appropriately titled *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*.

Butler tells us not to try to figure out why he picked the ones he did or why they are in the particular order in which they were published. We can only wonder why he tells us not to do something that probably few people would have thought of doing were it not prohibited. Taking the Rolls job and getting the sermons published was Butler's second big career move. The first (1726) and second (1729) editions are now extremely rare, but fortunately can be read on microfilm. The published sermons caught the attention of David Hume, who included Butler on his list of the founders of modern

moral theory. When Butler's major treatise appeared in print ten years after the sermons, the sermons were generally considered merely as illustrations of the *Analogy of Religion* (1736). Samuel Taylor Coleridge was one of the first to try to reverse this tendency, but even as recently as the 1920s there were complaints about the sermons not being attended to sufficiently. Today, however, the sermons, or at least the five most favored of the fifteen, are readily available in anthologies and in paperback editions. They are the only sermons in English that are routinely studied in secular classes in moral philosophy.

By the time the first edition of the Rolls sermons appeared, Butler had moved north to become rector of Stanhope. Because of the income from mining in the area, this was known as the "Golden Rectory". Little is known about how Butler wrote his most famous work, *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed, to the Course and Constitution of Nature* (1736) during this period. In his will, he ordered that all his papers be destroyed. His library was sold piece by piece soon after his death. We have some anecdotes, but no knowledge of where, how, or when he worked or what or who he consulted while he worked. There is an old story, and it must be true to some degree, that he reworked material from sermons not used in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls*. The *Analogy* contains an appendix, "A Dissertation on Virtue," that somewhat modifies the ethical doctrine of the sermons. There is most overlap on the topic of human ignorance. Ignorance is crucial for Butler since he is trying to evaluate the same evidence that has been available to everyone for a long time. His point is that when we look at that evidence as it comes to us in real life, we see that it is in the nature of a cumulative case, that all that matters is its consequences for practice and that all the evidence must be

judged against a background admission that we are still in deepest ignorance about important aspects of the universe, and especially of the consequences of our own actions.

Butler's friend at Oriel had died young, but he became chaplain to his brother, by then the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Queen Caroline carried on in England what was unusual there but common back in Hanover, a gathering of advanced male thinkers around a women of prominence. Butler was included for a time in this group, his person and his work found favor with the Queen, and on her death-bed, she urged that Butler be made a bishop.

When Butler became bishop of Bristol, he took on a job that cost more in expenses than it paid in income. He was therefore allowed to continue as rector of Stanhope until he became dean of St. Paul's, London, which provided him with a good income, much of which he used in Bristol. Eighty years after Butler's death much of what he left in Bristol was destroyed in the Reform Riots. There is now very little to see in Bristol that is directly related to Butler in his own time. Today in Bristol one can see the elaborate memorial to Butler in the cathedral, and the Butler Tower, so called because the funds for it were raised in memory of when Butler was bishop there. What remains of the bishop himself is now under the floor of the cathedral, near the high altar. The inscribed stone on the floor is badly worn, so most visitors, nearly all in fact, walk over Bishop Butler's tomb without being aware they are doing so.

Philosophically, what is most important about this period in Butler's life is that he published six of his sermons "preached on public occasions." Two of these sermons were delivered to the House of Lords, of which he as a bishop was a member, and the other four were given in London churches to solicit contributions for charities. These

public occasions may not sound promising, but actually the sermons, along with his charge to the clergy at Durham, provide us with the main points of Butler's views on institutional integrity. The sermons on human nature (Rolls sermons, 1-3) do not make clear how important formal institutions are for Butler's understanding of how we ought to live. He often distinguishes between our private life and our public life, but only the these later sermons does he spell out how he sees such institutions as the various charities, hospitals, missions, civil government, education and the church itself.

After the *Analogy of Religion* was published in 1736, Butler made some generally inconsequential changes and brought out a second edition that same year. After that second edition of the *Analogy*, he did not publish any work beyond what was specifically expected of him as a sitting bishop of the Church of England, i.e., these "public" sermons and the charge at Durham.

