

SEP 22 1939

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S LIFE-WORK

By

Eleanor Sowers,
" "
Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

1938

Submitted to the Department of English
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1938



OKLAHOMA
STATE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
JUL 27 1971

Acknowledgement

To Doctor Lawrence Babb, my sincere appreciation for his advice, criticism and encouragement during the writing of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Introduction	1
I. Circumstantial Selection	3
II. Shaw's Conception of Will of the Life-Force	7
III. Creative Evolution	22
Conclusion	31
Bibliography	32

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw frequently refers to the Life-Force. The meaning of the term, however, remains vague to the reader of Shaw's plays. Numerous articles have been written to elucidate the conception, but only further confusion seems to be the result.

Of the Life-Force Holbrook Jackson says:

The Life-Force must not be imagined as standing apart from ordinary things. It is neither an outside and independent deity nor a metaphysical toy. On the contrary, the Life-Force has for Shaw no other existence than that of living things.¹

A reader of Mr. Shaw would be unable to define the Life-Force from Mr. Jackson's comment, nor would he be satisfied with the definition that is given in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

The various religious beliefs found in his plays may be summarized as follows: God, or the Life-Force, is an imperfect power striving to become perfect.²

Very closely related to this statement is a comment made by Shaw himself:

We know that in all art, literature, politics, sociology--in every phrase of genuine life and vitality,--man's highest aspiration is to create something greater than himself. So God, or as I prefer to concretize it impersonally, the Life-Force, has been struggling for countless ages to

1. Archibald Henderson, "The Philosophy of Bernard Shaw," Atlantic Monthly, 103 (1909), 227.
2. "G. B. Shaw," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th Edition, XX, 471.

become fully conscious of Himself--to express Himself in higher and even higher forms up the scale of evolution.³

Shaw again refers to his Life-Force in Man and Superman when he says:

Life is a force that has made innumerable experiments in organizing itself,--to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible--in short, a God.⁴

One may see the beginnings of a definition of the Life-Force in these questions. But is he able to formulate from them an adequate statement? This paper represents an effort to define the concept more freely and clearly through a study of Shaw's plays and prefaces. I have based the material of this discussion primarily on two sources: Back to Methuselah, which Shaw calls his "Metabiological Pentateuch," and Man and Superman.

The paper has three chapters. The first deals with Circumstantial Selection, which is the accompanying circumstance of the Life-Force. The second chapter is a discussion of the Life-Force itself which may be defined tentatively as an impulse inherent in life to better itself. The concluding part, entitled "Creative Evolution", deals with Shaw's religion.

3. Henderson, op. cit., p. 231.

4. G. B. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 113-114.

Chapter I

Circumstantial Selection

If the Life-Force is to find expression, it must have a medium through which it may act. The universe, Shaw thinks, is nothing less than a series of experiments made by the Life-Force with the object of creating for itself an all-powerful, all-intelligent medium of activity. Superman is Shaw's conception of the ideal means of expression for the Life-Force; he is the end toward which evolution is moving. Shaw's name for the process which Darwin calls Natural Selection is Circumstantial Selection. This is a process necessary to the development of Superman.

Shaw believes man is a link in the chain of evolution. The Life-Force finds him necessary as an experiment. Man is of the procession moving towards what is greater than himself, namely, Superman.

Darwin believes that Natural Selection acts, not by preserving a few highly favored individuals, but by killing off all those who do not come up to a certain standard. He shows that plants and animals tend to increase rapidly, though the amount of food is strictly limited; therefore more organisms come into existence than can possibly live. In fact, in each year as many die as are born, and this gives rise to a struggle for

existence. He shows that generally those varieties which are best adapted to succeed in life will live the longest and will leave more offspring, while the others will be killed. The successful individuals will hand down their useful characteristics to their offspring, occasionally in a more useful form; thus useful variations will tend more and more to improve, and succeeding generations will diverge more and more from the original stock. This process Darwin calls Natural Selection.

The power of Natural Selection increases as the structures which influence the struggle get more perfect and as competition gets keener. It is Natural Selection which has brought about the main progress of life. Natural Selection picks here and there one species out of many and makes it the founder of a family.⁵

The evolutionary process which Darwin calls Natural Selection Shaw calls Circumstantial Selection. Shaw feels that the purpose of this process is to prepare the way for, to provide the material for the creation of Superman, the species of the future.

One may ask, "Can an ordinary man be a Superman?" The answer is "No"; the Superman is a type to be developed, the man of tomorrow. Among the men of today and yester-

5. Frederick Wollaston Hutton, Darwinism and Lamarckism.

day, however, one finds occasionally an individual who feels the urge of the Life-Force especially strongly and who consequently contributes to the progress of the species.

