Eugenics, Genetic Determinism and the Desire for Racial Utopia in the Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler

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Abstract

African-American writer Octavia E. Butler brought the ethics of eugenics to the forefront of science fiction. Butler’s fiction demonstrates an obsessive focus on the ethics of directing human evolution by eugenic practices. I contend that Butler uses eugenics to achieve racial utopia that hinges upon the eradication of physical markers of difference. She envisions eugenics, genetic engineering and genetic mutation as potential means of solving problems of race, gender, class, and religious-based oppression by eradicating the biological causes of physical difference. Such an obsessive focus on biological causes of human behavior makes her fiction extremely biologically deterministic. For Butler, revising behavior always means altering biology. However, in her narratives, eugenic practices are always directed by external sources, revealing her ultimate pessimism about humanity’s ability to save itself. Her stories suggest that it is only through molecular level biological change that humanity can achieve any kind of meaningful utopia, but that the ability to direct such change will remain forever out of humanity’s reach.

It is my argument that after 1980, Butler’s science fiction increasingly demonstrates a belief that it is only through eugenically altering humans that we will continue as species without destroying ourselves. Consequently I have limited my analysis of her work from the publication of her novel *Wild Seed* (1980), to her last published book, *Fledgling* (2005). Butler’s untimely death in 2006 has since sparked increasing interest in this intriguing and unique science fiction author. Her contribution to literature more generally is only now being acknowledged. It is the purpose of this thesis to reposition Butler’s fiction as important ethical discussions of the extent to which guided reproduction can be an evolutionary panacea to the abundant problems that seem to inevitably arise when humans encounter physical, spiritual, and intellectual difference.
Declaration

I, Andrew Schapper declare that:

i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated;

ii) due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used;

iii) the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed ……………………………………….
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Science fiction often deals with the role that science and technology might play in the future of humanity. Octavia E. Butler was the only female African-American science fiction author to have achieved international recognition in the second half of the twentieth century. She brought discussions of the ethics of manipulating human evolution and the role of biological science in our social development to the forefront of science fiction. Across her oeuvre Butler’s fiction demonstrates an obsessive focus on the ethics of directing human evolution by eugenic practices. Her fiction not only provides unique views on eugenics and genetic engineering, but on Western culture generally. In her novels, Butler uses the concept of eugenics as a way to imagine the eradication of physical markers of difference. For her, the oppressive and hierarchical institutions of Western patriarchy can only be overcome through biological intervention. In her desire for divergent races to breed away physical differences, Butler overtly reinterprets aspects of the utopian eugenic goals of many late nineteenth and early twentieth-century eugenicists.

Whether as projected utopian worlds or dystopian visions expressing anxieties about Western culture, writers since the nineteenth century have used science fiction to meditate on the nature and character of human identity to a large popular readership. In the wake of the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in the postwar period, authors including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Aldous Huxley, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia E. Butler have used science fiction as a way of discussing ethical problems regarding the tensions between evolutionary outcomes and the means used to achieve them. Butler’s fiction in particular demonstrates an all-consuming focus on the moral and ethical gap between controlling biological evolution and the erosion of individual rights that such control might precipitate.

Butler’s fiction is gaining increased critical attention and the ethical richness of her novels has sparked intense literary debate. However, Butler’s depictions of eugenics and genetic engineering have either been overlooked, or have resulted in divergent interpretations as to their purpose. Hoda M. Zaki describes Butler’s writing as
‘biologically essentialist’\(^1\) but does not examine how her characters manage to create utopias from genetic manipulation. As I discuss later in this chapter, Cathy Peppers dismisses claims of eugenics in Butler’s work by describing it as ‘biophilic, not eugenic.’\(^2\) However, such a claim is tautological, as the biophilic nature of Butler’s writing relies on a deep-seated biological essentialism that is at the foundation of much eugenic thought. Michelle Erica Green also hints at an essentialist impulse in Butler’s fiction. Again, Green tries to distance Butler from eugenic ideas by positing that her fiction breaks with the kind of biological determinism upon which hardline and non-liberal forms of eugenics have historically relied. As yet, there is no criticism that investigates the distinct presence of what I am calling the utopian eugenics that impels Butler’s writing. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to examine Butler’s depictions, interpretations, and criticisms of eugenics to show that she sees biological evolution by eugenic manipulation as the only viable way to effect meaningful social change, in spite of its intrinsic dangers.

It is my contention that Butler uses eugenics to achieve utopian states, all of which hinge upon the eradication of physical differences. She envisions eugenics, genetic engineering and genetic mutation as avenues to solving problems of race, gender, class, and religious-based oppression. She does so by formulating eugenic techniques that eradicate the biological differences that distinguish both different human groupings as well as divisions between human and non-human beings. Butler’s fiction thus demonstrates a firm belief in biology as the main constituent that defines human, indeed all, sentient behavior. Her revision of human behavior is always contingent on genetic engineering and eugenic manipulation of human biology. Those who control biology control the future of human character. However, in Butler’s narratives, eugenic practices are always directed by an external source, whether by genetic accident, the deliberate selective breeding of a four thousand year old demigod, an extraterrestrial disease, an alien species, or an ancient race of vampires. In taking humans’ evolutionary future out of their hands, Butler reveals her ultimate pessimism about humanity’s ability to save itself from self-annihilation stemming from nuclear catastrophe, human-made climate change, and ideological

extremism. Her stories suggest that it is only through molecular-level biological change that humanity can achieve any kind of utopia, but that the ability to direct such change will remain forever beyond humanity’s capability.

Science fiction is a space where social, political, economic and technological concerns can be explored away from the limitations of realism. What actually constitutes science fiction is notoriously difficult to define. According to Carl Freedman, science fiction can be characterized simply as ‘the American pulp tradition established in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback founded Amazing Stories.’\(^3\) This is too narrow a definition, since it ignores those writers who have used common tropes of science fiction to produce works of literary fiction. However, this description is indicative of a long-held assumption that science fiction is, by and large, a popular genre. In response to its stigmatization as pulp, science fiction has conversely been characterized in such a broad sense to include:

- the whole tradition of arealistic travel literature from Lucian to Rabelais, Cyrano, and beyond;
- the classic utopian line from More onward; a modernist and postmodernist tradition of work not actually marketed as science fiction, from Kafka and even Joyce to Samuel Beckett and Thomas Pynchon; and even such world-class epic poets as Dante and Milton.\(^4\)

A definitive position on the dichotomous labeling of science fiction as either pulp, or so expansive as to include all major canonical authors, is beyond the scope of my analysis. What is common to all of the authors mentioned above, as well as to most writers of science fiction, is the freedom to discuss current anxieties without being tied to the physical, temporal and cognitive laws that bind human existence in the present day. As Darko Suvin has commented

> In the best cases SF [science fiction], just as parable and metaphor, relates to a significant problem of the social addressee in indirect ways, through estrangement into a seemingly unrelated concrete and possible set of situations…The relationships in outer space and/or


\(^4\) *ibid*, p.15.
farther in time, the strange new chronotopes, always signify human relationships in the authors here and now.5

Suvin’s argument that science fiction always reflects the concerns and anxieties of the historical moment in which it is produced suggests that ‘worthwhile SF texts’6 as he calls them, always have important ethical considerations conveyed through parables and metaphors. In such a view, science fiction becomes a vastly rich, if somewhat problematic, genre to explore ethical considerations. Science fiction is less concerned with offering plausible depictions of possible futures than it is with interrogating the present by creating fictional worlds, times, histories and beings, where specific issues can be critically engaged.

In line with Suvin’s categories for ‘worthwhile SF’, Butler’s novels often address present anxieties through metaphor, parables and direct moral clashes. She is concerned with the effects of evolutionary advancement, which she interrogates by creating stories that depict compulsory genetic change for humans. In doing so, she creates fiction that dramatizes the relationship between utopia and dystopia. Thomas More’s book *Utopia* introduced the term ‘utopia’, which meant ‘good place’ or even ‘no place’,7 but whose meaning now encompasses a broad set of different political and social paradigms all denoting a paradise-like social, political, or economic environment. However, as Fredric Jameson has commented, utopian texts, from Thomas More down to the Soviet novel of the twentieth century, contain an internal contradiction wherein the pursuit of utopia highlights the implausibility of such an idea.8 This contradiction revolves around utopia as a totalizing concept. The tension of utopian fiction resides in what Jameson identifies as the presence of the ‘negative’ in a world supposedly free from negativity.9 Utopia is thus undermined by the very presence of that which is supposedly impossible: the presence of ideas that counter the hegemonic concepts around which utopian thought is organized.

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6 ibid, p.207.
8 Jameson, Fredric. ‘Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?’ *Science Fiction Studies*. vol.9, 1982, p.154.
9 ibid, p.154.
For Jameson, the same contradiction exists in dystopian fiction. In the futurist and science fiction tradition in which Butler operates, arguably the most visible grappling with the contradictions of dystopia occur in the writing of George Orwell. Orwell’s commitment to socialism as ‘the only proper basis for the society of the future’ was countered by his profound distrust of idealized social visions too disconnected from ordinary life. Orwell depicts the inverse to Jameson’s description of utopia. For Orwell, within the dystopian nightmare exist positive human attributes that inevitably overthrow the dystopian structures. The presence of the negative in utopian fiction, and the positive in dystopian fiction, has greatly influenced science fiction, which grapples with social projections based on contextual anxieties. Butler’s fiction operates in this dialectic between utopia and dystopia. Her writing cannot be strictly labeled ‘utopian’ or ‘dystopian’, but is, rather, reflective of Margaret Atwood’s concept of ‘Utopia’, a state revealing the interconnectedness of these apparently opposite concepts. As Atwood, speaking on the nature of utopia and dystopia, comments, ‘you see something like a yin and yang pattern; within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia.’ In Butler’s fiction the loss of autonomy, agency, as well as subjection to extreme violence, immerses her characters in classic dystopian settings. However, her characters, in their struggles to survive these bleak environments, reveal the ‘hidden utopia’ Atwood describes, behind such dystopian settings. This dialectical relationship between utopia and dystopia characterizes the eugenic impulse in Butler’s fiction. She conceives of eugenics as a utopian project that aims to cure social problems through genetic advancement. However, the question of who exactly has the right to direct evolution recognizes the dystopian elements present in both hardline eugenic ideology and in the fictions that have commented on eugenics since the 1940s. Utopia in Butler’s fiction is sometimes achieved after periods of trauma and chaos, and the specter of dystopian control and enslavement often continue to lurk both amidst and alongside the utopian goals. I discuss these issues in Chapter 3, which deals with the relationship between apocalypse, utopia, dystopia and eugenics.

11 ibid, p.73.
12 Atwood. 2011, p.85.
Much of Butler’s fiction can be viewed in terms of what Fredric Jameson has labeled ‘critical dystopia,’ which is a ‘negative cousin of the Utopia proper, for it is in the light of some positive conception of human social possibilities that its effects are generated.’

Expressed more simply, issues such as ‘overpopulation, pollution and inhuman rate of technological change…are then extrapolated,’ creating worlds where contemporary anxieties are severely intensified. Extrapolation as a literary device allows science fiction authors to interrogate human ethics from perspectives where the human institutions that maintain society have broken down. However, because of Butler’s focus on eugenics and her faith in genetic engineering’s ability to successfully direct positive human change, her fiction has what I call a strong eugenic utopian impulse that reveals an ultimate belief in genetic determinism. The utopian impulse in Butler’s writing is underpinned by her deep pessimism that humanity is incapable of meaningful change without eugenic and genetic intervention from external sources.

I shall approach Butler’s fiction via Jameson’s characterization of social extrapolation. She creates worlds where the scientific limitations of genetic engineering and eugenics are sidelined in order to interrogate the ethics that surround eugenic ideology and genetic technologies. For example, in the Patternist Series (1976-1984), Butler depicts an immortal demigod figure who has time to see the results of selective breeding. In the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89), she creates a race of aliens who practice genetic engineering as part of their natural physical contact and reproduction process. In Clay’s Ark (1984), she inundates Earth with an extraterrestrial disease that alters the human genetic structure and is transmitted by touch; and, in Fledgling (2005), she creates a species of long-lived vampires whose knowledge of genetics allows them to manipulate the evolution of their children. Rather than suggesting that a future filled with aliens, vampires and telepaths is plausible, Butler uses these familiar tropes of science fiction as vehicles to express her pessimism that humanity cannot change and survive without externally directed forms of eugenic manipulation. By using characters who range from gene manipulating aliens, symbiotic vampires, enslaving telepaths, and humans with an

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array of genetic diseases, abilities and inherited characteristics, Butler cloaks her ethical interrogations in populist imagery but ultimately defers social change to questions of genetic enhancement or improvement. Science fiction enables Butler to set aside any constraints of realism in order to create intense hypothetical scenarios that deal with one of the major debates of our age: the role that genes play in determining human destinies.

In addition to freeing the author from constraints of realism to elicit ethical debates, science fiction offers the potential for political commentary. The science fiction genre encompasses novelists who comment on the admirable and not so admirable elements of both society and science fiction writing itself. Justine Larbalastier cites Butler as an author who began writing, at least in part, as a reaction to the abundant gender stereotypes to be found in science fiction. From the outset of Butler’s career, she set herself in opposition to significant trends in science fiction, the first of which was its failure to create believable female characters. As Butler commented in an interview with Charles H. Rowell,

> The movie that got me writing science fiction was ‘Devil Girl from Mars.’ That was just one of the old sub-genre of science fiction movies that talked about how the people on some other world have used up all their men. So this beautiful, gorgeous, Martian woman has come to Earth to get some more men…I watched it as a kid, and it seemed a silly movie to me, so I turned it off and began writing.

Butler’s description of her early encounters with science fiction books and science fiction films resonates with Joanna Russ’s comment that ‘there are plenty of images of women in science fiction … but hardly any women.’ Russ’s statement expresses a widely-held assumption that, historically, men have been the predominant consumers and producers of science fiction. Butler herself has said that science fiction is ‘nearly all white… and, until recently, all male.’ From the outset of her writing career, which began at the age of ten, Butler opposed the kinds of science

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fiction writing that represents women purely in terms of male fantasies, as objects of desire or fear. The popular ‘superman’ science fiction of the 1950s and 60s, represented by novelists such as Isaac Asimov, Frank Herbert and E. Van Vogt reinforced traditional gender roles, and the belief that ‘evolution itself dictated that man should be aggressive, brutal, courageous, and powerful, while woman is cast as the Angel in the Cave.’ The frequency with which such sexist depictions of women cropped up in science fiction was enough to provoke Butler to challenge readers by creating strong female characters who are often responsible for the survival of themselves, their families, and their entire communities.

Critics of Butler’s work largely agree that she writes feminist science fiction. The sub-genre draws much of its lineage from the utopian exploration of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s novel Herland, which has its historical roots in the ‘Socialist-feminist politics’ of the early twentieth century in the United States. Butler has been grouped with authors including James Triptee, Jr., Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Anne McCaffrey and Marge Piercy, all of whom ‘have brought speculation about the future of sex roles to science fiction,’ as Larbalastier puts it. Butler’s fiction places sexual roles at the heart of many of her narratives because of her eugenic focus. Reproduction becomes the central battleground for Butler’s characters. However, she focuses on race and religion just as much as gender and sex roles. Butler uses the tensions between competing interests of different gender, race and religious ideas as ways to interrogate the ethics of manipulating reproduction for evolutionary outcomes. In doing so, she not only reinterprets sexual roles, but, perhaps more importantly, the reproductive outcomes of such roles become the focal point of her stories. Sex is almost always tied to reproduction, which has led critics, including Donna Haraway, to criticize Butler for failing to represent homosexual relationships. As Haraway comments of Dawn (1987), ‘Heterosexuality remains unquestioned, if more complexly mediated.’ Butler is uninterested in depicting homosexual relationships because she is focused on dealing with reproductive outcomes as opposed to rewriting normative heterosexuality. Reproduction remains inextricably

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tied to heterosexual intercourse, which reveals that Butler is more concerned with the
ethical problems of evolutionary goals than overturning heterosexual norms.

As the only female African-American science fiction writer to achieve international
recognition to date, Butler provides a unique perspective on and critique of Western
culture. Butler asserted that ‘As far as being a black science fiction writer here, my
early isolation helped me…I was aware that there was only one other black science
fiction writer that I knew of – and that was [Samuel] ‘Chip’ Delany.’ As such,
Butler represents a voice that has been absent in science fiction and marginalized in
Western culture. Despite being grouped with science fiction writers who explore
post-feminist concepts of gender identity, Butler engages with eugenics as a means of
achieving utopia by eradicating the biological roots of physical difference, which
further highlights her uniqueness in the genre. Her persistent genetic determinism
undermines post-modernism’s abandonment of essentialist categories of identity, as
traits of human behavior including violence, hatred of difference, development of a
conscience, intelligence and the capacity to be educated, are all depicted as having a
genetic basis. Butler’s biologically deterministic approach to behavior initially seems
out of place with the prevalent 1970s and 1980s trends of feminist deconstruction.
After post-structuralism much feminist thought was focused on rejecting
sociobiological claims, not reinforcing them. However, the idea of using eugenic
practices to overcome racial problems has antecedents in the fiction of some female
African-American authors like Pauline Hopkins. Hopkins argued for miscegenation
between black and white Americans in order to create a eugenically strong, racially
homogenous society. As John Nickel has commented, Hopkins’ ‘fiction advocates,
not the obliteration of black racial traits, but rather a combination of black and white
traits.’ This concept of using eugenically guided miscegenation pioneered by
Hopkins predates Butler by many years, but it nonetheless informs her depictions of
interracial and interspecies reproduction. Hopkins’s approach to eugenics especially
dramatizes the idea that physical disparity can be actively and positively translated
into physical similarity to the benefit of society. Much of the existing criticism

24 In particular, ‘Hagar’s Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice.’ (1901-1902) in The
suggests that Butler dispenses with biological essentialism, which would align her with attempts to deconstruct the binary logic that supports the edifice of patriarchy. Instead, Butler’s fiction reflects a belief that oppressive characteristics such as sexism, racism, and religious intolerance are an intrinsic part of humanity’s genetic structure. By presenting human change as solely produced by eugenic selective breeding, genetic mutations, extraterrestrial diseases that change the human genome, and genetic engineering, she shows a complete lack of faith in cultural forces like collective action and political coalition to overcome the inherent hatred of difference so graphically visible in human society. Humans play a role in deciding their genetic evolution only to the extent that they participate in radical biological change or are permanently sidelined from the emerging utopian societies. These radical biological changes are almost always directed by external forces that exist outside of humanity, which suggests that for Butler change may happen to us, but is not ultimately controlled by us. For Butler, oppression across boundaries of race, gender, class and religion is symptomatic of a universal and innate hatred of difference that can only be transcended by genetic change.

Butler’s focus on rewriting sex roles, gender, and race relations was partly brought about by her social position. Butler writes from a position of marginality in science fiction in terms of her race and gender but also as a result of being a self-proclaimed loner. As she commented in an interview with Jerome Jackson, ‘I’m a writer; I’m a loner, very solitary; this is what I do.’ Butler’s personal liminality contributes to her focus on social extrapolations, as defined by Jameson, that depict the struggles of people trying to gain power. In her words, ‘I like to write about struggles, people who are clearly needing to do something or be something…’ Here, she reveals her evolutionary focus. The ‘struggles’ she refers to can be seen as particular contests.

28 ibid, p.2.
over the direction and character of evolution. Butler also writes from a position of economic marginality. She was forced to work at ‘terrible little jobs I used to get at factories…Those grindingly dull jobs…were capable of sending anyone up the wall.’\(^\text{29}\) Her position as an economically disadvantaged, African-American woman in the 1960s, a time of drastic social upheaval in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, suggests a motive for her focus on power relations. The black power political groups that emerged after the Civil Rights Movement were not always as focused on equality between the sexes as they were on equality between races, often employing staunchly sexist ideologies that have been described by one critic as ‘a new era of male chauvinism.’\(^\text{30}\) For example, the Black Panthers Party for Self Defense, which was initiated in 1966 and which actively urged African-Americans to resist white oppression, described itself as ‘the cream of Black manhood.’\(^\text{31}\) While there has been significant historical revision of the importance of women’s participation in organizations such as the Black Panthers, images of black power movements were dominated by men throughout the 1960s and 70s.\(^\text{32}\) Despite the active role of women, organizations like the Black Panthers were often accused of extreme sexism, which contributes to the ways in which Butler deals with both race and class. The experience of exclusion informs Butler’s treatment of contested sites of power, such as religion, race, gender and class, which she sees as interconnected and often operating in tandem to reinforce ‘othering’ and oppressing difference.

Butler’s social position partly explains why her work is so important for the study of science fiction and literature in general. In an article published in 1985, science fiction critic Jacques Lemieux noted that ‘contemporary SF constitutes a form of imaginary expression peculiar to a very specific social category, the scientific and technical subclass of the petty bourgeoisie.’\(^\text{33}\) Lemieux’s statement expresses the

\(^{29}\) Butler, Octavia E. Afterword to ‘Speech Sounds’ in Bloodchild and Other Stories. New York and London: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995, p.120.


cynicism often directed at science fiction: it is stigmatized as representing a small, male, technically trained section of society. To quote Lemieux further: ‘This…subclass…benefiting from a higher standard of living than that of the working class and having…a certain influence on the decision-making processes of large concerns…nonetheless must yield to the ruling classes in matters of true economic and political power.’ Thus it can be argued that science fiction is often about power relations and that it depicts the tensions that arise from exclusion from the political power of the ruling class. However, as Lemieux’s comments reveal, science fiction is rarely written by the working class. Butler stands out as an anomaly in the genre of science fiction not only in terms of her race and gender but also, particularly if Lemieux’s account of science fiction authorship is correct, in terms of her class position. Therefore, she provides a voice that comes from a background that has been underrepresented in the genre and in mainstream culture generally.

Butler’s uniqueness in Science Fiction means that the overtly eugenic basis of her writing is sometimes subordinated to discussions surrounding race and gender. In order to emphasize Butler’s complex relation to eugenics and genetic engineering, I draw on several major historical accounts of these practices, the most important of which is Daniel Kevles’s seminal work In the Name of Eugenics (1995). Kelves argues that eugenics emerged at a time when Social Darwinism was in the ascendant and with it the ideas that humans could take control of evolution to solve a range of important social problems such as poverty, ill health, crime and racial degeneration. Similarly, Butler’s fiction also views humanity as facing a new set of social biological crises including overpopulation, disease, but most importantly, innate and barbaric violence. She posits that altering human biology through genetic manipulation is the only means to transcend these biological and social problems. Butler, in a similar fashion to eugenicists in Britain and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, presents the cure for social problems as relying on biological solutions. The reduction of all facets of human existence to biological determinants was the key philosophical logic that underpinned much of the eugenics movement. The discourses of eugenic idealism took for granted that eugenics was an objective and necessary attempt to rescue humanity by applying scientific principles

34 Ibid, p.149.
to social problems. As the so-called Father of eugenics, Sir Francis Galton, asserted when defining eugenics in a 1904 article:

Though no agreement could be reached as to absolute morality, the essentials of eugenics may be easily defined. All creatures would agree that it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well-fitted than ill-fitted for their part in life; in short, that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens of their kind, whatever that kind might be. So with men.  

From this comment it is evident that Galton construed eugenics as a commonsense philosophy that argued for the natural impulse in all species to be free of disease, weakness and socially destructive behaviors that were seen as rife in nineteenth-century Britain. Galton and other early eugenicists, including Karl Pearson, began with the best intentions of rescuing humanity from what they saw as an impending racial decline. It is this utopian impulse in early positive eugenic thinking that Butler reflects in her fiction. By creating worlds where human violence and prejudicial attitudes are an innate part of the human genome, she leaves humanity with no alternative for social development other than eugenic manipulation as is indicated in *Wild Seed*, *Xenogenesis* and *Fledgling*; genetic mutation, as seen in the *Parable* novels; and genetic illness, as portrayed in *Clay’s Ark*.

Butler’s perception of the inheritability of mental characteristics draws from the ideas propounded by Galton’s main American counterpart, Charles B. Davenport. In particular, Davenport’s emphasis on heredity can be seen in his attitude towards abilities, such as an aptitude for music, which he felt was predetermined by parental lineage. As Davenport argued in a journal article in 1921:

not only mental but also emotional states have a hereditary basis…the quality of our sense has a clear hereditary basis…not only have great musicians an innate capacity for discriminating between closely similar qualities of pitch, intensity, time and for tonal memory but they belong to families with these innate qualities…The musician is born not made.

While Davenport stressed the innateness of musical ability, his beliefs in heredity reflected the prevailing beliefs of the cultural superiority of upper-class Anglo-Saxon

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people born in the United States. Indeed, Davenport, much in the same way as Galton and Pearson before him, ‘identified good human stock with the middle class – especially “intellectuals”, artists and musicians, and scientists.’\textsuperscript{37} Eugenics expressed the perceived middle-class propensity towards social self-improvement. The values of bourgeois culture, of intellectualism, music, aptitude for scientific inquiry, and hard work, were thus buttressed and given scientific authority by eugenic ideology. Far from being based on any tangible scientific evidence of genetic inheritance, such views of human heredity solidified and preserved the cultural prejudices of the eugenicists themselves. Eugenics was both produced by, and contributed to, the existing prejudices of the upper-middle classes. Butler likewise demonstrates faith in the inheritability of character traits such as conscience, which as I reveal in Chapter 3, becomes the crucial cornerstone of a new religion. As I discuss in detail, Lauren’s ‘biological conscience’ becomes the defining characteristic of her religion and shows that Butler shared ideas with Davenport in her approach to identity and biological inheritance. She believed in the primacy of biology in determining the roots of human behavior. While Butler’s social views are very different from eugenicists including Galton and Davenport, it is ironic that her mechanisms for instituted social change reiterate similar methods proposed by proponents of the eugenics movement.

Butler’s portrayal of identity as wedded to genetics has led Hoda M. Zaki to censure Butler for being biologically essentialist. This essentialism manifests in a number of key ways. Zaki argues that Butler sees humanity as innately violent, that men are more violent than women, and that humans display a complete incapacity to change in response to altered environmental conditions.\textsuperscript{38} She suggests that Butler presents fictional worlds where ‘the origin of violence…lies in the human genetic structure, which is responsible for the contradictory impulses towards intelligence and hierarchy.’\textsuperscript{39} I agree with Zaki, to the extent that Butler’s fiction mostly depicts human violence towards difference, particularly racial and gender oppression, as an innate product of our genetics. The ‘Contradiction’ represented by the compulsion to intelligence and hierarchy, as the alien Oankali call it, is described to Lilith, the chief protagonist of Butler’s novel \textit{Dawn} (1987). As Jdahya, the first of the alien species

\textsuperscript{37}Kelves, Daniel J. \textit{In the Name of Eugenics}. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995, p.47.
\textsuperscript{38}Zaki. 1990, pp.241-242.
\textsuperscript{39}ibid, p.241.
to converse with Lilith, explains: ‘You [humans] are intelligent. That’s the newer of the two characteristics.’

He goes on to say, ‘You are hierarchical. That’s the older and more entrenched characteristic. We saw it in your closest animal relatives and in your most distant ones. It’s a terrestrial characteristic.’

Here, the so-called ‘human’ genetic contradiction is actually inflated to include all terrestrial life that bases its survival on evolutionary struggle, the difference being that humanity is the only species to achieve ‘intelligence’ as the Oankali see it. The couching of the genetic flaw of hierarchy within the very nature of all life on Earth reflects Butler’s pessimism regarding the effectiveness of any form of collective human action. As Zaki describes in detail:

Butler’s unmediated connections between biology and behaviour have an implicit corollary: that abandoning the human body is the necessary prerequisite for real human alteration. This represents an essentially retrogressive view of politics (i.e., of collective human action), which she never sees as offering the solution to social or political problems. Her conditions for fundamental social change are such as to postpone it indefinitely.

By reducing all of humanity’s negative behavior to an expression of this genetic flaw Butler suggests that positive evolution can only be achieved through the eradication of the genetic condition of hierarchy. To overcome hierarchy, Zaki asserts, means abandoning the human body, particularly traditional human reproduction, and evolving instead through controlled genetic engineering. What Zaki does not say is that Butler genuinely sees genetic advancement as facilitating positive social change, and that genetic engineering doesn’t mean abandoning the human body but rather seeks to actively alter its biological structure. Zaki argues that Butler postpones fundamental social change indefinitely. However, Butler’s continual depictions of eugenic development by selective breeding, physical displacement, genetic and contagious illness, genetic engineering and miscegenation, all demonstrate that social change is not only possible, but is essential for survival. For Butler, change is essential, but the conditions for social change are at their core, always reducible to genetic advancement and almost never a product of social coalitions.

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41 ibid, p.39.  
In contrast to Zaki’s view of Butler’s fiction as biologically deterministic, Donna Haraway characterizes Lilith as the representative of ‘cyborg’ politics, thereby rejecting claims that Butler is essentialist. Haraway’s ideas of cyborg politics have become particularly relevant to analyses of Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy after Haraway discussed the first novel of the series in a chapter of her book *Primate Visions* (1988). In this chapter, Haraway identifies Lilith as the embodiment of cyborg feminism. Haraway’s cyborg is the organic and inorganic monster that threatens ‘humanness.’ The cyborg is the figurative boundary transgressor that defies rigid categorization as ‘self’ or ‘other’. According to Haraway, to eradicate oppressive patriarchy, the dualisms which have characterized modernity need to be dismantled. In turn, this process requires the deconstruction of the oppositional logic that upholds the concept of progressive evolution and the distinction between animals and humans; nature and artifice; as well as the idea of original unity. Haraway comments:

> Catastrophe, survival, and metamorphosis are Butler’s constant themes. From the perspective of an ontology based on mutation, metamorphosis, and the diaspora, restoring an original sacred image can be a bad joke. Origins are precisely that to which Butler’s people do not have access.  

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Here, Haraway contends that Butler’s focus on species transformation reflects a fascination with hybridity and fracture from the teleology of Western history. She suggests that a return to essentialist notions of identity is impossible because of humanity’s severed ontology in the post-apocalyptic landscape. As such, Lilith does not represent ‘the Second Coming of the sacred image,’ but stands as a figure who is led into a ‘monstrous metamorphosis’, who is ‘multiply stripped,’ fighting for ‘survival, agency and choice on the shifting boundaries that shape the possibility of meaning.’ 44 In this interpretation, Lilith is a figure who is faced with the same difficulties as Haraway’s postmodern bodies. She is a cyborg whose interaction with aliens leads to a metamorphosis that results in the dissolution of the boundary between the self and the other. For Haraway, this redefining of humanity involves a renegotiation of the way gender, race, and species can be conceptualized and


44 *ibid*, p.227.
principally stands for a rejection of the divisions which have allowed racist patriarchy to persist. In drawing the link between Lilith and cyborg politics, Haraway clearly thinks that Butler rejects biological essentialism.

While extremely influential, Haraway’s analysis is completely at odds with the majority of Butler’s fiction. It is significant that Haraway only discusses the first novel in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and makes no mention of Butler’s subsequent works. This is because Butler’s characters do not conform to the specificities of cyborg politics, but are representative of a deeply deterministic logic. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the essentialism that Haraway seeks to reject in Butler’s writing is in fact, reinforced and intensified by Butler’s consistent reliance on genetic engineering and eugenics as solutions to human social problems. Genetic alteration through selective breeding, genetic mutations, disease, and engineering is reflective of Butler’s desire to achieve utopia by eradicating physical otherness. Butler’s fiction does not conform to Haraway’s concepts of cyborg identity as breaking with essentialism. Rather, Butler’s writing is indicative of a deterministic logic that creates racial utopias by eliminating racial difference.

Butler’s insistence upon genetic alteration does not mean that she is ignorant of the ethical problems that can be caused by controlling human evolution. In her novels, there is a distinct tension between consequentialist ethics and human rights-based ethics. Eugenics is the key area where this tension is most thoroughly played out in Butler’s writing. By forcing her characters to address important ethical debates between communal goals and individual rights, Butler demands that her readers engage with dilemmas that exist between human rights and consequentialist ethics. Consequentialism is a term often used to describe ethical theories that loosely define moral actions by the amount of value ascribed to the consequences of those actions. 

According to ethicist S. Jack Odell "the most important and influential form of consequentialism is utilitarianism." Indeed consequentialism has been formulated by continual revisions of utilitarianism from Jeremy Bentham to Peter Singer.

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Butler’s engagement with consequentialism and utilitarianism is largely focused on eugenics and engineering better societies. Her discussions of consequentialism examine the tensions between what is valuable to an individual as opposed to what is valuable for society. For Butler, the survival of a decimated human population is often reliant on individual sacrifices to the wider goals of the community and, indeed, the species. However, Butler is all too aware of the problems behind utilitarian ethics.

Despite her focus on ensuring more valuable evolutionary outcomes for humanity, as I discuss in Chapter 1, she creates a demigod figure whose ethics are overtly utilitarian, yet damagingly hedonistic. Butler counters this brand of utilitarian destructiveness with Christian ethics that champion the sanctity of each individual human life, thus showing her fascination with the ethical tension between broad social aims and personal freedoms. Bioethicist Soran Reader suggests that consequentialist theorists have tried to revise John Stuart Mill’s early utilitarian theory of the promotion of valuable consequences to define ‘value’ as what ‘a rational well-informed, widely experienced” agent would prefer.47 For Butler, the crisis for humanity is that these ‘widely experienced agents’ who are able to define value are not always humans. By taking the decisions for the direction of human evolution out of human hands, Butler problematizes the legitimacy and self-evidence of human agency. Moreover, she places humans in positions where the goals of the species at large are privileged above the individual rights often arbitrarily ascribed to humans by virtue of their membership of the human species. Although Butler sees eugenic development as the key to human social advancement, she is sympathetic to the loss of agency that consequentialist ethics may cause. As such, there is a pervasive tension between broad biological aims and individual rights and freedoms in her writing that is intensified to show extreme abuses of individual rights in the pursuit of extreme eugenic consequences. The result of the ethical dilemmas of Butler’s writing is that biological aims often predominate over individual rights so that individual sacrifices become a necessary catalyst for utopia.

Butler presents human rights-based ethics as the main critique of consequentialism in her fiction. Human rights-based ethics gained momentum as an articulation of the

defense of the declaration of human rights put forward by the United Nations in 1948. For human rights-based ethicists, it is a source of constant concern that consequentialism, including varying types of utilitarianism, can and sometime does, justify actions that are in opposition to the declaration. The idea of defending the notion of an inherent human dignity has a Judeo-Christian tradition, and is even ‘inescapably religious’ according to some critics.48 The declaration of the UN General Assembly recognized ‘the inherent dignity and… the inalienable rights of all members of the human family…’49 As Julie Harrelson-Stephens and Rhonda L. Callaway posit, ‘from a theoretical and philosophical perspective, we find one prevalent definition of human rights as simply the rights one has because one is human.’50 In Butler’s fiction, human rights often emerge in the form of anthropocentric Christian ethics. The Judeo-Christian idea of the sanctity of human life is the counter voice to the eugenic consequentialism of characters such as Doro in Wild Seed. However, Butler’s fiction after 1980 increasingly shows her willingness to place evolutionary goals above the rights of individuals, particularly in Clay’s Ark (1983, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3) and the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89, which is the subject of discussion in Chapter 5).