Butler did eventually become bishop of Durham. This position brought him back to the North Country where he had his parish at Stanhope years before. At that time, the bishop of Durham was a prince/bishop with greater political powers than other bishops since the area was considered a border state. Butler died only shortly after getting to Durham, but he is still remembered as one can see in references to him by later bishops of Durham. The most recent one who was most influenced by Butler and did the most to promote Butler Studies was Ian Ramsey, whose life like Butler's was sadly cut short when there was still much he could have done. The Rev Canon Professor D W Brown, who is now Van Mildert Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, may perhaps be singled out as a leader in the use of Butler's methods in theology today. Were we to

look back into the past, mention would have to be made of John Henry Newman. All these men are associated with Butler's college at Oxford, Oriel.

Even those who have seen clearly the analogy between Butler and Pascal, going before, and William James, following, rarely achieve the full effect of Butler's writing. We need constantly to bear in mind that in his own time Butler was better known for his church-work than his writing, and that the writing itself was only done in close connection with the church-work. When Butler became ill, he was taken to Bath, where he died in 1752. The tar water did not work any better for him than it did for his friend Bishop Berkeley. The building where Butler died is marked, but it is some blocks from the usual tourist trail and can be difficult to find.

**His Reputation.** Some after his death, Butler's works began to be reprinted in the main Scottish cities and were used extensively in theological and general education there. During the earlier nineteenth century, Butler's *Analogy* was essential reading for any educated person in the English-speaking world. The excitement about Butler eventually wound down and the *Analogy* became just another "Christian Classic." Sadly there were some Christian theologians who sought to advance their own work by disparagement of Butler's. Almost always this attitude was based on a very imperfect study of Butler.

Butler has never been an easy read, and the purpose of the new edition is to see to it that those who do invest the effort are paid the best possible dividend. The key words for describing not just Butler but the whole Anglican tradition in theology and for seeing it as an especially pure continuation of the work of the primitive church are words like "evince," "indicate," "induce," "point" as well as "disclose" and "reveal."

God revealed himself in the work of creation (nature), in the history of Israel, and in the person of Christ. The writers of scripture (what became scripture) worked with the language of the oral tradition and the still living memory so much as they had access to it. For this tradition, the experience of ritual life was more important than philosophical reflection or literary composition. Those theological writers and church-workers generally would need first to have a disclosure experience and would as a result have the eye and ear, so to speak, to produce works that would seek to evince, indicate, induce, or point to the experience for others. Borrowing a word from the language of architecture, Butler calls this the “effect” of his writing. Logically or rhetorically the argument is a cumulative case based on analogies and probabilities, but the probabilities we end up acting on may, Butler says, be less than an even chance. Butler, therefore, greatly expanded Pascal’s wager and showed there are many ways by which one can come to see that the religious gamble is one worth taking.

Those who end up less interested in Butler or Pascal or James sometimes feel this is all a matter of intellectualizing about religion rather than the living of the life of religion, i.e., being a Christian. Such attitudes result from a very imperfect attention to what Butler says. That Butler never wrote anything as “literature” has already been stressed, but when we get into the texts of Butler we see that he very consistently refers to religion as a practical matter, that is, as a matter of practice as opposed to speculation. Butler rejected entirely the philosophy of Descartes as speculation, and one of his main themes, the only topic treated at length in both the Rolls sermons and the *Analogy* is human ignorance. When Butler talks about probability, his point is that since human, as opposed to divine, knowledge is imperfect, we have to act on probabilities. Once we are

acting on probabilities, we can fairly bring in considerations that would not be relevant in a formal proof. This is the line that James developed so well. I may act on a proposition for which I have rather slight evidence because I especially want that proposition to be true and because by my so acting I can play a role in bringing about the truth of the proposition. One does not demand proof that an election is fair before participating in the election. One has to decide how the balance of probabilities will play out and how one's participation will contribute to or detract from the fairness of the election. The mere fact that objections to fairness have been raised may help to bring it about that the election is fair, or more fair than it would otherwise be.