Cain, in Book I of Back to Methuselah, is such a person. He is very definitely aware of the all-powerful force of life. Cain has been created by Circumstantial Selection to head a new order.

In the opening part of the Metabiological Pentateuch, Shaw goes back to the time when Adam and Eve were the only human beings. Then came Cain and Abel. The Life-Force speaks through Cain:

Adam: You said there would be no killing because the voice would tell our children they must not kill. Why did it not tell Cain that?

Cain: It did; but I am not a child to be afraid of a Voice. The Voice thought I was nothing but my brother's keeper. It found that I was myself, and that it was for Abel to be himself also, and look at himself. He was not my keeper any more than I was his; why did he not kill me? Was there no more to prevent him than there was to prevent me: it was man to man; and I won. I was the first conqueror.

Adam: What did the Voice say to you when you thought all that?

Cain: Why it gave me the right. It said that my deed was as a mark on me, and a burnt-in mark such as Abel put on his sheep, that no man would slay me. And here I stand unslain, whilst the cowards who have never slain, the men who are content to be their brother's keeper instead of their masters, are despised and rejected, and slain like rabbits. He who bears the brand of Cain shall rule the earth. When he falls, he shall be avenged

sevenfold; the Voice has said it; so beware how you plot against me, you and the rest.---The Voice tells me that I must offer myself to every man to be killed if he can kill me. Without danger I cannot be great.⁶

It is not Cain's desire to live forever but to live life to its fullest, and when death comes, it is a means to a more splendid life. This is shown through the conversation of Cain in answer to Adam's question:

Adam: Mine is the Voice of Life; Yours the Voice of Death.

Cain: Be it so. For it whispers to me that death is not really death; that it is the gate of another life: a life infinitely splendid and intense: a life of the soul alone: a life without clods or spades, hunger and fatigue--.⁷

I interpret the voice referred to in these lines to be the Life-Force. Cain has become conscious of its desires and finds he has no choice but to do its bidding.

In this chapter I have endeavored to show the Darwinian conception of Circumstantial Selection as the accompanying factor of the Life-Force. The Life-Force works toward perfection through this evolutionary process to a certain point. This point is man. Man cannot be Superman; however among men there are those who feel the urge of the Life-Force, and it is this individual who is the next step in the evolutionary development of Supermen. At this point Circumstantial Selection is no longer necessary.

6. Back to Methuselah, pp. 27-29.

7. Ibid., p. 37.

Chapter II

Shaw's Conception of Will of the Life-Force

The Life-Force and Will are, to Shaw, synonymous terms. Shaw, however, uses the term Will, as we shall discover, in a somewhat special sense. It is Will which is necessary to the creation of Superman and the saving of civilization. Shaw says:

Where there is a will, there is a way. If there be no will, we are lost. That is a possibility for our crazy little empire, if not for the universe; and such possibilities are not to be entertained without despair. We must, while we survive, proceed on the assumption that we still have energy enough to not only will to live, but to will to live better. That may just mean that we must establish a state Department of Evolution, with a seat in the Cabinet for its chief, and a revenue to defray the cost of direct state experiments and provide inducements to private persons to achieve successful results. It may mean a private society or a chartered company for the improvement of human live stock. But for the present it is far more likely to mean a blatant repudiation of such proposals as indecent and immoral with, nevertheless, a general secret pushing of the human will in the repudiated direction; so that all sorts of institutions and public authorities will under some pretext or other feel their way furtively toward the Superman.

As I have pointed out, Shaw accepts the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection. He also, however, accepts a principle of Lamarck's which is necessary to his theory of the development of Superman.

He says:

I was Neo-Lamarckian. Lamarck, whilst making many ingenious suggestions as to the reactions of external causes on life and habit, such as change of climate, food supply, geological upheavals and so forth, really held as his fundamental proposition that living organisms changed because they wanted to. As he stated it, the great factor in evolution is use and dis-use.⁹

Let us look more closely into the Lamarckian theory in order to see how Shaw associates his Life-Force with this evolutionary process.

Lamarck's theory was that variations of structure have come about principally through animals' own efforts to satisfy their wants. The wants would vary as the external conditions varied; thus changes in the environment of a species would result in changes in structure. Lamarck supposed that the constant stretching of the toes of the otter in the act of swimming had caused the skin between the toes to enlarge, that constant running had made the deer and antelope fleet, that the constant stretching of the neck of the giraffe had made it grow. The variations that arose in this way must therefore be definite or progressive, and must have been acquired after birth. The Neo-Lamarckians agree that progress has been mainly, although perhaps not exclusively, secured by the in-

9. Op. Cit., p. XXIII.

heritance of post-natal variations, which have arisen, either through the attempt of the animals and plants to adapt themselves to external conditions, or by the direct action of external causes on the individuals.