Human rights ethics have a long tradition in America that is not simply the product of Christian values. In Western Europe and North America, philosophers including Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, and Thomas Paine, initiated debates concerning human rights.51 These thinkers articulated concerns that demonstrate the transition from ideas that focused purely on the duties of moral agents, to concerns of the rights to which one is entitled by virtue of one’s humanity. This focus on the basic rights of humans was seen to spring from natural law, which endowed humans with certain rights as a result of their connection with nature and therefore with God. Such progressive ethical thought cemented the anthropocentricity of Christian moral ideas.

Human rights theorist Robert Churchill suggests that ‘Since the eighteenth century, natural rights, and then human rights, have been regarded in the West as the most fundamental of moral rights.’\textsuperscript{52} Natural rights were identified by John Locke as ‘“the rights to life, liberty, and property.”’\textsuperscript{53} Likewise, the Declaration of Independence speaks of “rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as natural rights.\textsuperscript{54} From these early attempts to characterize a system of human rights up until the declaration of human rights, it is evident that the most basic human entitlement, as seen by Western philosophers, is the right to life, which effectively holds that membership in the human family is a right conferring status in and of itself. While this anthropocentric view of ethics has a corresponding Judeo-Christian duty not to kill, the overtly human-centered vision of the world has crystalized the concept of humans as natural masters of our environment. The focus on formulating philosophical foundations that support the inherent rights of humans constitutes a shift away from classically religious discourse that focuses on duties and corresponding rewards for obedient behavior.

Anthropocentric ethics are founded on the notion that membership in the human species alone is right-conferring. Such an ethical view holds that we cannot talk of other beings as having rights. We can discuss the treatment and attitudes to other species, but we cannot confer rights on such beings. Butler problematizes anthropocentrism by creating environments in which sentient creatures other than humans have strong, sometimes stronger, claims to rights than their human counterparts. Butler presents an expanding circle of rights, but she does so by forcing humans to encounter alien others who are both physically and mentally superior, rather than extending rights to other beings in the current terrestrial hierarchy of Western societies. By decentering anthropocentrism, Butler explores ideas of extending rights beyond humanity in a provocative and challenging fashion. She does so by starkly interrogating the way we subjugate others. By depicting humans who are oppressed and used for exploitative purposes, Butler forces the reader to engage with how we treat those in subordinate positions of power.

\textsuperscript{52} ibid, p.14.  
\textsuperscript{53} ibid, p.14.  
\textsuperscript{54} ibid, p.14.
Butler interrogates supposedly self-evident Western truths about the sanctity of human life in relation to other species. One assumption that Butler overtly challenges through her writing is anthropocentrism. Put simply, anthropocentrism holds that only human beings, and the satisfaction of their desires and needs, are valuable in themselves.\(^{55}\) Such an anthropocentric view of the World has been widely criticized by feminists and ecologists as an intrinsic part of patriarchal Christian morality. Perhaps the most famous attack on the prevalence of anthropocentrism in Western thought was historian of science, Lynn White Jr. who in 1967 wrote, ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis.’ In this article, White laid the blame for impending ecological crises largely with the Christian attitudes of domination and subjugation of nature prescribed in the Bible and enshrined in both Catholic and Protestant doctrine. White described Christianity as ‘the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen.’\(^{56}\) Such ecologically based critiques of Christian ethics have mostly revolved around criticisms of Genesis where humanity’s relationship is described in terms of subduing and having dominion over the World and all beings contained within it.\(^{57}\) Anthropocentric Christian ideas hold that humans, as the only beings made in the image of God, have a proper and natural position as the dominant species of the planet.\(^{58}\) Butler was well aware of biblical concepts relating to the human position in the global hierarchy, as her mother forced her to go to church from an early age. Moreover, Butler was an avid reader of the Bible, more in terms of providing interesting stories than religious doctrine. She stated in an interview with McCaffery and McMenamin, ‘I’ve always loved the Bible for quotable things I could draw on.’\(^{59}\) Butler’s use of the Bible as a source for the topics of her novels meant that she was aware of the overtly anthropocentric logic that underpins Christian natural hierarchies and the ethical principles that support these hierarchies. Butler’s ability to articulate the structure of entrenched Western hierarchies caused her to speculate on what would be required to overthrow this anthropocentric system. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 5, Butler concludes in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy that it is only through genetic

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56 White, Lynn Jr. in Roper, Duncan. ‘The Earth as a “Garden” for all Creatures: Lynn White Forty Years on.’ *Stimulus.* vol.15, no.4, 2007, p.12.
58 *ibid*, p.226.
59 McCaffery and McMenamin, 1990, p.68.
alteration of the human genome that anthropocentrism can be overcome. Such an approach is indicative of the way in which Butler sees social structures as having biological causes and dictates that biological manipulation is the main driver of social change.

Butler’s challenge to anthropocentric ethics forms a part of her challenges to racist patriarchy in America. Butler is acutely aware that as humans we often regard ourselves as unique and privileged beings, as opposed to nonhuman animals who do not exhibit the characteristics that we have devised to separate ourselves from our surroundings. Indeed, Butler’s approach to countering anthropocentrism is enmeshed with her racial critiques, as she shows how racist dogma has often historically been framed in terms of species difference. For Butler, humans’ ascendant position in the terrestrial hierarchy is augmented by the displacement of humanity as the dominant species on Earth, which often precipitates cultural and racial clashes. Butler fictionalizes our separation from the natural world by introducing intelligent sentient species that strip humanity of its dominance as well as highlighting our ethical hypocrisy. In this one instance, Butler’s fiction grapples with ideas promoted by bioethicist Peter Singer, who has written on the need to recognize our shared kinship with the animal world. He suggests that such a common lineage can only by contradicted by religious ethics:

Apart from adherence to a religion…that dangerously separates human beings from nature, I can find no grounds for a defense of the view that comparisons of the value of human and nonhuman lives are improper. In the absence of any such basis, we can assume that this prohibition is simply a last-ditch defense of the human-centred view of the universe that was so severely challenged by Copernicus and Galileo, and given its final blow by Darwin.\(^60\)

With this denial of our common heritage and continued kinship with animals comes the increased desire to manipulate the natural world and bend it to our concerns. Butler is less concerned with pointing out humanity’s exploitation of animals and the environment. Rather, she uses anthropocentrism as a vehicle to illuminate the racial contradictions of hierarchies of race and species. In Xenogenesis, Butler challenges human attitudes towards nature by making the alien Oankali far more ecologically

\(^{60}\) *ibid*, p.98.
advanced than humans. The Oankali use their mastery of genetics to create a system of living organisms rather than relying on manipulating inanimate objects. As Lilith explains to Leah, ‘The ship is alive and so is almost everything in it. The Oankali use living matter the way we use machinery.’ By characterizing the alien species as physically disgusting, sexually provocative, ecologically superior, and non-hierarchical in their political organization, Butler creates the Oankali as an almost inverse image of humans. In doing so, Butler reveals a similar concern to Singer’s in that human identity has dangerously separated itself from the natural world, and that the anthropocentric nature of our ethical system is dangerously exploitative for the other beings with whom we share the planet. Ironically, Butler’s attack on anthropocentrism reiterates similar approaches to nature to those which are embedded within Christian ethics. The aliens, vampires and demigods who are the main agents of engineering away humanity’s genetic problems still maintain a sense of dominance and mastery of ‘nature.’ Moreover, to achieve racial utopias, intelligent characters must force subordinate species into behaving in evolutionarily sound ways, thereby reiterating a species hierarchy where one makes the decisions for the others. The only difference for Butler is that humans are replaced as the dominantly intelligent beings forcing their anthropocentric ethics upon others. A particular irony of Butler’s fiction is that her pessimistic view that humanity needs genetic alteration means that power imbalances are often intensified in the pursuit of utopia. It is only by submitting individual rights to broader social goals that anthropocentric logic is ultimately dispensed with.

The need to expand morality outside human hegemony is something that Butler’s fiction deals with time and time again. However, the way in which Butler makes her readers confront the topic is to inundate earth with other species who are not only sentient but who appear more intelligent, stronger, and who have longer lives than their human counterparts. As such, Butler envisions a future in which humanity is supplanted as the dominant species, which in turn forces her readers to assess our treatment of those species we consider subordinate. Unlike both ecological and anthropocentric ethicists who preach ethics that are premised on choice and the

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61 Butler, 2007, p.140.
62 Texts where this is evident include: The Xenogenesis Trilogy (1987-89), The Patternist Series (1976-83), and Fledgling (2005).
ability to change society based on political decisions, Butler presents a world-view that suggests that humanity is doomed without biological change. Her insistence that human behavior is entirely prescribed by biology means that the only option for sufficient change that would guarantee survival is a genetically engineered solution. The consequentialist eugenic desire to alter wider society to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number uncovers a level of pessimism that defers change to the realm of biology over coalition between disparate groups. Butler reveals that she has given up on humanity’s ability to survive unless external pressures (genetic engineering, aliens, vampires, interstellar diseases, and chance mutations) force genetic change.

Like Butler, Singer contends that Western society has rejected its shared kinship with animals, which has resulted in mastery and domination as the main approaches to other species. Singer argues, like Haraway, for a re-assessment of this practice. Such a position has implications for religious tenets such as the sanctity of human life, as well as human rights ethics that attribute rights by virtue of humanity. Butler’s narratives make a point of featuring beings who transgress the boundaries between animal and human and, as such, she creates fictional explorations of the very themes that theorists such as Singer and Haraway grapple with. While Butler appears to dispense with ‘speciesism’ by eroding the division between animal and human in her fiction, such as in *Clay’s Ark* (1984), she also reinforces eugenic ideologies that seek to reproduce the genetically fit, while preventing those deemed unfit from producing more of their kind. As I shall argue, Butler’s insistence on eugenics as the only means to achieve social utopia means that the biological root of physical differences are eradicated. The stability required for meaningful utopias in her writing is only made possible by eliminating the kinds of genetically defined characteristics that have historically been used to distinguish difference in terms of gender, race and even species.

Analyses of Butler’s fiction have appeared in academic journals that include: *Science Fiction Studies, Callaloo, and Femspec*. Criticism of Butler’s work contribute to chapters in wider analyses of science fiction, including books by Donna Haraway, Marleen S. Barr, Patricia Meltzer, and Justine Larbalastier, but until recently there were no significant works devoted solely to her fiction. In 2010, Gregory Jerome Hampton published *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler*, which I draw
on frequently in this thesis, as it is the most extensive critical work on Butler’s fiction. Critics including Meltzer, Burwell, Green, and Salvaggio to name a few, focus on her portrayals of gender and race and indeed these issues are explicitly crucial in regards to eugenics and ethics and I shall address these in every chapter of this thesis. However, critical analyses of Butler’s fiction are strangely silent on her ideas about the ethical problems of genetic engineering and eugenics and their role as harbingers of human evolution. Critics including Cathy Peppers and Michelle Erica Green are eager to distance Butler from both eugenics and essentialism. Peppers acknowledges the presence of eugenic tendencies in Butler’s fiction but passes over the eugenic elements as useful sites to interrogate her writing. In a similar fashion, Green glosses over the examples of biological essentialism by ignoring the glaring examples of genetic determinism in Butler’s fiction. I believe that the reason for the subordination of eugenics to discussions of race and gender in analyses of Butler’s fiction is because of the dark history of eugenics. The specter of this past permanently looms over discussions of human biological improvement, which leads critics to downplay Butler’s overtly eugenic focus.

In her article, ‘There Goes the Neighborhood’ (1994), Michelle Erica Green examines Butler’s literary treatment of utopias. To the extent that it delineates a plausible utopian impulse in Butler’s writing, Green’s work is insightful and useful. She does, however, criticize ‘essentialist’ interpretations of Butler’s stories. According to Green, essentialism is ‘a term used pejoratively by poststructuralist feminists to attack biologically based models of human behavior.’ She rejects claims that Butler’s work is biologically essentialist, maintaining that even in her early work she still undermines a fixed biological or deterministic standpoint. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, by analyzing Butler’s writing after 1980, her overtly eugenic focus means that her fiction should be read contrapuntally to Green’s argument. Butler’s writing becomes increasingly committed to the idea that genetics lie at the root of all human behavior. Green points out that in Butler’s short story The morning, the evening, and the night (1976) ‘biology is never destiny, even when it appears to be…Lynn has a…choice: she can commit suicide, or live for the moment until the

illness takes her…[her] best chance for survival comes from putting…[her] differences to work. 64 This however, is to confuse the argument between biology and difference. Biology in this story is the cause of difference, a difference that is used to oppress other humans. While Lynn is given the option of ‘putting her differences to work’ in the story, she is essentially offered a choice between a life dictated by her genetic makeup or killing herself, an inevitability of her illness anyway, which is hardly a choice. Green also fails to mention the eugenic implications of this narrative. The people who run the DILG estate are selected based on their genes. These genes allow them to influence and control other sufferers from the disease, which in turn places them in a position of power at the top of a hierarchy. Green neglects to investigate Butler’s eugenic concerns of segregation, sterilization and what Green herself calls altered morality and human biology through ‘careful breeding and teaching’. 65 This omission is a major contradiction in Green’s work, as eugenics, which was the scientific naturalization of biological determinism, can be described as an increased focus on careful breeding and teaching. Thus, Green emphatically illuminates Butler’s eugenic stance but refuses to term it ‘eugenics’ or even ‘biological essentialism.’ I interpret this refusal as an attempt to distance Butler from the tarnished term ‘eugenics’ and its sinister connotations in modern society.

Cathy Peppers suggests that Butler’s fiction flirts with eugenic discourse. However, Peppers is also eager to distance Butler’s writing from historical eugenics. Peppers’ article ‘Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler’s Xenogenesis’ (1995) is one of the more nuanced readings of Butler’s work. She argues that Butler incorporates elements from various Western myths of origin, particularly the story of human genesis in the Bible, to help theorize how human identity might be conceived in new ways. She contends that the ‘cyborg’ quality of Butler’s work lies not so much in the literal hybridity of the characters, but in the overall narrative that fuses myth, history, and science, creating a hybrid, fractured understanding of the history of human identity. She states that Xenogenesis seizes ‘our culture’s most powerful origin stories, those stories which are at the origin of what it means to be human in the Western order.’ 66 For Peppers this ‘cyborg origin story’ consists of: ‘the Biblical

64 ibid, p.181.
65 ibid, p.175.
story of our genesis as “Male and Female”; the sociobiological story, which situates
our identities in our genes; and the paleoanthropological story of our evolution from
our Stone Age ancestors. She adds to this list the ‘narrative of the African diaspora
and slavery,’ which she suggests functions as the origin narrative of African-
American identity. For Peppers, Butler creates a narrative that genuinely imagines
new modes of being. She does so by more than ‘merely retelling one origin story
with a difference, but by putting the four originary discourses…into a dialogic
relation with each other.’ In doing so, Butler does not attempt to refute, or indeed
support, any one of these discourses, but rather seeks to use the power of such
discourses by ‘changing them from within.’ This contention is an attempt to
reconcile the examples of slavery and power relations of dominance and
subordination with examples of fluid gender and sexual identities. As such, Peppers
seeks to legitimize Haraway’s position that Butler’s fiction typifies cyborg feminism.

Peppers argues that Lilith’s cancer in Xenogenesis is part of Butler’s critique of the
conventional sociobiological narrative by reimagining genetic disadvantage as an
evolutionary positive. At the beginning of Dawn, Lilith is told that she had ‘A
cancer,’ that was removed, ‘Otherwise, it would have killed you.’ Jdahya explains
to Lilith that she not only had a tendency towards producing cancerous growths but
that she had a ‘talent for cancer.’ Even by the use of language – here the
description of genetic predisposition as a ‘talent’ – it is evident that the alien Oankali
have a completely different approach to human biology, one that focuses on the
genetic potential of all elements of the human body. Where humans see disease and
imperfection, the Oankali see potential for change and evolution. Indeed, Lilith’s
‘talent’ provides the Oankali with exciting potential evolutionary directions. Jdahya
states that the human body’s ability to create tumors has the potential to provide
succeeding generations with abilities such as the ‘Regeneration of lost limbs.

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67 ibid, p.48.
68 ibid, pp.48-49.
69 ibid, p.49.
70 ibid, p.49.
72 ibid, p.22.
73 In Xenogenesis, The alien Oankali describe humanity’s tendency to producing cancerous tumors as a
talent. For the Oankali, who are genetic collectors, cancer is seen as helping to unlock how to switch
on certain genes for malleability and regeneration, p.22.
Controlled malleability...Even increased longevity.\textsuperscript{74} A character who appears in the conclusion to the trilogy, Jhodas, achieves these eugenic goals and is able to make itself appear more human in order to be less threateningly alien to the humans it encounters. Peppers reports that,

Seeing cancer in this way not only puts a positive spin on something we normally find hideous (and fatal), it also disrupts the usual sociobiological story of human evolution, which assumes that every biological characteristic has a clear purpose either favouring or disfavouring survival.\textsuperscript{75}

I agree with Peppers here, to the extent that Butler does try to reimagine cancer as a tool for evolutionary advantage, rather than as an incurable fatal disease. However, this does not in any way indicate that Butler challenges narratives of genetically determined evolution. If anything, the Oankali are more attracted to humanity, precisely because of this genetic affliction, which they see as an evolutionary advantage for the alien/human hybrids. The Oankali’s desire for interactions with humans is entirely scripted by a genetic need to breed with difference in order to evolve. Here, Butler reinterprets traditional eugenic conceptions of what is genetically appealing, but this in no way challenges the legitimacy of reducing evolutionary potential to a product of favorable genetics.

Peppers is one of the few critics to draw the link between Butler’s texts and eugenics. But, she does so in order to distance Butler’s fiction from engaging with the historically fraught arena of eugenics. Peppers points out that by pairing humanity with a species that is acquisitive rather than hierarchical, Butler challenges conventional conceptions of the evolutionary myth as relying on the survival of the fittest. Instead, she creates a view of evolution that relies on symbiosis and thereby challenges the ‘eugenic dreams’ of the Darwinian evolutionary narrative.\textsuperscript{76} Peppers acknowledges that ‘eugenic dreams of creating a “pure and perfect humanity” continue to supply the logic for our contemporary uses of the prime technology of sociobiology, genetic engineering.’\textsuperscript{77} Here, Peppers clearly draws a link between

\textsuperscript{74} ibid, p.41.
\textsuperscript{75} Peppers. 1995, p.52.
\textsuperscript{76} ibid, p.54.
\textsuperscript{77} ibid, p.54.
genetic engineering and the inevitable quest for perfection that ensues once such technologies are obtained. Peppers, in her attempts to distance Butler from any eugenic interpretations, describes her fiction as ‘biophilic, not eugenic.’ By aligning the alien species with biophilia and distancing them from eugenics, Peppers expresses her desire that the Oankali be viewed as an environmentally utopian society, free from the dangerous and historically tarnished hierarchies that the term ‘eugenics’ has come to symbolize. Peppers bases her rejection of the alien’s eugenic society on the fact that the Oankalis’ genetic engineering is ‘intense’, ‘erotic’ and ‘pleasurable.’ Peppers sees the Oankalis’ focus on ‘trade’ as a condition of their biology. She views the Oankali as obsessed with the trade itself, not the outcome of the trade. This interpretation is incorrect: the Oankali are obsessed with trade in order to regenerate both human and Oankali species. As Jdahya states to Lilith regarding the trade: ‘We were overdue for it when we found you. Now it will be done – to the rebirth of your people and mine.’ The trade as an erotic device is important, but the outcome of the eugenic experiment is the Oankalis’ real motivation for trade. As well as expressing the necessary desire for rebirth and regeneration through genetically engineered miscegenation, Jdahya’s comments reveal the imposing universalizing eugenic zeal that was a feature of state-institutionalized and non-liberal eugenic programs of the early twentieth century. Rather than revealing the Oankali to be biophilic, the Oankalis’ insistence of trade conforming to their narrow terms exemplifies the naturalization of the eugenic impulse of species betterment through genetic tampering. The Oankali incarnation of miscegenation rejects historical eugenics’ racist focus on racial purity amongst humans. However, the Oankalis’ desire, even biological necessity, to manipulate reproduction in such a way as to completely control evolution is indicative of Butler’s approach to eliminating difference as a means to achieve utopia. Moreover, human concerns and ideas are largely sidelined, as the Oankali ability to read and interpret genes is never challenged by Butler throughout the series. Those who can interpret genes have exclusive rights to the character and direction of evolution, which is an overtly eugenic concept.

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79 ibid, p.55.
80 Butler. 2007, p.43.
Walter Benn Michaels refers to Butler’s depictions of miscegenation in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy in terms of post Cold War approaches to identity. Michaels examines political scientist Samuel Huntington’s claims that the future of human conflict ‘will be cultural’ by analyzing the shift in approaches to identity in posthistoricism. In this model of cultural conflict, ideological differences that are universal give way to cultural differences that reflect a difference of perspective. To quote Michaels: ‘Ideological conflicts are universal…they involve disagreement, and it is the mere possibility of disagreement that is universalizing.’ Ideologies (particularly the conflict between capitalism and communism, for example) do not dispute the existence of universal truth, they merely disagree on which truth should dictate behavior. By contrast, in the post Cold War world of posthistoricism, ‘the alternative to difference of opinion [ideology] is difference in point of view (or perspective or subject position).’ This difference of subject position can be characterized as a shift from asking the question: ‘Which side are you on?’ to ‘What are you?’ This shift to questions of ontological being leads Michaels to discuss Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy, as the series deals overtly with the clash of cultures between humans and a race of aliens. In the series, this cultural conflict is played out in a very literal sense, as differences amongst humans are entirely diminished by the otherness of the alien Oankali. The aliens offer humans the chance to reproduce with them, creating a new, superior branch of evolution. Some humans manage to reproduce through incest, which shows how Butler, in Michaels’ words, not only insists on ‘miscegenation as the privileged form of sexual activity, but makes incest the only alternative to it.’ Inbreeding leads to serious genetic flaws, which are contrasted with the genetic advancement of the crossbred alien/humans. Butler’s two-sided depiction of incest equates eugenic evolutionary development with miscegenation, and the dysgenic slide into extinction with the desire to remain ‘pure’ humans.

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83 *ibid*, p.31.
84 Michaels. 2004, p.29.
85 *ibid*, p.36.
Michaels illuminates a crucial tendency in Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy that I believe is true of her entire oeuvre from 1980 until 2005. He posits that,

if the resisters’ desire to “stay human” expresses their fear of difference, it obviously expresses their desire for difference (difference, that is, from the aliens). Insofar as identity and difference are complementary rather than oppositional terms, the human desire to stay human is simultaneously (and without contradiction) the desire to stay the same and the desire to be different. And the commitment to difference embodied in the commitment to miscegenation produces the same effect from the opposite direction. In a thoroughly miscegenated world, the traits of particular races or species would, of course, disappear – everybody would be the same.  

Here, Michaels essentially equates miscegenation with assimilation, in that the reproduction between those of different cultures (in Butler’s story, literally those of very different species) creates a healthy happy and ultimately utopian society that overcomes problems of difference by breeding away the visibility of physical otherness. In an almost throwaway line in his analysis, Michaels reveals the idea that is at the heart of all of Butler’s fiction: ‘If miscegenation is an expression of the appreciation of difference, it is also a technology for the elimination of difference.’

It is this observation that so accurately characterizes Butler’s propensity to privilege miscegenation in reproduction. Michaels’ project is to show how examples of African-American science fiction deal with posthistoricism, so he does not go into more detail about Butler’s fiction. However, I believe that Butler not only uses miscegenation as a tool for eliminating difference, but that she also uses eugenics, genetic chance, disease, outer space colonization and even religion in order to extinguish biological difference as the means to achieve utopia. For Butler, social evolution is contingent on eradicating the biological roots of physical difference.

Consequently, I have chosen to investigate Butler’s representations of eugenics and genetic engineering through the lenses of gender, race and religion, as these are crucial areas in which genetic engineering and eugenics ignite ethical debates. In all of these areas, Butler’s characters are presented in scenarios in which many standards of contemporary American ethics, particularly with regards to the sanctity of human
life, are either openly contested or rejected. What emerges from these challenges to human rights-based ethics is Butler’s pervasive insistence that human evolutionary survival may hinge upon our ability to put wider communities, indeed the species as a whole, above the rights and freedoms of individuals. This ethical position is evident in the utopian eugenic impulse in Butler’s fiction that sees the eradication of physical difference as the means through which social problems can be transcended. For this to be possible, Butler privileges biology as the defining characteristic of human behavior.

With such biologically deterministic views of behavior, Butler’s only recourse to effecting social change is to use eugenics and genetic engineering. However, she is not ignorant of the ethical problems that arise from eugenic manipulation. As such, I focus on the ethics of eugenics and genetic alteration as can be discerned from critical readings of major works spanning three decades. These include: Wild Seed (1980), the Parable series (1993 and 98), Clay’s Ark (1984), the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89), and Fledgling (2005). I have chosen these novels as they show an increasing interest in genetics and eugenics as means by which human society is irrevocably altered. I have excluded her four earlier novels, Patternmaster (1976), Survivor (1977), Mind of My Mind (1977), and Kindred (1979). This is in no way to suggest that these novels are not interesting and fertile sites for critical analysis. However, Butler’s oeuvre reflects an increasing fascination with eugenics and genetic determinism that begins with the publication of Wild Seed in 1980 and grows in intensity until her final publication in 2005.

I approach the topic by focusing on the major sites where I see eugenics and genetic engineering triggering ethical debates in her fiction. I characterize these as: the relationship between Christianity and biological science; the links between apocalypse, utopia, pandemic and genetic illness; and race, species and the eradication of racial and species difference through miscegenation. Furthermore, as race, gender, class and religion have historically played such major roles in eugenic ideology it is crucial to recognize how embedded these concepts are in the genetic practices of today, even if eugenics has reemerged as a tool to promote a new era of free choice. It is my contention that the central element of Butler’s fiction is the interrogation of contemporary ethical standards in relation to eugenics and genetic
engineering, which she achieves by creating characters who explore new and alternative means to enhance and change human evolution. Through re-imagining eugenic practices, Butler posits different ethical scenarios that center on the ideologies behind seizing control of human evolution and directing its development. Ultimately, Butler argues that humanity’s hatred of difference is genetic. With hatred of those who exhibit difference, particularly physical difference, encoded in our DNA, the only avenue for systemic change is eugenics. By depicting eugenics as the catalyst for social improvement Butler contends that the elimination of the biological causes of these destabilizing differences is the only way to achieving social utopia.

My aim in this thesis is to analyze how Butler envisions new forms of human development. By closely examining passages that depict her characters engaging in eugenic activities, I aim to delineate how and why Butler is exploring the themes of eugenics and genetic engineering practices. I further seek to discover whether such depictions can be seen as ultimately supporting eugenics and genetic engineering, or whether such active alteration of our evolution breaches our ethical conception of what it is to be human. Butler’s fiction is about the ethics of controlled evolution. Her novels convey the sense that humanity is not evolving rapidly enough to deal with the increased ecological, sociological, economic and political pressures of a modern, globalized, and increasingly small social planet. Human history culminates in Butler’s writing to show an inability to produce meaningful systemic change. Butler’s solution to what she sees as this endless repetition of catastrophic history is for humanity’s biological evolution to be accelerated and directed. She does this by forcing her characters to confront entities that demand biological and genetic evolution. In doing so, she challenges Western Judeo-Christian morality, as her depictions of enforced evolutionary change often subsume individual freedom and the sanctity of human life into the wider long-term goals of the community.

I begin my analysis of Butler’s fiction by examining how her earlier novels express anxiety and suspicion towards eugenics. By analyzing her novel, *Wild Seed* (1980),

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88 In an interview in 1996 Butler stated, ‘We keep playing the same record. Earlier I was talking about it: we begin something and then we grow it to a certain point and then it destroys itself or else it is destroyed from the outside—whether it is Egypt or Rome or Greece, this country or Great Britain, you name it.’ Butler, Octavia E. interview with Potts, Stephen W. ‘We Keep Playing the Same Record: A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler.’ *Science-Fiction Studies.* vol.23, 1996, pp.335-336.
in conjunction with the eugenic theories of the inheritance of behavioral characteristics put forward by Francis Galton and Charles Davenport, I argue that, at this early stage in her career, Butler sees Christian ethics as crucially important. At this early point in her writing, Butler sees Christianity as the necessary counterpoint to keep eugenic manipulation of human reproduction from committing atrocities that violate every human’s right to life. In Chapter 1, I show that in *Wild Seed* the interplay between human rights ethics and consequentialism is most problematic as the entity in control of evolution undertakes eugenics for overtly selfish reasons. Doro’s selfishness and megalomania highlights the ethical problem of who should be able to direct evolution and whether the power to manipulate evolution is, in itself, intrinsically corrupting. I begin by looking at how Butler reinterprets classical mythology, specifically the Promethean stories in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, to show the long heritage of concern humanity has exhibited in relation to tampering with its own evolution. I then demonstrate that *Wild Seed* can be read as embodying a contest between eugenic science and Christian religious ethics, depicting the tensions between evolutionary goals and individual rights. To do this, I investigate the historical eugenic discourse of Sir Francis Galton and Charles Davenport to show that, while Butler’s fiction actively engages with eugenics as a means to achieve utopia, at this formative stage of her literary development she was concerned that eugenic thinking without the countering moral voice of Christian ethics would lead to abuses of power.

In her later novels, Butler shows an increasing willingness to move away from Christian ethical standards. Indeed, she becomes openly critical of biblical literalist Christianity. Consequently, in Chapter 2, I shift my analysis to Butler’s overt challenge to Christianity and the Calvinist heritage of America in *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1997). I argue that Butler replaces Christianity with a religion premised on science and evolution, wherein God ceases to be the eternal agent separate from humanity and actually becomes the natural world in which we are immersed. In linking science with divinity and evolution with God, Butler echoes the eugenic discourse that sought to replace Christian morality with a set of ethics couched in evolutionary science. But the utopian impulse of her religion is ultimately the exclusion of difference. In her attempt to rewrite religion, couched in evolutionary science, Butler places genetics at the heart of human social change, as
the prophet and initiator of the new religion possesses a genetic disposition that is the primary basis of her ethical outlook. I examine Calvin’s ideas of predestination and human bondage to sin in order to show how Butler critiques divine determinism by reinterpreting the American Puritan dream of divinely ordained utopia, supplanting it with a biologically determined utopia. I also address literary critic Mhadu Dubey’s claims that Butler’s two *Parable* novels are part of an emerging African-American postmodern canon, which is important, as it reflects the trend in criticism to view Butler’s writing in terms of cyborg identity politics that was initiated by Donna Haraway. I disagree with characterizing Butler as postmodern precisely because of her reliance on genetics and eugenics as utopian tools. Genetics emerges as the ultimate metanarrative across almost all of her fiction after 1980. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, Butler’s focus on genetic improvement completely invalidates reading her writing as postmodern, particularly if postmodernism is characterized by its general incredulity towards the metanarratives of modernity. By drawing attention to Butler’s persistent genetic determinism as well as demonstrating that metanarratives, such as scientific progress, remain completely unchallenged in these works, I argue that Butler’s fiction is more concerned with utopian eugenic goals of creating biological uniformity to transcend problems arising from racial, gender and religious difference.

My analysis then shifts to Butler’s depiction of pandemic illness, resulting in the genetic change of humanity in *Clay’s Ark* (1984). Butler’s depiction of pandemic disease as ushering in new pathways of evolution reveal that her conceptions of eugenic utopianism are not limited to positive eugenic practices of selective breeding. Here, Butler expresses belief in the utopian potential of eugenics and the eradication of physical difference as the means of transcending social problems stemming from difference. Her desire to see humanity affected at the genetic level by enforcing a new branch of evolution is even more strongly represented than in her previous works. By linking utopia with pandemic disease, Butler reiterates an apocalyptic tradition that views pandemic pestilence in terms of the necessary scourging of humanity. In this sense, disease emerges as an evolutionary and genetic winnowing of humanity. The crucial feature of the link between eugenics and apocalyptic thought again resides in the eradication of biological difference as a means of achieving racial utopia. This chapter analyzes articles by literary critic Sheryl Vint, as she is one of the very few
critics to write about *Clay’s Ark*. Vint argues that the novel depicts the blurring of the boundary between humans and animals and is thus an exploration of humanity’s shared kinship with animals. However, rather than representing affiliation across lines of species, Butler’s novel reflects the desire to overcome problems arising from perceived biological difference by eliminating its visibility. In *Clay’s Ark*, as in most of Butler’s fiction, utopia comes to be reliant upon racial uniformity.

Butler’s insistence on racial uniformity as the necessary condition for utopia is most acutely depicted in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. In this series, the desire to eradicate otherness is realized through genetically engineered miscegenation. I show that Butler uses miscegenation as a technology for eliminating biological difference, which has striking similarities with the eugenic fiction of Pauline Hopkins written over eighty years earlier. The disturbing feature of Butler’s use of genetic engineering in the series is her introduction of inter-species reproduction as a means to eradicate difference between two disparate species. This focus on eradicating physical difference through miscegenation emerges as one of the key points of Butler’s fiction, as it reveals her ultimate belief in eugenic utopia and genetic engineering as the cure for social problems.

I then examine how this desire to eradicate otherness manifests in terms of allegories of species in Butler’s novel *Fledgling* (2005). By looking at the ways in which Butler uses miscegenation and the historical myth of the vampire, I show how Butler uses mythic figures as allegories for racial difference. In this context, Butler presents miscegenation as the means through which racial utopia is achieved by the eradication of physical markers of difference.
Chapter 1: Eugenics and Reproduction in *Wild Seed*

This chapter is concerned with Butler’s representations of eugenics in her novel *Wild Seed* (1980). At this early stage in Butler’s literary career she exhibits an ambivalent approach to eugenics. In the novel, Butler uses the clash between eugenic utilitarianism and Christian-based human rights ethics to dramatize her unease at allowing human evolution to be directed by a singular entity or force. I analyze how Butler engages with myths of origin, particularly with the Greek myth of Prometheus and Judeo-Christian genesis. In doing so, I show that Butler expresses a desire to see human evolutionary advancement through eugenics, but is also apprehensive about the potential loss of individual autonomy that this could precipitate. I examine the eugenic discourses of Francis Galton in Britain to show the initial social conditions in which eugenics emerged as a scientific concept. I then focus more specifically on the eugenic ideas of Charles Davenport. Davenport was the most high profile eugenicist in early twentieth-century America, and I examine his ideas about the inheritability of emotional states in order to show how Butler’s depictions of eugenics coincide with his theories of selective breeding for racial advancement. At this formative time in her writing, Butler expresses the desire to alter human biology and with it human identity through eugenic intervention. However, Butler’s main protagonist continually challenges the validity of eugenic pursuits by stressing how systemic hardline eugenics impinges on individual rights. In doing so, she puts forward a view that a Judeo-Christian ethical approach to the sanctity of human life is necessary in providing a moral voice to counter the potentially oppressive aspects of eugenics and patriarchal science.