Butler, like the Cambridge Platonists before him, used the biblical phrase “candle of the Lord”. Since we have so little in the way of biographical records, we cannot say with any certainty what Butler might have thought of his readers or even of the people in the pews listening to his sermons. Certainly he had what is the Christian view generally that some such thing as the candle of the Lord exists in each person. The light of this candle is often so difficult to see that we may doubt it is there at all, but the universalistic version of Christianity with which Butler is associated, and for the very concept of God as all-powerful and unable to fail, it seems we need to act on probabilities and treat all others as so many refractions of the divine. Even when this seems the lesser probability, it is worth acting on since by doing so we may help to bring it about that it is so. Butler develops all this in his sermons on benevolence and on the love of God, but in preparing the new edition we need to give special attention to how we treat the text.

With this style of theology, the signs or symbols of the original writer must be preserved as much as possible. We can map which aspects of Butler's writing appealed

to some at least of his early readers, but we also know that any change in the text can easily do more harm than good since we are not transmitted mere cognitive meaning, if that at all, but rather seeking to achieve “effect,” which in this case is a very specific religious reaction of whole-heartedly adopting the life of virtue and of piety within the Christian church as one’s own. We also know that some aspects of the printed page of 1726 or 1736 are incidental and not expressive.

Those who have the interest certainly should consult the original works, at least on microfilm, but it would be a mistake for us to stress creation of a facsimile, what Thoemmes did with the Gladstone edition, and what many of the previous editors have done. The problem is that books are artifacts and no matter how carefully they are preserved and no matter how much is explained in notes, we cannot expect that an artifact from one culture will even have the potential to produce the effect in our place and time surrounded as we are with a very different culture. The University of Rochester Press therefore recognized that what was needed was to find people as familiar as possible with all aspects of Hanoverian church life and with all aspects of ethics and philosophical theology as it is practiced today and then let them work out a plan for presenting Butler to the modern reader in a way that stands the best chance of producing the desired effect.

There is no question here of coming to agree with Butler. For almost all readers, however many there are, the contribution of Butler will only be one of many that contribute to an education in philosophy and theology. Butler, and all the rest are to be treated as colleagues. What is different and profoundly significant for some is the nature and extent of Butler’s reception. The new edition will not just, as is usual, include notes

on Butler's sources, but will also have extensive annotation of his reception from the day his works first appeared on down to the present.

Once one starts to look at the sources and at the reception, far more questions are raised than answered, so the editorial workers have to, outside of this introduction, adopt an entirely objective and historical approach.

**Presentation of the text.** There will never be agreement on how to edit the eighteenth-century, so we can never hope that all readers will agree with what we have done. What we can argue for and can hope to gain assent to is our principle of editing, which is that we want to maximize the pay-off for those readers who invest the most in the text. The most recent attempts at major revision (Bernard in 1900 and Gladstone in 1898) do not deliver enough to the modern reader who is willing to make the effort. So, for example, if "hypothesis" appears with a small "h" and with a capital "H", the careful reader will naturally think some distinction is being made. But no such distinction appears in Butler. We have to distinguish between that which is expressive and that which is distractive, as well as that which may simply be neutral. Butler's failure to provide full citation when he quotes is distractive to the serious reader who wants to know exactly what he is talking about. We need to supply the reference, but we ought not to do so by changing ("expanding" as they say in the trade) what Butler wrote. It is entirely distractive when one cites a modern edition, one that Butler could not possibly have seen, so we have to go back and try to find the edition Butler used or might have used. Changes in spelling are always distractive. Readers who consult unabridged dictionaries may wonder that Butler was using such modern spellings or even American forms. We need to guarantee the reader that every word is spelled the way Butler spelled