In kinogenesis, which is the distinguishing point of Lamarck's theory, we have an explanation of adaptation. Before an organ can be used it must be there: mechanical stimulus cannot possibly originate a new secretion. It cannot be a cause of new variations, but can only increase variations in certain directions. "Use-inheritance" may be substituted for kinogenesis.¹⁰

Shaw explains the Lamarckian theory when in the preface of Back to Methuselah he says:

If, like a mole or subterranean fish, you have eyes and don't want to see, you will lose your eyes. If you like eating the tender tops of trees enough to make you concentrate all energies on the stretching of your neck, you will finally get a long neck like a giraffe. This seems absurd to inconsiderate people at the first blush; but it is within the personal experience of all of us that it is just by this process that a child tumbling about the floor becomes a boy walking erect; that a man sprawling on the road with a bruised chin, or supine on the ice with a bashed occiput, becomes a bicyclist and a skater. This process is not continuous as it would be if more practice had anything to do with it; for though you may improve at each bicycling lesson during the lesson, when you begin your next lesson you do not begin at the point at which you left off. You relapse apparently to the beginning. Finally, you succeed quite suddenly, and do not relapse again. More miraculous still, you at once exercise the new power unconsciously. Although you are adapting your front wheel to your balance

10. Hutton, op. cit.

so elaborately and actively that the accidental locking of the handle bars for a second will throw you off; though five minutes ago you could not do it at all, yet now you do it as unconsciously as you grow your fingernails. You have a new faculty, and must have created some new bodily tissue as its organ. And you have done it solely by willing.¹¹

Shaw continues to elaborate on this evolutionary process:

You are alive; you want to be more alive. You want an extension of consciousness and power. You want, consequently, additional organs, or additional use of your existing organs. You get them because you want them badly enough to keep trying for them until they come. Nobody knows how, nobody knows why: all we know is the thing actually takes place. These relapse miserably from effort to effort until the old organ is modified or the new created, when suddenly the impossible becomes possible and the habit is formed. The moment we form it we want to get rid of the consciousness of it so as to economize our consciousness for fresh conquests of life; as all consciousness means pre-occupation and obstruction. If we had to think about breathing or digesting or circulating of our blood we should have no attention to spare for anything else, as we find to our cost when anything goes wrong with these operations. We want to be unconscious of them just as we wanted to acquire them; and we finally win what we want. But we win unconsciousness of our habits at the cost of losing our control of them; and we also build one habit and its corresponding functional modifications of our organs on another, and so become dependent on our old habits. Consequently we have to persist in them even when they hurt us. We cannot stop breathing to avoid an attack of asthma, or to escape drowning. We can lose a habit and discard an organ when we no longer need them, just as we acquired them; but this process is slow and broken by relapses; and relics of the organ and the habit long survive its utility. And if other and still indispensable habits and modifications have been

11. Back to Methuselah, intro., pp. XXIII-XXIV.

built on the ones we wish to discard, we must provide a new foundation for them before we demolish the old one. This is also a slow process and a very curious one.¹²

Shaw literally means that man is able to shape the evolutionary process to his liking. The human animal will change when it wills to change. Shaw has borrowed the ideas of self-improvement through will from Lamarck. The will to improve is the Life-Force. After man has been produced by Circumstantial Selection, he must continue to develop, Shaw believes, through his own will to do so. Man must create Superman from himself.

Shaw was obviously influenced by the German philosopher Nietzsche. Nietzsche says, "Do what you want to do." He recognizes, as does Shaw, will as the essential factor in the evolution of Superman. He says:

Wherever I found a living thing, there found I will and power; and even in the will of the servant found I the will to be master.

That to the stronger the weaker shall serve-- thereto persuadeth he his will who would be master over a still weaker one.--

And as the greater surrendereth himself to the greater that he may have delight and power over the least of all so doth even the greatest surrender himself, and staketh life for the sake of power.

Whatever I create, and however much I love it, soon must I be adverse to it and to my love: so willeth my will.

12. Ibid., XXV-XXVI. *Evolutionary Ethics*, pp. 127-128.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

And even thou, discerning one, act only a path and footstep of just my will: verily, my will to power maketh on the will of Truth.

Will to existence: that will doth not exist: for what is not cannot will.

Only where there is life, there is also will: not however, will to life, but--so I teach thee-- will to power!