*Wild Seed* narrates the story of Doro and Anyanwu, two immortal demigods who struggle to deal with one another throughout an alternative history of the middle passage from Africa to America. Doro, almost four-thousand years old, is a parasitic being who inhabits the bodies of men and women. He is a kind of spirit, a witch, who collects those people who, like him, display signs of witchcraft. Doro is drawn to Anyanwu, who he finds in an Igbo (Nigerian) village in the guise of an old priestess. As he expresses to Anyanwu, ‘Awareness of you has pulled me a
great distance out of my way.¹ He continues, ‘People as different as you attract me somehow, call me, even over great distances.’² Doro discovers that Anyanwu is ‘wild seed’ and instantly recognizes her potential to assist him in his eugenic breeding program, which through the course of nearly four millennia has become his primary obsession. Through the course of the novel, Doro jealously tries to tame and possess Anyanwu: ‘He had to have the woman. She was wild seed of the best kind. She would strengthen any line he bred into her, strengthen it immeasurably.’³ Doro’s attempt to control Anyanwu results in a multi-generational power struggle, with the two immortals locked in a combat of morality. Anyanwu struggles for autonomy for herself and her children, while Doro dogmatically pursues his eugenic aims, often forcing Anyanwu into behaviors that disgust her sense of moral propriety. *Wild Seed* is a complex and rich narrative that explores two very different moral codes, each embodied in the figures of Doro and Anyanwu. Each character represents a web of moral behaviors that can best be characterized as consequentialist social Darwinist ethics (Doro) and Christian ethics (Anyanwu). By viewing each main character as a representation of an ethical model, Butler shows how Christian morals are crucial in providing ethical checks on the eugenic aspirations of emerging science and technology.

More than any of Butler’s texts, *Wild Seed* explores the tension between Christian moral standpoints and eugenic evolutionary aims. Through the character Doro, Butler depicts both negative and positive eugenics as he strives to create a master race of ‘witches’ who exhibit ‘special’ talents. Doro challenges Anyanwu’s ideas of the sanctity of intelligent life: her Christian morals are questioned by his evolutionary ethics. By using eugenics to interrogate ethical concerns regarding race and gender ideologies, Butler engages with the debate concerning the extent to which human behavior is biologically determined as opposed to socially constructed. While on the surface, this debate is not as pronounced as it becomes in her later work, the *Xenogeneis* trilogy (see Chapter 4), a closer reading of the eugenic politics of *Wild Seed* reveals Butler’s deep fascination with biological determinism, represented by

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² *ibid.*, p.7.
³ *ibid.*, p.22.
her characters’ quest to control and direct human reproduction and its subsequent evolution.

The critical literature rarely refers to *Wild Seed*, which is an oversight given that the novel in many ways serves as a didactic allusion to the atrocities to which eugenics could lead. Therefore, in this chapter I analyze *Wild Seed*’s eugenic imagery, with reference to the historical British and American eugenic ideologies that embraced the ideas of racial purity using positive and negative eugenics, as outlined by Sir Francis Galton and Charles B. Davenport. Specifically, I will compare Doro’s ideas of selective breeding for the inheritance of mental abilities with Davenport’s ideas of the inheritance of particular moral and intellectual traits in order to demonstrate how mainline eugenic thinking persists in popular culture and continues to be a dominant factor in influencing perceptions about inheritance in late twentieth and twenty first-century America.

What emerges from Butler’s depictions of eugenics is a challenge to Christian morality and stories of human origins. All of her novels present eugenics, genetic engineering, and genetic determinism as alternative ways of addressing human (and non-human) origins in direct opposition to the Christian story. Butler is preoccupied with narrating stories of origins and showing how new human variation is created and controlled by individual characters. Doro’s ideas in *Wild Seed* are strikingly similar to Charles Davenport’s regarding the inheritance of mental abilities. Doro and Davenport both express the idea that intellectual traits such as the propensity to higher learning, psychic ability, sensitivity, and even loyalty, are entirely contingent on inheritance and can therefore be strengthened by selective breeding. It is my contention that Doro’s ruthless employment of eugenic ideas should be read as the embodiment of social Darwinist, patriarchal science that characterized eugenic ideology in early twentieth-century America. Butler’s depiction of eugenics as conducted by such a totally ruthless, unfeeling being reveals her ideas that human nature needs drastic intervention, but at this stage in her career she can’t conceive of eugenic change without unacceptable breaches of human rights. Consequently, the character Anyanwu serves as Doro’s counterpoint; she embodies ‘feminine nature’ as an archetypal mother, healer and priestess to her people. She is also the object, the ‘wild seed’, over which Doro seeks total mastery. While Anyanwu’s gender roles are
fluid and involve interesting bodily transgressions, her morality in regards to marriage, reproduction, and life and death, is entrenched in the Judeo-Christian tradition that views human life as having inherent value beyond reproductive outcomes. Conversely, Doro is only concerned with eugenics and breeding in his quest to create a master race of ‘witches’ who treat him as a deity. This oppositional relationship between Doro and Anyanwu can be read as the struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy, as both immortal beings establish family structures that typify these dichotomous hierarchies. However, more than superficially representing a clash between masculine and feminine archetypes, Doro and Anyanwu embody the contestation of Christianity and evolutionary theory. I do not mean that Anyanwu simply stands for Christian morality. Rather, she typifies the Judeo-Christian moral standpoint that views human life as inherently sacred, a position that Doro actively defies.

Butler creates dramatic tension in her novels by challenging entrenched Christian moral beliefs and instead focuses on evolutionary outcomes. Teri Anne Doerksen has argued that Butler explores difference by using allegory and that she reflects contemporary anxieties - particularly with regard to gender, race, and science and technology - by transposing them on to fictional landscapes. Butler does not always suggest that new moral codes are superior, and both Anyanwu and Doro embody contradictions that undermine the cohesiveness of their respective moral codes. Wild Seed, more than any of her other works, warns against unfettered eugenics. The novel also serves as an interrogation of Christian approaches to the sanctity of human life. As with most of Butler’s writing, divine determinism is replaced by biological determinism, which reveals Butler’s focus on the ethics of deterministic logic. Butler shows that genetic advancement, while necessary for positive evolution, could also usher in a new age of racial slavery and abuses of individual rights and freedoms.

Christian morality, while always challenged by Butler’s focus on evolution and

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4 For example, In the Xenogenesis trilogy moral beliefs against incest are challenged by the Oankali who’s sexual relationship typically exists between brother and sister to ensure the best genetic combination. In the Parable series, Lauren challenges Christianity by creating a religion based on evolutionary science. In Fledgling, the main protagonist – Shori, a young vampire – challenges the racist establishment of vampire culture, as she is genetically modified to have dark skin in order to withstand sunlight.

eugenics, remains a powerful theme from which she cannot turn away at this stage of her career.

*Wild Seed* dramatizes power relations, particularly gender relations between Doro and Anyanwu. Sandra Y. Govan has noted that in each of Butler’s novels, ‘the implicit struggle for power revolves around explicit conflicts of will and the contests of survival a heroine endures.’\(^6\) Govan contends that power struggles in Butler’s novels are always about gender relations, which are characterized by the female protagonist’s ability to survive violent patriarchy. In *Wild Seed*, these contests for survival revolve around Doro’s eugenic program. It is through his attempt to create his own master race by selectively breeding valuable ‘seed’ that Butler represents this power struggle between the sexes. Nowhere else does Butler display this desire to manipulate human evolution through selective breeding so comprehensively. From the outset of the novel, Doro’s attitude towards people, which is indicated by the title, is to view them entirely in terms of their reproductive value, or as he describes, their ‘seed.’ *Wild Seed*’s depictions of the struggles that arise from Doro’s selective breeding produce fascinating ethical debates that deal with the goals of the community pitted against the rights of individuals. This debate can best be characterized as the clash between consequentialism and human rights ethics. While power relationships are dominant concerns in the text, the ‘contests for survival’\(^8\) characterized by Govan can be defined more accurately as battles between the ethics of manipulating human evolution and the value of individuals beyond their reproductive potential. As I demonstrate, contests of power in *Wild Seed* are about moral revision, achieved by pitting two opposing moral ideas against each other.

**Myths of Origin: Prometheus**

*Wild Seed* is a myth of origin for an alternative branch of human evolution. In this respect, Doro is an echo of the Promethean myth. Both Doro and Prometheus attempt to imbue humanity with gifts that go beyond what nature intended. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the Prometheus story explains the human condition and how the separation

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\(^7\) Butler. 1980, p.13.

\(^8\) Govan. 1984, p.83.
of Gods and men was actualized. Hesiod narrates, ‘Prometheus, Iapetus’s brave son, thoroughly fooled him, for he stole inexhaustible fire.’ The story continues that this ‘offended profoundly the mind of Zeus, who thunders aloft, and his fond heart grew very angry seeing the twinkle of fire afar among men, who are mortal.’ Hesiod here implies that Zeus’s offence at Prometheus’s actions lies in humanity obtaining an element that was reserved for the gods, thereby blurring the boundary between humans and deities. Furthermore, as Estelle Strazdins suggests, fire in the Prometheus myth serves as ‘an element which is symbolic of technological wisdom and which possesses the ability to transform.’ The transformative power of fire is thus symptomatic of Hesiod’s anxiety that trying to manipulate the trajectory of human development has unforeseen consequences. Prometheus inadvertently creates hardship for himself as Zeus bound devious, wily Prometheus in terrible bonds and he skewered his middle. Furthermore, on him he set a long-pinioned eagle to eat his immortal liver, which grew overnight just as much as that bird with tapering wings had eaten during the whole day preceding.

Prometheus’s attempts to alter human development and humble Zeus through trickery leads to the creation of Pandora who is endowed with all the deceit the immortal Olympians could muster. Hesiod’s misogyny is virulent as he describes the invention of women: ‘Wonderment seized the immortal gods and men who are mortal

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9 The myth affirms why bones are sacrificed to the Gods, and the origin of fire, which are linked in a chain of events that leads inexorably towards a lifetime of toil and trouble for mankind.’ Dougherty, Carol. Prometheus. Routledge: London, 2006, p.37. For Hesiod, the Prometheus myth serves as an integral part of the cosmology that validates his own pessimistic view of human existence as unrelenting bucolic hardship. Prometheus undertakes a battle of wits with Zeus on behalf of men, as he tricks the Olympian deity into choosing the bones of a slaughtered ox instead of the meat by covering them with a layer of fat. Zeus subsequently withholds fire from humanity as a punishment.


11 ibid, p.73.


13 ibid, p.71.

when they beheld such a sheer deception and hardship for mankind.¹⁵ Thus ‘did Zeus create women, bad for mankind, in cahoots in all manner of tiresome mischief.’¹⁶ The Prometheus myth reflects an anxiety about the unforeseen consequences of attempting to manipulate human development and evolution. This perturbation is also present in Butler’s work, which deals with the moral implications of Doro’s eugenic tampering. Just as Hesiod reflects anxiety concerning Prometheus’s contestation of the will of the gods, Butler’s character Doro analogously challenges the natural order by changing the direction of human evolution. The reason Butler’s fiction alludes to Greek myths is her focus on originary discourse. Butler’s obsessive focus on new pathways of evolution means that her writing should be read as narratives of evolutionary genesis. Both biblical and classical allusions permeate her texts, all of which try to imagine human behavior as taking an evolutionary leap, culminating in the birth of a new, superior species. Part of the success of Wild Seed is the familiarity caused by her allusions to classical mythology.

The Prometheus story has come to symbolize humanity’s evolution into something that was unexpected. Prometheus is the catalyst and agent of this change. Eugenics and its focus on evolutionary transformation is inseparably linked to the Promethean narrative. As Michael Rose has postulated, eugenics stands as an example of Promethean Darwinism. He asserts that, ‘If evolution is indeed the key force that makes us, that defines us, or that limits us, then the Promethean mission can be recast as the effort to control the direction of evolution.’¹⁷ In short, if evolution is the guiding force of life on Earth, then the new Promethean mission for humanity becomes eugenics. Doro is a Promethean figure in a number of important ways. His eugenic program of selective breeding to create his own master race of witches exemplifies Promethean Darwinism. Doro manipulates human evolution through positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Furthermore, Doro’s own existence reflects that of Prometheus. His position as a kind of intermediary between humanity and god, his continual death and rebirth, and his eventual absolution all echo the myth of Prometheus. By presenting a new Promethean myth Butler also rejects the explicit

¹⁵Hesiod. ‘Theogony.’ 2005, p.73.
¹⁶ibid, pp.74.
misogyny that is so prominent in many myths of origin. She focuses on Doro as the Promethean master manipulator who seeks to dominate Anyanwu, but she always shows both of their perspectives in a way that Hesiod certainly does not. In providing the female perspective, Butler disrupts the masculinist focus of Christian and Greek myths of origin in an attempt to fictionalize a species genesis that aims to overturn the patriarchal dominance of its originary discourse.

Butler invites us to read Doro as a Promethean figure. Doing so reveals that her novel ultimately presents debates about the ethics involved in life and death. Doro resembles Prometheus in more ways than simply mirroring the Titan’s attempt to change the course of humanity. Butler reinterprets the Promethean project in order to examine the difference between evolutionary and Christian ethics. Doro’s existence echoes Prometheus’s curse to be perpetually tortured by the eagle that consumes his liver each day. Both Prometheus and Doro straddle two worlds, where they are neither part of the pantheon of recognized deities, nor part of the humanity they help to shape. Doro’s immortality lies in his ability to ‘take’ people. Doro reveals this power to Anyanwu upon their first meeting: ‘I kill, Anyanwu. That is how I keep my youth, my strength. I can do only one thing to show you what I am, and that is to kill a man and wear his body like a cloth.’

Doro goes on to describe how he has ‘worn’ millions of bodies, to which Anyanwu responds by calling him ‘ogbanje, an evil spirit child born to one woman again and again, only to die and give the mother pain.’ Butler refers here to a Nigerian (Igbo) myth, which not only shows her awareness of African folklore, but also represents both Doro and Anyanwu as textual figures of African Diaspora. Doro and Anyanwu’s immortality allows them to remember their Nigerian and Egyptian heritages and strengthens their feelings of displacement when they journey to America, which serves as a textual representative of modernity, in contrast to the timeless landscapes of mythic Egypt and Africa. Here, Butler alludes to the racial melting pot of settlement in America, but she does so in order to create an alternative history of slavery, one that refocuses the slave narrative to contextualize it in the biological discussions of genetic advancement of the late twentieth century. Nonetheless, Doro dismisses Anyanwu’s label of ‘ogbanje’ owing to his creative project of ‘race’ building, which places him at odds with the

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19 ibid, p.12.
characterization of the socially unsettling ogbanje spirit. In his role as race builder, Doro is more like Prometheus than the torturous ogbanje. Doro’s position as the manipulator of human evolution and his deathlessness make him, like Prometheus, perpetually outside the realms of humanity and the gods. Doro expresses this isolation after musing on the killing of some of his people who have become too arrogant to be controlled: ‘He never kept these bodies long…At these times more than any others, he felt again utterly alone, forever alone, longing to die and be finished. What was he, he wondered, that he could have anything at all but an end?’

This pathos illuminates Doro’s wish to be a part of the humanity that he creates. Just like Prometheus, he is trapped in a perpetual cycle of immortality that draws agonizingly close to death but refuses the finality of actually ending.

While Doro goes through a process of disembodiment that Prometheus obviously does not, both beings are trapped halfway between death and life. Prometheus is visited by the eagle, which symbolizes death at the hands of a predator. The eagle only devours his ‘Immortal liver, which grew overnight just as much as the bird with tapering wings had eaten during the whole day preceding.’ In a similar fashion, Doro’s life force cannot be contained long by human form and he quickly uses up the bodies he inhabits, having to ‘jump’ to the next body. While this characteristic of Doro’s existence affords him near omnipotent power, as he cannot be killed, it also traps him in a state of perpetual separation from humanity. Anyanwu, whose power resides completely within her body, struggles to understand this. She asks, ‘Will I see, someday, what you are like when you are not hiding in another man’s skin?’ Doro replies by saying, ‘Pray to your gods that you never do, Anyanwu. Let me be a man, be content with me as a man.’ Doro needs to maintain the illusion of his humanity in order to maintain contact with his people. Just as Prometheus cannot escape the inevitable visit from the eagle, so too Doro can never escape the death of the body that he wears. Both mythological figures go through a kind of death and rebirth, while their consciousness continues, demonstrating Butler’s tendency to reaffirm the Cartesian split of mind and body as two separate entities. Towards the end of the novel Doro gives Anyanwu a ‘gift’ by coming to her wearing the body of a

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20 ibid, p.179.
man he knows she will be attracted to. Anyanwu begs Doro to stay in this body, but despite his enjoyment of her attraction, Doro laments:

Nothing had changed. She would not want him near her for a while after he had changed. She would still refuse to understand that whether he killed out of need, accident, or choice, he had to kill. There was no way for him to avoid it. An ordinary human might be able to starve himself to death, but Doro could not.  

Here Doro, in a rare moment of self-reflection, understands that Anyanwu can never really accept the nature of his being. He is a killer. He can never transcend his need to kill, which highlights Doro’s equation with evolution and nature. His identity, while providing him with immortality, locks him into a system of being that cannot be transcended by any kind of intellectual action or decision of his own continuation. Doro, in contrast to humanity and Anyanwu, cannot control his mortality and thus loses a level of agency. He is never accountable for his own life as a finite being. He is completely trapped by his own nature, which places him at odds with Anyanwu’s view of the intrinsic value of all human life. Like Prometheus trapped in Olympian bonds on Mt. Caucasus, Doro is a prisoner of his own imperishability.

The purpose of creating a Promethean character who is trapped in a vicious cycle of necessary killing is to draw attention to the fact that Doro, who attempts to ‘build’ a race, is a highly destructive and parasitic force. This juxtaposition of Doro’s desire to create and his nature as a parasite may reveal his guilt at the amount of death that his existence inflicts upon his people. He cannot break free of his mode of being: he is no more responsible for his existence as killer than Anyanwu is for her healing ability. Butler presents this characterization in order to show how Doro is both Promethean master and yet a victim of evolution. Doro embodies what bioethicist Ted Peters has described as genetic determinism’s split nature: puppet determinism, which ‘presumes we are victims of our genes [and] Promethean determinism, which presumes we can take charge of our genes.’  

Doro embodies both puppet and Promethean determinism in that he is both a victim of his strange genetics as well as the master eugenic manipulator. As such, he symbolizes ideas and anxieties about biological science, as the faith in genes as the ultimate determinant in human

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23 ibid, p.264-265.
behavior leads inevitably to eugenic ideology. As Ann Ward has stipulated, ‘Even where strong positive claims are not made for genetic determinism, proponents have begun to assert that neo-Darwinism has superseded and even invalidated previously dominant traditions within value theory such as liberalism, Marxism, and Christian humanism.’25 The trend in philosophy for biological explanations taking precedence over social explanations, as described by Ward, occurs later than Wild Seed’s publication. Butler recognized that the social Darwinist ideologies that were so visible in the eugenics of the early twentieth century were never really dispensed with. Rather, such eugenically inspired views remained a popular undercurrent in explaining human behavior and are now being redeployed as increased understanding of human genetics brings further scope for Promethean Darwinism.

Myths of Origin: Christian Genesis

Butler’s use of myths in Wild Seed engages the reader in moral debates with regards to life, death and existence. Gregory Jerome Hampton has suggested that Wild Seed ‘can be understood as the retelling of the biblical story of Genesis…’26 I agree that the novel combines Judeo-Christian and Greek mythological origin stories that fictionalize the birth of a new form of humanity. However, Hampton has perhaps confused the symbolism of the two main protagonists. Hampton posits that the motifs of Genesis permeate the novel on a multitude of levels, asserting that ‘As Adam and Eve, Anyanwu [her name literally means ‘Sun’] the sun rises from the Doro, the East.’27 Hampton continues, ‘The two are destined from the beginning to create a new world. As a serial body possessor, Doro (The Serpent) takes on the guise of the seducer that leads Eve/Anyanwu away from the path of the straight and narrow, into sin.’28 Hampton’s analysis suggests that Anyanwu is enticed, more aptly tricked, into forsaking her African homeland and is forced by Doro to undertake the middle passage to America. Just as the serpent enticed Eve away from the word of God, so too does Doro entice Anyanwu away from her home, which also illuminates

27 ibid, p.44.
28 ibid, p.44.
how Anyanwu and Doro’s relationship can be seen in terms of an allegory for slavery. Hampton explores how Butler uses mythology, the rich symbols of biblical allusion and the historical narrative of the African Diaspora, to create her own myths of origin. Notwithstanding Butler’s use of Biblical typology, in contrast to Hampton I contend that Anyanwu represents a Christian ethical position with Doro representing the pervasive insidious ethic of Social Darwinism. This is primarily because Doro views human life as only having value in relation to the presence of inheritable traits, as opposed to Anyanwu who not only cherishes each individual life as inherently sacred, but also questions Doro’s assumptions that behaviors are so biologically determined. Doro, owing to his likeness to Prometheus, continues what moral philosopher Barry J. Richardson calls Christianity’s ‘mixed Hebrew and Greek heritages.’

Doro’s disembodied nature participates in the quest for spiritual meaning, as opposed to material identity. Richardson continues, ‘The denial of the value of the material world that we saw so permeating Greek thought, has left its mark on us: we are not comfortable with being material creatures, we search for what we believe are more valuable ‘spiritual’ qualities.’ Doro’s lack of materiality and his goal of eugenically engineering people with psionic powers reflects a Christian obsession with ‘valuable spiritual qualities.’ However, reading Doro and Anyanwu as Adam and Eve is a misleading analogy as it glosses over the moral clashes that occur throughout the novel. The power relations between Anyanwu and Doro are best understood as a clash of moral codes. By analyzing the text through this lens, Butler’s own approaches to the intrinsic value of human life are revealed. Thus, the power struggles of the novel are really about moral revision achieved through oppositional ethical debate between utilitarian eugenics and human rights ethics that see every human life as sacred.

Butler’s fiction often deals with Christian ethics by challenging the authority of Christian ideology. Sarah Wood avers that, ‘Although Butler’s fiction interrogates the authority of Christianity, it nonetheless acknowledges the affirming role that this religion has played in the lives of Black Americans from slavery to the present day.’

In her attempts to grapple with the philosophical meaning of what it is to be ‘human’,

30 ibid, p.97.
31 Wood, Sarah. ‘Subversion through inclusion: Octavia Butler’s interrogation of religion in Xenogenesis and Wild Seed.’ Femspec. vol.6, issue 1, 2005, p.87.
Butler invariably returns to Christian imagery and ethics as the counterpoints to her representations of eugenic evolution. Wood argues that Doro represents patriarchal Christianity, which is constantly trying to dominate and force the submission of Anyanwu’s African-American female identity. For Wood, this reveals the ‘complex relationship that African-Americans, yet especially Black womanhood, must maintain towards the Christian religion.’\footnote{ibid, p.90.} Doro’s sense of his own divinity is certainly supported by passages in the novel where he considers his power over all others he has encountered: ‘Her [Anyanwu’s] thinking would change as had the thinking of other powerful, self-willed people whom Doro had recruited. She would learn that right and wrong were what he said they were.’\footnote{Butler. 1980, p.92.} Doro’s sense of divine authority exists because of his apparently totalitarian control of morality revealed by his statement that right and wrong are solely his to define.

However, Doro’s divinity is representative of the excesses of eugenic ‘science.’ Wood sees Doro’s divinity as relying on his ‘ability to control the genesis of his people.’\footnote{Wood. 2005, p.92} She further comments, ‘Doro’s callous manipulation of his followers results in their relegation to human fodder for his experimentation.’ As such, ‘Doro suggests a god cruel, indifferent, and manipulative of his people, a god reminiscent of the book of Job.’\footnote{ibid, p.92.} Wood views Doro as the vengeful, manipulative God of the Old Testament because he creates a race of humans and takes an active role in punishing and rewarding their behavior towards him and one another. This is an interesting interpretation, but one that it is not entirely appropriate. In contrast to the Judeo-Christian god, Doro is described as a mutation of nature, rather than its supreme inventor and controller. In this respect, Doro is reflective of the liminal Promethean deity who is produced by nature, but undertakes the very human attempt at mastery over nature. Rather than representing God in a Judeo-Christian sense, Doro’s status as a genetic mutation, coupled with his attempts to control and bend human nature to create more people with his own genetic oddity, is reflective of eugenicists’ (including both Galton’s and Davenport’s) attempts to immortalize the class, gender and racial ideals of the technically trained middle class. All of Doro’s ‘witches’ go through a ‘transition’ where their psionic abilities mature, or they are killed in the
process. Doro was the first person to experience this inevitability of ‘special’ genetics:

He was thirteen when the full agony of transition hit him. He knew now that that was too young. He had never known one of his witches to live when transition came that early. He had not lived himself. But unlike anyone he had managed to breed so far, he had not quite died either. His body had died, and for the first time, he had transferred to the living human body nearest him. This was the body of his mother in whose lap his head had rested.  

Doro’s death and subsequent usurpation of his mother’s body can be seen as invoking Christ’s death and resurrection in a symbolic sense, as Doro’s transition from human to god mirrors Jesus’ own analogous transformation from human life to divinity. However, unlike the entirely embodied nature of Jesus whose physical resurrection is the cornerstone of Christian faith, Doro’s transition to deity is completely disembodied. Doro’s metamorphosis thus marks his initiation as a force both of nature and produced by nature. In contrast to Christian beliefs, Doro is only able to exert mastery over nature because of his rare genetic mutation, which shows his divinity is really a result of natural selection. In this sense, Doro, far from being constructed as a metaphor for Christian divinity, actually appears as a result of evolution through mutation, a fictional embodiment of Darwin’s idea of species change through biological ‘variation.’ His attempts to control the biological variation that brought about his own special existence by manipulating breeding to create more people like him means that Doro is a metaphor for the manipulation of human evolution through eugenics and can be seen as social Darwinism out of control. Doro is the new Prometheus for the genetic age.

**Eugenic Consequentialism and the Necessity for Christian Ethics**

Reading Doro as a textual representative for social Darwinist science reveals Butler’s critique of eugenics as a set of ethics that ignores the importance of individual rights and the sanctity of human life. Through the course of four thousand years, Doro becomes increasingly dehumanized as his breeding programs begin to take on

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36 Butler. 1980, p.177.
scientific dispassion. As Isaac, Doro’s favorite and most gifted son, relates to Anyanwu, ‘compared to what the rest of us feel when we love or hate or envy… I don’t think he feels very much. I don’t think he can. I’m afraid the time will come when he won’t feel anything. If it does – there’s no end to the harm he could do.’

Here Isaac alludes to the fact that without an ethical voice that questions Doro’s eugenic aspirations and the way he uses people, any residual ties to his own humanity are in jeopardy. Isaac implies that Anyanwu is the moral voice that Doro requires to hold on to his humanity. He pleads with her, ‘You could stay with him and keep him at least as human as he is now…I’ll die like all the others, but you won’t – or, at least you needn’t.’ Here, Isaac suggests that Anyanwu’s immortality is the very essence of her ability to keep Doro’s eugenics in check. Unlike the other humans Doro has encountered over his impossibly long existence, she is the only one who is not temporary. In this respect, Anyanwu alone has the ability to enforce on Doro some kind of morality that exists outside his own constructed eugenic program. Her difference from him is the crucial element in preventing his desire for self-reproduction from utterly destroying his ties to the human world.

Anyanwu’s difference from Doro is most evident in her attitude towards her children. Doro is able to manipulate Anyanwu precisely because of her continuing devotion to protecting her children. Towards the end of the novel, when Doro succeeds in finding Anyanwu after one hundred years of searching, he again uses her children as leverage to force her into submission. Doro states, ‘Sun Woman, either you will accept my people [to breed with hers]…or you will come with me, taking mates where and when I command, or you will give me your children.’ Doro’s demands illuminate his attempt to control Anyanwu’s reproductive ability, which bears a striking similarity to eugenic ideology’s attitude towards the female body. Butler is ambivalent towards such control. She expresses horror and hopelessness at the oppressive nature of selective breeding. At the same time, she expresses pessimism towards human behavior, which she presents as needing drastic genetic alteration to overcome its violent and barbaric tendencies. Indeed, Butler’s depiction of the battle to control Anyanwu’s reproductive abilities can be seen as commenting on the

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38 Butler. 1980, pp.128-129.
39 bid, p.129.
continuation of attempts by the state to control reproduction that persisted despite the apparent rejection of eugenics after World War II. As eugenic historians Chloe S. Burke and Christopher J. Castañeda have insisted, ‘after the end of the formal eugenics movement, coercive sterilization of poor women and women of color continued through the 1970s.’ Butler’s focus on the eugenic appropriation and control of women (particularly women of color) engages with historical events in the United States. Doro and Anyanwu’s relationship serves as an allegory of this eugenic control of the African-American female body by patriarchal medical science. Butler’s preoccupation with eugenics has an historical context that is of particular relevance to women of color. Through Doro’s attempts to completely control Anyanwu’s reproductive life, Butler alerts the reader to the atrocious and suppressed aspect of American history wherein women’s reproductive rights continued to be breached by medical practitioners.

While science fiction may seem like a counterintuitive genre with which to speak to African-American readers, by using its speculative qualities to express ethical critiques of eugenic ideology, Butler extends her ethical debates to a wide audience. She said in an interview in 2004, ‘I knew I had at least three audiences’; her fiction has relevance to science fiction fans, feminists and those interested in African-American history. Consequently, Butler’s appeal to a wide readership becomes a useful political strategy for critiquing both American eugenic history and current eugenic aspirations. Anyanwu acquiesces to Doro’s wishes to save her own life but also to save her children from becoming ‘mares and studs,’ completely dehumanized by Doro’s eugenic selective breeding. Her fear of the dehumanization of her children at the hands of Doro reflects her view that all human life is sacred and has intrinsic value beyond his uses for them. Doro and Anyanwu are embodiments of the competing views of utilitarian eugenic aims and Christian human rights-based ethical approaches to the value of human life.

The concept of human life having inherent value regardless of its utility is a

43 Butler. 1980, p.213.
fundamental element of Christian ethics. Stanley Rudman suggests that, despite differing denominational approaches to human rights among Christians, there exists a ‘real convergence among all shades of Christian opinion about the source of human dignity, namely in man’s creation in the image and likeness of God.’ While all denominations of Christianity appear to be able to reach a consensus on humanity’s universal importance, evolutionary ethics, particularly social Darwinist rhetoric evident in much eugenic thought, openly challenges the assumption of universal worth. For Christian ethics human existence is sacred because of its resemblance to the God that created life. On the other hand, the evolutionary ethics promoted by eugenics, claim that the individual is subordinate to the good of the species. Christian ethics assumes that, regardless of any agreed social value, every human being is born with the same value as any other. In contrast to Doro, who creates a hierarchy of values based on reproduction of ‘special’ inherited qualities, Anyanwu is described as loving all her generations of children: ‘She cared about each of her children, raised each one she bore, and loved it.’ In her approach to motherhood, Anyanwu reveals that her outlook is similar to a Christian ethical position that sees the importance of every human life beyond any perceived social value or evolutionary goal. What Butler achieves here is to pit motherhood against science. Anyanwu’s relationship to Doro blurs the boundary between consent and coercion, which again invokes the relationship between motherhood and science in the eugenics that was still being practiced in the 1970s. Rebecca Kluchin has revealed that,

After the development of federal family planning, physicians recorded coercive sterilizations as voluntary, sometimes eliciting women’s signed consent days after surgery, sometimes never securing it at all, other times obtaining verbal consents, or obtaining verbal or written consents, or both, when patients were under the influence of medication or under duress, most commonly during childbirth.

This seizing of female reproduction illustrates how patriarchal science has often sought to deny women control of their own bodies. The complete breaches of autonomy, as outlined by Kluchin, represent the lengths to which eugenicists were

45 Butler. 1980, p.213.
willing to go in the name of so-called human improvement. Doro’s attempts to control Anyanwu can be seen in a similar vein. His insistence that she submit herself and her children to his eugenic goals reflects the persistence of eugenic ideology in American thought as late as the 1970s. By alerting readers to the continuance of coercive and oppressive characteristics of eugenic ideology Butler stresses that evolutionary ethics, while necessary, must be tempered by ethics that take into account the value of individual lives. In contrast to the varied practical applications of historical eugenics, evolutionary betterment must not be achieved at the expense of human rights.

Conversely, Doro’s view of his ‘children’ demonstrates a eugenic perspective that only sees people’s significance in terms of their reproductive potential. Butler writes, ‘Doro looked at people, healthy or ill, and wondered what kind of young they could produce. Anyanwu looked at the sick…and wondered whether she could defeat their disease.’

Doro’s view of his children shows remarkable similarities with sentiments expressed by Francis Galton, the man who initially coined the term ‘eugenics.’ Galton contended that,

\[\text{We may not be able to originate, but we can guide. The processes of evolution are in constant and spontaneous activity, some towards the bad, some towards the good. Our part is to watch for opportunities to intervene by checking the former and giving free play to the latter.}\]

For Galton, it was not enough to allow nature to select on its own: evolution was to be actively guided by humanity. In a similar fashion, for Doro the evolutionary process is far too slow and requires his constant, vigilant eye to make sure ‘free play’ is given to desired outcomes, while undesirable outcomes are kept in check. This sense of gaining mastery over the natural world by encouraging the processes of evolution through natural selection imbues eugenic ideology, and Doro, with a kind of religiosity. The scientist is elevated to moral, ethical and genetic crusader for the further development of the human species. Just like Doro, the eugenicist becomes a figure of god-like mastery over the processes of evolution. In this sense, Doro’s clear manipulation of people, and his attitude towards human life as having value that is

\[\text{47 Butler. 1980, p.160.}\]
contingent upon the presence of an exclusive list of desirable character traits, means that Doro emerges as an embodiment of patriarchal science rather than patriarchal Christianity.

**Divinity and Science: Eugenics and the Slippery Slope to Individual Excess**

Doro’s apparent divinity does not weaken his position as the embodiment of Social Darwinist, patriarchal science. The combination of scientific epistemology coupled with religion is similar to Galton’s concepts of eugenics and shows how Butler sees both science and religion as sometimes relying on belief rather than evidence alone. As Galton imagined it, eugenic ideology was intended to combine scientific epistemology with religious fervor in order to provide people with material and spiritual nourishment. Indeed, ‘it was the dream of Galton that eugenics should not forever remain academic but that, being the vital concern of us all, it should become a sort of religion.’ For Galton, eugenics had strong claims to become an orthodox religious tenet of the future, for eugenics co-operate with the working of nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly.

Here, Galton links his concept of eugenics with humanity’s ‘natural’ condition. By suggesting that evolution through natural selection included struggles between human races, Galton rejected Christian ethics that treated all human life as sacred. While Butler doesn’t make mention of any specific influences of Galton and Davenport, she

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52 Galton. 1904, p.5.
has stated in an interview that *Wild Seed* was borne out of an adolescent fantasy to ‘live forever and breed people.’ In order to breed people for certain traits, as Doro does so ruthlessly, the novel conveys a sense that behavioral characteristics can be manipulated through selective breeding. Such advocacy of using human reproduction to manipulate and alter human evolution reiterates the foundational eugenic ideology of both Galton and Davenport. Both pioneers of eugenics sought to actively alter human destiny by intervening in nature, which, at the time, was reliant upon interfering with marriage and reproduction.