it and every punctuation mark is as Butler had it. Italics can be expressive, so it too should be reproduced from the original. Capitalization is another matter. Butler seems to have used capital letters in a way dictated by the conventions of his time, conventions that changed drastically, but gradually, only a short time after he wrote. Like everyone else at the time, Butler capitalized not just the initial words in sentences and proper nouns, but all substantives. Unlike italics, punctuation and spelling, this capitalization never seems to tell us anything about what Butler is trying to say or where he is trying to point us, so we use modern Anglo-American capitalization. Pronouns referring to the deity are a very difficult area and cannot usefully be discussed here. Line breaks and page breaks do not seem expressive, and Butler probably did not contribute to them. Chapter breaks do matter, as do titles for chapters used in the table of contents. The index and internal cross references create special problems. When Butler cites one of his own pages, we are sometimes in doubt about exactly what part of the page he has in mind, and of course those are pages of the original editions. Since Butler clearly had a hand in two editions of the sermons (1726, 1729) and two editions of the *Analogy* (both in 1736), we have to record all these variants. The variations should be presented to the reader on a single page since many of them are context sensitive.

**Definitions** present a special problem. Modern lexicography was only beginning in Butler's day. There had always been plenty of discussion of the meaning of words, but very little systematic study of how words were used. We have no choice but to check the literature Butler or his readers would have been familiar with and then construct definitions, i.e., should articles that help to bring the word or expression into focus. The

process is always in danger of breaking down entirely. How, for example, can we hope to convey what Butler mean, or might have meant, by works such as “mind”?

**Source issues.** Finding the edition Butler seems to have consulted for his quotations is relatively easy. Bernard has complicated matters somewhat by including a puzzling note, but even such can be of help. Editors often scoff at printings that appeared long after an author’s lifetime or that seem to have been done in an “unscholarly” manner. The policy in the new edition is to make some reference to all discussions of and attempts to identify sources. We do not mind recording the errors of the past as long as we are careful not to repeat them. There are so many points that cannot be resolved that it seems better just to quote the data and move on.

The Bible is Butler’s most important source, by far. As with lexicography, Butler was living in the relatively early days of biblical criticism. He lacks the sensibilities that all modern readers of the Bible would have. Sometimes he seems to offer a profound insight into a passage, or at least the passage offers an insight into him, but other times he seems only to be quoting what happened to come to mind. There is a long tradition of editors supplying these references.

The same is true of his other most frequently cited sources: Aristotle and Cicero. Previous editions are filled with editors’ conjectures of where in Aristotle or in Cicero one might find Butler’s sources. Those who really want to trace all the threads should not stop with reading Aristotle and Cicero along with editorial notes. A rich source of references can be found in editions, usually translations, of Aristotle and Cicero as well as a host of other writers that were published during the years when Butler was most

current. There was a time when it just seemed natural to point readers of any of the theological classics (even Mencius in the Legge translation) back to Butler.

We also find some recalcitrant allusions that no one so far as located. For example, in his sermon on self-deception Butler wants to say that just as some of us never miss an opportunity to learn from experience there are others who seem to do all they can to avoid the truth about themselves, these are the self-deceivers. So Butler says that such people “invert the observation which is somewhere made upon Brutus, that he never read, but in order to make himself a better man.” Apparently Butler had no idea where he had heard this (“somewhere’), and all those who have tried to find the sentiment expressed in regard to Brutus or anyone else that Butler might have been confusing with Brutus, have been unsuccessful. For the most part, editors pass over this passage without any comment. The kind of disciplined reading that we encourage does not provide for avoiding a challenge, but then the human life-span does not provide for raising to all such challenges.

Tangential matters may be neglected, although it is always a guess, and a guess prone to self-deception, which matters are tangential, but everything Butler says about self-deception is crucial since his whole system and practice turns on one’s ability to overcome self-deception and receive the word of God inwardly making use of all the empirical senses, reason and conscience by means of a triangulation. The best we can do is to keep whatever search reports have been collected previously in front of those who are working on the text today. We do not expect to find the source for the Brutus comment in time for this edition, so the fall-back position is to make it clear to readers

how much we would welcome any information about it. Without a continuing Society dedicated to this work there would be no convenient clearinghouse for information.