Much is reckoned higher than Life itself by the living one: but out of the very reckoning speaketh--the will to power--¹³

Nietzsche continues:

The will is the creator,¹⁴

for,

Willing emancipateth: for willing is creating: so do I teach, and only for creating shall ye learn.¹⁵

Man to Nietzsche, as to Bernard Shaw, is but a stepping stone to Superman. He is something to be surpassed, something "That must be surpassed."

For Nietzsche says:

--man is a bridge and not a goal---The past of man to redeem, and every "It was" to transform, until the Will saith: "But so did I will it: So shall I will it--."¹⁶

Shaw is most emphatic in his belief that man should do what he wants to do. He feels that in this way man is able to get what he wants. He must desire to be and must become Superman. When man becomes Superman he will realize the fulfillment of his desires.

13. The Philosophy of Nietzsche, pp. 126-127.
 14. Ibid., p. 151.
 15. Ibid., p. 212.
 16. Ibid., p. 204.

Shaw feels that for ages man has been on his knees. He has been thanking higher powers and cringing before unknown fates. Until he knows what he is doing, until he acts with a will of his own, the unknown, be it God or Life, will use him again and again as it has done in the past as the material of experiments.

Man, however, is partly to blame for this state of affairs. It comes as a result of ignorance and incapacity and worst of all contentment. The worst stumbling block in the path of Life-Force is contentment. If man has an intelligent understanding of life and the desire to carry out its aim he is able to help the Life-Force in its creation of Superman.

Don Juan, whom Shaw represents as conscious of the Life-Force says:

I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy, unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. This is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser, self-consciousness, and clearer understanding.¹⁷

Shaw always makes it plain that the will for betterment, the Life-Force, is conscious in a few individuals, unconscious in others. Don Juan says:

I sing the philosophic man, him who seeks in contemplation to discover the most inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means

17. Man and Superman, p. 129.

of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means.¹⁸

Shaw believes that the Life-Force is an instinct, an impulse innate in man to strive toward perfection. The instinctive will to advance toward perfection is very strong in some men, for example Cain and Don Juan. In most men it is very weak. Men in general have been substituting duties for instinct, and in this way have actually stopped life's growth. Man should dare to follow the dictates of his instinctive will. He must override tradition, act unconventionally, violate the orthodox morality if he has the urge to do so. It is in this way that man may fulfill his duty to himself and to the Life-Force.

Let us turn our attention to the plays themselves for evidence of the will.

In the opening part of Back to Methuselah it is the Serpent who tells Eve the great power of will. Eve learns that for the sake of creation it is necessary to will, it is necessary to imagine, for this is the beginning of creation. The serpent says to Eve:

I worship you Eve. I must have something to worship. Something quite different to myself, like you. There must be something greater than the snake.

Eve. Tell me what to do.

Serpent. Think. Will. Eat the dust, lick the white stone: bite the apple you dread. The sun

18. Ibid., p. 115.

will give you life.

Eve. I will tear another Adam from my body if I tear my body to pieces in the act.

Serpent. Do. I dare it. Everything is possible. I remember Lilith, who came before Adam and Eve. I was her darling just as I am yours. She was alone: there was no man with her. She saw death as you saw it when the fawn fell; and she knew that she must find out how to renew herself and cast skin like me. She had a mighty will: she strove and willed and willed.

Eve. How did Lilith work this miracle?

Serpent. She imagined it. She did not know that imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you desire and imagine; and at last you create what you will.

Eve. How can I create out of nothing?

Serpent. Everything must have been created out of nothing. Look at that thick roll of hard flesh on your strong arm! That was not always there: you could not climb a tree when I first saw you. But you willed and tried and willed and tried: and your will created out of nothing the roll on your arm until you had your desire--.19

Cain says, "There is something higher than man.

There is hero and Superman." If the will is to have freedom for this creation man must do what he wants to do.

He must be free from the limitations of society, tradition and conventionalities. Cain says to Adam:

I revolt against the clay. I revolt against the good. You say it gives strength: does it not also turn filth and smite us with diseases? I revolt against these births that you and mother are proud of. They drag us down to the level of

beasts. If that is to be the last thing as it has been the first, let mankind perish. If I am to eat like a bear, then I had rather be a bear than a man; for the bear is not ashamed: he knows no better. If you are content like a bear, then I am not. Stay with the woman who gives you children. I go to the woman who gives me dreams. Grape in the ground for your food; I will bring it down from the skies with my arrows, or strike it down as it roams the earth in the pride of its life---. I do not want to eat children. I do not know what I want, except that I want to be something higher and nobler than this stupid old digger whom Lilith made to help you bring me into the world, and whom you despise now that he has served your turn.²⁰

Shaw for the first time in his play puts words into Eve's mouth expressing the idea that if the Life-Force is to realize fully its purpose the span of years of man's life must be increased.