By creating Doro as a demigod, Butler also reinterprets Galton’s thesis that eugenics would inevitably emerge as a religion. By advocating evolution as a religion, Galton also refuted creationist ideas that species remain as God created them. In contrast to Christian ideals of charity and poverty, eugenics viewed the weak as disposable and thereby challenged Christian conceptions of the moral and physical value of people as an intrinsic part of their humanity. The morality that is couched in evolutionary science is a consequentialist ethic that can be characterized by the popular saying ‘the greater good.’ While eugenics can be seen in terms of consequentialism, as it places the betterment of the species above the immediate needs and desires of the individual, Doro shows just how tenuous the consequentialist eugenic ethic is. By dogmatically pursuing eugenic breeding based around his narrow idea of genetic value, Doro’s ethics are not shaped by the utilitarian goal of the greatest happiness of the greatest number but by moral despotism. While this totalitarian control appears congruent with the internal logic of evolutionary theory, Butler’s problem with such moral despotism lies in who has the right to decide the best course of evolution.

While Doro seeks racial betterment through careful selective breeding, his conditions for improvement are entirely contingent on his individual criteria for genetic advancement. In this respect, Doro’s use of extreme eugenics has more in common with Machiavelli’s virtue ethics than consequentialism. Machiavelli’s approach to power can be described as ‘virtue-ethics which prizes individual success by any and all means, where success in every case means the submission of one’s entire

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community to one’s dominance and control, through fear.³⁵⁵ Virtue ethics, in this manifestation, runs entirely counter to consequentialist ethics which argue that good actions are those that promote the greatest value for the greatest number. Machiavelli instead lionized the subjugation of community desires to the primacy of the individual interests of the ruler. Leadership through domination and fear was the ethical ideal in itself, as it is only through total fear that continued power is guaranteed. This characterization of Machiavelli’s politics in The Prince is startlingly similar to Doro’s attitude to his people. Doro’s thoughts demonstrate how consequentialist eugenic aspirations can slide into Machiavellian virtue ethics:

They had obeyed him, throwing away clearly defective children born of their inbreeding, and strengthening the gifts that made them so valuable to him. If those same gifts made them abnormally quick to anger, vicious, and savagely intolerant of people unlike themselves, it did not matter. Doro had been very pleased with them, and they had long ago accepted the idea that pleasing him was the most important thing they could do.³⁶

Rather than promoting eugenics as a means by which to achieve racial betterment, as was the case in the most benign form of historical eugenics, Doro’s eugenics slide down the slippery slope into providing the means by which he achieves entirely selfish ends. By showing how eugenic consequentialism can turn into Machiavellian despotism, Butler comments on the need for any utopian science that aims at genetic ‘betterment’ to have moral voices that reiterate the inherent value of human life. Anyanwu constantly challenges Doro, rather than passively submitting to his every whim as countless others have done for four thousand years. In depicting Anyanwu’s defiance, Butler creates a textual parable that illuminates the importance for evolutionary science to consider and be influenced by Christian ethical ideas of human life.

The eugenic morality that views unborn future people as taking precedence over some people alive in the present still persists. The dangerously utopian yearning behind eugenics is still evident amongst some sociobiologists and geneticists. The sense of racial and moral decline that was evident in the late nineteenth century is echoed by recent eugenic scholarship. Geneticist John Glad has written,

³⁶ Butler. 1980, p.45.
Eugenicists argue that there is much in our genes which may have been advantageous to previous generations and species, but conditions have now changed radically. They maintain that we can either work with nature and achieve utopia, or we can in our greed reject reform and perish.\(^{57}\)

In a perhaps surprising reiteration of early twentieth-century eugenic ideology, Glad lists a range of behaviors that are genetically determined. He states, ‘Genes play a major role in virtually all behavior, including, alcoholism, smoking, autism, phobias, neuroses, insomnia…’\(^{58}\) This list seems to perpetuate the endless list of ‘dysgenic’ traits of which eugenics sought to cure in humanity. By suggesting that these traits are genetically determined, the logical progression is that eugenics is the way to rid humanity of these behaviors by ‘genetic manipulation.’\(^{59}\) Eugenics was by no means limited to a craze of the early twentieth century. Indeed, the hard-line eugenicists like Davenport held such ideological weight precisely because of his ‘impeccable’ credentials and his ‘scientific ethos.’\(^{60}\) Modern proponents of liberal eugenics (such as Glad, Agar, and Wilkinson) are again reiterating these same ideas of the ‘science’ of hereditable traits. Many of the ideas promoted one hundred years ago are re-emerging as genetic science becomes a more privileged epistemology.

Butler, writing in 1980, was all too aware of the potential for eugenic social Darwinist ideology that create hierarchies of genetic value - often based on the individual prejudices of proponents of such ideas - to again infiltrate both scientific and popular discourse. In this context, Doro’s ethical code of dogmatic evolutionary science is a critique of the persistent undercurrents of eugenic thought in America. What is so fascinating is that Butler’s fiction becomes increasingly reliant on utopia as an intrinsically eugenic pursuit. As I will demonstrate, eugenic manipulation becomes increasingly important for Butler in building sustainable utopian visions in her fiction. The fact that Butler became more convinced of eugenics’ utopian potential, despite its history of atrocity and abuse in America, is indicative of just how dire the racial situation was in her eyes in the United States.

\(^{57}\) Glad. 2006, p.50.
\(^{58}\) ibid, p.57.
\(^{59}\) ibid, p.49.
The utopian potential of eugenics is not as crystalized in *Wild Seed* as it is in Butler’s later fiction. This is evidenced by Butler’s representation of the extreme clash between Doro and Anyanwu’s moral codes. Doro’s morality is firmly rooted in evolutionary science as opposed to Christianity. His attitude towards Anyanwu and her children reveals his goal of directing evolution: ‘He would use her for breeding and healing. He would use her children, present and future, to create more acceptable long-lived types.’ There is an inferred religiosity in Doro’s thinking here as he seeks to create children who won’t die, thus creating them in his image which increases their intrinsic value by imbuing them with a reflection of his godly nature. However, this thinking is entirely consistent with eugenic ideology. Eugenics, as conceived by Galton and Davenport, was all about reproducing similarities and repressing difference.

**Inheritance of Mental Characteristics and the Eradication of Difference**

Although Doro appears to breed difference by creating a new pathway of human evolution, his project is really about recreating his image and ultimately about eradicating difference. When Doro initially convinces Anyanwu to go with him to America, he does so by saying ‘Let me give you children who will live!’ While Anyanwu perceives this as a lie to ensnare her in his breeding program, towards the end of the novel Doro reiterates his goal of creating children who won’t die. He says to Anyanwu as she grieves the loss of her daughter: ‘It goes on, you know,’” he said. “The dying.” “It doesn’t hurt you.” “It does. When my children die – the best of my children…Someday, we’ll have others that won’t die.” Here Doro, in a rare moment of compassion, reveals the true source of his breeding program, which is to end the pain and loneliness associated with the deaths of his children, but also to create a race of humans that, like himself, will not die. The desire to reproduce his own characteristics is also the aspiration to eradicate difference. While Doro’s sense of loss at the death of his children could allude to his association with a Christian ethic, it is significant that Doro qualifies his statement that it hurts him when the

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61 Butler. 1980, p.90.  
62 *ibid*, p.22.  
63 *ibid*, p.252.
‘best’ of his children die. Thus Doro’s pain at the loss of his children is contingent on how successful they were as eugenic experiments. Doro loves and desires that which is closest to him. He seeks to breed his own image, a process that has striking similarities to American eugenics, which also sought to legitimize the idealized racial, class and gender position of the technical elite, thereby eradicating those ‘others’, the harbingers of the dysgenic traits that were the omens of racial degeneration.

Doro’s eugenic program closely resembles Davenport’s ideas about the heritability of mental abilities. In bulletin number nine of the Eugenics Record Office in 1913, Davenport explains what he saw as the positive and negative inheritable traits of African and Anglo-Americans. Showing his fidelity to scientific methodology, Davenport displays a veneer of objectivity as he lists the positive traits of African-Americans:

In certain physiological differences between the two races, the black has the advantage. It is frequently affirmed that the sense of sight is, on average, sharper…[and] Greater pressure on the skin is needed to produce pain."64

Davenport lists certain diseases to which African-Americans had shown more resistance, as well as describing emotional qualities that include a ‘good nature, keen sense of humor, and native love of music.’65 Davenport continues that the ‘negro’ also displays ‘dog-like fidelity’ which is ‘not universal by any means, but characteristic of the race when treated kindly.’66 What emerges from Davenport’s flagrant racism is the characterization of African Americans as animalistic. By describing physiological superiority in areas such as eyesight and pain tolerance Davenport attempted to legitimize the continual subjugation of African-Americans by highlighting their apparent lack of sufficiently developed moral and mental capabilities. Likewise, Doro dismisses physical traits as completely subordinate to intellectual attributes. As Doro says of an attractive body he wore as a gift to Anyanwu:

65 ibid, p.32.
66 ibid, p.32.
the comfortable time in the compact little body he had taken as a gift to her was over. It had little of the inborn strangeness he valued. Anyanwu’s child by it might be beautiful, but chances were, it would be very ordinary.\(^{67}\)

Although the beauty and functionality of this body served Doro’s purpose in seducing Anyanwu, Doro’s comments, like Davenport’s, reflect a hierarchy of genetic value that emphasizes intellectual abilities over physical perfection. Davenport categorizes a savage/culture dichotomy between African and Anglo-Americans that can be seen in his list of the undesirable traits of the ‘negro.’ Such negative qualities include:

A strong sex-instinct, without corresponding self control…a certain lack of genuineness – a tendency to pass off a clever veneer for the real thing, due to an inability or unwillingness to master fundamentals…[as well as] a premature cessation of intellectual development.\(^{68}\)

Davenport’s claims that an entire ethnic social group would exhibit these so-called ‘negative’ traits may seem laughable to the modern reader. However, the significance of such assertions is the idea that these amorphous and obscure ideas about different racial identities were the quantifiable result of biological inheritance. The notion that a person’s ‘genuineness’ or ‘self-control’ could be inherited in a similar fashion to nose, lip, and hair formation, as Davenport claimed,\(^{69}\) effectively racialized character traits, regardless of economic, social or environmental factors. For Davenport, social factors could never replace the primacy of genetic lineage.

Correspondingly, in *Wild Seed*, Doro’s view of the genetically desirable is entirely contingent on the presence of mental abilities. Doro is completely uninterested in commonly held physical signifiers of race, such as skin color, but is focused purely on the presence of psionic ability. Anyanwu quizzes Doro about his son’s ancestry. Doro replies that Isaac is a, ‘mixed body, white and black and Indian…His mother was white…He is more her son – in appearance anyway.’\(^{70}\) Although Isaac is essentially a ‘mulatto’ passing as white in an era of slavery, his real power is not related to his skin color or appearance. It is Isaac’s psychic abilities that make him Doro’s treasure:

\(^{67}\) Butler. 1980, p.264.
\(^{68}\) ibid, p.34.
\(^{69}\) ibid, p.32.
\(^{70}\) Butler. 1980, p.62.
This was a favorite son, a rare, rare young one whose talent and temperament had matured exactly as Doro had intended. Doro had controlled the breeding of Isaac’s ancestors for millennia, occasionally producing near success that could be used in breeding, and dangerous, destructive failures that had to be destroyed.\footnote{ibid, p.63.}

Isaac’s ability to move objects with his mind is the result of careful selective breeding. However, the most strikingly similar parallel with Davenport’s ideas of inheritance is the notion that Isaac’s temperament was also the result of this judicious forced breeding. In Butler’s novel, just as in Davenport’s diatribe against certain ‘types’ of marriages, there exists an idea that poor temperament can be passed on to the following generation with ‘dangerous’ consequences and that this should take precedence over the dilution of skin color through miscegenation. For example, to quote Davenport, ‘forget skin color and concentrate attention upon matters of real importance to organized society. Prevent those without sex-control or educability or resistance to serious disease from reproducing their kind.’\footnote{Davenport. 1913, p.36.} Mental attributes are listed before physical attributes, which structurally belies Davenport’s focus on mental aptitude as more important than physical ability. Indeed, Davenport, like Butler, characterizes both mental and physical attributes as a product of genetic inheritance.\footnote{Davenport tried to draw the link between ‘nomadism’ in primitive people and ‘the hyperkinetic state’ which was claimed to be ‘frequently associated with depression’ and ‘manic-depressive psychosis.’ (p.72.) Davenport suggested that people exhibited hyperkinetic restlessness (which included a range of physical and mental disorders ranging from fidgeting to manic depression) because of a tendency to revert to primitive nomadism, which shows how both mental and physical genetic predispositions to such amorphous ideas as ‘the wandering instinct’ characterized heredity as the defining feature of behavioral and physical characteristics in eugenic ideology. Davenport, Charles B. ‘The Feebly Inhibited: Nomadism, or the Wandering Impulse, with Special Reference to Heredity: Inheritence of Temperament. \textit{Carnegie Institute of Washington}. Cold Spring Harbor: The Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1915, pp.9-13, pp.71-75\footnote{ibid, p.36.}  While Davenport rejects ‘color’ as the main factor in social degeneration through miscegenation, he nonetheless shows how fundamentally racist his eugenic ideas are by ascribing negative mental and emotional abilities to African-Americans.} Davenport further asserts that ‘The problem of the socially fit must be treated not as one of color [italics in original], but as a problem of the spread of feeble-mindedness and physical weakness in organized society.’\footnote{ibid, p.36.} While Davenport rejects ‘color’ as the main factor in social degeneration through miscegenation, he nonetheless shows how fundamentally racist his eugenic ideas are by ascribing negative mental and emotional abilities to African-Americans.
In the same way, by seeking only to breed people with ‘special’ abilities, Doro participates in a racist eugenic program. Alyson Buckman has suggested that Doro’s ‘emphasis on psionic talents helps to deconstruct binaries by uncoupling race, class, and gender from ability.’ Rather than deconstructing race, gender and class, Butler actually collapses them into the same mysterious category of ‘special’ psionic abilities, which are biologized as hereditary traits. It is true that miscegenation, in terms of skin color, bears no relevance whatever for Doro. Indeed, it could be argued, along Buckman’s line of reasoning, that it is Isaac’s fusion of multiple identities that leads to his power. However, Doro’s dogmatic pursuit of ‘witchcraft’ and his pragmatic pairing of fit individuals for certain reproductive outcomes repeats the ideology of historical eugenics as outlined by Davenport. Just as historical eugenics was invented to support the propagation of special talents that were believed to be hereditary – intellectualism, music, and predisposition to practicing science – so too does Doro create a clear hierarchy of genetic value based on the presence of desired, mystified, hereditary biological traits. The desire to reproduce certain types of people at the expense of others is reflective of the desire to eradicate difference by the eugenic mechanisms of selective breeding.

Ethical Clashes: Religion and Science and Moral Combat

Why would Butler create a character who embodies the racist, sexist and attempted totalitarian mastery over human evolution of historical eugenics? At this stage in her literary career, she does so to remind the reader that while scientific knowledge and its perceived understanding of the natural world in many cases leads to advancements in human quality of life, the path to scientific progress is always riddled with moral crises. Eugenics was, and continues to be, one such crisis. Theologian Stephen J Pope contends that ‘we ought not to give ethical authority to science because the knowledge of nature produced by science does not guarantee moral wisdom.’ Pope opines that science cannot provide humanity with moral guidance because the increased knowledge of the physical world does not necessarily lead to advancements.

75 Buckman, Alyson. ‘“What Good is all this to Black People?” Octavia Butler’s Reconstruction of Corporeality.’ Femspec. vol 4, issue 2, 2004, p.205.
in the moral lives of human beings. For Pope, the science of evolution does not account for humanity’s intrinsic desire to act in moral ways. He goes on to say that evolutionary analysis of religion reflects the long-term effort of modernity to marginalize, control, and finally eliminate religious communities…Sociobiology and evolutionary psychology provide an ideology intended to help along its demise.\(^77\)

By ignoring the ethical relevance of religion and attempting to characterize it as a stage in evolutionary development that science has now taken over, sociobiology is in danger of reducing ethics to the pursuit of purely biological evolution, at the expense of spiritual and emotional beliefs. Doro is a textual representative for evolutionary science as bent on the eradication of religion. Anyanwu is a symbol of religion that is under continual threat from Doro, who attempts to marginalize, control and finally eliminate her. Anyanwu, like the modern theologian, feels this threat: ‘Doro’s mark had been on her from the day they met. She could break free of him only by dying and sacrificing her children and leaving him loose upon the world…’\(^78\) Without Anyanwu, the moral voice of religion, warped science is loosed unchecked upon the world. By showing how evolutionary science can lead, and has historically led, to persecutory excesses Butler is clearly demonstrating that while she remains unsure about religion, her upbringing as a Baptist has imbued her with the notion that Christian morality is a crucial counter-voice to excesses in scientific ideology. Her approaches to religion are ambivalent, but in *Wild Seed* she acknowledges that it can and has provided a necessary moral voice to keep the potentially oppressive characteristics of evolutionary science – typified by eugenics – in check.

By pitting two opposing moral codes against one another Butler participates in a philosophical project of moral revision. Moral philosopher Jesse J. Prinz has argued that ‘The key to moral change is to pit current values against each other. We often live quite complacently with inconsistencies in our values, but we are embarrassed when they are brought to our attention.’\(^79\) Inconsistencies in morality can exist if they remain unchallenged by opposing codes. Butler uses this philosophical idea of

\(^{77}\) *ibid*, pp.28-29.
placing opposing value systems in combat with one another to draw attention to the various inconsistencies of both. This sounds dichotomous, and to a large extent *Wild Seed* is, in as much as competing moral systems are represented as combative, oppositional and sometimes incompatible. This is part of her wider project of presenting moral alternatives in order to force the reader to examine their own moral standpoints with regard to human life.

There is a philosophical implication in the representation of combative moral codes in *Wild Seed*. Prinz again puts forward that genuine revision of standard moral values is ‘difficult as long as people in power are not suffering.’\(^\text{80}\) This idea is apparent in Doro’s behavior. He has lived for nearly four thousand years without having to alter his morality, owing to his near omnipotent power and immortality. His position as demigod only becomes a problem when Anyanwu, who represents a competing value system, becomes a part of his long life. She is disgusted with Doro’s rampant killing. Doro kills a friend of Anyanwu’s as punishment for her disobedience, repeating his moral value that only asks for people to ‘obey’ him,\(^\text{81}\) which reveals that Doro’s ethics are premised on the unyielding, apparently universal, unsympathetic discourses that characterize social Darwinism. Anyanwu expresses her exasperation at Doro’s moral code: ‘What would stop him now he had decided to kill?’\(^\text{82}\) The inevitability of Doro’s violence further strengthens reading Doro as a representative of evolutionary ethics, as his unsympathetic killing is naturalized by the impossibility of opposing it, much the same way that natural disasters cannot be stopped. Indeed, Doro’s seemingly unaltered brutality casts him as a natural disaster. Anyanwu describes his power as a terrifying and inescapable force: ‘If Doro flaunted his power before others as he was flaunting it now before her, even his most faithful worshippers would run. His way of killing would terrify anyone.’\(^\text{83}\) Doro repeats his actions because his moral code has never been challenged. His omnipotent power has never been disrupted by another being’s immortality. What is significant about this passage is that rather than forcing Anyanwu’s total submission, he actually solidifies her moral opposition towards him.

\(^\text{80}\) *ibid*, p.293.
\(^\text{81}\) *ibid*, p.38.
\(^\text{82}\) Butler, 1980, p.171.
\(^\text{83}\) *ibid*, p.175.
Anyanwu, read as the representative for Christian morality, cannot accept Doro’s use of another’s life to punish her, repeating the Kantian ethic that no ends ever justify using people as a means, owing to man’s status as ‘an end in itself.’\(^{84}\) Doro’s failed attempt at complete mastery through domination is expressed only pages later, when he says to his son Isaac, ‘she’s wild seed, I’m tired of the effort it takes to control her.’\(^{85}\) Doro’s patriarchal attitude is illuminated through Anyanwu’s nature as both ‘wild’ and ‘woman’, which becomes threatening to Doro’s morality that sees all life as subordinate to his eugenic designs. Through Anyanwu’s refusal to be totally confined by Doro’s patriarchal conception of reproductive identity, Doro’s moral code is constantly challenged by Anyanwu’s. Her ethics repeatedly appeal to Christian concepts of the individual value of each human life. This leads Doro, the person in power, to become unsettled. It is only through his uncomfortable moral position that Anyanwu is able to force changes in Doro’s values, which she does through repeatedly opposing his values with hers.

Butler’s characterizations of Doro and Anyanwu also reflect a feminist interrogation of reproductive rights and the control of the female body in patriarchy. Doro’s overtures at ownership and possession of Anyanwu are blatant from the novel’s outset. Doro muses on Anyanwu’s eugenic possibilities: ‘He had to have the woman. She was wild seed of the best kind. She would strengthen any line he bred into her, strengthen it immeasurably.’\(^{86}\) Instantly Doro characterizes Anyanwu as a woman to be possessed, an object to be owned, used and manipulated for his eugenic purposes. In homage to the eugenic feminist writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anyanwu’s ability to strengthen any strain ‘bred into her’ means she is responsible for the future of the human race. Dana Seitler has argued that eugenics in the early twentieth century saw that women were endowed with the ‘capacity to pass down either health or disease to future generations…’\(^{87}\) As such, ‘potential mothers, became the focus of a campaign to stave off…degeneration.’\(^{88}\) This call for women to be the guardians of future generations was combined with the call for men to be responsible for ‘lifting

\(^{85}\) *ibid*, p.181.  
\(^{86}\) Butler. 1980, p.22.  
\(^{88}\) *ibid*, p.181.
up’ their race. In his famous ‘Talented Tenth’ polemic, W.E.B. Du Bois asserts that upper echelons of African-Americans will rescue the race from its current problems:

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.\(^89\)

Although Du Bois does not specifically outline women’s role in rescuing the race, his insistence that the most gifted African-Americans could reproduce more of their kind reflected the eugenic thinking of the time that placed reproduction at the center of human evolution. Women’s role, whilst confined to motherhood, nonetheless represented an important custodian of the future betterment of African-Americans’ social position and the positive direction of human evolution. In a similar fashion to eugenic fiction of the early twentieth century, Butler creates Anyanwu as the figure who embraces ‘motherhood as a site of biological value…at the center of the birthing of history.’\(^90\) However, Doro, while viewing Anyanwu as a means by which to breed strength into his people, sees motherhood not so much as a site of power and female agency, but as a role in which to confine her and strip away her independence. He considers: ‘he had better get her with a new child as quickly as he could. Her independence would vanish without a struggle. She would do whatever he asked to keep her child safe.’\(^91\) Here, Butler suggests that eugenic feminism does not really offer a means to avoid sexual oppression. For Anyanwu, being responsible for genetically strengthening Doro’s people results in her utter oppression at the hands of Doro, who sees her predisposition to being a caring mother as a way to manipulate and control her. It also implies that feminine identity is intrinsically and biologically maternal, a presumption that remains ironically unchallenged, as almost all of Butler’s heroines are, or become, mothers in her writing. Nonetheless, it is through this combative relationship, which signifies the competing ethics between motherhood and eugenic reproduction, that the moral lesson of the story is realized. Butler depicts moral revision as only occurring through the confrontations between competing groups.


\(^90\) ibid, p.189.

\(^91\) Butler. 1980, p.27.
Doro is representative of dispassionate evolutionary science. However, Anyanwú’s constant challenge to his utilitarian ethics elicits more human compassion from him. While Doro attends the transition of one of his daughters, Isaac muses on his approach to life: ‘It was rare for another person’s pain to disturb Doro. If the girl seemed to be dying, he would be concerned that good seed was about to be lost. But if she was merely in agony, it did not matter.’

The explicit psychological reason for Doro’s dispassionate response to his children’s pain is his sheer longevity and experience with living through lives and deaths of his thousands of years’ worth of children. However, the tension between Anyawú’s view of the intrinsic value of human life and Doro’s view of life as a tool to be used for his eugenic program represents an anxiety that science has the potential for ethical abuses if the dispassionate objectivity, on which its many methods often resides, is extended to include the value of human lives. Paul Lombardo has argued that the term eugenics has become a part of the American vernacular in describing potentially dangerous trends in emerging science and technology. He affirms that ‘The specter of eugenics is also commonly invoked to question the use of new technologies and the pursuit of science more generally.’

Read in this way, Butler’s use of eugenics then becomes a device by which she can present the ethical concerns regarding the pursuit of science more generally. The reason eugenics can be so readily deployed in order to criticize emerging science and technology is largely a result of the perception that it stands as an example par excellence of how science’s dispassionate objectivity can lead to atrocious outcomes. Doro stands as the very embodiment of the refusal to guarantee the rights of humans by the mere fact that they are human.

Science and the Fear of ‘Playing God’

By creating Doro as the fictional representative of concerns surrounding scientific practices, Butler draws upon societal fears of the scientist who plays god. Here, she can be seen as invoking Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein. Ruth Salvaggio explores this connection when she says of *Wild Seed*, ‘“Doro’s paternal concerns...”

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92 ibid, p.184.
revolve around his mechanical breeding experiments: He does not create children, but Frankenstein monsters.” 94 Salvaggio highlights the association of selective breeding with worrying technological advancement when she speaks of ‘mechanical breeding.’ Here, the fear of eugenics exists less in the potential manipulation of people and the denial of their individual rights than in the actual reproductive outcomes that result when people play god. J. Andrew Denman draws another comparison between Doro and Victor Frankenstein, as both scientists ‘manipulate the laws of nature.’ 95 There are obvious differences in the two characters, but the parallels between the pair reveal an approach to the concept of monstrosity that is quite similar. As Denman notes, ‘In Shelley’s version, much of the tension revolves around Frankenstein’s Hamlet-like contemplation of suicide.’ 96 Frankenstein is revolted by the monstrosity of his creation and thus serves as a warning to the reader of the pitfalls surrounding the scientist’s attempt to play god. Doro, on the other hand, revels in the monstrosity of his creations, but his attempts to control every facet of their reproduction reveals a similar concern with science that devalues human existence by attacking the Christian ethic of the perceived inherent dignity of all human life.

While Doro is often portrayed as oppressive, ruthless and callous in pursuit of his eugenic goals, his success in breeding an alternative branch of human evolution alludes to Butler’s ultimate faith in the possibility of eugenics to recreate human destiny. Such a faith in the power of eugenic manipulation informs her later fiction, where eugenic practices become the mechanisms that achieve utopia. 97 In contrast to Frankenstein, Doro finally accepts the ethical voice of Anyanwu. He incorporates Anyanwu’s demands into his eugenics. After several deaths in her extended family in quick succession, Anyanwu makes the decision to end her long life. Anyanwu realizes that she can no longer stand life if all that exists is Doro’s reductionist breeding. She exclaims, ‘Everything is temporary but you and me. You are all that I have, perhaps all that I would ever have…And you are an obscenity.’ 98 For Anyanwu, Doro’s mere existence has become an untenable breach of her ethics. She

95 Denman. 2005, p.10.
96 ibid, p.10.
97 This is particularly the case in Xenogenesis and Fledgling. These novels will be analyzed in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.
even quotes a biblical passage to humble him, saying, ‘Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.’\textsuperscript{99} Anyanwu finally feels that her morality with regard to the sanctity of all human life is fatally incompatible with Doro’s existence. By describing Doro as an obscenity, Anyanwu voices her objection, not merely with his attitude towards life, but the very nature of his dispassionate existence. What she yearns for is an example of his humanity, some sign that his existence is not merely the symbol of utter dispassion and cold utilitarianism for his own selfish ends. As Anyanwu lies down to die, to ‘shut herself off,’ Doro’s dispassionate existence cracks and shatters. He begs her, ‘Sun woman, please don’t leave me.’ Doro is finally altered by Anyanwu’s challenge to his morality that views all life in terms of eugenic utility: ‘He wept…He wept as though for all the past times when no tears would come…He could not stop.’\textsuperscript{100} Anyanwu finally achieves a moral compromise from Doro. In doing so, Butler shows how necessary Christian ethics still are in making sure that the dispassionate reasoning and logic of science is never treated as universally arbitrary in all matters. For her, the failure to recognize any inherent value and dignity in human life leads all too easily down a slippery slope to the atrocities of social Darwinism. Nonetheless, by creating compromise across the disparate boundaries of eugenic consequentialism and Christian humanism, Butler expresses a belief in the utopian possibilities of eugenics. At this stage in her career, she is adamant that humanity must change, that change is contingent on biological alteration, and that eugenics may be the only answer but must be tempered by Christian human rights ethics.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In all of Butler’s novels, characters whose ethical standpoints represent traditional Judeo-Christian values in relation to gender roles, reproduction, and life and death, are overtly challenged by ethics that are premised on survival and the evolution of different kinds of humans. Through her allusions to the classical myth of Prometheus, and to the eugenic writings of Francis Galton and Charles B. Davenport with regards to the heredity of intellectual traits, conflicts in \textit{Wild Seed} can be read as

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{ibid}, pp.268-269.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{ibid}, p.277.
a form of moral revision. Butler’s fiction demonstrates an intense fascination with both metamorphosis and transition. For her characters, nothing is more important than the tension between Judeo-Christian, human rights based ethics and consequentialist social Darwinist ethics that guarantee not only the future survival of the human species, but the nature and character of future human (and non-human) identity. Butler is aware that consequentialism - which Peter Singer describes as ethics that judge the moral value of acts only ‘by their consequences’ ¹⁰¹ - can be used to justify oppressive behavior, as in the case of eugenics which subordinates the value of the individual to the greater good of the species. Despite her focus on evolution, by dramatizing the atrocities that result when consequentialist ethics are employed for selfish means, Butler argues for the Christian ethic that all humans have inherent value and should be protected against what Stanley Rudman calls ‘utilitarian manipulations of individual worth.’ ¹⁰² For Butler, at this point in her literary career, the debate between human rights ethics and consequentialism is most sharply characterized as a battle between eugenic manipulations of individual worth and the Christian belief in the inherent value of each individual life.

However, Butler’s earlier ambivalence to eugenic ideology’s ability to avoid being perverted by individual malice is mitigated in her later fiction. Hence the next chapter examines Butler’s attempt to create a viable ethical alternative to Christianity, one that, like the early eugenic thinking of Galton and Davenport, sought to promote a system of ethics that was based on evolutionary science.

Chapter 2: Religion, Science and Genetic Determinism in Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents

All Successful life is
Adaptable,
Opportunistic,
Tenacious,
Interconnected, and
Fecund.
Understand this.
Use it.
Shape God.¹

This chapter is concerned with how and why Butler creates utopian religious visions amidst fictional dystopias where slavery, barbarism and Christian fundamentalism have become widespread. She criticizes Calvinist predestination as the antecedent and driving theoretical basis of American Puritanism, which she sees as intrinsically exclusionary and able to be deployed to defend atrocities including slavery perpetrated against those outside its ethical boundary. Butler creates an alternative belief system to Christianity that is founded on evolutionary science. In doing so, she invokes eugenic tenets of the early twentieth century both in terms of science’s increasing moral responsibility as well as the inheritance of behavioral traits that characterized eugenics’ framing of social utopia achieved through evolutionary struggle. By replacing divine determinism with a mystified religion of biological science (which as I establish, remains unchallenged in her novels), she supplants divine determinism with biological determinism. Through looking at the specific concept of Calvinist predestination and how it was deployed by American Puritans, she critiques and ultimately rejects the foundations of American Christian thought while at the same time promoting a view of human behavior that reinforces genetic determinism.

In the *Parable* novels, Butler challenges Christian myths of origin by creating an alternative religion that is founded on evolution as its principal doctrine. In this chapter I focus upon how her depictions of religion relate to the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and human bondage to sin, and how she challenges these concepts by creating a religion that has evolution as its ‘golden rule.’ By analyzing historical and contemporary engagements with Calvinist doctrines combined with close textual readings of Butler’s novels *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), I demonstrate that Butler rejects Calvinist ideas of divine predestination and the Puritan religious discourse underpinning the American social policies and religious ideals that were promoted and intensified throughout the Reagan era in America. However, while Butler is eager to formulate religious ideals that apparently break with divinely ordained utopia, the utopian promise of her alternative religion results in exclusion of those outside this new religion’s ethical boundary. In rejecting Calvinist predestination, Butler deploys genetic determinism with similar results: the exclusion from social utopia, and ultimate eradication of the ‘other.’

Butler creates an alternative religion whereby her characters must take an active role in human evolution to ensure their survival. This focus on creating a challenge to Christianity is important in understanding Butler’s fiction with regard to broader issues of science and its relationship to religion. By looking at the ideological rift between Calvinism and evolution, Butler’s fiction rejects theologies of Christianity, particularly those that take their lineage from American Puritanism, and posits that religion needs to provide practical ways in which we can evolve beyond our current behavioral tendencies.

In most of her novels, Butler explores positive eugenics as a means by which humanity can control its own evolution to avoid self-destruction. Specific eugenic programs are less central to the *Parable* novels than some of her other work, such as the *Xenogenesis* trilogy – (1987-89) discussed in Chapter 4; the *Patternist* series – (1976-84) discussed in Chapters 1 and 3; and *Fledgling* – (2005) discussed in Chapter 5. In the *Parable* novels, Lauren’s religion is premised on a marriage of scientific ideas and religious faith that aims at bettering the species by helping humanity evolve past its inherited destructive tendencies. In Butler’s focus on evolution, species betterment, and survival through adaptation, she confronts the ethical dilemmas of
who has the right to direct the evolution of the human species. The ethics of species change, whether through eugenics and genetic engineering as in the Patternist and Xenogenesis series’, or through the creation of a religion founded on evolution as in the Parable novels, is about eradicating those physical and cultural differences that lead to violence and intolerance. Just as the eugenic programs of her other novels suggest eliminating physical difference is the necessary step in attaining utopia, so too the Parable novels’ rejection of Christianity and abandonment of Earth reflect Butler’s ideas that human intolerance to difference can only be transcended by the cessation of contact with those incompatible others.