**Contextual issues**, especially formal and acknowledged, are dangerous areas for speculation. Josiah Tucker, Butler's chaplain, tells us, in one of the most famous anecdotes:

His custom was, when at Bristol, to walk for hours in his garden in the darkest night which the time of the year could afford, and I had frequently the honour to attend him. After walking some time he would stop suddenly and ask the question, "What security is there against the insanity of individuals? The physicians know of none; and as to divines, we have no data, either from Scriptures or from reason, to go upon relative to this affair". . . He would then take another turn, and then stop short: "Why might not whole communities and public bodies be seized with fits of insanity, as well as individuals! Nothing but this principle, that they are liable to insanity, can account for the major part of those transactions of which we read in history."

Do we really know how typical or untypical this sentiment was in Butler's time? Do we know that he referred to Methodists as an insane community? Is it fair for us to consider this passage in relation to Butler studies more than Josiah Tucker studies? This thought does not correspond to any passage in Butler, although he does appeal to insanity ("distraction") in attempting to reduce an opponent's position to absurdity. Tucker told the story at least several times, and locating all the instances is a challenge since Tucker's

works have not been indexed. Edgar Allan Poe gives his version, along with some comments in his “Marginalia” in the *Democratic Review* (1844):

The Bishop of Durham (Dr. Butler) once asked Dean Tucker whether he did not think that communities went mad *en masse*, now and then, just as individuals, individually. The thing need not have been questioned. Were not the Abderians seized, all at once, with the Euripides lunacy, during which they ran about the streets declaiming the plays of the poet? And now here is the great tweedle-dee tweedle-dum paroxysm — the uproar about Pusey. If England and America are not lunatic now — at this very moment — then I have never seen such a thing as a March hare.

An innocent reader may wonder whether a passage such as this really does provide context or whether it might better be considered a curiosity. One cannot follow every lead in every direction. The laws of natural selection apply to religious research as much as anything else. In this case the key is to find in the secondary literature on Poe a significant analysis and evaluation of how they are related. The key text in this case seems to be Robert D. Jacobs on the New Critics, where he argues that what Butler, whom he refers to as one of the “harried divines,” tried to do becomes extremely interesting in relation to Poe’s use of the words “gradation” and “analogy.” So mapping the context of Butler’s work down through time becomes wonderful entertainment in itself.

Another major contextual issue is that of the deists. Not in Butler’s time, certainly, but especially since the middle of the nineteenth century it has become conventional to identify Butler’s *Analogy* as a reply to the deists. Not only does Butler

never refer to the deists by name, but even in Leland's great encyclopedia of deists and their opponents there is no mention of Butler. There are perhaps two paragraphs in the *Analogy* that clearly do refer to the deists, and of course the reference needs to be identified there. Many people have been convinced that the *Analogy* is primarily a reply to the deists by the point that Butler does say he is taking it for granted that the existence of God has been proved. All that Butler means here is that he is not aware of any serious objections to the many proofs of God that are readily available in the literature of his day. Indeed, Butler's own first published work, the letters to Clarke, was primarily a discussion of Clarke's proof God in his Boyle lectures. There are a few passages in which Butler does say he assumes God exists, but it is always clear from the context that what he means, clearly means, is that he is taking for granted that the proofs of God are successful and that he takes them as successful because no one seriously challenges them. So to link Butler to the deists by claiming he helps himself to an ad hominem against the deists since they were willing to grant that God exists without demanding proof, is simply absurd.

**Reception.** Scholarly editions usually avoid many references to reception, especially that beyond the author's lifetime. There are two reasons for placing special emphasis on reception. One is that so many of the connections with Butler are just intrinsically interesting.