Eve says:

Will they learn all the ways of all the stars in their little time? It took Enoch two hundred years to learn to intercept the will of the voice. If they shorten their lives, they will dig and fight and kill and die; and then holy Enoch will tell them that it is the will of the voice that they should dig and fight forever. Man need not always live by bread alone. There is something else. We do not know what it is; but some day we shall find out; and then we will live on that alone, and there shall be no more digging, nor spinning, nor fighting nor killing.²¹

The Brothers Barnabas in Part II also realize the necessity of a longer life if civilization is to be saved. They too believe this may be accomplished through

20. Ibid., pp. 32-33.

21. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

the desire of the individual. Franklyn Barnabas says:

Life is too short for man to take it seriously.---You see she hasn't time to find out what life really means. She has to die before she really knows.²²

Conrad: But you could live a devil of a long time if you really wanted to.²³

It is the will--alias the Life-Force which will be able to solve the problem of civilization. If the race is a failure then,

The force behind evolution, call it what you will, is determined to solve the problem of civilization; and if it cannot do it through us, it will produce some capable agents. Man is not God's last work: God can still create. If you cannot do His work He will produce some being who can.²⁴

This force of which Franklyn Barnabas speaks is the Life-Force willing itself to perfection in Superman.

Franklyn continues to place stress on the power of the will when he says:

We can put it into men's heads that there is nothing to prevent its happening but their own will to die before their work is done, and their own ignorance of the splendid work there is for them to do.²⁵

Shaw makes a definite distinction between will and petty desire. He does not want one to mistake idle fancies for the working power of the will. Burge says:

Do you mean that you have nothing more practical to offer than the mere wish to live longer? Why, if people could live by merely wishing to, we should all be living forever already. Everybody would like to live forever. Why don't they?

22. Ibid., p. 50.
 23. Ibid., p. 50.
 24. Ibid., p. 92.
 25. Ibid., p. 95.

Conrad: Pshaw! Everybody would like to have a million of money. Why haven't they? Because the men who would like to be millionaires won't save sixpence even with the chance of starvation staring them in the face. The men who want to live forever won't cut off a glass of beer or a pipe of tobacco, though they believe the teetotallers and non smokers live longer. That sort of liking is not willing. See what they do when they know they must.²⁶

Franklyn: Do not mistake mere idle fancies for the tremendous miracle working force of Will nerved to creation by a conviction of Necessity. I tell you men capable of such willing, and realizing its necessity, will do it reluctantly, under inner compulsion, as all great efforts are made. They will hide what they are doing for themselves: They will take care not to know what they are doing. They will live three hundred years, not because they would like to, but because the soul deep down in them will know that they must, if the world is to be saved.²⁷

The "Soul deep down" is the force which Shaw feels is essential to save the human race.

Eve has stated that the span of life must be increased, but she has not specified how long. Franklyn in Part II states that man must live three hundred years.

It was the Life-Force which inspired Ann to seek in John Tanner the father of the Superman. It was the Life-Force to which Tanner yielded in spite of protestations against its power.

Ann: Well, if you don't want to be married, you needn't be.

Tanner: Does any man want to be hanged? Yet men let themselves be hanged without a struggle for

26. Ibid., p. 95-96.

27. Ibid., p. 96.

life, though they could at least give the chaplain a black eye. We do the world's will, not our own. I have a frightful feeling that I shall let myself be married because it is the world's will, not our own, and that you should have a husband.²⁸

This and more to the same effect he declaims to Ann, who realizes in a flash that the duel is nearly over and proceeds with deadly feminine intuition to play her trump card. In Mr. Shaw's words, she "cares to throw away her customary exploitations of the conventional, affectionate and dutiful poses and claim him by a natural right for a purpose that far transcends their mortal personal purposes." She is inspired to do this by the Life-Force. She is clever and self-controlled, a liar, a bully and a coquette; at the supreme moment the Life-Force endows her with every quality. To all this Tanner succumbs.

Why did the Life-Force choose Ann? Because she had the will and determination to succeed in fulfilling the dictates of her will. Why did Tanner yield to Ann's designs?

Tanner it seems has two wills, a will of his own and the will of the Life-Force. There is a struggle between the two forces; however, it is the Life-Force which wins. According to Shaw Tanner's own desire is not will. How-

28. Man and Superman, p. 169.

ever, the stronger power, the Life-Force, is his true will. Tanner yields to the force because he has no alternative.

Ann. Why are you trying to fascinate me, Jack, if you don't want to marry me?