The two Parable novels trace the actions of Lauren Olamina, a young African-American girl living in the walled suburb of Robledo California in the year 2024. In the novel America is on the verge of complete disintegration: the economy is failing, law and order have broken down, global warming has made California virtually uninhabitable, and there is increasing use of a drug that makes ‘watching a fire better than sex.’ This startling depiction of California has been described by Peter Stillman as a dystopia that bears such close similarities to modern trends that, rather than producing estrangement, the reader is shocked by familiarity and can readily see how current problems could so easily manifest as intensified near future dystopias. Lauren anxiously waits for the day when the safety of Robledo’s wall is breached by the swarms of desperate people trying to survive on the streets. As she muses to herself, ‘Even in Robledo, most of the street poor – squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general – are dangerous. They’re desperate or crazy or both.’ In this seemingly futile landscape Lauren ‘discovers a set of truths’ that she names Earthseed, a new religion that is based upon the idea that ‘God is Change.’ Lauren’s struggle to begin the first Earthseed community and fulfill its ultimate destiny of ‘taking root amongst the stars’ continues in Parable of the Talents amidst growing religious intolerance and bigotry. Both Parable novels provide examples of Butler’s critique of Christian ethics: Christian ideology is used to persecute Lauren and her followers based on their ideological difference. Butler’s depictions of the ‘Christian

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3 Butler, 1993, p.54.
4 Stillman, Peter G. ‘Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler’s Parables.’ Utopian Studies. vol.14, no.1, 2003, p.16.
5 Butler. 1993, p.10.
6 ibid, p.3.
7 ibid, p.85.
America’ group in *Parable of the Talents* highlights extremist elements in Christian ideology. The Christian America organization is a fictional intensification of exclusionary Christian dogma spun out of control, as they irrationally hate and persecute all beliefs that do not adhere to their narrow prescriptions for spiritual existence. Butler focuses on how hatred of people who fall outside Christianity’s ethical boundary can manifest as violent barbarism, particularly when economic, ecological and social problems combine. Despite Butler’s criticism of religious intolerance, as I will demonstrate, she ends up creating an equally exclusive religion whose followers abandon Earth rather than reconcile with those who have ideological differences. Such drastic policies of planetary exodus reveal Butler’s deeply pessimistic view that human nature is intrinsically violent and that differences can never be overcome without radical biological change.

Butler herself came from a strict Baptist household. Her early exposure to Biblical language and narratives is a significant determinant in her work. *Wild Seed*, *Xenogenesis*, and *The Parable Series* all use Biblical language and figures from Judeo-Christian literature. From a young age Butler did not share the same beliefs as her family. As she stated in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin:

> I stopped believing in the afterlife when I was about twelve…What set me off, was going to church one Sunday – I was raised a born again Baptist – and hearing the minister read a passage from the Bible and then say, “I don’t know what this means, but I believe it.” Somehow you’re supposed to believe and have faith but not worry about having any evidence to support that belief and faith. That just doesn’t work for me, and I never went back.

This recollection from her childhood reveals that for most of her life Butler believed that evidence should take precedence over faith. Her thirst for scientific fact, coupled with intricate knowledge of the Bible and Christian language resulting from her

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7 *Wild Seed*'s three books are divided into titles from the Old Testament: Covenant, Lots Children, and Canaan. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the main character is named Lilith in an allusion to the Jewish myth of Lilith, who was Adam’s first wife who refused to lie under him during intercourse. She then gave birth to all manner of demons, just as Butler’s Lilith mates with the alien Oankali. (see chapter 4 for more detail on *Xenogenesis*)

upbringing, is what makes Butler’s depictions and analyses of Christianity so compelling. Her focus on evidence and observation as the means by which the universe can be reliably interpreted is constantly reinforced by her characters throughout the *Parable* series. Lauren displays unwavering faith in science and technology’s ability to provide a utopian vision for humanity. Butler’s unquestioned belief in science’s ability to convey an accurate picture of the world raises important questions about her work, particularly in regard to the interplay between social constructivism and biological determinism.

**Baptist Beginnings, Calvinist Predestination and God as Change in *Parable of the Sower***

Butler critiques Christian predestination by creating a parable where individual agency is the crucial condition for surviving dystopia and achieving utopia. Like Butler herself, the chief protagonist of *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina, comes from a Baptist household. However, Lauren’s affiliation with the Baptist church is exclusively based on a sense of obligation to her family, as her father is Robledo’s minister. Lauren has lost faith in the Baptist church, revealing: ‘At least three years ago, my father’s God stopped being my God. His church stopped being my church.’ Lauren’s sense of familial duty prevents her from having the courage to speak of her newly forming religious beliefs. She continues: ‘today, because I’m a coward, I let myself be initiated into that church. I let my father baptize me in all three names of that God who isn’t mine any more.’ Lauren’s impending schism from her father’s Baptist faith mirrors Butler’s own loss of faith in Christianity as a young girl. Butler has conveyed that, as ‘a good Baptist kid, I read the Bible first as a series of instructions as to how I should believe and behave, then as bits of verse that

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This could be a deliberate attempt of Butler’s to engage African American readers. In a series of six national surveys conducted on religious denominations from the year 2000 to 2003, over half the African-American population surveyed reported to be Baptist. - Taylor, Robert Joseph, Chatters, Linda M, and Levin, Joseph. *Religion in the Lives of African Americans: Social, Psychological and Health Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004, p.22. By creating a conventional American family and situating them amidst a bleak dystopia, Butler is highlighting the urgency of acting to prevent these dystopias from eventuating.


*ibid*, p.7.
I was required to memorize, then as a series of interesting, interconnected stories. Although her faith in the literal accuracy of the Bible waned, Biblical stories and the ethics such stories expressed remained an interest that is visible in her novels through her allusions to Biblical events and characters. The Parable novels not only reflect Butler’s desire to replace divine determinism with biological determinism, they also illuminate the ethical difficulty of creating utopias. In her attempts to create an ethic that breaks free from the exclusionary moral boundaries of Christianity, Butler’s religious utopia and its biological imperative to leave Earth ends up with a clearly defined ethical boundary that excludes and erases those who do not conform to its ideology.

Christianity is a central motif of the Parable novels. However, Butler was also exposed to the rise of the Nation of Islam and African-American political militancy in America in the 1960s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Malcolm X, along with the Nation of Islam more generally, became famous by ridiculing the southern, integrationist, and nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. Malcolm X’s rise to prominence was intensified by his characterization of all white people as ‘devils.’ He impressed students with his fiery speeches, quick wit, striking analogies, glorification of black people and Africa in general. However, students and young African-Americans were sometimes repelled by his religious ideology since it was wrapped in the Nation of Islam's theology, which preached a strict moral code, denigrated women, denounced all whites as inherently evil, and advocated complete ‘separation of the races.’ The conflation of political and religious militancy enmeshed within the rhetoric of Malcolm X is visible in Butler’s critique of organized religion in Parable of the Talents. Although her ‘Christian America group’ is an overtly Christian fundamentalist organization, Butler nonetheless criticizes religious fundamentalism that promotes the vilification of groups based on religion, gender and ethnicity. Although Butler does not mention any specific experiences with African-American Islam, she does describe the impact of her peers’ involvement in the Black power movements of the 1960s. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim Butler, Octavia E. from Afterwords to “Near of Kin” in Butler, Octavia E. Bloodchild and Other Stories. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995, p.85.

McMenamin in 1988, Butler recounted, ‘I was a member of the black student union, along with this guy who had been interested in black history before it became fashionable.’\textsuperscript{14} Butler continues that her friend was under the assumption that older generations of African Americans should have revolted. Her colleague once commented, ‘I wish I could kill off all those old people who have been holding us back for so long.’\textsuperscript{15} Butler used such militant views of the period of slavery as fuel for her novel Kindred (1979), by transposing a peculiarly middle-class view of history into the heart of Antebellum slavery. Moreover, the political extremism embodied in Butler’s contemporary’s view of African-American history is visible in her depictions of religious slavery in Parable of the Talents. As I discuss later in this chapter, Parable of the Talents shows how religious extremism can be politicized in order to oppress difference and legitimize slavery. Butler uses the political foundations of her experience of student activism and her exposure to Biblical literalism to critique the very foundations of the Christian ideologies used to legitimize slavery. However, by replacing Christianity with a religion with the clear utopian goal of leaving Earth to create a new world free from religious intolerance, Butler presents utopia as contingent on the eradication of religious difference.

While Butler herself remained skeptical toward the epistemological foundations of religion, her Baptist upbringing provided her with knowledge of biblical stories, as well as Christian ethics. As she describes herself, with regard to her upbringing, ‘I like the fact that I got my conscience installed early. I have a huge and savage conscience that won’t let me get away with things.’\textsuperscript{16} Here, Butler alludes to her conscience as partly resulting from her early exposure to Christian morality. While Butler is critical of Christianity’s potential to deny rights to those outside its moral boundary, her own attempt to create a fictitious inclusive religion ends up drawing a corresponding ethical boundary that excludes those construed as ‘other’ from entering its utopia.

Butler’s characters are confronted with a social scenario where economic security, communal safety and any semblance of law and order have utterly broken down.

\textsuperscript{14} McCaffery and McMenamin, 1990, p.65
\textsuperscript{15} ibid, p.65.
Stillman has described this dystopia as an ‘eviscerated and impotent government that reflects the intensifications of the dreams of the Republican right in the Reagan years.’\(^{17}\) The economic environment of the novel reflects Butler’s anxiety that unregulated free market capitalism inevitably leads to economic enslavement and that the United States political system would disintegrate under such extreme economic pressures. In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler highlights the specific problems of Reagan policies ‘which promised lower taxes, less governmental regulation and other “interference” in the market, lower levels of aid to the poor, and a general reliance on the market to reward and penalize.’\(^{18}\) In the novel, corporations have largely superseded any function of centralized government, which is characterized by the reemergence of slave cities controlled by corporate interests independent of governmental tampering. As Lauren’s father says of Olivar, a city now controlled by a European manufacturing company, ‘this business sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction. I don’t trust it. Freedom is dangerous…but it’s precious, too.’\(^{19}\) Here, Butler interestingly conflates a common element of science fiction, as Lauren states, ‘Cities controlled by big companies are old hat in science fiction,’\(^{20}\) with the historical past of antebellum slavery, which again Lauren expresses by her comment, ‘I’ve never seen one [science fiction story] where the hero fought like hell to get taken in and underpaid by the company.’\(^{21}\) The offer of safety is extremely enticing in a society where centralized government and the rule of law have capitulated. Here, Butler also alerts her readers to the danger of history repeating itself by describing slave cities as ‘half-antebellum,’ evoking America’s past of chattel slavery. By creating a near future that intensifies Reaganite presidential trends and fusing them with science-fiction tropes of corporate omnipotence and America’s history of slavery, Butler creates a plausible dystopia that shocks the reader through its remarkable familiarity.

Amidst extreme social, economic and ecological difficulties, Butler’s characters are forced to deal with rising religious intolerance. The persistence of biblical literalism in religious thought, despite ongoing challenges from scientific evidence, is

\(^{17}\) Stillman. 2003, p.15.
\(^{18}\) ibid, p.16.
\(^{19}\) Butler. 1993, p122.
\(^{20}\) ibid, p.123.
\(^{21}\) ibid, pp.123-124.
something in which she is greatly interested. In the novels, she depicts Christianity as largely dominated by fundamentalism, which sets up a confrontation between members of Lauren’s religion and the intolerant ‘Christian America’ group, whose politics are founded on a distinct ‘us and them’ mentality. This is demonstrated by its slogan: ‘Join us and thrive, or whatever happens to you as a result of your own sinful stubbornness is your problem’ [italics in original].

Texas Senator Andrew Steel Jarret’s comments represent Christian America’s zealous belief in religious thinking that rejects all those who fall outside its ethical boundary. Jarret’s brand of Christianity is the opposite of Lauren’s focus on change and is characterized by the total rejection of evolution and accusations of witchcraft leveled at alternative epistemologies.

The tension between Christian ideas of creation and evolution as a result of the survival of the fittest is explored in Parable of the Sower. Lauren is deeply critical of peoples’ belief in what she describes as a ‘big-daddy-God.’ To her, the Christian God ‘sounds a lot like Zeus – a super-powerful man, playing with his toys the way my youngest brothers play with toy soldiers.’ Images of the super-powerful man exploiting his plastic pawns allude to Butler’s concern that Christianity is an inherently patriarchal value system both in terms of the biblical text itself, and in relation to the way preachers instruct their congregations. In this regard, Lauren’s rejection of Christianity can be seen as a feminist rejection of the institutions of patriarchy. Moreover, Butler’s denial of patriarchal religious institutionalism extends to the moral imperatives that underpinned the Nation of Islam. Nick Bromell has argued that for most of his political career, Malcolm X, as a member of the Nation of Islam, ‘believed in human inequality, holding that all white persons were devils— existentially and morally inferior to blacks.’ Butler thoroughly rejects the characterization of race in such dichotomous and value-laden terms. However, the invisibility of women in both Christian and Muslim traditions of African-American race politics led Butler to challenge the gender assumptions of the Calvinist heritage of American Puritanism. Furthermore, Butler’s own experiences of gender

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24 ibid, p.16.
marginalization from the Black power movements and her own family’s brand of born again Baptism led her to critique the patriarchy that pervaded these religious institutions.

Butler’s rejection of the patriarchal image of God as a heavenly father hinges upon the absence of purpose behind such a deity. As she ponders: ‘Maybe God is a kind of big kid, playing with his toys. If he is, what difference does it make if 700 people get killed in a hurricane – or if seven kids go to church and get dipped in a big tank of expensive water?’ This quote also expresses Lauren’s frustration at the wastefulness of what she sees as an archaic religious practice. The continuity of tradition, in this case of Baptism, highlights the inability of her father’s religion to adapt to the new ecological environment of the parched and barren Californian landscape. However, underlying Lauren’s comments is Butler’s deep ambivalence towards Christian concepts of divinity and predestination, as the fixity of God and his chosen people’s divine rights seems to lead inexorably to ecological chaos and loss of human life. Here, Butler shows her utilitarian outlook. For her, Christianity’s static view of divinity as well as its ideology of mastery over nature, culminate in material disaster. It is thus ironic that despite Butler’s attempt to critique static concepts of divinity, replacing them with god as change, her characterization of conscience as genetically determined ends up drawing an equally exclusionary moral boundary as Christianity.

Lauren does not reject her father’s religion purely out of her distaste for what she perceives as outdated customs. She views her father’s static God as having no relevance to her lived experience. While no means limited to African-Americans, the need for religion to be directly applicable to a lived reality has historical roots in the Christianization of African-Americans that began in the Great Awakenings of the 1720s. The Great Awakening saw spiritual renewal break forth in local churches and villages throughout the colonies across major lines of church denominations as well as across categories of social and political affiliation. Religious historian William Brackney has noted that

26 ibid, p.16.
Baptist identity…laid an emphasis upon religious experience as a priority over confessionalism. While [Baptists] were not unconcerned about doctrinal orthodoxy, they wanted to see doctrine mediated in life experience.²⁸

This focus on the lived Christian experience proved to be far more attractive to the African-American population than did the scholarly focus on orthodoxy that the Puritans had to offer. Just as large numbers of African-Americans rejected Puritanism for its lack of perceived use to them as slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, so too does Lauren turn her back on Christianity for its failure to deliver any means by which to survive in her dystopian world. For Lauren, worshipping the Christian God represents a failure to acknowledge the pervasive and unstoppable impact of change. However, it is significant that Butler does not criticize Baptism with the same venom that she reserves for more fundamentalist Christian movements. Her particular grievances with Christianity are with Christian groups who rigidly adhere to dogmatic Biblical literalism and refusal to countenance the validity and importance of science, particularly of evolution.

Diverging from the perceived stasis of the Baptist Christian God, Lauren formulates her own religion, which preaches that ‘God is Change.’²⁹ Each new chapter in Parable of the Sower has a verse from Lauren’s self-made bible: ‘Earthseed: The Books of the Living.’ The first of these short verse poems immediately establishes the difference between the nature of Earthseed and Christian conceptions of God. The preamble of chapter 1 is as follows:

All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God
Is Change.³⁰

²⁸ ibid, p.27.
²⁹ Butler. 1993, p.3.
³⁰ ibid, p.3.
Right from the novel’s outset it is clear that Lauren’s perception of God is something that is not only constantly changing, but is also something infinitely changeable. For her, God shapes humanity but is equally shaped by humanity in return. In this respect, Earthseed is an attempt to demystify God. Lauren tries to articulate a conception of God that is grounded in the lived experience and dispels any notions of divine purpose. In doing so, she rejects Calvinist predestination, which has been described by Glen Moots as ‘double predestination,’ where predestination to salvation works together with predestination to damnation to determine the fate of all.\textsuperscript{31} Moots describes this belief in double predestination as a ‘“unilateral covenant” scheme wherein human participation became irrelevant when considered in the light of divine sovereignty.’\textsuperscript{32} Calvin’s notion of predestination thus argues that no action or event on the Earth happens without the will of God.

In stark contrast, Lauren creates a religion that enables her to survive the increasingly hostile surroundings of Southern California. It is only by accepting hard work and accountability for individual actions that there is any hope for survival. As Lauren posits in The Books of the Living:

\begin{quote}
We do not worship God.
We perceive and attend God.
We Learn from God.
With forethought and work,
We shape God.
In the end, we yield to God.
We adapt and endure,
For we are Earthseed
And God is Change.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

The link between Lauren’s language and evolution is made explicit by her continual reiterations of the words ‘adapt,’ and ‘survive,’ as well as her capitalization of the word change, which shows her difference from any conceptions of religious

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{ibid}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{ibid}, p.17.
predestination. Furthermore, the notion that humans not only shape God but also perceive God is sacrilegious to Calvinist ideology in which God’s Will remains hidden from humanity. To include one example from Ecclesiastes: ‘When times are good be happy: but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.’ A person’s path is already laid out; life is a process of discovering that path. By perceiving and attending God, Lauren insists that we actually make our own path, and in turn direct and influence the path and the very nature of God. Lauren’s demand to shape God echoes Galton and Davenport’s ideas about eugenics as providing a vehicle to positively steer and direct human evolution. By rejecting Calvinist predestination as well as Biblical literalism, which describes the world as having always existed as it is in the present, Lauren’s very idea that God can be directed entices her religious followers to participate in divinity. The idea of practically involving people in the fate of human morality echoes eugenic discourse that attracted scientists to take an active role in determining the path of human evolution.

In opposition, Calvin’s theory of divine predestination argues that even the act to choose freely is illusory. His main argument for this is human bondage to sin. For Paul Helm, ‘Calvin cannot contemplate a world created by God in which He fails to have control over every event in that world…By contrast, the bondage of the will to sin has been brought voluntarily by mankind on itself; it was not always thus.’ Calvin’s position was that Adam initially possessed free will in the sense of ‘unrestricted power to choose either good or evil courses of action.’ But having chosen an evil course of action, Adam and Eve’s fall resulted in the evaporation of free will for all subsequent humans. Calvin built upon Augustine’s doctrine which, following the Pauline view that sin was introduced through Adam and Eve’s disobedience of God’s command, understood sin to be a “turning away from God, the supreme good, and turning toward the world or changeable goods in an inordinate way”.

36 *ibid*, p.160.
Antithetical to Calvin’s concept of God as immutability, Lauren’s slogan ‘God is Change’ reveals the difference of her conception of divinity. Lauren not only rejects the idea that it is sinful to revere the changeable world, she maintains that the creative and directive force of the universe is actually change itself. The human legacy of bondage to sin is one of the examples Calvin uses to express his idea that all actions are pre-ordained by God’s divine decree. The belief in our own agency is another offshoot of our bondage to sin. Calvin expressed the view that ‘one effect of sin was to breed illusions in the human mind, and that no illusion was more pernicious than that of the supposed freedom of the will.’

Therefore the immutable and eternal will of God is behind all actions. These views (as well as those of Augustine and Aquinas) are totally contrary to Lauren’s. For Calvin, turning away from the immutability of God to the changeable world represents the rejection of true wisdom and the taint of sin for all subsequent generations. For Lauren, religious fulfillment is premised on guiding change and shaping God, which shapes humanity and the material world. By creating a character who worships change, Butler presents a religion that takes up Galton’s eugenic ideals of placing humanity’s biological development at the heart of all human concerns. However, Butler also inverts eugenic ideals so that directing biological change becomes the eugenic imperative as opposed to preventing racial decline.

By creating an inverse image to the theological and philosophical foundations of much American Christian thought, Butler argues for a reassessment of Christian ethical principles. What emerges from the *Earthseed* verses that are littered throughout both *Parable* novels is a sense of responsibility that each individual has for shaping God, which in turn shapes human evolution and the material world itself. This is not to suggest that Butler creates a godless religion, as again and again Lauren states that ultimately ‘God prevails.’ However, it is to say that she supplants divine determinism with a belief system that valorizes evolution in a naturalized and strangely unproblematic way. In doing so, Butler replaces divine determinism with biological determinism. Butler creates an idea of God that rejects the Calvinist premise of predestination that is not only a founding doctrine of Christian ethics, but

38 Helm. 2004, p.159.
40 *ibid*, p.225.
also a major cornerstone of the American political heritage. However, as I will demonstrate, she presents science and evolution as epistemologies that are beyond interrogation, which echoes Galton’s utopian eugenics that placed the importance of human racial survival above and beyond the need to validate its methods with hard evidence.

**Butler’s Critique of Patriarchy**

Butler’s rejection of Calvinist predestination is part of her feminist critique of American Christian patriarchy. Indeed, the fatalism of predestination is a significant driver of the ecology of her dystopia. In this context, Lauren’s religion seems cognisant of Luce Irigaray’s criticism of Christianity’s current failure to adapt to the ecological pressures of a more environmentally stressed planet. Irigaray states that, ‘any sermon on the salvation of the soul, on the love of the poor, any so-called Eucharistic ritual, any evangelical discourse that doesn’t concern itself with saving the earth and its natural resource, is perverted.’ For Irigaray, Jesus’ irrevocable link to nature means that Christianity should not be able to theologically separate the ‘eucharist from a respect for the earth.’ Jesus thus potentially serves as a bridge to older ‘gyneocratic or matriarchal’ forms of worship. The potential link between Jesus and matriarchal worship could eradicate gender difference, as Jesus would embody both feminine and masculine natures. For Butler, Christianity has rejected the potential for Jesus to embody both genders. The ecological crisis depicted in the *Parable* novels, indicate Christianity’s dominance by patriarchy and the subsequent rejection of Jesus as symbolic of the ecological state of the earth. Butler equates patriarchy with Calvinist notions of predestination and the inherent rejection of change and agency such thinking causes. Failure to accept religion’s role in preventing ecological chaos is indicative of patriarchy’s symbolic meaning that characterizes Jesus Christ as a separate and distinct entity from the Earth. The implication of Irigaray’s criticism, as well as Butler’s novels, is that the schism between heaven and Earth as separate entities in Christian culture has led to individualism, mastery, dominance, and destruction of the environment. For Butler,

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42 *ibid*, p.213.
43 *ibid*, p.213.
the need for religious and moral revision is tied to the need for ecological revolution. In the novels, exploitative attitudes to women, people of color, the poor, and the environment are all tied to a refusal to adapt and change, a refusal that is the result of belief in divine predestination.

Lauren’s view of scientific observation as forming the foundation of her religious aesthetic reflects the difficulties of her dystopian world. In *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler* (2010), Gregory Jerome Hampton has noted that

> Lauren’s church tries to systematize her observations and assumptions and act on them. With her Bible, Earthseed: Book of the Living, Lauren creates a manual of praxis instead of mere faith and theory.\(^{44}\)

Here, Hampton creates a clear hierarchy that privileges pragmatic action over faith and theory, whereas Lauren’s writings are permeated by a faith based belief system in a similar fashion to the Christian Bible. Her writings are observational and serve a very specific practical purpose: helping people summon the courage that is required to be responsible for their own material and spiritual survival. However, Lauren’s observations are laden with faith, both in science and its ability to perceive immutable truth, as well as Lauren’s own assumption that she can discern immutable truth through her eyes. Butler can be seen as mystifying science by homogenizing its methodologies and epistemologies and then placing them beyond scientific challenge. However, it is more accurate to say that she envisions religion as incorporating science into its basic principles. In this respect, Lauren’s preoccupation with praxes of survival acknowledges the forces of evolution that must be included in conceptions of religious thought. By contrast, Christian patriarchy confines both women and men in a system of narrow moral imperatives. It is only through accepting evolution and changeability that survival can be assured, and human behavior can be positively influenced to reflect human nature rather than repress it. In an interview given thirteen years before *Parable of the Sower* was written, Butler revealed her desire for religion to evolve. She comments,

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The kind of religion I’m seeing now is not the religion of love and it scares me. We need to outgrow it. What we’ve done is create for ourselves the massive power of a Big Policeman in the sky. It would be nice if we would police ourselves.45

Just as Lauren comments about Christianity’s ‘big-daddy God,’ Butler, years earlier, expressed her problem with the patriarchal, controlling image of a celestial cop presiding over humanity as though we are naughty children. The fact that her descriptions of Christianity and religion are expressed in similar language thirteen years later suggests that Parable of the Sower is an attempt to fictionalize what a religion might look like if we, as Butler put it, ‘police ourselves.’ That means taking charge of our own destiny, both spiritually and materially. Lauren’s religion is more than what Hampton describes as a ‘manual of praxis’.46 Earthseed is premised on a belief system that holds scientific observation as sacred and strangely beyond critical interrogation. Yet, despite Lauren’s focus on individual agency, I will demonstrate that through the course of the novels it is revealed that her genetic condition is the root of her religious conscience, which shows Butler’s deterministic logic. Divine determinism is replaced by biological determinism.

The Sacred Epistemology: Science, Religion, Utopia, and Postmodernism in Parable of the Sower

In Parable of the Sower, Lauren creates a system of belief that ultimately marries scientific observation and religious idealism. When she is asked about her spiritual beliefs, Lauren describes her realization to the small group of travelers: ‘I was looking for God…I wasn’t looking for mysticism or magic…God would have to be a power that could not be defied by anyone or anything.’47 For Lauren, this universal power is change. Indeed, change is the one force of the universe that seems utterly impossible to fight against. Lauren continues: ‘But it [change] is not a god [my italics]. It’s not a person or an intelligence…It’s a truth…Every living thing, every bit of matter, all the energy in the universe changes in some way.’48 Lauren’s

46 Hampton. 2010, p.92
48 ibid, pp.217-218.
language demonstrates what Madhu Dubey has delineated as *Earthseed*’s ‘unqualified validation of scientific epistemology.’ The ‘truth’ of change exists for Lauren as an observable and quantifiable element that pervades every level of the universe. As Dubey argues, ‘It is Lauren’s observation of natural processes of metamorphosis that gives rise to her principle of god as change…claiming that her belief system reflects a reality that is immediately accessible to empirical observation.’ The crumbling of the social landscape of America thus serves as an example of natural metamorphosis and provides Lauren with the potential for real social change rather than lamenting the loss of an earlier, better time for which her Baptist parents yearn. Lauren never questions the scientific method’s ability to convey an unproblematic view of the universe, which reflects Butler’s own epistemological faith in science. Dubey believes that *Parable of the Sower* depicts the ‘creation of social emergency [which] gears all communal concerns toward the goal of physical survival, thereby suspending epistemological doubt.’ Rather than producing an aesthetic device that reconciles the ‘problem of representation besetting so many African-American authors,’ Butler’s refusal to interrogate scientific epistemology reflects her desire to strip away intellectual abstractions and explore what humanity looks like when its only goal is self-preservation and species continuity. Dubey characterizes Butler’s fiction as postmodern. However, if we believe Jean-François Lyotard’s assertion of the postmodern as the ‘end of the “grand narrative” of the moderns, and of the epistemology of representation on which it had been based,’ then Butler’s unqualified belief in science appears incongruent with this version of postmodern incredulity. By contrast, Butler maintains an authoritative narrator who, rather than interrogating scientific epistemology, actually extends its influence by making it the spiritual as well as material guide.

Lauren’s unquestioned faith in scientific observation is demonstrated by her belief that ‘Change’ is the one truth of the universe. Her religious outlook reveals Butler’s ultimate conviction that immutable truth is possible. In *Cities and Signs: Black*

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50 *ibid*, p.94.
51 *ibid*, p.95.
52 *ibid*, p.95.
Literary Postmodernism, Dubey attempts to reinterpret theories of the postmodern city that are inclusive of the ‘specificities of African-American life and history,’ thereby extending the debate of postmodernism beyond the ‘insidiously racialized’ subject position of the ‘modern West.’ Her attempts to categorize Parable of the Sower as an African-American literary postmodern text run into problems precisely because of Butler’s refusal to interrogate scientific epistemology, but also as a result of the way she structures both Parable novels. As Dubey admits:

The authoritative status of “Earthseed” is further reinforced by the fact that although excerpts from it are occasionally included…within the text…they most often appear as epigraphs to the novel’s chapters. Typographically set off from the body of the text, these epigraphs visually summon up the transcendent authority of the disembedded discourse and, indeed, actually function as sacred discourse.

The fact that Butler refuses to interrogate the epistemological foundations of science is further bolstered by a refusal to interrogate the sacred text of Earthseed. What Butler achieves here is less the expression of what Brian McHale calls the ontological dominant of postmodernism, than it is the ‘modernist (epistemological) device’ of the ‘focalization of all evidence through a single center of consciousness.’ Butler focalizes all evidence through Lauren as the supreme ‘centre of consciousness’, which is free from interruptions of narration that characterize postmodernism’s ontological crisis, as outlined by McHale. The unquestioned integrity of Lauren’s ‘Books of the Living’ represents what Roland Barthes describes as ‘ordinary’ literature’s tendency to be ‘tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions.’ The fact that the entire novel is based on the journal entries from Lauren’s life, coupled with epigraphs from Lauren’s self-made Bible, demonstrate this ‘tyrannical’ focus on the author as providing the reliable lens through which all the action in the novel is viewed. Butler’s employment of a journal-based structure through which all the novel’s action is narrated reveals that

54 Dubey. 2003, p.7.
55 ibid, p.7.
56 ibid, p.79.
she rejects postmodern forms that unsettle the perspective dominance of a single narrative voice. Butler’s faith in observation is structurally supported by her creation of a protagonist who has the epistemological authority to convey a reliable vision of the world she inhabits, and the reader is continually encouraged to empathize with Lauren and her religious ambitions. In doing so, Butler creates an alternative religious system that is free from interruptions that might disturb the totality of her dystopian fictional world. The end result is a utopian religion that is born amidst dystopia, revealing Butler’s belief in observational science to provide moral as well as material truth.

In her attempts to theorize a religious system that is inclusive of scientific explanations of the universe, Lauren expresses a belief that immutable and eternal truths can exist. She says:

Show me a more pervasive power than change…Earthseed deals with ongoing reality, not with supernatural authority figures. Worship is no good without action. With action, it’s only useful if it steadies you, focuses your efforts, eases your mind.59

This statement reflects Lauren’s, and indeed Butler’s, ultimate belief in the authority of lived reality. Butler’s emphasis on survival at all costs reveals her belief in biological imperatives. God ceases to be a guiding authority figure, but this does not mean that Butler dispenses with authoritative epistemology. In Lauren’s view, the very idea of God translates into positive action that results in survival and evolution and can be viewed as corresponding to utopian eugenics, treating humanity’s biological development as a sacred cause. Lauren’s religion thus elevates the process of spiritual and material evolution to an authority figure in itself and illuminates Butler’s biologically deterministic tendencies, as positive action becomes tied to questions of evolution and survival.

The replacement of religion with science leads to what Kathryn Cramer has illustrated as a paradox in science fiction:

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If our faith in science replaces religious faith, science is co-opted into becoming a religion, which, of course, would be unscientific...The primacy of the sense of wonder in science fiction poses a direct challenge to religion: Does the wonder of science and the natural world as experienced through science fiction replace religious awe? While faith in science replaces or metamorphoses into religion for Lauren, she does not dispense with religion as a crucial ethical tool. *Parable of the Sower* deals with science being put through a process of mystification, as the constant scrutiny of its methodology that leads to scientific knowledge is curiously absent from the *Parable* novels. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, other novels such as *Wild Seed* show that religion is necessary to provide a moral voice to oppose unfettered eugenics. The *Parable* novels mark Butler’s concerted effort to move beyond Christian morality and create a belief system that weds her faith in science with spirituality. Butler still conveys a sense that religion is necessary to ensure science’s dispassion does not result in a rejection of the intrinsic value of each human life. However, her faith in the utopian possibilities of eugenics is reflected in the deification of evolution and the corresponding demand that humans shape the God of change. This means that she draws a similar moral boundary as Christianity, one that excludes the ‘other’ from its utopia.

**Christianity and Eugenics**

Lauren’s religion of evolution shares similarities with Francis Galton’s concepts of eugenics. Galton promoted eugenics as a religious alternative to Christianity. Initially, eugenics was far from being considered as solid, evidence-based scientific fact. From Galton and his supporters’ own revelations, it is evident that eugenics was thought of as potentially providing the collective spiritual nourishment for which traditional religion was usually responsible. In this case science ceases to be dispassionate, objective observation and takes on a distinctly religious tone. Jeffrey Weeks argues that, ‘Science in the eyes of the leading advocates of eugenics was married with messianic optimism and fervour.’

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belonging to a collective group that was involved in the future betterment of humankind could have resulted in eugenics supplanting other religions. Galton suggested that, ‘eugenics – “a virile creed” – should become a “religious tenet” of the future.’ While Weeks’s language is histrionic, he conveys Galton’s zeal for implementing his eugenics. For Galton, the goal of eugenics, literally the physical, mental and spiritual health of humanity, was so important as to eclipse the pressing need to fully scientifically substantiate all of his theories. In a similar fashion, Lauren’s immersion in the dystopian environment of the Parable novels sharpens her observation that humanity needs fundamental change to survive. By deifying change, Lauren expresses a desire for utopia that is premised on biological alteration and can be seen as reflecting a eugenic drive.

Eugenics has a strong corollary with religious thinking. Galton called for eugenics to become the new religion of the scientific age. Eugenics historian Edwin Black suggests that, despite his best attempts, Galton lacked complete scientific evidence for eugenics. Black posits that Galton responded by appealing to the value of eugenic ideas in spite of the apparent lack of empirical validation. Black states:

Unable to achieve a level of scientific certainty needed to create a legal eugenic framework in Britain, Galton hoped to recast eugenics as a religious doctrine governing marriages, a creed to be taken on faith without proof. Indeed, faith without proof constitutes the essence of much religious dogma.

What is so startling about the lack of scientific evidence for eugenics was that eugenicists, far from rejecting its principles as unscientific, called for belief to take precedence over observation. The mere fact that Galton even entertained such an idea suggests that he firmly believed in the utopian potential of eugenics as a system of species betterment. In a similar fashion, Lauren attempts to create a new religion based on the premise of survival through forced evolution. Furthermore, she bases her religion on unchallenged faith that observation can elucidate the immutable truths of the universe, thereby characterizing science as a sacred epistemology in itself. Here, Butler perpetuates a similar biological essentialism to that which was rife in

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Britain and America during the eugenics movement. Eugenics looked to biology to answer questions that religion or cultural traditions had formerly been asked to solve. In her attempt to rewrite Christianity, Butler opens up the possibility that human behavior can never break free of deterministic logic. In creating a religion that is premised on an unchallenged acceptance of evolution, divine determinism is replaced by biological determinism. This should be read as a self-reflexive critique of the problems of her own project. As she admits: ‘if we do outgrow it [religion]…we’ll find other reasons to kill and persecute each other.’ Thus Butler reminds the reader that exclusionary discourses, whether religious or biological, have the potential to elicit oppressive behavior. Nonetheless, her deep pessimism with regards to humanity’s innate inability to tolerate difference dictates that Butler can never break free of biological determinism. Biological change is the only way to change humanity’s intrinsic hatred of the other.