By Emerson's day, the *Analogy* was well-known, but somewhat old-fashioned. That Emerson would have read it at Harvard is perhaps obvious, but what he would have made of it is not. When Emerson quotes from Butler in his *Nature*, published exactly one hundred years after the *Analogy*, he gives no indication he is doing so. Emerson left it to

scholars to discover that the line, “What we know, is a point to what we do not know,” which it does not appear in Butler’s works, is attributed to Butler in the novel *Tremaine* (1825) by Robert Plumer Ward, a novel Emerson had copied from into what is now known as “Blotting Book II.” Since Ward quoted indirectly, Emerson apparently became confused when he tried to put in the quotation marks. In the same passage of *Tremaine*, which is filled with passages in the style of the *Analogy* but with no reference to Butler, Ward attributes to Butler the definition of “natural” which is found in the *Analogy at* I.i.23, and was also used as an epigraph by Darwin in his *Origin of Species*, second and all later editions. (See the letter from Asa Gray to Charles Darwin, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1860.)

We cannot hope to include in the edition all references to Butler. The economic principle of selection is that we want to tell readers all and only what they both do not know and need to know. Admittedly, our ideas about what people need to know may be somewhat more expansive than their own, but here as elsewhere we need be guided by probabilities. Associations of lesser interest today that have been well documented in the literature can get less attention than facts the previous editors have avoided or at least not mentioned. We think it matters that so much of the non-English material in Butler Studies is in Italian, just as it matters that for all that Butler wrote about the Jews, the Jews almost never write about Butler. Yet there is at least one exception even to this. In the *Spoon River Anthology*, the whole point about “Seth Compton,” the librarian turns not only on knowing what Butler’s “Analogy” is but on knowing what it symbolized for Edgar Lee Masters. Readers of Herbert Marcuse will most likely be at a loss unassisted to understand what he is saying about Butler, but those familiar with the doctrine of *Principia Ethica* may feel comfortable with Moore using “Everything is what it is, and

not another thing” as its motto. Should we then explicate Marcuse’s hedge that Bishop Butler’s most famous saying is either the most unphilosophical motto or it refers to the qualitative difference between that which things really are and that which they are made to be? Does it help or hinder understanding to know that Wittgenstein is said to have considered this motto for his own book? Is it a digression from the work of the Bishop Butler Historical Society to inquire more into Wittgenstein’s thoughts on Butler, or should we simply take the word of Wittgenstein’s biographer, Ray Monk?

Abraham Lincoln told Noah Brooks that he particularly liked Butler’s *Analogy* and Mahatma Gandhi’s comments on Butler are perhaps well known to those who are interested. What is slightly more obscure, however, and what many people do not know, is that by the 1920s and 1930s, when interest in Butler seemed at an all-time low, where was a widely held belief that careful study of Butler was no longer needed since all he had to say of importance had now been better said by Henry Drummond. Harriet Beecher [Stowe] being so stressed about having to teach Butler to a class of girls, Oscar Wilde putting the *Analogy* on a list of books “not to read at all,” John Adams being first attracted to Abigail when he saw her reading the *Analogy*, and how one president of Dickinson College was forced to resign because of his inability to deal with the anti-Butler sentiment among students, are all stock anecdotes that need to be documented and their own reception examined. Perhaps the single most interesting bit of reception uncovered so far, and one still far from having a satisfactory account, are the lines from “Howl,” later cancelled, about someone wandering the windy streets looking for a church, an example of baroque architecture, carrying a volume of Butler’s *Analogy* and looking for an example of Butler’s analogy. We might think this is just a random image

of which even Ginsberg himself later thought better, but it is worth remembering that the slogan “first thought, best thought,” so often today associated with Ginsberg and fundamental to his method, is found in Butler’s seventh sermon, the other sermon on self-deception, in the form “the first thought is often the best.” Thinking of William Blake as an older source is natural enough, but attempting to sort out Butler’s reception by Blake actually complicates things a good bit. Those who have ears may make of it what they will, but without a comprehensive guide to the reception of Butler down through time readers have no chance of tapping into the context of Butler and no chance of self-consciously placing themselves in the stream of religious thought and practice down to the present. Hence this project of a new edition and the work of the Bishop Butler Historical Society.