Tanner. The Life-Force. I am in the grip of the Life-Force.²⁹

Ann turned down the proposal of marriage made by Octavius, for though he was "chivalrous, faithful, tender hearted, and fine, yet his life was barren--the Life-Force passes it by." The Life-Force passes those who are unable to struggle and fight for their existence, and it finds expression in one who dares to defy its course.

It is the Life-Force which is the incentive and creator of Superman, for says Don Juan:

--And I, my friend, am as much a part of Nature as my own finger is a part of me. If my finger is the organ by which I grasp the sword and the mandolin, my brain is the organ by which Nature strives to understand itself. My dog's brain serves only my dog's purpose; but my brain labors at a knowledge which does nothing for me personally but make my body bitter to me and my decay and death a calamity. Were I not possessed with a purpose beyond my own I had better be a ploughman than a philosopher, for the ploughman lives as long as the philosopher, eats more, sleeps better, and rejoices in the wife of his bosom with less misgiving. This is because the philosopher is in the grip of the Life-Force. This Life-Force says to him, "I have done a thousand wonderful things unconsciously by merely willing to live and follow the line of least resistance: now I want to know myself and my destination, and choose

29. Ibid., p. 170.

my path; so I have made a special brain - a philosopher's brain - to grasp this knowledge for me as the husbandman's hand grasps the plough for me. And this", says the Life-Force to the philosopher, "must thou strive to do for me until thou diest, when I will make another brain and another philosopher to carry on the work."³⁰

30. Ibid., pp. 133-134.

... of a religious nature. ...
... of religions ...
... of civilization ...
... of the people ...
... of a great religion ...
... of Creative Evolution ...
... of scientific religion ...
... are now anxiously looking.

Creative Evolution is already religion,
and is indeed the workable religion of
the present generation, ...
of pseudo-Chalcedonism, of mere scientism, ...
of the soulless officialism and ...
of the Mechanists and Neo-Darwinists.

... continued.

... I had always known that ...
... of life ...
... of Creative Evolution ...
... we were ...
... with which ...
... of all the religions that ...
... of humanity.

31. ...
32. ...

Chapter III

Creative Evolution

Shaw is interested in finding a religion that can include the idea of Evolution. He is inclined to identify his deity with the Life-Force. His plea for a religious revival is of a practical nature. He believes that the breakdown of religious faith under the impact of Darwinism is leading to the collapse of civilization. He notes that good-natured, unambitious men are cowards when they have no religion, and that the people cannot be raised to great heights without a religious impulse.

Shaw's religion is Creative Evolution. He feels it is the genuinely scientific religion for which all wise men are now anxiously looking. He says:

Creative Evolution is already a religion, and is indeed now unmistakably the religion of the twentieth century, newly arisen from the ashes of pseudo-Christianity, of mere scepticism, and of the soulless affirmations and blind negations of the Mechanists and Neo-Darwinians.³¹

Shaw continues:

---for I had always known that civilization needs a religion as a matter of life or death; and as the conception of Creative Evolution developed I saw that we were at last within reach of a faith which complied with the first condition of all the religions that have ever taken hold of humanity.³²

31. Back to Methuselah, intro., p. XC.

32. Ibid., intro., p. XCVIII.

There is nothing in life for man unless he accepts the idea of evolution. The evolutionist has something to look forward to. Shaw says:

There is nothing for us today and nothing more to hope for unless the idea of evolution is introduced. Then we can have hope, then there is something to live for and though we do not know what is coming, that man who is an evolutionist does believe that there is something coming that is far different than what has been, something higher; something which lives more intensely than anything which has gone before.³³

Bernard Shaw's religion is the expression of his faith in life and the will. He regards man as divine because actually man is the last effort of the will to realize itself as God.

Shaw does not believe in personal immortality. He believes that death is only a means of economizing life. For he says, "--the power that governs the earth is not the power of Life but of Death," as, "men will die for human perfection."

Bernard Shaw comes not as a god-breaker, as some would believe, but rather as a god-maker. He comes as a heretic among the people of the modern faith in convention, in precedent, in the institution. He does not deny God for he knows Him to be only too real. But he does say, "Beware of a man whose God is in the Skies, for until man has become the arbiter of his own destiny, he can never realize the purpose of the world."

33. Archibald Henderson: "Bernard Shaw's Vision of the Future". The Golden Book, Vol. IX (1929), p. 91.

It has readily been supposed that the purpose of the world is to serve and perfect man, but Bernard Shaw has consistently put this conception aside in favor of its direct opposite. Although Shaw recognized the salvation of man is one of the purposes of the Life-Force, he also supposes that the highest purpose of man is to realize the trend of the Life-Force. Man is of value to the world as its savior.