Lauren’s focus on observation as the dominant means of perceiving universal ‘truth’ is supported by her continuing claims that she did not ‘invent Earthseed’ but ‘Began to discover it and understand it.’ Like most religious leaders, Lauren believes emphatically in her truth, but unlike other religions, Earthseed does not attempt to create a unified cosmological theory. Rather, Lauren attempts to make observations about the universe that can be practically applied in order to assist people in their struggles to survive. In this respect, Butler’s changing God is actually evolution itself, which again highlights the ideological difference between Calvinist doctrine and Lauren’s notion of God. By rejecting the Calvinist principles that contributed so strongly to American Puritanism, Butler demonstrates some similarities with the ideas of struggle and the active use of hardship to gain spiritual and moral authority as put forward by Malcolm X. Bromell suggests that Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam (NOI) expressed a sense that,

many black Americans who had suffered unjustly at the hands of whites had gained reliable moral knowledge and moral authority; that was the recompense for their suffering and the grounds of their hope. Yet these activists were also pulled by their equally strong resolve to

end unjust black suffering no matter what moral and spiritual benefits it might have conferred on themselves and other black Americans.67

Lauren’s religious outlook, while very different from the NOI, is similarly infused with the sense that religion can be shaped by experiencing struggle against oppression and that surviving and coping with oppression leads to moral insight. Moreover, for Lauren and Malcolm X, the fight for determinacy is shaped by religion so that, at least philosophically, religious ideals inevitably contain the political activism that demands change. While Christian activists such as Martin Luther King Jnr held on to the assumption that god was working with a design, the NOI sought to overhaul the racial establishment through militant defiance. However, for Calvin, a ‘God working without design might himself change through time as the contingent universe changes.’68 This would have been an impossible conception of God, for ‘If God were to “work without design, he would not be virtuous or praiseworthy,” as he would thus allow “accidental events,” which would not be guaranteed to produce the highest good to the universe.’69 Thus, for Calvin, the very ability to characterize God as inherently good is the fact that, unlike other elements in the perceivable universe, He is entirely free from change. Lauren’s response is to dissolve the idea of a conscious God and elevate the process of evolution to the realm of the divine. Implicit in Lauren’s conception of evolution as God is the ultimate faith in objective observation, which reveals Butler’s belief in science as a meta-narrative of modernity and greatly undercuts the ability to see her texts as postmodern. She is less interested in exploring fluid identities, as critics including Haraway, Meltzer, Barr, and Hampton have argued, and is more interested in interrogating utopian possibilities arising amidst fictional dystopias. Indeed, the end result of Lauren’s religion is a utopian voyage away from Earth with other Earthseed devotees. The Earthseed faithful populate outer space to be free of religious persecution, which resembles the Puritan exodus from Britain to the New World.

69 ibid, p.589.
Survival is the first goal for Butler’s characters in *Parable of the Sower*. The second goal is seemingly less attainable, yet appears to be equally significant in giving people hope. In what Butler has described as a familiar trope of science fiction, that of space colonization, she creates *Earthseed* with the ultimate goal of ‘taking root amongst the stars.’ Lauren’s vision for the destiny of *Earthseed* is to populate outer space, which appears as a very literal incarnation of utopia as ‘the promise of salvation from Earthly cares.’ Lauren’s religious aesthetic is centered on the realization of this utopian salvation from the dystopia of Earth. She comments:

> The essentials [of Earthseed] are to learn to shape God with forethought, care and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves; and contribute to the fulfillment of the Destiny.

However, the utopian promise of this destiny seems a fanciful improbability in an American environment where obtaining enough food and water is a constant daily battle. Lauren’s lover Bankole articulates the group’s skepticism when he interrogates her notions of *Earthseed*’s ‘Destiny.’ He states: ‘why should people bother about the Destiny, farfetched as it is? What’s in it for them?’ Here, Bankole expresses cynicism directed towards organized religion that often presents promises that are beyond scientific reason. He also reflects the concern of rampant individualism that has contributed to the creation of dystopia. Lauren rejects Bankole’s pessimism by saying that Earthseed’s destiny provides ‘A unifying, purposeful life here on Earth, and the hope of heaven for themselves and their children. A real heaven, not mythology or philosophy. A heaven that will be theirs to shape.’ Behind Lauren’s new religion is the utopian promise of a better and malleable world, not the intangible promise of a blissful life after death. In this respect, Lauren’s ideas of a utopian world created out of hard work, continuing

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71 Butler. 1993, p.222.  
74 *ibid*, p.261.
evolution and adaptation for the benefit of future generations bear striking similarities to some of the impulses behind positive eugenic discourse. Such discourse held that ‘good Americans,’ could be bred in a similar fashion to good racehorses, thereby declaring a holy war on the survival of ancient dysgenic customs. Lauren can be seen as declaring war on what she sees as these ‘dysgenic customs’ when she characterizes her religious belief that Earthseed’s destiny is to colonize space:

That’s the ultimate Earthseed aim, and the ultimate human change short of death. It’s a destiny we’d better pursue if we hope to be anything other than smooth-skinned dinosaurs – here today, gone tomorrow, our bones mixed with the bones and ashes of our cities…

By escaping Earth without people of conflicting belief systems, Butler presents religious hegemony as a utopian condition. She insists, as she does in most of her novels, that difference, whether racial or religious, is an unsettling force that needs to be overcome through radical biological means. Furthermore, the above remark reveals Lauren’s, and Butler’s, absolute belief that it is only through drastic biological change – in this case repopulating an entirely new habitat – that humanity has any chance of survival and continuity. Such survival is entirely predicated on a utopian society free of the divisive elements of religious difference. I am not suggesting that the means of attaining this utopia are similar to any historical eugenic programs, but that the eugenic utopian impulse pervades Lauren’s conceptions of God as evolution and the destiny of a lived heaven for future generations. The desire to populate other worlds, forsaking those of other religions, also appears as a means to eradicate religious otherness.

Lauren’s Earthseed religion arises amidst economic, political and social turmoil in Parable of the Sower. In the sequel, Parable of the Talents (1998), Bankole (now Lauren’s husband) describes the period where he met Lauren and was exposed to her religious ideas. He conveys that ‘The period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as “the Apocalypse” or more commonly, more bitterly “the Pox” lasted from 2015 through 2030.’ Bankole continues:

75 Black. 2003, p.25.
76 Weeks. 1989, p.129.
77 ibid, p.222.
the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climate, economic, and sociological crises. It would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas. We caused the problems: then we sat and watched as they grew into crises.79

Using a technique that is common in science fiction, Butler takes contemporary problems and extrapolates them to create a dystopia where current anxieties can be expressed and critiqued. Butler’s dystopia reflects anxieties that America is facing rapid climate, economic and social change. Butler’s novels suggest that a failure to act on these changes will result in increasing social upheaval characterized by increased economic desperation highlighted by violence, drug use and a breakdown in law and order. Butler neatly characterizes this fear of social disintegration, through Bankole’s analysis of ‘the Pox.’ He reveals:

Amid all this, somehow, the United States of America suffered a major nonmilitary defeat. It lost no important war, yet it did not survive the Pox. Perhaps it simply lost sight of what it once intended to be, then blundered aimlessly until it exhausted itself.80

Here, Butler creates social, economic and ecological upheaval that allows extremist thinking to take root and then to dominate. She sets up this dystopian world to present two very different religious choices that humanity might take to deal with global crises. Lauren’s response is to create a religious system of belief that is, at least on the surface, based on inclusive knowledge that is geared towards material and spiritual survival. Parable of the Talents also depicts the reversion to extremist Christianity as the inherent danger of the power vacuum created by widespread economic, ecological and social chaos. In Butler’s own words: ‘I thought religion might be an answer, as well as…a problem…and it’s both.’81 Butler’s depictions of extremist Christianity create an equally extreme goal for the followers of Earthseed, which is the abandonment of Earth in search of a new world to populate with its own religious devotees, thereby eradicating otherness to create a stable utopia.

In *Parable of the Talents*, the emerging cohorts of Christian extremists are led by Texas Senator, Andrew Steele Jarret. Early in the novel, a settlement that neighbors Lauren’s *Earthseed* community is attacked. The intruders are described as markedly different from the usual roaming gangs who raid settlements for money, food and children who they keep alive ‘for rape and then for sale.’\(^82\) Aubrey Dovetree describes her family estate’s attackers: ‘They all wore big white crosses on their chests – crosses like in church. But they killed us. They even shot the kids.’\(^83\) The perpetrators of these crimes, an image which cynically evokes the Ku Klux Klan as well as Christian warrior iconography from the crusades, are members of the ‘Christian America’ group, whose political and ideological voice is Senator Jarret. In the power vacuum of post-apocalyptic America, Jarret gains support and political momentum by ‘being a throwback to some earlier “simpler” time.’\(^84\) Jarret harks back to period of American history that never actually existed:

> He wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, worshipped him in the same way, and understood that their safety in the universe depended on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different.\(^85\)

Here, Butler criticizes the social reactionary movements that emerged in Western culture during the 1980s. The political and social landscape of Butler’s *Parables* can be seen as dystopias that intensify Reaganite politics. In his historical account of the rise of postmodernism, Lawrence E. Cahoone describes “premodernism” emerging as a reaction to the status quo of modernity as well as postmodernism in literary criticism. He avers: ‘More prominent in Western society as a whole has been the desire to turn back the clock, to respond to the problems of modern society and culture with a…return to earlier…traditional cultural forms.’\(^86\) In politics this reversion involves moving away from the ‘liberal individualism’ that was characterized as undermining the fabric of society.\(^87\) More importantly for Butler is the idea of this ‘widespread political conservatism,’ manifesting as a call for ‘moral

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\(^{83}\) *ibid*, p.18.  
\(^{84}\) *ibid*, p.19.  
\(^{85}\) *ibid*, p.19.  
\(^{87}\) *ibid*, p.10.
regeneration, for a return to community and religion, and in an extreme form, in religious fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{88} Just as Bankole’s comments identifies the political conservatism that leads to success for ‘premodernists’ like Senator Jarret, he also articulates an historical context that could lead to an increase in religious fundamentalism, namely that of disillusionment with recent crises of modernity.

The Christian Americans led by Jarret, who later becomes president, are set up as the direct opposition to the apparently inclusive religion of \textit{Earthseed}. Jarret’s social and religious bigotry targets anyone who falls outside his criteria of appropriate religious practices. Bankole laments that Jarret’s supporters have been known to form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches. He says, ‘A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist…or even a Catholic.’\textsuperscript{89} Jarret is the embodiment of reactionary religious intolerance, but it is his persecution of \textit{Earthseed} that steels Lauren to keep striving for an eventual exodus from Earth, which is an extremely exclusionary action in itself. Jarret’s irrational hatred of all those outside his narrow parameters for correct religious worship expresses Butler’s deep fear of American religious intolerance, but it also reveals Butler’s deeply combative depiction of human behavior. Butler uses Jarret as a vehicle to critique the reinvigoration of Christian fundamentalism in America in the twentieth century. From the 1920s on Biblical literalism re-emerged as a common feature of American Christianity. Such Christians often reacted against Darwinism and argued that the bible was an infallible guide to faith and morality as well as being indisputable historical and geological fact.\textsuperscript{90} Butler’s rejection of Biblical literalism in the \textit{Parables} can be seen in Christian America’s perpetration of atrocious and barbaric slavery of those who fall outside the Christian moral boundary. While Butler attempts to create a religion that is premised on inclusivity and evolution, the barbarism and dogmatism of her dystopia result in exclusionary moral practices as the

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{ibid}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{89} Butler. 1998, p.19.
\textsuperscript{90} Phy-Olsen, Allene. \textit{Evolution, Creationism, and Intelligent Design}. Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010, pp.60-61. The numbers of Christians in America who take the bible literally has not diminished. Although hard-line creationist doctrines have ‘retreated into private schools and Bible colleges,’(p.61) such views still have widespread support from conservative religious groups. Religious historian Allene Phy-Olsen has stated that the fundamentalist faithful ‘have not relinquished their beliefs. Instead, they have developed a rich counter-culture with their own presses, numerous publications, films and museums.’ (p.61). Rather than acknowledge the advances in empirically based science, biblical literalist Christianity has produced its own verification of its philosophical and cosmological ideas.
only means to achieve any kind of utopia. The violent extremism of her dystopias mean that Butler tends to argue that difference always leads to oppression and can never be overcome by human agency alone.

Butler’s engagement with America’s history of the contestation of Christian ideology is embodied in the philosophical opposition between Earthseed and ‘Christian America.’ Here, Butler expresses anxiety that if religion fails to adapt to the evolution of society and the discoveries of modern science, it could plausibly result in prejudicial hatred and widespread, unjust violence. This is not to suggest that biblical literalism leads inexorably to violence and prejudice. What I am suggesting is that Butler’s belief in science leads her to be skeptical and, indeed, hostile to interpretations of the world that defy advances in scientific understanding. By creating polar opposites of epistemology in the Parable novels, Butler is able to interrogate how extremism in religious ideas continues to manifest as explicit conflict with those outside its moral boundaries. In doing so, she reveals her fascination with human conflict and violence, which is so widespread in her fiction that it appears as an inherent aspect of our species. This idea connects strongly to ideas of the vigorous and combative struggle for survival that was expounded by eugenic discourse.

**Ethics, Moral Boundaries and Biological Determinism in Parable of the Talents**

Butler presents Christianity as having the potential to result in a resurgence of slavery. Here she is engaging with the idea of an ‘us-and-them’ based hierarchy that is centered around the premise of chosen and un-chosen groups. The idea of a chosen people and their subsequent covenant with God is an abundant feature of Christian ideology, particularly Calvinism. Paul Griffin has stated that: ‘The Puritans were heirs of the Calvinist tradition.’

91 Puritan theology took up Calvin’s notions of predestination and bondage to sin, as well as espousing Calvin’s distinctive views of covenant and creation. The Puritans’ concept of covenant was modeled on the Mosaic tradition in which they believed God had elected them the new chosen people. In Griffin’s view this theology of bondage to sin, predestination, covenant and creation could become powerful tools for oppression ‘in the hands of bigoted

92 *ibid*, p.16.
Christians.' He continues: ‘Each of these theological ideas, wrongly avowed, could enable religionists to claim divinely imputed superiority not only in religious status but also with respect to racial, gender, social, economic, and political status. This is precisely what happened.' The idea of a divinely predetermined chosen people meant that acts of slavery could not only be justified by men of God, they could actually be promoted by Scriptural evidence. Biblical evidence of sanctioned slavery could be sourced throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 9: 20-28, Leviticus 25: 40-46 to name a few). The Calvinist view that the Hebrew Scriptures laid the foundation of proper covenant theology meant that Puritans could see evidence of slavery committed by the ‘chosen people’ and apply the same divine logic to their own quest to establish their promised land. This is not to reduce racism in America to the sole product of biblical theology. What it does say is that Butler, through her depiction of slavery committed by Christian ‘Crusaders’, is well aware that slavery in America was perpetrated by men and women of God.

Butler’s fear that dogmatic religious thought leads to prejudicial atrocities is typified by President Jarret’s ‘Crusaders.’ The members of Lauren’s Acorn community are subjected to escalating acts of barbaric enslavement as their ‘teachers’ begin their task of Christian re-education. After one of Lauren’s friends, Emery Mora, has been repeatedly raped she finally commits suicide, but not before killing her rapist first. The reprisals for Emery’s defiance are severe. All the women in the community are punished. As Lauren narrates,

We were all lashed for what Emery did. The men were made to watch. We were marched out of the school and lashed as we were made to kneel and pray, to scream out our sins, to beg for forgiveness, and quote Bible verses on command…This was an orgy of abuse and humiliation.  

Through passages such as these, it is evident that not all of Butler’s characters are able to survive at all costs, highlighting just how much of an achievement the act of survival is in her dystopia. Emery’s defiance is evidence of Butler’s interest in using dystopias to, as Dennis Rohatyn puts it,

93 ibid, p.17.
94 ibid, p.17.
95 Butler. 1998, p.211.
enable us to see just what is indispensable, what cannot be suffered or permitted no matter what the circumstances. In the worst of all possible worlds we lose not only hope but even the language with which to identify what has been stolen from us.  

Emery is a prime example of the inability to even talk of trauma. Stripped of even the language to articulate her grief at having lost both her husband and two children, Emery (who is one of Lauren’s first converts in Parable of the Sower) decides to kill herself. Lauren describes her conspiracy: ‘She seduced one of the Crusaders…Then sometime during the night, she cut his throat…She lay down beside her first victim and cut her own wrists.’ Unlike Lauren, who is able to secretly write in her journal, Emery has been stripped of her ability to ‘survive and endure,’ demonstrated by her complete absence of hope and her oblivion in the dystopia of sexual slavery. However, it is Lauren’s experience of sexual slavery that highlights Butler’s biological explanations for all facets of human behavior by showing how Lauren’s religious ideas are a product of her genetic affliction.

The Biological Conscience: Inheritance and Religious Ethics

Lauren’s experience of slavery is made even more difficult by her biological affliction. She suffers from an hereditary illness that makes her experience other peoples’ pain: hyperempathy. Butler often creates chief protagonists who are afflicted with some form of fictitious disease, sometimes the result of drug use in the preceding generation. In Lauren’s case, her mother abused a ‘smart drug’ called ‘Paracetco.’ Lauren relays the causes of her illness: ‘Thanks to Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein powder, the particular drug my mother chose to abuse before my birth killed her, I’m crazy.’ As the name suggests, hyperempathy causes Lauren to experience other people’s pain when they are in her line of vision. Lauren reveals: ‘I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel. Hyperempathy is what the doctors call an “organic delusional syndrome…”’ I get a lot of grief that doesn’t

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98 ibid, 210.
belong to me, and that isn’t real. But it hurts. Jerry Phillips has described hyperempathy syndrome as effectively nullifying the existence of the ‘other’ in *Sower*. He states:

in a hyperempathetic world, the other would cease to exist as the ontological antithesis of the self, but would instead become a real aspect of oneself, insofar as one accepts oneself as a social being. Earthseed is the practical ethics of this heightened consciousness of what it means to experience being as, irreducibly, being-with-others.

There can be no doubt that Lauren’s biological affliction greatly impacts her experience of being a social animal. Phillips’s characterization of Lauren’s hyperempathy as breaking down the barrier between self and other is insightful, as Lauren’s ethics are framed by her experience of literally ‘being-with-others.’ What is most significant here is that it appears that Lauren’s biological condition is a crucial driver of Earthseed’s ethical outlook. Butler sees biology as motivating social behaviors and that ethical behavior is actually the result of biological predispositions. Furthermore, Lauren’s affliction of hyperempathy suggests that the tempering of science-based ethics by empathy is an important requirement. An ethic that is premised on science without empathy is dangerous as dispassionate objectivity could and, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, sometimes does lead to legitimizing using people for experimentation without consent, thus stripping them of their inherent value as humans.

The imbalance between those in positions of power and those subjugated by such relationships reflects Butler’s preoccupation with biological determinism. As Hoda M. Zaki has argued, ‘the relationship between ruler and ruled is never egalitarian for Butler, but is always a matter of dominance and submission consistent with her essentialist view of human nature.’ Zaki asserts that Butler’s essentialism lies in her view that ‘human nature is fundamentally violent,’ owing to the ‘human genetic structure.’ Zaki is referring to Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy, which I shall discuss.

100 ibid, p.12.
103 ibid, p.241.
in detail in Chapter 5, but her argument still applies to both Parable novels. While the Parable series is Butler’s attempt to imagine social change through religious transformation, the very formation of the religious ethic that precipitates social change is biologically scripted. Butler’s biological essentialism dictates that social change is impossible without molecular level alteration of humanity. Zaki sees her refusal to provide any political alternatives as representing her essentialist view of the world: ‘The public arena of politics, where dialogue and dissent occur, is nullified in most of her novels by her construction of permanent states of emergency.’  

This nullification of dissent is exemplified by Lauren’s captivity, where the very act of speaking to the guards or to other captives, is cause for neurological lashings from the slave collars. In this respect, Butler has rendered political debate completely absent from her dystopia. She does so to highlight the futility of political debate, which she sees as insufficient in guaranteeing human survival, thus revealing her biologically deterministic tendencies.

Lauren’s utopian religion is ultimately born out of a biological mutation. Here, Butler reiterates the necessity of biological change in order to guarantee humanity’s survival. Lauren echoes these sentiments: ‘If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn’t do such things…if everyone could feel everyone else’s pain, who would torture?’ The potential for positives resulting from a seemingly catastrophic inherited disease shows Butler’s unceasing biological determinism. Lauren continues: ‘I’ve never thought of my problem as something that might do some good…I wish I could give it to people. Failing that, I wish I could find other people who have it…A biological conscience is better than no conscience at all.’ Lauren admits that her conscience is biologically scripted. This is not to say that her conscience is inferior, but it does suggest a way out of the social problems that revolve around lack of empathy. The idea that biology can determine a person’s conscience suggests that ethical ideals can be inherited. By creating a character whose inherited disease is responsible for her conscience, Butler presents a world in which inheritance dictates behavior. This view of genetic inheritance has striking similarities to Charles Davenport’s eugenic concepts of the heritability of

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104 *ibid*, p.242.  
106 *ibid*, p.115.
behavioral traits. Davenport explained all traits and behaviors as rooted in biology. Thus ‘imbecility, insanity, epilepsy, albinism, alcoholism,’ hair and lip formation, as well as ‘self-control’ were all biologically inherited to the same degree. Just as Davenport saw all moral behavior as dictated by a person’s biological heritage, so too does Lauren’s hyperempathy dictate her ethical outlook. Here, Butler’s biologically deterministic logic is displayed, as it is through Lauren’s biological affliction that her religious ideas are given weight and her conscience takes shape.

How are we to view Earthseed’s ethics if biology largely dictates destiny? The abandonment of Earth in search for new worlds demonstrates Butler’s belief in evolutionary ethics. Although the Earthseed spaceships only leave in the novel’s epilogue, the goal of populating other worlds is constantly reiterated throughout the series. It is particularly poignant that the evolutionary ethic that enables Lauren to dream of abandoning the Earth, leaving it in the hands of her oppressors, is strikingly similar to the ethics that allow the ‘Christian America’ group to perpetrate their acts of violence. In his book, In the Name of God, John Teehan discusses the debate surrounding the ethics of Christianity as is evident in the bible. He states that:

Christianity does represent a new development in humanity’s religious consciousness; it does present a different understanding of humanity's relation to the divine; it does provide the material for a new understanding of our moral relationship to others. But this does not preclude an evolutionary basis for this religious ethical tradition…

Teehan’s argument is that while many Christian ethicists claim that Christianity is a universal ethic that goes beyond group identity based on ethnicity, it still creates an ethical system that is based on ‘the psychology of reciprocation, which also triggers evolved preferences for kin, and which establishes a group identity by drawing a moral boundary between itself and others…’ In Lauren’s quest to establish a new religion, the same characteristics of Christianity that Teehan describes emerge in Earthseed. The drawing of moral boundaries based on a group identity is evident.

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108 ibid, p.32.
110 ibid, p.106.
first in the walled suburb of Robledo, then again in Acorn, and lastly, on the space ships destined for Proxima Centuri. What is particularly significant is that while Lauren tries to come up with a religion that is free of history to avoid becoming ‘smooth-skinned dinosaurs,’ her religious logic is inexorably tied to this Judeo-Christian ethical principle of group identity as formed by the erection of a moral boundary. At the heart of this moral boundary is the utopian eugenic desire to eradicate otherness. By leaving the planet and only allowing Earthseed converts to populate the new world, Butler creates a utopian vision that is premised on the absence of otherness to transcend the social, political and economic dystopia of Earth.

While Christianity shows no preference for any specific ethnicity it still adheres to the binary logic of us-and-them. This creation of the in-group out-group mentality that legitimizes Christian America’s vendetta against Lauren and her people is evident even in the words of Christ. As Teehan again argues, ‘Jesus himself expresses the epitome of such binary thinking: “He who is not with me is against me”.’ Just as Christ rejects those who are not with him, so too does Lauren. Through her creation of Earthseed as a major alternative to Christianity, Butler illuminates her ideas about the inherently violent and intolerant nature of human identity. In an interview with Marilyn Mehaffy and AnaLouise Keating, Butler stated that in Parable of the Sower, ‘I talk about us as we are, and I give us – I don’t give it; nature seems to have given it – a religion.’ Here, she suggests that nature and biology have endowed us with the religious impulse. Rather than attempt to deconstruct such biologically deterministic logic, Butler actually tries to use the idea of ‘nature’ by characterizing religion as dependent on observing the natural processes of the universe in order for her characters to, as she puts it, ‘save themselves.’ While Lauren’s religion is undoubtedly very different in its specifics to Christianity, the logic of the in-group and the out-group still applies. The result of this is that the same hierarchies for preferences towards those within the moral boundary of the group remain.

111 Butler. 1993, p.10.
112 ibid, p.328.
114 Butler. 1993, p.222.
115 Teehan. 2010, p.126.
117 ibid, p.62.
unchallenged. Therefore, humanity’s tendencies to power relations of dominance and oppression are left intact and actually exist in these novels as natural, biological characteristics of human behavior.

Conclusion

Through her *Parable* novels, Butler is quick to reject notions of religious predestination. She vehemently reacts against Calvinist ideologies that have God as the instigator and controller of all events in the lives of those on Earth. She also rejects the patriarchal foundations of the Nation of Islam, yet embraces its ideology of surviving struggle as a key feature in gaining spiritual and moral authority. Butler sees the Puritan ethics of Christians as the chosen people, as being reinvigorated in America in the 1980s by Reagan’s association with evangelical Christianity. The 1984 election saw Christian Right groups throwing their support behind Reagan as a ‘man who was a godly, evangelical Christian, who would bring American back to God.’ Consequently, Butler uses this period in America’s history of Christian evangelical rejuvenation as the source of her dystopian critique of religious fundamentalism. However, while she rejects notions of divinely prescribed predestination, she most certainly does not dispense with determinism. Indeed, she supplants Calvinist divine predestination with biological determinism. Butler’s refusal to interrogate its method results in science existing as a sacred epistemology in her novels. Rather than presenting postmodern texts that deal with crises of ontology, Butler has delivered stories that reinforce the value of epistemological certainty, as it is through such unqualified belief that the utopian promise of the novels can be achieved. While technology is never imbued with inherent good or evil, the redemptive and destructive potential of both are always represented. Whether science and technology are to redeem or destroy is a result of the nature of the humans wielding them. Butler has expressed this view herself: ‘I don’t really have much hope for us as a species, especially if we become more technologically aware and if we stay here on Earth. Just talking through the problems isn’t an adequate solution.’ This statement also shows how Butler dissolves political discussion, as she does not really believe that it is a viable means through which humanity can solve

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its problems. She is more interested in interrogating the ethical dilemmas people face when survival and species continuity are the only real goals of existence.

A particular irony of Butler’s emphasis on survival is that, as a result of her persistent reduction of human behavior to biological bases, she ends up with similar ethical products to Christianity, which she ardently opposes. By perpetuating an essentialist view of human behavior, she creates a religion that draws a moral boundary around itself in the fashion of Christianity. By never deconstructing the sacred texts, both *Earthseed* and Christianity maintain a level of mysticism that is actually uncannily similar despite their obvious ideological differences. *Earthseed* does provide an insightful critique of Christian theology. However, Butler’s own epistemological bias towards science results in the same ethical conclusion as Christianity: the exclusion of those outside the moral boundary, and the ultimate eradication of otherness via exclusive exodus and repopulation.
Chapter 3: The Contagious Pandemic: Utopia, Dystopia, Eugenics and Apocalypse in Clay’s Ark

Christian ethics surrounding the intrinsic importance of human life are often counter arguments to eugenics in Butler’s novels. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, her Parable novels mark a significant attempt to create a religious ethic premised on evolutionary ethics in order to move beyond Christianity’s privileging of its own specific in-group ethic. Despite trying to conceive of a challenge to Christianity based on inclusion and perpetual change, Butler ends up drawing similar ethical conclusions that result in the elimination of difference as the necessary condition for utopia. With this focus on erasing otherness as the precondition for utopian possibilities, I now focus on Butler’s more extreme depictions of eugenic selection in her earlier novel Clay’s Ark (1984). In the novel, Butler presents utopia as relying on both negative and positive eugenics, which in itself hinges upon disease as a catalyst for evolutionary alteration. In this chapter, I analyze how Butler reinterprets pandemic illness to interrogate the tension between utopian and dystopian eugenics in her novels. Butler uses illness to explore the evolutionary advantages that sometimes emerge from dystopian environments. In contrast to historical eugenics’ focus on selective breeding, Butler’s novel Clay’s Ark depicts a pandemic illness that conflates contagion with genetic disease, triggering a new pathway for evolution. The novel’s dystopian characterization of sickness gives way to a hidden utopian goal of a new branch of human evolution that is contingent on the erasure of physical difference brought about by the presence of a terrestrial bacterium. However, in contrast to stories of pandemic diseases where human agency prevails in overcoming illness, Butler presents new directions of evolution resulting from the inevitable spread of a virulent, contagious disease. This focus on utopian evolutionary advancement springing from a dystopian pandemic demonstrates her fascination with evolution being directed by external sources.

It is my argument that Butler uses the inescapably contagious nature of the extraterrestrial disease as a symbol for the authoritarian control of human reproduction typified by the state institutionalized eugenics of the twentieth century.
However, Butler reinterprets this dystopian image of eugenics and rewrites it as having a utopian potential. The utopian impulse that pervades Butler’s depictions of eugenics are focused on how she sees the eradication of the biological causes of physical difference as the catalyst to creating a society free from the divisive and unsettling forces of differences in genetic and cultural heritages. Those who survive the microbe’s attack are unified by its biological purpose to spread itself and permanently alter terrestrial biology to its liking.

Butler’s presentation of a contagious pandemic in *Clay’s Ark* offers a utopian apocalyptic vision resulting from the purging of ‘sick’ humanity. The only two noteworthy critics who have written on *Clay’s Ark*, Sherryl Vint and Maria Aline Ferreira, have argued that Butler uses illness to investigate the collapse of boundaries of otherness, specifically the boundary between human and animal. However, it is my contention that Butler’s fatalistic approach to the apocalyptic spread of disease also reflects her eagerness to show the physical death and subsequent rebirth of current humanity. Consequently, her depictions of illness reflect her tendency to present biological solutions to social problems. In *Clay’s Ark*, Butler creates a utopian eugenic narrative in which she fictionalizes the erasure of the biological roots of physical difference as a means to create a racial utopia.

To show how Butler creates a utopian eugenic vision that relies on apocalyptic illness as its catalyst, I analyze the heritage of apocalyptic thought in America. I investigate the Christian concepts of apocalypse in the context of the book of Revelation, as it portrays utopia being brought about, at least in part, through the apocalyptic trial of universal pestilence. I also examine Puritan notions of utopian apocalypse resulting through human action in American culture. Butler depicts both human agency and divine fatalism in her apocalyptic novel. She also theorizes a eugenic utopia in the idiom of a social Darwinist struggle that depicts an extremely accelerated version of the survival of the fittest. Consequently, the tension between dystopian and utopian interpretations of eugenics arises, as the ethical questions of the extent to which utopian eugenic ambitions should take primacy over individual rights to life become the crucial concern of Butler’s novel. I then analyze Vint and Ferreira’s articles, both of which argue that *Clay’s Ark* narrates our shared kinship with animals. Their contentions link Butler’s novel with Donna Haraway’s project of boundary implosion.
as a means of feminist resistance. As such, I also look at Haraway’s use of the immune system and the body’s response to disease as an allegory for highlighting how the human body undermines dualistic and colonialist concepts of the self and the other. I use Haraway’s allegory of the immune system as a subversion of dualisms to as a counterpoint to Butler’s. For Butler, the potential for immune responses to undo dichotomous logic is made redundant by the presence of an extraterrestrial pathogen, whose utter contagiousness serves to reinforce colonialist language and iconography.

Far from collapsing boundaries as a tool for feminist resistance to patriarchy, Butler uses pandemic illness to illuminate how positive evolutionary outcomes are only guaranteed by the eradication of otherness. Subsequently, utopia is premised on a kind of racial uniformity rather than an acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity. With this apocalyptic winnowing of humanity at the heart of the novel, I further examine the role of religion, specifically Christian concepts of apocalypse in both the vernacular of Revelation and the apocalyptic Puritan tradition of America. *Clay’s Ark* is permeated by both fatalistic and active concepts of apocalypse. By creating characters who try to prevent the outbreak in spite of the futility of fighting the pandemic, Butler places Christian morality at the heart of the emerging community. In doing so, she expresses a religiosity that weds evolutionary aspirations with apocalyptic and eugenic yearnings for ‘better’ humans at the expense of those less suited. As in the *Parable* novels that I examined in the previous chapter, *Clay’s Ark* replaces divine determinism with genetic determinism, as Butler’s approach to biology seems dictated by the same fatalistic logic that dominates Christian ideology. Through her reinterpretation of apocalypse, Butler displays the same desire for both moral and biological uniformity that is at the heart of both the chiliastic apocalyptic tradition and eugenics.

**Pandemic disease and its role in the Apocalyptic Imagination**

There is a strong corollary between pandemic disease and apocalypse in Christian thought. Despite its controversial nature and its characterization by some Christians as a ‘curiosity that accidentally and embarrassingly belongs to the New Testament,’
the Book of Revelation has informed the Western imagination of its own demise.\(^1\) In Revelation, the horseman who springs forth upon the opening of the fourth seal by the ‘Lamb’ is described as ‘Death,’ who, along with the other three horsemen, is endowed with the power to kill ‘by sword, famine and plague.’\(^2\) The notion of pandemic pestilence resulting in apocalypse is by no means limited to the Bible, and Butler seizes upon Christianity’s long association of pestilence with apocalypse in order to use illness as a catalyst for the creation of a eugenic utopia. Butler’s use of apocalyptic iconography is reflective of a broader popularization of the apocalyptic impulse so graphically and erotically displayed in the Apocrypha. In the words of Jonathan Kirsch, the threat of apocalypse has, ‘migrated from the pages of Revelation to some of our [Western Culture’s] most exalted works of literature, art, music as well as the sports pages, the movie screen, and the paperback best-seller.’\(^3\) In short, the imagery, language and most importantly, the concept of the end of the world through a cataclysmic event, are deeply rooted in Western culture and its literary imagination. This apparent yearning for the end of days is present in Clay’s Ark, as Butler conveys a vision of pandemic illness as facilitating utopian apocalypse. As Charles Strozier has suggested, Revelation’s vision of finality demonstrates a ‘remarkable myth of violence, revenge and renewal.’\(^4\) It is the concept of renewal through apocalypse that is particularly relevant to Butler’s novel and is indicative of her refusal to dispense with Christian concepts when formulating ethical ideas. However, in contrast with her other novels, particularly Wild Seed, Clay’s Ark posits a world that is ripe for apocalyptic renewal. Indeed, the truly contagious and unavoidable nature of the disease reveals Butler’s eagerness to dramatize the death of the current human race and supplant it with a new mode of human being.