Nevertheless, he views the possible failure and extinction of man with optimism, for he knows that such a contingency would only be the result of man's failure to take the opportunity given him or realizing the aim of the world. Man is not an end in himself. The Life-Force is not spending itself in perfecting so limited an instrument for its purpose. Man must be surpassed; he is no longer looked upon as an end, but as a means to an end. He is as much a creature of transition as any species in the order of the universe.

To Bernard Shaw the universe is God in the act of making Himself. Within the universe, in Shaw's conception, there is a great purpose, a great will. This force is bodiless and impotent without executive power of its own. After innumerable experiments the force succeeds in changing inert matter into the amoeba, the amoeba into something more complex; finally there has been evolved a man with hands and a brain to accomplish the work of

the Life-Force.

In Man and Superman, Shaw for the first time shows Man conscious of the Life-Force through the character of Don Juan. Juan sees the needs of man and is willing to help life to cooperate with the superhuman power that will produce the "higher man." Don Juan wants to see man something other than the means for woman's getting children and rearing them.

Man has been woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutionary process she invented him, differentiated him, created him in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce.³⁴

But there has been a change. Man has become too strong to be controlled by woman. He has become too imaginative and mentally vigorous to be content with mere self-protection. "He has created civilization without consulting her."³⁵

"What is this civilization?" asks the Devil. Don Juan answers:

--it is an attempt on Man's part to make himself something more than the mere instrument of Woman's purpose. So far the result of Life's continual effort not only to maintain itself, but to achieve higher and higher organization and completer self-consciousness is only, at best, a doubtful campaign between its forces and those of Death and Degeneration.

34. Man and Superman, p. 112.

35. Ibid., p. 112.

36. Ibid., p. 112.

Don Juan feels that the mammoths and the man, the mouse and the megantherium, the flies and the fleas and the Fathers of the church are more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, "the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely unilludedly self-conscious, --or--a god."

If their life is to realize its aim, it must strive for a brain, an organ by which it can attain not only self-consciousness but self-understanding. Don Juan says:

--to Life, the force behind the Man, intellect is a necessity, because without it he blunders into death. Just as Life, after ages of struggle, evolved that wonderful bodily organ the eye, so that the living organism could see where it was going and what was coming to help or threaten it, so it is evolving today a mind's eye that shall see not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up short sighted personal aims as at present. Even as it is, only one sort of man has ever been happy, has ever been universally respected among all the conflicts of interests and illusions.³⁷

This individual is one "who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means."³⁸

The Superman will see the needs of the universe, and so eager is he to accomplish the desired results

37. Ibid., p. 115.

38. Ibid., p. 115.

that there are no limits to his power. His life is only useful in so far as it is able to aid the Life-Force. One held by the force of life is not necessarily the happy individual. Tanner would have been much more contented if he had remained a jolly bachelor instead of being carried off kicking by a woman whom he regards as a ruthless liar.

It was Ann who pursued Tanner and forced him to marriage, much against his will, to be the father of the Superman. Tanner yielded to Ann's desire, not because of his affection for her, but because he finds himself in the clutches of the Life-Force.

Eighteen years after the publication of Man and Superman Shaw wrote his second book on Creative Evolution, Back to Methuselah. He says:

I now find myself inspired to make a second legend of Creative Evolution without distractions and embellishments.---I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic associations, and go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden. I exploit the eternal interest of the philosopher's stone which enables men to live forever. I am not, I hope, under more illusion than is humanly inevitable as to the crudity of this my beginning of a Bible of Creative Evolution.³⁹

Shaw approaches Creative Evolution from a different angle in his Metabiological Pentateuch. The elements of Circumstantial Selection and will are still present; however Shaw places emphasis on longevity. Man must

39. Back to Methuselah, intro., pp. C-CI.

live three hundred years or civilization will perish.

Franklyn and Conrad Barnabas may be said to be the "Cains" of the present generation. They realize that the men of their generation are only further steps in the path of evolution. If they cannot solve the problems of civilization then God will produce some being who can. The Life-Force, the power behind evolution, will not allow a static individual to remain in its path. "Unless this withered thing religion, and this dry thing science, have come alive in our hands, alive and interesting, we may just as well go out and dig in the garden until it is time to dig our graves," says Franklyn & Barnabas.⁴⁰ Shaw has brought science and religion together under the name of the Life-Force and has made it one of the inspiring factors in the case of longevity.

Longer life is to Franklyn and Conrad a "sort of religious aspiration and personal hope."⁴¹ The will to live three hundred years can be put into men's heads, and it behooves man himself to carry out this desire. Man will hide what they are doing. They will live three hundred years, not because they would like to, but because the woul deep down in them will know that they must if the world is to be saved.