Butler characterizes illness as a means to achieve an alternative branch of human evolution. Clay’s Ark, the third novel in the Patternist series (1976-84), narrates the story of origin of the ‘Clayarks’ who appear in Butler’s first published novel,


Patternmaster (1976).\textsuperscript{5} In Patternmaster, the landscape of the distant future is dominated by two distinct branches of human evolution: Clayarks and Patternists. Clayarks possess none of the Patternists’ mental abilities and depend entirely on their physical senses to survive.\textsuperscript{6} Butler’s future depicts the Cartesian split of mind and body as existing literally in the two distinct species, as the Clayarks’ power is firmly rooted in the body: speed, agility, and strength; whereas the Patternists’ power resides in psychic manipulation and telepathy. The hostility between the two species hinges upon the denial of the other’s status as human. While both species are of human origin, the fact that they each embody different sides of the Cartesian rupture renders them completely incompatible, and demonstrates Butler’s focus on power clashes that arise from extreme biological difference in her early fiction.

Patternmaster deals with the explicit patriarchal power struggle between two sons vying for control of the patternist society. As Sharon DeGraw notes of the novel, ‘Race is not directly addressed,’ and the racial focus of later novels in the series is not emphasized.\textsuperscript{8} However, there is an implicit racial context to the work that exists between two separate species of humanity: Clayarks and Patternists. The narrator of Patternmaster recounts the popular image that each species carries of one another: ‘Patternists and Clayarks stared at each other across a gulf of disease and physical difference and comfortably told themselves the same lie about each other… “Not People”’.\textsuperscript{9} Here, Butler associates disease with otherness, as the presence of the illness is the defining physical and mental characteristic that defines the Clayarks’ biological and racial difference from the Patternists. Here, the sick body serves as a metaphor for constructions of biological inferiority. Butler’s ideas of disease also relate to the concept of dysgenics, formulated by Charles Davenport, who sought to prevent the ‘reproduction of undesirable traits.’\textsuperscript{10} Butler’s depiction of inheritable traits as racially split between mental and physical characteristics reflects

\textsuperscript{5} The Patternist Series was published out of chronological narrative order. The last book of the series, Patternmaster, was published first (1976), the second book, Mind of My Mind, was next (1977), the first book, Wild Seed came next (1980), and lastly came the third in the series, Clay’s Ark (1984).


\textsuperscript{7} The Patternists are the offspring of Doro’s eugenic tampering that was discussed in chapter 1.


\textsuperscript{9} Butler, Octavia E. “Patternmaster”, 2007, p.709.

Davenport’s ideas that particular heredity patterns belonged exclusively to Anglo and African-Americans. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Davenport saw desirable mental characteristics existing more prominently in the Anglo-American population and stronger physical attributes in the African-American populace. As such, Butler can be seen as racializing Clayark and Patternist genetic lineages by invoking the eugenic discourse used by Davenport to racialize biological differences amongst the American population in the early twentieth century. The brutality of the disease highlights the overtly eugenic, accelerated social Darwinist ethics of her fictional world. However, as I later demonstrate, Butler inverts this negative eugenic concern of genetic disease prevention and presents a contagious pandemic as containing the utopian potential to eradicate physical differences through apocalyptic renewal. The presence of the extraterrestrial disease that leads to Clayark identity makes bodies both different and dangerous, but ultimately desirable and utopian. By characterizing their otherness in terms of contagion Butler draws the link between disease and utopian transformation.

*Patternmaster’s* landscape is a post-apocalyptic world where humanity, on the one hand, has undergone irreversible transformation through pandemic pestilence, and on the other has achieved new powers as a result of eugenic manipulation. The fact that both species emerge as dominant forms of humanity through very different means shows how, even in her early fiction, Butler is fascinated with eugenic outcomes, particularly with utopian eugenics that eradicate physical difference through evolutionary struggle. Of all Butler’s novels, it is in *Clay’s Ark* that the link between apocalyptic renewal and disease is most thoroughly examined. Indeed, the fictional world of *Patternmaster*, of which *Clay’s Ark* is a prequel, is undermined by Butler’s characterization of the alien illness as so thoroughly totalizing it cannot be conceivably avoided. Because *Clay’s Ark* was written seven years after *Patternmaster*, it is valuable to analyze it in isolation from the other novels in the

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11 The biologizing of racial differences is by no means limited to the period of the popularization of the eugenics movement. Encounters with aliens in science fiction from the 1920s until today can be viewed through this lens of the clash of different biological groups, which merely uses species otherness as a smokescreen to express anxieties of racial difference. Such popular examples of a clash of cultures include Robert A. Heinlein’s Hugo award winning novel *Starship Troopers* (1959), H.G. Wells’s classic *War of the Worlds* (1898), Orson Scott Card’s novel *Ender’s Game*, and more recently, Neil Blomkamp’s film *District 9* (2009).
series, as it shows her increasing focus on the erasure of the biological markers that denote difference as a means to transcend issues of intolerance to difference.

*Clay’s Ark* is Butler’s most apocalyptic novel. The story narrates the process by which current humanity is either eradicated, or altered and renewed. Elana Gomel has contended that,

> apocalyptic fictions typically linger on pain and suffering. The end result of apocalyptic purification often seems of less importance than the narrative pleasure derived from the bizarre and opulent tribulations of the bodies being burnt by fire and brimstone, tormented by scorpion stings, trodden like grapes in the winepress.¹²

For Gomel, the tendency of apocalyptic fiction to obsess on the bodily pain caused by pandemic illness reflects the oddly sadomasochistic yearnings associated with ideas of the end of the current world order. *Clay’s Ark* certainly fits in to Gomel’s model of apocalyptic fiction’s focus on bodily suffering. However, the end result of Butler’s apocalyptic renewal is the crux of the novel, rather than the eroticism of pain and suffering, despite its graphic illustrations of violence, pain and bodily trauma. The hidden eugenic utopia that emerges from the dystopian focus on pain and suffering is the important leitmotif of Butler’s novel. Pestilence and death resulting in a racial utopia reveals Butler’s increasing fascination with forcing humanity’s biological advancement through achieving the kind of symbolic genetic homogeneity that comes from dismantling the biological markers of race. Butler uses dystopia as a catalyst to achieve utopia for those strong enough to survive.

As with all of Butler’s texts, *Clay’s Ark* presents a violent and largely dystopian world. However, this dystopian landscape is permeated by the presence of an apocalyptic utopian impulse, which is revealed in the necessity to force human biological transformation through pandemic contagion. Lupe, a sufferer from the alien disease, recounts how it saved her from her dystopian life amongst the ‘pure’ humans. She recounts,

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We lived in a cesspool. My parents’ house got caught in a gang war, got bombed. One of those gangs wanted to make a no-man’s land, you know. They needed to put some space between their territory and their rivals.’ So they bombed some houses, torched others. They got their no-man’s land. My parents, my brother, and a lot of other people got killed.¹³

The violent barbarism of the near future is palpable, as gang warfare eclipses any rule of law and order, which cynically reveals Butler’s vision for the American future. Ecological, social and economic crises unsettle any kind of governmental stability, which in turn creates a sense of permanent emergency. Such a dystopian environment imprints upon the reader the need for drastic change beyond the current allegedly democratic processes of the present day United States, one that might seek social betterment not through political means but instead through biological pathways. This is an implicit literary device employed by Butler that urges the reader to sympathize with evolutionary leaps in biology as the sole means to overcome the dystopia of the near future. Lupe, along with other members of the Clayark community, has to survive the initial onslaught of an illness that kills three in four people. However, the utopian promise of living among a collective of people too physically powerful and ecologically self-sufficient to be destroyed by the violent dystopia of America in 2021 shows how Butler’s characters undertake an apocalyptic trial of the flesh to enter a eugenically utopian community. The presence of pandemic illness and the chaotic, gruesome brutality that litters the novel is indicative of the link between disease, violence, and apocalyptic renewal, as each dystopian element functions in terms of the natural progression towards utopia. The disease in Clay’s Ark, just as Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation, functions to usher in a new world order through the large-scale sacrifice of humanity to illness and death.

Butler characterizes the disease as universally contagious. The illness is brought back to Earth by an exploration team. This disease¹⁴ burns people inside and can be seen as an apocalyptic trial from within the body, rather than affecting it from without. Meda, who suffers from the Clay’s Ark disease, explains the origin of the extraterrestrial illness to Blake:

¹³ Butler. 2007, p.525.
¹⁴ The disease is known as the ‘Clay’s ark’ disease, named after the spaceship that discovered it when exploring a planet orbiting Proxima Centuri Two. p.490.
The disease is from the second planet of Proxima Centuri. It killed ten of a crew of fourteen...they began by isolating anyone who got sick. Then they found they had to restrain them to keep them isolated. That amounted to slow death by torture.\textsuperscript{15}

Here, Butler stresses the link between the illness and bodily torture. The process of internal burning that the characters feel also links disease with biblical iconography of fire and brimstone associated with the apocalyptic destruction of the unrighteous in Revelation. The disease kills three out of four people, but the survivors are irrevocably changed: ‘The organism doesn’t use cells up the way a virus does. It combines with them, lives with them, divides with them, changes them just a little.’\textsuperscript{16} This process of combination is extremely violent: people become impossibly ill as their entire physiology is scoured from within. In this respect, the alien disease appears to share elements of viral infection, but more significantly it shares a figurative link with cancer, which is often ‘framed by the metaphor of transformation,’ as well as ‘contamination and imputed infection.’\textsuperscript{17} By using the language of cancer and its association with the vernacular of internal biological change, Butler reinterprets disease as potentially redemptive, which reveals her focus on the evolutionary outcomes of apocalypse, not just the fetishization of pain and bodily agony.\textsuperscript{18} Reading the disease as an evolutionary catalyst has the disturbing implication that a utopia free of discrimination against difference is largely reliant on eliminating physical markers of racial difference. Butler’s biological determinism, which locates racial difference in the body, means that the disease dissolves race by eliminating physical difference. The mechanics of the Clay’s Ark disease also shares a common thread with surviving cancer, which is only achievable by adapting to and eventually overcoming cellular change, as well as enduring its inevitable pain. Considering Butler’s obsession with biological change, the disease emerges as a tool for evolution. However, as with all of Butler’s fiction, this evolution is thrust upon humanity by an external source and is indicative of her pessimistic view that humanity will not be the primary agent in ensuring its own survival.

\textsuperscript{15} Butler. 2007, p.490.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{ibid}, p.487.
\textsuperscript{17} Weiss, Maria. ‘Signifying the Pandemics: Metaphors of AIDS, Cancer, and Heart Disease.’ \textit{Medical Anthropology Quarterly}. vol.11, no.4, 1997, p.460.
\textsuperscript{18} This reinterpreting of cancer as a potentially redemptive disease through eugenic and genetic tampering is made more explicit in The Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89), where Lilith’s ‘Talent for Cancer’ is used by the Oankali to increase their own genetic capabilities. This will be discussed in detail in the next Chapter.
Evolution and Multiple Identities: *Clay’s Ark* and the Perceived Challenge to Binary Logic

Butler’s focus on challenging current modes of human being is a common theme of criticism of her work. Evolution is a constant motif of her fiction, and critics including Vint and Ferreira also contend that Butler presents new possibilities of human evolution. Vint has insisted that *Clay’s Ark* depicts, ‘a new way of being, a new kind of subjectivity that is constituted precisely via a new sense of kinship with our animal others.’ Far from eliminating difference, for Vint, Butler’s characterization of illness creates a human modality that reintegrates us into the natural world. Vint’s declaration that Butler fictionalizes a new subject position that has a shared kinship with animals is based, at least in part, on the physiological changes that the alien disease causes in the next generation of children. Social change is a direct corollary of biological alteration, revealing Butler’s insistence that social development is secondary to genetic evolution. Keira explains to her father Blake that Jacob (Meda and Eli’s son) is the result of ‘Diseased-induced mutation.’ She continues, ‘Jacob’s beautiful, really…The way he moves – catlike, smooth, graceful, very fast. And he’s as bright as or brighter than any other kid his age.’ For Vint, the diseased-induced mutation that Keira refers to is encapsulated in the way that Butler explores our shared kinship with animals. The combination of animalistic physiology with intelligence could be seen as a way in which Butler explores the boundary between animals and humans as imploding. According to Vint, the Clayark’s animalistic physiology shows how Butler’s novel can be read as an exploration of Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of ‘becoming.’ To quote Vint: ‘Butler’s novel is an example of a text that offers a new mythology for imagining this moment of becoming, for being both and neither human and animal since that binary no longer holds.’ The Cartesian binary that separates animals and humans no longer holds because ‘pure’ humanity is entirely eradicated. The disease, a global pandemic by the novel’s conclusion, either alters human biology or kills the human.

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body, which reveals Butler’s negative eugenic reimagining rather than her focus on species hybridity. The physiological changes in human identity thus become the signifiers of the metaphorical dissolution of binary categories. By depicting the boundary between species as porous, Vint sees Butler as presenting a vision of the future that rejects ‘more exploitation, more exclusion, more binaries, more of the same.’

However, the fact that Butler cannot seem to envisage evolutionary change without the death of the majority of people inhabiting the Earth suggests that she is more interested in theorizing utopia as premised on genetic winnowing and creating a stable uniform community with which utopian idealism can functionally take root. The mass purge of the human genome that the disease precipitates is irrevocably tied to social Darwinist discourse of the survival of the fittest, and is thus inherently competitive and organized around hierarchies of genetic suitability.

Vint puts forward the idea that the breakdown of dualisms elicits freedom from oppressive structures of Western modernity. Her argument invokes Donna Haraway’s contentions about the breakdown of hierarchies of Western epistemology in her book Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (1991). In Simians, Haraway uses the immune system to construct an elaborate allegory for the breakdown of binary categories. She interrogates concepts of the body as symbolizing the rejection of Western dualistic logic, focusing on the immune system as an analogy for alternative constructions of selfhood in postmodernity. She argues that the immune system is an elaborate amalgamation of different functions and systems within the body, representing multiple, competing and often contradictory functions within the one matrix. In her words,

The genetics of the immune system cells, with their high rates of somatic mutation and gene product splicings and rearrangings to make finished surface receptors and antibodies, makes a mockery of the notion of a constant genome even within the “one” body. The hierarchical body of old has given way to a network-body of truly amazing complexity and specificity.

Here, Haraway continues her project of attacking Western dualisms, which she began in A Manifesto for Cyborgs (1983). She insinuates that in theorizing concepts of race

23 ibid, p.288.
and gender (specifically in *Clay’s Ark*: species), ‘ideologies of human diversity have
to be developed in terms and frequencies of parameters and fields of power-charged
differences, not essences and natural origins or homes.’

The rejection of essential notions of identity creates a boundary implosion between ‘self’ and ‘other.’

Haraway argues that this boundary transgression is not limited to external materiality but exists within our bodies and is therefore an inherent part of our biological composition. She posits that the immune system is always ‘in a state of dynamic internal responding. It would never be ‘passive, “at rest”, awaiting an activating stimulus from a hostile outside…there could be no *exterior*…no “invader” that the immune system had not already “seen” and mirrored internally.’

Therefore, the immune system is a kind of anti-colonial network where the boundaries of exterior and interior implode, where ‘“Self” and “other” lose their rationalistic oppositional qualities and become subtle plays of partially mirrored readings and responses.’

Vint is eager to attribute the kind of boundary implosion that Haraway describes in *Simians* to the Clay’s Ark disease. However, the illness commits the very sin of colonialism that Haraway insists is impossible for the immune system. The alienness of the microbe means that the human body has not ‘mirrored internally’ or ‘seen’ the disease. The process of the alien disease is one of inner world colonialism that reflects historical policies of conquering and assimilation. Eli stresses that the disease is a ‘symbiont not a parasite’, which does not ‘use up cells the way a virus does’ but rather ‘combines with them, lives with them, divides with them, changes them just a little’.

Yet, Butler still describes the disease in colonialist language that evokes images of invasion rather than the ‘subtle play’ through which Haraway characterizes immune response. The onslaught of the microbe is couched in terms of invasion and the subsequent changing of human physiology. Eli recounts his early experience with the microbe on board the Clay’s Ark space ship:

> The host [human] body was a hostile environment for them – an environment already occupied, claimed, chemically marked by others…Their toxin-neutralization was merely their reflexive effort to survive in that hostile environment. But the original invading organisms

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26 ibid, p.218.
27 ibid, p.218.
28 Butler. 2007, p.487.
had too much of a head start…those new organisms simply became part of the original invasion… Reinfection was the answer, then – or an answer [italics in original]…Without it everyone died. With it, some lived."²⁹

The language that Butler uses to describe the microbe’s effect on the human body is firmly rooted in terms of aggressive expansion that evokes images of nationalistic conquest. Terms such as ‘invasion,’ ‘occupied’ and ‘claimed’ territory all suggest that the microbe takes over the human body, much as an army would occupy foreign territory in war. Although the microbe does not use up cells in the same fashion as a virus, it does either kill or change them. This forced cellular assimilation invokes an image of an invading colonial army that demands adaptation or death. Eli’s discovery that ‘reinfection’ led to survival only further validates this interpretation. Without the full weight of the alien invasion, the microbe cannot sufficiently change human physiology to its liking, which ensures survival. The fact that less complete attacks results in the death of the human body shows how Butler has created a disease that requires ‘symbiosis’ on its own expansionist terms. In this respect, it appears that the alien microbe’s effectiveness as a colonist, and thus as the catalyst for evolutionary advancement, resides in the way it eradicates the foreign biological difference of the human cellular composition. The disease creates a stable, homogenous environment for itself out of a hostile one. It changes difference to similarity, and if the human body is not robust enough to accept such radical change it perishes. Such a drastic change to internal biology, which then results in an evolutionary advancement, reveals how Butler sees a eugenic utopia emerging from an apocalyptic trial. As with the *Parables* and *Wild Seed*, Butler’s religious imagination instilled in her through her Christian upbringing is likewise evident in the pages of *Clay’s Ark*.

**The Scouring of humanity: Eugenics, Religion and Apocalypse through Pandemic Contagion**

Apocalypse, utopia and eugenics have a dialectical relationship in *Clay’s Ark*. This relationship is characterized by the tension between Butler’s desire to depict the transcendence of humanity’s intolerance to difference, and the ensuing elimination of

²⁹ *ibid*, pp.494-495.
current humanity that such transformation precipitates. The role of religion, specifically Christianity, has been entirely overlooked in relation to *Clay’s Ark*. Indeed, the novel has been almost completely ignored by critics, which is astounding in light of its ethical richness and the overtly evolutionary nature of its narrative arc. Butler appears to sideline religion from the story. As the narrator of *Clay’s Ark* states, ‘Religion was about as far out of fashion as it had ever been in the United States.’ Butler’s creation of a near future America where religion has fallen out of fashion is perhaps an ironic reversal of the historical context of *Clay’s Ark*. In the early eighties, leading up to the year of the novel’s publication in 1984, right-wing Christian groups were throwing their support behind President Reagan as a man who ‘who would bring America back to God.’ Religion’s apparent absence in *Clay’s Ark* reveals Butler’s skepticism towards its importance in the future American social landscape. However, she infuses the novel with a subtle yet pervasive religiosity that illuminates how potent religious discourse was, and continues to be, in the United States. Despite the apparent waning of religious ferocity, Eli, the astronaut harbinger of the dread disease, was a ‘boy preacher’ who had ‘read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and could still talk about it knowledgeably.’ While Genesis and Revelation appear here as simply the first and last books of the Bible, it is significant that Butler names them, as they directly reflect the narrative trajectory of the birth of the Clayarks and the subsequent scourge of humanity the disease brings. Butler creates an inverted allegorical parable of apocalypse resulting in new origins, which flips the narrative trajectory of the Bible where genesis ends in revelation and instead begins with apocalypse ushering in genesis.

Despite trying to create an American landscape where religion is no longer a major factor in the cultural lives of its citizens, Butler ends up placing Christianity at the heart of humanity’s revelatory trial and subsequent evolutionary genesis. Butler writes of Eli, ‘he knew his Bible. This in particular impressed both the old man and his wife.’ Here, Christian charity and Eli’s own specific knowledge of the Bible combine to save him and spread the disease. The Boyd family unwittingly feed, clean and clothe the dying man, unaware of the deadly organism he carries with him.

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30 Butler. 2007, p.503.
31 Pierard. 1985, p.100.
32 *ibid*, p.503.
33 *ibid*, p.503.
More than just ensuring the material survival of the disease, Eli’s Christian heritage imbues the fledgling Clayark community with a sense of Christian ethics. Butler implies that Eli is a morally reliable agent by virtue of his link to Christian ethics and his ability to conceive of ethical ideas in a Christian way. While Eli acknowledges that his Clayark community ‘are the future’, simultaneously he cannot live with being responsible for the widespread death the disease will create. As he wistfully laments the threat of pending pandemic, ‘What happens happens…I won’t make it happen…It will happen though…Sooner or later, somehow, it will happen.’ Butler implicitly links religion with the formation of the new community. It is only through Christian charity and Eli’s Christian history that he is preserved, ensuring the alien microbe’s survival and the death of humanity. However, Butler also creates sympathy with Eli owing to his morally authoritative position as a result of both his religious and scientific heritage. His dual identity as an astronaut and a God-fearing man cast him as morally trustworthy, and guarantee the formation of an ethical utopian community around him. Butler could also be read here as cynically portraying Christianity as the literal harbinger of humanity’s end. However, Butler couples scientific and religious authority in her protagonists across her oeuvre, which gives them both the epistemological and theological clout to form utopian communities. In this desire to wed science and religion the eugenic impulse of Galton shines through, in that Butler uses the authority of both religion and science to give moral weight to her emerging communities. Butler reimagines a community based around drastic evolutionary change.

By showing Christianity at the heart of an apocalyptic outbreak of disease, Butler demonstrates the strong link between apocalyptic Christianity and the teleology of US history. Historian John Gray has argued that the narrative of Puritan settlement Americanized Christian apocalyptic thought as the ‘colonization of the New World was itself an apocalyptic event.’ Such an interpretation of settlement in America suggests that the Puritans saw themselves in terms of having survived the apocalyptic

34 ibid, p.607.
35 ibid, p.608.
36 Galton posited that ‘Eugenics strengthens the sense of social duty,’ so as such, the ‘conclusions’ of eugenics would naturally ‘find a welcome home in every tolerant religion.’ Galton, Francis. Essays in Eugenics: London: The Eugenics Education Society, 1909, p.68.
trials of banishment and resettlement. Furthermore, the survival of apocalypse infused the early American Puritan colony with a utopian sensibility that directly reflected the narrative of Revelation: the promise of a new Jerusalem for the ‘elect’. In Clay’s Ark, surviving the alien disease’s initial onslaught is an analogously apocalyptic transition to utopia. In a similar fashion, the colonization of the New World represented a physical and spiritual exodus from oppression to a promised utopia that was predicated on surviving the upheaval of environmental displacement and settlement of a foreign, hostile land. In abandoning England to create a colony of Christian virtue, the early settlers undertook the establishment of a utopian nation. As Gray continues,

From the time the first colonists from England landed to the time when the country gained its independence America saw itself through the lens of religion. Both the post-millennial thinking that looked forward to a world transformed in part by human action and more chiliastic pre-millennial beliefs that anticipated cataclysmic conflicts shaped the way Americans interpreted their history and viewed the future.\(^{38}\)

While Gray presents a broad characterization of American history and the trajectory of apocalyptic thought, what is extremely important when approaching Butler’s text are the tensions within the American apocalyptic tradition between the post-millennial utopian world and the pre-millennial apocalyptic world. As Gray neatly summarizes, the utopian impulse of the Puritan religious heritage is that human action would be directly responsible for creating heaven on Earth, whereas older views anticipated, in the style of Revelation, an apocalypse issued from beyond the reaches of human agency.

Both human agency and external fatalism are present in the apocalyptic motifs of Clay’s Ark. Perhaps surprisingly, the chiliastic belief of divinely ordained apocalypse is given significant attention precisely because of Butler’s unwavering biological determinism. This seems like a contradiction, as apocalypse, by its very lineage with divine omniscience, appears incompatible with biologically reductionist views of the trajectory of evolution. However, the literal alienness of the disease and the suspension of human agency in fighting it, indicates how Butler wedd biological

\(^{38}\)ibid, p.112.
determinism and chiliastic apocalypse in terms of accepting fatalism beyond human agency. The simultaneous and apparently contradictory wedding of deterministic fatalism with a demand for human agency is also visible in the eugenic writings of Charles Davenport, whose approaches to hierarchies of genetic value are oddly visible in the majority of Butler’s writing. Davenport’s approach to eugenics reflects this same acknowledgement that human action, while entirely necessary, remains secondary to the genetic conditions that determine behavior. When writing of the role of ‘Eugenics and Uplift’ Davenport asserts that education is of little consequence compared with the eugenic health of citizens: ‘In the same class will be two boys who have the same school training. One catches ideas almost before they are expressed…Another comprehends slowly…and seems as little plastic as a piece of wood.’ While eugenics was undoubtedly the call for action to stop the spread of dysgenic traits, the biological determinism that supports Davenport’s views is similarly fatalistic and reflective of pre-millennial approaches to apocalypse. In this respect, human agency is subordinate to the higher power of genes and biology in the case of eugenics, and God and his will in early Christianity. However, in both Davenport’s eugenics and the religion of the Puritans there can be seen an important transformation that elevated the status of human agency in the pursuit of utopia, even if both divine and biological determinism still held primary position in dictating life. Butler similarly depicts biological determinism as taking precedence over human agency. Although Butler’s characters can impact the direction of apocalypse by their reaction to the disease, the illness itself is nonetheless thrust upon humanity by an external apocalyptic force: an extraterrestrial invader.

Characters’ responses to the disease illuminate the tension between human agency and external fatalism in the actualization of apocalyptic utopia. Rane becomes physically obsessed with one of her barbaric captors described as an ‘ape.’ In spite of his aesthetic and behavioral repugnance, she finds him ‘almost edible’ and ‘irresistible.’ Rane’s conscious agency is overwhelmed by the biological compulsions of the alien disease highlighting the extraordinary power of the extraterrestrial biology:

39 Davenport. 1923, pp.254-255.
40 Butler. 2007, p.600.
41 ibid, p.600.
She rubbed herself against his hairy body, smiling outside and screaming inside. It was as though she were two people. One wanted, needed, was utterly compelled to have this man – perhaps any man… Yet some part of her was still her [italics in original]. That part screamed, soundlessly weeping, and clawing with imaginary fingers at the ape’s ugly, stupid face.  

Unlike Eli and others in his community, Rane’s submission to the disease reflects a response to apocalypse that results in denying human consciousness in shaping the utopian result of apocalyptic trial. She gives herself over to the organism causing a rupture in her being that is symbolized by her bodily death, but more importantly through her sense of her cerebral death. In her battle to regain conscious control of her body, Rane loses: ‘Then the organism controlled her completely. Her body moved under its compulsion and her feelings were abruptly reconciled with her actions. Part of her seemed to die.’  

The death of her human consciousness symbolized by the alien colonization of her senses is a bleak precursor to her physical death. She is repeatedly raped, shot, and eventually beheaded, the disease brutally keeping her alive to feel all of this barbarism. In attempting to fight the illness, in fleeing from the community, Rane commits the actions that result in her rejection from the flock and her subsequent death. In failing to grasp the chiliastic nature of Butler’s apocalypse, she privileges her own ability to resist alien colonialism, which results in her death. While Butler does give space for human agency, the dramatic irony of Rane’s demise becomes a didactic parable that shows the importance of community and the necessity to be amongst one’s own racial (species) group. Furthermore, it serves as a parable that rejects human autonomy in the face of apocalyptic change. Rane and Blake are punished by their rejection of Eli’s community, which has unwittingly become their racial family brought about by the physiological changes of the alien illness. Only the racial family can assist people in surviving the apocalyptic trial of the alien pestilence, which shows how Butler conceives of racial identity as framed in terms of eradication of difference. The end result is survival among racial homogeneity or death outside the genetic group. This approach to community formation is indicative of Butler’s pre-millennial approach to

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42 ibid, p.600.
43 ibid, p.600.
44 ibid, pp.601-605.
utopia as always contingent on the eradication of difference, since difference never facilitates survival in the dystopian landscapes in which her characters are situated.

**Utopian Eugenics: Liberal Individual Eugenics and Dystopian Authoritarian Eugenics in *Clay’s Ark***

Utopia and eugenics are unavoidably theoretically wedded. However, discussions of eugenics inevitably invoke the dystopian history it has come to symbolize. The utopian tradition that imagines a better society hinges upon the idea that better people will populate the idyllic society created in utopian writing. Utopian literary critic Patrick Parrinder has gone so far as to comment that ‘The traditional utopia, it can be argued, depends on eugenics just as it depends on stability, social stratification, and the abolition of private property.’

For Parrinder, the desire for utopia is unmistakably eugenic, as a perfect place is useless without perfect people to inhabit such an environment. What is revealing about this view of utopia is the intrinsic need for it to be uniform, as disunity and difference are the means by which traditional utopian spaces are unsettled and subverted. The links between utopia and eugenics are founded on concepts of perfection, but are equally contingent on the absence of difference.

Sir Francis Galton, following Darwin, set the initial utopian characteristics of the eugenics movement by couching it in terms of the desire to save and perfect human evolution by actively and positively intervening in nature. He became increasingly convinced that eugenic concerns, being of the most prescient necessity, would inevitably constitute a ‘new post-Christian humanist religion.’

Galton reflected the religious zeal for eugenic thought when he said, ‘It seems to me that few things are more needed by us in England than a revision of our religion, to adapt it to the intelligence and needs of the present time.’ The adaptation referred to by Galton was the wedding of scientific authority with the ethical voice of religion that would

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46 *ibid.* p.4. Galton even went so far as to produce a utopian work of fiction, *Kantsaywhere,* which only survives as a fragment. The work depicts the fantasy of a ‘utilitarian biologist’, (p.4) where the technocratic science elite, control the sexual pairings of all citizens representing the utopian eugenic state *par excellence.*
preach ‘honest morals in unambiguous language.’

Davenport also took up Galton’s sense of the religious potential of eugenic ideas. He saw eugenics as the means to create a homogenous human environment that perfected people’s ‘healthy emotional nature,’ pursuing the equally eugenic and Christian goals of ‘love, loyalty and devotion.’

In both Galton and Davenport’s ideas of eugenic ‘uplift’ the utopia offered by eugenics is similar to that of Christianity in that hard work and sacrifice are the moral imperatives to creating a lasting utopia. Butler’s presentation of apocalypse in *Clay’s Ark* reflects this couching of morals in an unambiguous pursuit of utopia at any cost. Butler presents utopia as relying on surviving the disease’s initial trial, which then guarantees membership in the racial utopia. While the eugenic characteristics of *Clay’s Ark* appear to be more dystopian than utopian, there is nonetheless an uncomfortable, and unambiguous, implication behind Butler’s characterization of pandemic disease. In contrast to other twentieth-century eugenic utopias, Butler’s novel characterizes the carriers of the Clay’s Ark disease as the evolutionary future, who give rise to a new evolutionary pathway for humanity. The main difference is that rather than creating a utopia where disease has been eradicated through Galton’s eugenic methods of judicious marriage and reproduction, or Davenport’s focus on negative eugenic mechanisms, Butler uses disease as a means to drastically winnow the gene pool as well as eradicate the biological causes of physical difference amongst humans. In doing so, she creates the racial uniformity and genetic perfection to populate a new eugenic utopia.

*Clay’s Ark* depicts the complicated relationship between eugenics, dystopia and utopia. In the wake of Nazism, the history of eugenics has been dominated by its characterization as intrinsically dystopian. However, as bioethicist Aviad E. Raz has suggested, ‘eugenics, viewed as dystopian and authoritarian in most of the 20th century, is in the process of being reinterpreted today as utopian and liberal,’ which is also how its originators perceived it. *Clay’s Ark*’s version of utopian eugenics is not based on liberalism, but rather uses dystopian totality as a means to explore a utopian society based on racial uniformity. In doing so, Butler subverts the implication of liberal eugenics that the freedom to choose to engage in eugenic practices eliminates

48 ibid, p.59.
49 Davenport. 1923, p.255.
any potential for atrocity. Liberal eugenics argues that authoritarian institutions, particularly authoritarian governments, have historically employed discriminatory and prejudicial behavior in relation to human genetic improvement. Eugenics is now linked with liberal individualism that aims at genetic manipulation, alteration and selection that holds the utopian ‘potential for the elimination of genetically transmitted diseases.’

What characterizes this liberal reinterpretation of eugenics is the freedom of choice, as distinct from the governmental policies of compulsory sterilization in America, and the atrocious killings perpetrated in Nazi Germany. The dystopian characteristics of historical eugenics reside in the retrospective analysis of its institutionalization by authoritarian governments. This is certainly not limited to Nazi Germany. Many of the dystopian aspects of eugenics, like compulsory sterilization, continued to be committed in America until the 1970s. In the USA the involuntary sterilization legislature initiated in the 1920s ‘had sanctioned over 20,000 nonconsensual sterilizations on patients in state-run homes and hospitals, or one third of the more than 60,000 such procedures in the United States in the 20th century.’

This drastic enforcement of negative eugenics by the state characterizes the dystopian aspects of American eugenics. Butler analogously presents this dual nature of eugenic ideology that simultaneously contains the utopian desire for a better, healthier society and the dystopian control and discrimination that such a desire seems inevitably tied to in light of historical research into eugenics.

The utopian outcome of eugenic ideology is always permeated by the threat of dystopian devastation in the novel. For example, it is ultimately through Blake’s naivety in insisting the illness can be cured that it is eventually loosed upon the world. The relation this idea of the inability of the medical profession to cure the sick body has to dystopian eugenics is that the only option available to prevent the decay of humanity is segregation, which, Butler reiterates, is futile. By refusing to entertain the possibility of modern science to counteract the disease, Butler

53 Negative Eugenics was particularly championed by Davenport, who wrote of the need for ‘surgical intervention,’ which included castration, and extended to prevention of marriage and physical segregation to compulsory sterilization. Davenport, 1923, pp.256-260.
54 Butler. 2007, p.622.
characterizes the illness as so deeply rooted in the body that the sick need to be removed from society. This sharp division between the sick and the healthy reiterates dystopian negative eugenics that sought to eradicate the unfit elements of society by segregation and sterilization, even euthanasia. Eli knows, just as the reader knows, that any attempt at turning himself over to government hands will result in dystopian eugenic practices to avoid the spread of the sick body. Yet, Butler’s obstinate refusal to entertain human agency in curing the disease reveals her ultimate desire that the disease be spread. Far from showing fear or anxiety concerning a pandemic, Butler’s utopian eugenic impulse disturbingly yearns for the disease’s outbreak. As such, authoritarian eugenics textually represented by the absolute failure to oppose its universal infectiousness, is the process that ultimately achieves utopian eugenic racial stability. Butler’s utopian goal for eugenics is to create a new form of evolution, but this is not premised on liberal choice. It is premised on dystopian and authoritarian euthanasia of three quarters of Earth’s population. The disturbing ethic that underlies this apocalyptic yearning is that Butler seems to convey a sense that this price is worth paying for evolutionary advancement.