Bernard Shaw entitles the third part of the Bible of Creative Evolution "The Thing Happens," and the time

40. Ibid., p. 49.

41. Ibid., p. 94.

of this play is a summer afternoon in the year 2170 A.D.

To the astonishment of some of the characters of the play, it is found that there have been those who have lived for over two hundred years. It is the Archbishop, Franklyn Barnabas in Book II., who finds that he has been one of the chosen individuals to save civilization. Mrs. Lutestring, the domestic slave, is another individual enjoying long life. Though "long life is complicated and even terrible," says Mrs. Lutestring, "it is glorious all the same. I would no more change places with an ordinary woman than with a may-fly that lives only an hour."⁴²

The Archbishop and Mrs. Lutestring find it part of their duty to convince the people of the twenty-second century of the need of the extension of individual human life if civilization is to be saved. "We die in boyhood," says the Archbishop, "the maturity that should make us the greatest of all the nations lies beyond the grave for us. Either we shall go under as gray-beards with gold clubs in our hands or we must will to live longer."⁴³ Mrs. Lutestring continues:

Yes, that is it.---I felt, even when I was an ignorant domestic slave, that we had the possibility of becoming a great nation within us;

42. Ibid., p. 135.

43. Ibid., p. 143.

in hope for civilization.

44. Ibid., pp. 143-144.

but our faults and follies drove me to cynical hopelessness. We all ended like that. It is the highest creatures who, take the longer to mature, and are most helpless in our maturity. If the white race is to be saved, our destiny is apparent.⁴⁴

Shaw could well have concluded his Bible of Creative Evolution with the third book if all he had wanted to do was to set forth a theory for the saving of humanity. In the last two plays of this series there seems to be no hope for mankind even though he succeeds in developing a race of people he calls Ancients, who are supposed to be Supermen of the future.

The three-hundred-year-old sages are not his goal. They still are born of women and nourished by the fruits of the earth. The Ancients satisfy Shaw only through their ultimate aspiration.

Bernard Shaw begins his plays vigorously and joyously and ends in dreariness. Life in the year 3000 A. D. is apparently dignified and decent, but the only noble deed is that of man who dies rather than live among his faithless and deluded companions. When man ceases to will, when he no longer aspires for greater things, he then descends to the lower levels of humanity.

Even though the Pentateuch ends with a warning, Shaw has, I feel, succeeded in presenting his idea clearly. He wishes to impress mankind with the need of self-realization. Through Man's awakening Shaw feels there is hope for civilization.

44. Ibid., pp. 143-144.

Conclusion

It has been necessary in defining Bernard Shaw's Life-Force to discuss various factors which are closely related to the subject.

It is evident that the force to which Shaw refers is an evolutionary power. If the power is to express itself it must have a medium through which it may act. In order that it may have self-realization the force creates Superman. This creative power is the Life-Force.

I define the Life-Force to be an evolutionary power which reveals itself in man's will to perfect himself. Shaw hopes through this evolutionary process that man may be able to identify his purpose in life with the purpose of the universe, in this way achieving self-realization.

Just as humanity today looks to God as the great power to save the universe, so Shaw looks to the Life-Force. It is the great liberating factor of the universe, and Shaw looks to this force of life as the power which will save man.

Henderson, Archibald. "B. Shaw, His Life and Works." *Bookman*, XXXIV (1912), 419-424.

Henderson, Archibald. "Bernard Shaw's Vision of the Future." *Golden Age*, IX (1920), 29-30.

Bibliography

(Books)

- Darwin, Charles, Origin of the Species. New York City, N. Y. J. A. Hill and Co., 1904.
- Harris, Frank. Bernard Shaw. Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1931.
- Hutton, F. W. Darwinism and Lamarckism. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899.
- Shaw, G. B. Back to Methuselah. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934.
- Shaw, G. B. Man and Superman. New York: Brentano's, 1920.
- The Philosophy of Nietzsche. New York: The Modern Library, 1937.

(Encyclopedia Articles)

- "G. B. Shaw." Encyclopaedia Britannica (14th Edition), 1929.

(Periodicals)

- France, W. C. "Philosophy of Shaw." Bookman, XXI (1905), 428-31.
- Henderson, Archibald. "The Philosophy of George Bernard Shaw." Atlantic Monthly, 103 (1909), 227-234.
- Henderson, Archibald. "G. B. Shaw, His Life and Work." Bookman, XXXIV (1911), 418-424.
- Henderson, Archibald. "Bernard Shaw's Vision of the Future." Golden Book, IX (1929), 19-3.