Butler’s utopian faith in eugenics is not to suggest that she is unaware of its dystopian potential. Eugenics in the period of Butler’s fiction was almost universally associated with dystopian atrocities. Indeed, the main feature of twentieth-century analyses of eugenics was the specter of Nazism looming over any attempt to talk about human genetic improvement. As Raz suggests, ‘some of the eugenic ideas originally advocated by scientific and religious leaders at the turn of the 20th century were utopian and driven by the rhetoric of social reform.’\(^{55}\) Politicians, social activists, and religious leaders in Britain and America sometimes viewed eugenics as a progressive, new, and scientific way of making meaningful multigenerational changes to society. Indeed, eugenics as a concept distinct from its application is intrinsically utopian as its main goal is human improvement. However, even the utopian eugenic aim to be disease free and healthy, or as Daniel Wikler puts it, the favoring of healthy people over unhealthy people,\(^{56}\) is unavoidably discriminatory. In even the most seemingly benevolent manifestations of eugenic ideology, healthy people can quite

literally be favored over those cast as ‘unhealthy’ or even ‘undesirable.’ Nonetheless, the utopian aspects of early eugenic discourse were overshadowed by the dystopian applications of its ideology, which is most sharply characterized by the atrocities committed in the name of eugenics, all of which pointed towards genocide. Nazi atrocities have historically masked equally discriminatory practices committed in the USA, if on a much smaller scale than in Nazi Germany. Butler seems cognisant of eugenics’ ability to slide down the ethical slope and result in discrimination, even genocide, precisely because of her refusal to allow humans direct control of any eugenic practices in all of her fiction. Furthermore, by making the disease universally contagious and unable to be countered by any forms of human agency, Butler shows, with graphic and disturbing imagery, the potentially catastrophic cost of authoritarian eugenic programs to individuals. Clay’s Ark’s depiction of illness as a genuine pandemic that is unstoppable and unable to be countered by medical science or quarantine reflects both the utopian necessity to improve humanity, as well as the potential dystopian genocidal capabilities contained in eugenic ideology. The main difference between historical eugenics and the Clay’s Ark disease as a eugenic catalyst is that, rather than trying to preserve idealized human traits, the disease causes evolutionary changes that permanently alter humanity and kill off those not robust enough to survive drastic physiological change. Having said this, the prospect of such an extreme vision of the social Darwinist epithet ‘survival of the fittest’ reveals the overtly dystopian nature of any attempt to theorize human improvement to such a radical and large extent.

The importance of the shifting ground on which historians, bioethicists and medical philosophers view eugenics demonstrates epistemological dissent in how to interpret

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57 In the 1960s and 70s part of the cases against the sterilization laws brought to light that many women were sterilized against their wishes and that the majority of these women were of ethnic minorities and of the lower classes, which shows the inherent racism and classism of conceptions of genetic value in eugenic ideology. Stern has stated that ‘the experiences of the Mexican-origin women who suffered at the scalps of County General physicians mirror those of the African American, Puerto Rican and Native American women who came forth with comparable stories during the same years.’ Stern. 2005, p.1128.
59 A particularly horrible experiment designed and carried out by Davenport was the castration of a ‘feeble-minded’ dwarf, to in the words of Paul Lombardo: ‘provide insight into the “inherited defect” of “mongolism”...’ Lombardo, Paul A. “Dwarves: Uninformed Consent and Eugenic Research.” Ethics & Medicine. Vol.25, no.3, 2009, p.149.
the apparently benevolent desire to improve humanity. Part of the ‘new eugenic’ reinterpr}

etation of the utopian aspects of eugenic ideology is to advocate human improvement on an individual level, thus annulling the dystopian effect of authoritarian government. What is so prescient about this dialectical relationship between utopia and dystopia for Butler’s texts is that she presents utopian eugenic possibilities as always having a potentially dystopian and authoritarian edge. For instance, Doro in *Wild Seed* is an embodiment of authoritarian control; the disease in *Clay’s Ark* is so virulent that it too can be seen as a textual representative of authoritarian omniscience. If liberal eugenics is about the right to choose individual improvement, Butler’s novels almost never show this as a possibility. The totality, irreversibility, and high mortality rate of the Clay’s Ark disease serve as symbols for the harsh character of accelerated survival of the fittest and demonstrates Butler’s refusal to give people the power to better themselves in an individualistic eugenic sense. Eugenic change is thrust upon humanity by an irresistible force, an unavoidable pandemic illness, which ultimately reveals Butler’s focus on forcing people to survive and adapt to impossibly difficult situations. The reason the Clayark community emerges as a more suited, well-adapted, and ultimately better, branch of human evolution is precisely because humans did not engineer them. As with all of Butler’s fiction, the catalyst for evolutionary advancement comes from external sources, which reflects her ultimate pessimism about human nature as inherently destructive.

Butler’s refusal to allow humanity any real agency in facilitating its own evolution also reveals her deep pessimism that humanity cannot be accountable for its own betterment without external evolutionary pressures. Eli conveys just how totalizing the disease is by relaying his experience on Proxima Centuri Two, the birthing suit of the alien microbe. He narrates, ‘we found the organisms in almost every animal species alive.’ Eli continues that many species would die out, including ‘people.’

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60 New, or ‘Liberal’ eugenics is a current bioethical movement that argues for eugenic practices to eliminate diseases but that it should be directed by individual choice, not authoritarian institutions. Theorists associated with new eugenics are John Glad (2006), Nicolas Agar (1998)


62 Such external pressures are: in *Wild Seed* - Doro, a four-thousand year old being who cannot be killed or evaded; in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy – the Oankali, a race of aliens who force humans to breed with them; in *Clay’s Ark* – the alien disease that cannot be countered by any medicine and which eventually breaks loose world wide, to name a few.

63 Butler. 2007, p.607.
if the disease were to spread outside of his enclave. What is so fascinating about Eli’s admission is that Butler presents the escape of the illness as a foregone conclusion because of the nature of the microbial infection. The disease becomes a symbol for the totalitarian control of evolution, as humans (indeed all living species of animals) are either altered to create an acceptable environment for the microbe or made extinct in the process. The utopian aspect of eugenics for Butler is thus not related to freedoms of individual choice in overcoming disease. Rather, it is reliant on effecting evolutionary change that allows humans to survive harsher environments, as well as enabling characters to embrace their physiological changes and enter into a racially uniform utopian community. Far from reflecting the individualist liberal reincarnation of eugenics, the biological imperative to adapt or die depicts utopia as contingent on the eradication of difference, as did the state institutionalized eugenics of the twentieth century. Utopia might be the end result, but dystopia is the unavoidable catalyst.

The Conflation of Contagious and Genetic Illness

The Clay’s Ark disease is not only defined by contagion, but represents a conflation of physical and genetic transmission. While the disease is initially spread through physical contact, it is also sexually reproduced, which reveals Butler’s fascination with biological inheritance and the function of reproduction in evolutionary advancement. As Meda tells Blake of her children, ‘They were born with the disease, you know.’ Here, Butler construes the illness as both contagious through contact and genetically contracted through sexual reproduction. The conflation of contagious and genetic illness is strikingly similar to early twentieth-century eugenicists (most notably Galton in Britain and Davenport in America) who combined the social and the biological by construing social behaviors such as pauperism, alcoholism, and even prostitution as genetically inherited character traits brought about through dysgenic coupling. Butler reiterates these eugenic fears that behaviors born of economic,

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64 ibid, p.607.
65 ibid, p.485.
66 ibid, p.496.
67 Davenport was obsessed with preventing marriages between ‘defectives.’ In 1923 in an article on the inheritance of family traits he opined, ‘In view of the certainty that all children of two feeble-minded parents will be defective how great the folly, yes, the crime, of letting two such persons marry.’ Davenport, Charles Benedict. 1923, p.67. Again, conditions leading towards a lack of intellectual
social or environmental pressures could be passed on genetically. The characterization of an illness that is both contagious and genetically transferred infuses Butler’s narration of pandemic disease with a distinctly eugenic bent.

Furthermore, early eugenic discourse tried to use contagious disease as a metaphor for genetic illness. As bioethicist Diane B. Paul has posited,

> By the 1920s, discussions of bad heredity were often framed in the language of infectious disease; indeed, the metaphor “carrier” carries as one of its meaning the idea of unseen contagion.  

68 Contagion was deployed as a metaphor to describe the insidiousness of genetic illness in a language that was understood by the American public as inexorably tied to immigration, which brought carriers of infectious disease as well as carriers of dysgenic traits. This conflation of contagion and genes represents the lumping of ‘TB, typhus, cholera and trachoma, among other epidemics’ with genes of feeblemindedness and other dysgenic traits.  

69 Butler redeployes this metaphor by combining contagion with genetic illness and showing how it is through the ‘alien’ species that humanity must suffer pandemic pestilence. In this respect, Butler could be seen as ironically and cynically creating a story that fictionalizes the eugenic fear of the immigrant as the harbinger of both infectious and genetic oblivion. Read in this light, the alien microbe appears as the fictional embodiment of the irrational fear of the ‘illegal alien,’ as it is through the admission of the foreign body to our environment that humanity is annihilated. Yet, by characterizing the illness as both contagious through touch as well as sexually transmitted, Butler distinguishes the disease as an inescapable pandemic that links the decline in health with a decrease in morality. The decline in morality is evoked through increased animalistic sexual activity in the sufferers of the disease. However, there is no lament for humanity, but in the apocalyptic tradition, Butler looks forward to a new branch of human evolution that has been winnowed of the genetically weak and has been cured of the problem of racial difference.

devlopment such as class and access to education are negated by the biologizing of people of lower social standings as genetically feeble-minded.


69 ibid, p.160.
Butler’s conflation of genetic and contagious illness in *Clay’s Ark* raises the question of whether the disease can be seen in terms of symbiosis or parasitism. Maria Aline Ferreira has suggested that Butler’s depiction of the conflated illness facilitates a symbiotic relationship with an organism who offers, ‘benefits in return, such as more vigorous health, a longer lifespan, and pleasurable feelings.’ For Ferreira this mutually beneficial symbiotic parasitism is indicative of Butler’s view that the biological change that the alien disease creates is the means by which humanity’s evolutionary future is secured. Ferreira contends that it is only by ‘allowing the more powerful aliens to steer evolution – even if it means allowing them to modify the human bodies at the genetic, cellular level – will humans survive and adapt.’ In this view, evolution and thus survival, can only be guaranteed through embracing the internal otherness that the alien disease creates within the human body. The implication of this argument again suggests that Butler’s use of symbiosis and parasitism results in the dissolution of boundaries, one that is organized around the rejection of hierarchy. For Ferreira, symbiosis means the dissolving of the boundaries between species and the rejection of hierarchical attitudes that place humanity above and beyond the importance of our animal kin. Thus, symbiosis becomes the means by which evolution is achieved through ‘cooperative rather than hierarchized interactive structure.’ This focus on cooperation over competition reiterates Vint’s ideas, discussed earlier, that the hierarchal elements of animal identity are somehow discarded in favor of an inclusive communal identity based on recognizing the shared experience with animal others. However, Ferreira completely ignores the violence and high mortality rate of the illness. Her description of ‘allowing’ the aliens to take charge of evolution, which then offers advantages, suggests that humans enter a relationship with the microbe based on a cerebral decision, rather than being infected with a lethal illness. Such an argument completely coopts Butler’s novel for the purpose of feminist resistance as predicated on boundary dissolution without any acknowledgment of the totalitarian, inhuman, and destructive nature of presenting utopia as relying on the eradication of current human identity. The strong stain of dystopian death, authoritarianism and violent

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71 *ibid*, p.403.
72 *ibid*, p.411.
barbarism permeates the paths to utopia, which completely undermines the ability to see such utopia as the outcome of political choice.

Butler depicts the eradication of difference on two levels. Firstly, racial differences existing in the ‘pure’ human world are overcome by the dominantly grey appearance of the skin of the sufferers of the disease. Butler sidelines skin color as a distinctly visible marker of racial difference among the Clayark community, which reveals her desire to eradicate physical difference rather than depicting characters coming to terms with and celebrating difference. The victims of the extraterrestrial illness are described as ‘gray skinned’. While gray skin highlights their otherness from so-called ‘healthy’ humans, the disease renders all human skin gray in appearance, which annuls differences of skin color within the Clayark community. When first confronted by Eli and his group, Blake ponders, ‘He was a tall thin black man with skin that had gone gray with more than desert dust.’ When describing the second gunman Blake is also confronted by his appearance, thinking that his ‘tan seemed oddly gray.’ The defining feature of their racial identity identified by Blake in terms of skin color is their common hue of grey. However, Butler subsumes pre-existing concepts of racial identity as defined by skin color into a broader category of racial difference as characterized by those with the disease and those who remain uninfected. This boundary of species becomes the new racial boundary as Blake and his daughters struggle to come to terms with the Clayarks’ physical alienness.

Secondly, questions of ethics, politics and social position are equally annulled upon entrance into the community of the Clay’s Ark microbe. As Eli says of Ingraham, who came to the ranch with a gang of ‘pure’ humans to rape and steal: ‘That was another life…We don’t care what he did before. He’s one of us now.’ Likewise, Stephen, a former violinist, abandoned his dreams because of the biological imperatives to be among other sufferers of the illness. He laments, ‘I belong here. These are my people now.’ The significance of these previously diverse individuals living together is that it shows how the disease erases economic, social and physical

74 ibid, p.461.  
75 ibid, p.461.  
76 ibid, p.472.  
77 ibid, p.534.
difference. Having the disease and surviving among other sufferers overshadows previous human needs and shows how collective, shared and uniform biological identity is the necessary condition for utopian society. This emphasis on physical uniformity reveals how Butler sees biology as the determining factor in identity formation. Moreover, by characterizing the disease as supremely contagious Butler presents the multi-layered, impending eradication of the difference in species between ‘pure’ and Clayark humanity. As such, the novel is permeated by a multi-textured obsession with eliminating social, economic and physical difference as the only means of achieving the utopian goals of the cessation of irrational violence and barbarism. Butler’s answer to social reform is totalitarian in its rejection of the unsettling force of social, cultural and racial diversity.

Butler combines genetic and contagious illness to reveal that utopia is reliant upon a stability achieved by racial uniformity. However, attaining this racial stability involves widespread death and a painful editing of what constitutes ‘human’ behavior. The disease is construed as the instrument of humanity’s complete eradication, which shows how utopian goals can only be achieved through dystopian means. Because the illness genetically changes or kills the human body, it becomes a powerful symbol of the demise of human identity, located within the body. Krishnan Kumar puts forward that this type of ‘imagination of disaster,’ is at the heart of all dystopian fiction. However, this anticipated disaster can have different outcomes. For Butler, disaster becomes a way that current humanity’s crises of difference are subverted by the eradication of physical difference. The dystopian threat of disease is thus entirely infused with the eugenic promise of uniformity, just as the book of Revelation promises religious and moral uniformity. The disease symbolizes the demise of humanity through the organism’s internal colonization of the body. The disease’s only goal is to ‘survive and multiply.’ Yet, in creating an environment where this is possible, the microbe erases differences in the human body that then eliminate social differences. Biological change results in social development, which shows how Butler continually conflates biology and society and creates biological explanations for social phenomena. The representation of disease as facilitating the end of humanity is indicative of the dystopian heritage to which any eugenic thought

79 Butler. 2007, p.481.
seems irrevocably tied, yet simultaneously contains the utopian eugenic verve for living in a socially and racially uniform society. Butler reiterates the inability to culturally conceive of improving humanity without any dystopian interjections. As eugenics historian Michael Burleigh has argued,

> We may be so overshadowed by the crimes of the past, for which we have a developed pietistic and technical vocabulary, that we lack the conceptual equipment to comprehend the current, and potential, ethical upheaval stemming from the genetic revolution.⁸⁰

In accordance with such a view of the ethical landscape of new and emerging genetic technologies, Butler appears to be unable to consider human improvement as distinct from the apparent dystopian demise of the individual subject to which eugenic thinking has historically led. Eugenic and, indeed, evolutionary advancement is contingent on the virtual annihilation of current humanity, which translates not only to the sublimation of diversity into uniformity, but also to widespread death. This focus on evolution or death reveals how eugenics is tied to dystopian fears of the loss of human agency in the face of totalitarian institutions. A utopia premised on the eradication of difference is a utopia contingent on genocidal tendencies. Nonetheless, a utopia predicated on the biological destruction of the majority of people still is a utopia for those who can survive the dystopian winnowing.

**Promiscuity, Disease, Sex, and Reproduction: Biology versus Choice**

Butler’s reinterpretation of eugenic ideology depicts characters with the deadly Clay’s Ark disease as initiating a new direction for human evolution. The disease also increases sexual promiscuity, which reveals the desire to beget more suitable hosts for the alien microbe. Here, Butler draws the link between eugenic fears of moral and genetic degeneration by the proliferation of the ‘dysgenic’. The characters’ fears of moral degradation reside specifically within their heightened sex drive, which overtly challenges widely held sexual conventions of American society. After Blake and his daughters are infected with the alien microbe, they manage to escape Eli and his community. They are abducted by a ‘car gang,’ the members of

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which intend to keep the girls as sex slaves, which shows how Butler depicts the ‘pure’ humans as barbaric and in drastic need of biological change as a catalyst for social change. Butler highlights the worst of human behavior in order to break reader sympathy with the ‘pure’ humans in Clay’s Ark by characterizing humanity as needing radical evolutionary alteration. Blake’s actions are subsequently seen through the lens of evolutionary advancement. He subconsciously seduces one of the girls in the car ‘family’ as the narrator describes, ‘He was no longer in control of himself. Tiny microbes controlled him, had forced him to have sex with a young girl when an instant before, sex had been the farthest thing from his mind.’ Here, Butler implies that the rise in sexual desire corresponds to a loss of control, as Blake’s body, now automated by the alien disease compels him to act solely for the benefit of the microbe. Blake’s promiscuity is in part described as a form of sensory overload: ‘Her scent was incredible…He could not have thought he had the strength to hold her as he did with his newly freed hands and make love to her once and again and again.’While Butler explicitly links sexual excitement with sensory perceptions of smell characterized by Blake’s focus on her ‘scent,’ the implication here is that the disease causes promiscuity out of a desire to spread to beget more potential hosts.

However, rather than just trying to identify more hosts for the microbe, the increased sex drive signals a kind of moral degeneration and an atavistic return to acting on instinctual desires. This implication is made clear when it dawns on Blake that his increased sexual urge has almost caused him to rape his daughter: ‘“Kerry, [Keira’s nickname] did I rape you?”…“Almost…Rane stopped us. I…I wasn’t exactly fighting”.’ As well as the obvious taboo of incest, here Butler shows how sexual identity is strongly linked with reproduction in the novel. Both Blake and Keira already have the disease, so the desire to touch and have intercourse is not necessarily borne out of transmitting it to one another. However, the strength of the instinctual necessity to copulate, even breaking the institutional sanctity of the father/daughter relationship, shows how the disease not only seeks to be spread, but demands to be reproduced sexually between hosts of the illness. In this respect, Butler explicitly links disease with reproduction, echoing the eugenic fears that contamination could

81 Butler, 2007, p.590.
82 ibid, p.587.
83 ibid, p.591.
and would be passed down through sexual reproduction. However, the increased sexuality also signals a moral break with traditional humanity. The atavistic instinctual nature of the disease is like a rebirth that signals the end of humanity and the initiation into the ‘Clayark’ mode of being. Moreover, Blake and Keira’s sexual attraction to one another further demonstrates Butler’s tendency towards eradicating biological diversity. The sexual attraction between father and daughter can be seen as a desire to reproduce similarity and to further strengthen the absence of genetic difference amongst the sufferers of the disease. This tendency to reproduce within family circles is further explored in the Xenogenesis trilogy, where brothers and sisters form sexual pairs, which I shall discuss in the following chapter. The challenge to morality is thus foreshadowed by the biological imperative to dispense with genetic difference and to create a racially, and genetically, uniform utopian community.

The increased sexual promiscuity and the link this has to a sense of moral decline in the characters shows how Butler sees the continuance of human intellectual agency as crucial to survival. Vint has contended that Butler’s characters’ ability to choose certain identities liberates them from the malaise of patriarchal repetition. Vint delineates this presence of choice as the difference between what Deleuze and Guattri describe as fixed (molar) and fluctuating (molecular) identity. By positing that Butler’s characters are animal and molecular, Vint opines that animal identity becomes a way to theorize the multiplicity of identity, incorporating elements of otherness in the one subject. She uses Eli and his community of sufferers of the alien disease to illustrate this mode of subjectivity:

Eli and his people…are animal in a molecular or fluctuating way, adopting certain behaviors and changes typically labeled as animal (eating raw meat, engaging in indiscriminate sexual activity) but not accepting with this change other aspects that are part of our cultural construction of molar animal identity, the vicious and amoral “animal” constructed solely as the opposite of the humanist human.\(^84\)

The inference here is that Eli and his community choose to acknowledge their shared kinship with the more benevolent aspects of animal identity, while rejecting the more

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\(^84\) Vint. 2005, p.290.
violent and amoral aspects of animal identity. If being more sexually promiscuous is a choice borne out of rejecting oppressive elements of patriarchal society, it seems odd that Butler would show a father and daughter needing separation because of their newfound sexual attraction towards each other. Ironically, the depictions of sex are described as compulsions, where choice is subverted by the impulses of the body. What Vint completely ignores is the role of biology in forming these identities. The language, in the quote cited above, of ‘adopting’ and ‘not accepting’ implies that there is more conscious choice involved in dictating animalistic behavior than the result of biological compulsions. Eli explains his new alien altered biology: ‘Their purpose was now his purpose, and their only purpose was to survive and multiply. All his increased strength, speed, coordination, and sensory ability was to keep him alive and mobile, able to find new hosts or beget them.’ Eli’s impulse to eat raw meat and indulge in promiscuity is not engendered as a political choice to embrace the molecular identity of a multiply organized subject position, it is born out of creating the best environment for the microbes living within him and the subsequent spreading of the disease. Furthermore, rather than choosing to adopt animal behaviors, Eli and his community spend a great deal of their intellectual energy trying to prevent animal behaviors from dominating their identities, which suggests that the more violent and amoral, indeed all, animal identity is inherently part of their altered physiology. As such, Butler reveals her biologically determinist view of human identity. There is a sense that all behavior in the novel has a clear, hierarchical evolutionary base.

**Conclusion**

*Clay’s Ark* is a fascinating foray into the dialectical relationship between utopian and dystopian eugenics and the role of apocalypse in ushering in utopian renewal. Butler’s novel presents a dystopian image of eugenic intervention into human evolution. This dystopian character is dominated by the totalitarian control of human evolution by external forces. However, there is undoubtedly a strong utopian drive hidden behind the apocalyptic destruction of humanity. This utopian drive can best be characterized as the desire for genetic homogeneity that uses apocalyptic

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85 Butler. 2007, p.481.
transformation to eradicate racial difference. Butler’s propensity to eradicate the biological foundations of physical difference rather than celebrate divergent cultures, is something that lies at the root of her focus on eugenic and genetic technologies in her fiction after 1980. Nowhere else in her fiction is the desire for racial similarity so thoroughly expressed in such extreme and apocalyptic iconography. However, Butler also explores the desire to eliminate otherness using more traditionally eugenic ideas than pestilence and pandemic illness. Consequently, in the next chapter I shall continue to look at how Butler attempts to formulate utopia on the basis of biological homogeneity by analyzing miscegenation and genetic engineering in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy.
Chapter 4: Eugenics, Miscegenation and the Eradication of the Other in the Xenogenesis Trilogy

In this chapter I continue to interrogate Butler’s use of eugenics as a means of overcoming social problems arising from biological otherness. As in Clay’s Ark, Butler’s next published set of novels, the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89), depicts the eradication of the biological roots of physical difference as the only path to achieving social utopia. In the series, she overtly characterizes miscegenation as a technology designed to eliminate the physical differences between two disparate species. In doing so, she portrays interspecies reproduction as a means of removing unwanted character traits from humans and aliens. Butler creates a utopia that is contingent on the removal of the biological roots of physical disparity. Her generation of a genetically similar utopia is predicated on genetics as the main determinant in shaping physical and social behavior. By describing human behavior as innately self-destructive Butler reveals her tendency to reduce all human behavior to biological motivations. She delineates social advancement as entirely reliant on genetic improvement, which demonstrates her pessimistic worldview that human development is not only predicated on biological evolution, but that evolution can only ever be directed by an external source, in this case, a race of genetic engineering aliens.

Moreover, the way Butler theorizes genetic improvement is through miscegenation made possible by genetic engineering. Her ideas of miscegenation as a technology for the eradication of physical differences between humans and aliens echo African-American author and journalist Pauline Hopkins. Hopkins, like Butler, looked to miscegenation to eliminate superficial racial differences between Anglo and African-Americans as a method to abolish African-American political and social subordination. Hopkins, who wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, viewed miscegenation as a potential utopian tool for African and Anglo Americans to transcend superficial racial differences. She also sought to employ positive eugenics across racial lines to reproduce the best elements of both African and Anglo-American culture. As John Nickel comments, ‘Calling for the
comingling of white and black racial lines, Hopkins asserted that it would produce a genetically superior race and eventually lead to the amelioration of African Americans’ political and social conditions.\(^1\) Hopkins premised utopian social advancement on eugenically inspired miscegenation to eradicate physical otherness, as well as dysgenic character traits. In a similar fashion, Butler’s use of miscegenation as a way to achieve racial utopia and her focus on genetic change as an instrumental factor in human social development, means that utopia in this series is also based on the eradication of otherness. Her focus on interspecies reproduction seems to reject purity and embrace hybridity. Indeed, many examples of criticism assume that Butler’s series is about hybridity as resistance;\(^2\) which on the surface may appear correct, as miscegenation becomes the primary mode of reproduction. Consequently, I analyze Donna Haraway’s theories of cyborg identity. She presents the cyborg as a figure that facilitates hybridity as a means of feminist resistance to patriarchy. Significantly, Haraway’s book *Primate Visions* (1989) analyzes cyborg identity in relation to the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. However, miscegenation does not necessarily lead to race, gender and class emancipation by embracing hybridity. Rather, miscegenation precipitates racial assimilation and the eventual eradication of both the Oankali (alien) and human genetic codes. By using miscegenation as a technology for annulling difference, Butler presents a vision of biological similarity as the necessary condition for utopian social development.

The *Xenogenesis* trilogy comprises the novels *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). The series begins with the story of Lilith Iyapo who is awoken from suspended animation on board an alien spacecraft. She discovers that Earth has been all but annihilated in a nuclear war between America and Russia. Lilith is one of the few human survivors collected by the Oankali, a space traveling people in search of new life. The Oankali differ greatly from humanity in that they seek new life to trade their genes with and thus avoid stagnation and death:

> We do what you would call genetic engineering…we do it naturally. We *must* do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolving species instead of specializing ourselves into

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extinction or stagnation.\(^3\)

The Oankali’s biological need to seek out difference reveals how Butler superficially pins a utopian hope on the alien species. She has stated in an interview that individuals need to ‘learn about people. Learn about different people.’\(^4\) The Oankali can be read as a symbol for Butler’s own insistence that people seek out difference, as the alien species describes itself as ‘powerfully acquisitive. We acquire new life – seek it, investigate it, manipulate it, sort it, use it.’\(^5\) Butler extrapolates her insistence to learn about difference by creating a species whose physiological need for encountering otherness goes beyond curiosity of other cultures. The Oankali are genetically compelled to seek new life because of an ‘organelle within every cell of our bodies,’\(^6\) which demonstrates Butler’s focus on biology as determining all levels of behavior for both humanity and the alien species. Humanity, by contrast, is characterized as innately self-destructive owing to a genetic flaw. This flaw is the combination of intellect and hierarchical behavior and is indicative of Butler’s extremely deterministic logic in the trilogy. The Oankali see this ‘contradiction’ as a genetic predisposition that stems from newly formed intelligence with ‘hierarchies inherited from your [humans’] primitive ancestors.’\(^7\) Nolan Belk has posited that Butler’s series is based in both theories of genetics and a feminized idea of aliens, but also works to prove that the human condition is one of inherent deadly contradiction where intelligence is placed in the service of hierarchy.\(^8\)

By focusing on genetics and an internal biological contradiction Butler creates no alternative for societal change other than human eugenics achieved through genetically engineered miscegenation between two disparate species.

From the outset of the trilogy, the genetic exchange between humanity and Oankali is established as the major dramatic tension in the series. Yet, as I argued in chapter 1,

\(^5\) Butler. 2007, p.41.
\(^6\) *ibid*, p.41.
\(^7\) *ibid*, p.39.
\(^8\) Belk, Nolan. ‘The Certainty of the Flesh: Octavia Butler’s Use of the Erotic in the Xenogenesis Trilogy.’ *Utopian Studies*. vol.19, no.3. 2008, p.373
very few critics are willing to discuss Butler’s engagement with eugenics because of its tarnished history and association with staunch racism in America. The construction of a new, hybrid species achieved through cross-species reproduction and genetic engineering raises important ethical questions with regard to issues of reproductive rights and eugenics. The novel’s intention is indicated by the title *Xenogenesis*, which is a composite of *xeno*, meaning ‘other’ or ‘different in origin’, and *genesis*, meaning literally ‘origin’ or ‘story of creation’. *Xenogenesis* continues Butler’s project of narrating alternative stories of creation and again shows her willingness to create utopian societies by eliminating the genetic roots of physical differences that seem to inevitably lead to violence and oppression of the ‘other.’

**A Brief History of Miscegenation in American Culture**

Before analyzing how Butler uses miscegenation as a technology to remove biological difference between humans and the alien Oankali, I briefly outline its fraught history in American culture. While miscegenation as a concept has undergone significant revision, it still remains a taboo subject in the American popular consciousness. Butler reiterates approaches to miscegenation put forward by Pauline Hopkins writing a century earlier. Butler’s novels were published after the civil rights movement and Hopkins’ before. The fact that both authors, separated by a gulf of dramatic social and political change, chose to use miscegenation and eugenics as potential utopian tools illuminates the profound and lasting effects that both eugenic discourse and prohibitions of miscegenation have had on African-American writing.

Both Hopkins and Butler use interracial reproduction to concentrate desirable traits, while simultaneously eliminating undesirable traits. In *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901-02) Hopkins narrates that ‘[Racial] Amalgamation has taken place; it will continue, and no finite power can stop it.’10 The focus on racial amalgamation reveals that Hopkins saw miscegenation as a means to achieve racial utopia. Nickel contends that Hopkins saw racial amalgamation as eliminating racial political disparity. He contends, ‘By

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eliminating racial differences, race assimilation would overcome deep-seated
prejudices and put an end to racist practices.”

It is interesting that two vastly
different writers writing in very different contexts come to the same conclusion. For
both Hopkins and Butler the visibility of race needs to be eliminated in order to
eradicate the systemic racism of the United States, which was as present at the end of
the twentieth century as it was at its beginning. Both authors depict the use of
eugenically directed miscegenation to achieve the necessary abolition of race needed
to conceive of utopia.

Butler’s ideas of miscegenation obviously do not exist in a cultural vacuum and have
an historical antecedent in the fiction of Hopkins. But what exactly does
miscegenation signify? The term itself was coined in 1864 from the Latin words
*miscere* (to mix) and *genus* meaning race. It referred to reproduction across race lines
specifically characterizing reproduction between African and Anglo-Americans. Discussions of miscegenation were ignited when Thomas Jefferson was reported to
have taken his slave, Sally Hemings, as a lover. The same newspaper article also
labeled him the father of Sally’s children sparking American fears of interracial
identity in the mainstream media. Elise Lemire is deeply critical of the term
‘interracial’, which she sees as merely replacing the racist term ‘miscegenation,’
highlighting how even discussions of reproduction across race lines continue to be
permeated by the racist context that engendered such debates. Lemire views
miscegenation as gaining its modern genesis in an historical period where scientists
sought to biologize racial categories based on social stigmas. She contends that

Soon after [sexual] “preference”, or desire, was racialized, it was biologized. Normal
preference was construed as the desire to sexually couple and reproduce with someone who
not only has the same supposedly racial features as oneself but also the same source of these
features: namely, what was imagined as race blood.

13 Walker, Clarence E. Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally
14 *ibid*, p.1.
15 *ibid*, p.3.
By viewing racial otherness in terms of intrinsic differences in blood, miscegenation became seen as a violation of the laws of ‘Nature,’ an act of deliberate dilution of one’s own special ‘race blood.’ As eugenicists including Davenport would come to argue, miscegenation signified the dilution of pure race blood for both participants in inter-racial reproduction, and Davenport was thus a staunch advocate of anti-miscegenation laws and prohibitions of interracial marriages. He conceded that ‘in certain physiological differences between the two races, the black has the advantage.’ However, in asserting the project of eugenic intervention in maintaining anti-miscegenation laws Davenport argued that,

in legislation: forget skin color and concentrate attention upon matters of real importance to organized society. Prevent those without sex control or educability or resistance to serious disease from reproducing more of their kind.’

For Davenport, the most threatening dysgenic traits were to be found among children of African and Anglo Americans, as the act of interracial sex was a dysgenic exhibition of lack of control in and of itself. The racist fear of blood dilution is evident in Davenport’s scientific bolstering of prohibitions to miscegenation that were a hangover from slavery. Such measures by eugenicists provided scientific backing for prejudiced ideas, which partly explains why miscegenation remains a fraught and difficult topic. By insisting that miscegenation be the only means of reproduction in the series, Butler forces her readers to engage with racial purity as a discourse of marginalization. By pinning all evolutionary and utopian hope on the successful eradication of species difference through miscegenation, Butler suggests that racial purity in its historical eugenic sense is a redundant concept. However, hybridity emerges as a pure racial category where utopia is achievable entirely because of the elimination of racial difference that has led to hybridity of two disparate species groups.

Butler’s engagement with hybridity and miscegenation raises problems of racial purity. The concept of miscegenation is completely reliant on the idea of racial purity. The very notion that mixture is possible hinges upon the presumption that

17 ibid, p.36.
there are two pure, distinct racial categories. As SanSan Kwan and Kenneth Speirs have insisted,

the need to establish and sustain firm categories of race as a way to maintain White dominance in America left no place for the multiracial. Thus the mixed blood, who threatened these categories, was either monoracialized or represented as “deviant” and “pathological.”

Miscegenation, from this perspective, reflects not only an anxiety about the dilution and contamination of race blood, but is representative of the attempt of biologists to fix racial categories into pure and whole states. The idea of blood purity and dilution reflected in the characterizations of deviant and pathological identity is also a crucial ideological context in which Butler’s Oankali operate. The aliens, whose physical superiority ironically also characterizes their extreme otherness, replace humans as the dominant species of the planet. The alien body is the agent of transformation and eventual eradication of the human body and, as such, the Oankali come to symbolize deviant perversion for many humans unwilling to relinquish their pure identity. As Sherryl Vint has rightly pointed out, Lilith’s cooperation with the alien species leads other humans to view her as a race traitor, which reveals the ongoing characterization of those entering into sexual relationships across race lines as somehow betraying their essential racial identity. However, in displaying such reactionary behavior, Butler reiterates the importance of genetic winnowing in striving for utopia. Those who are too afraid to embrace the merging of two species and the subsequent eradication of pure human identity are outlawed from participating in the eugenic utopia offered by the alien species.

The Xenogenesis Trilogy depicts three generations of alien and human identity. The central theme of the trilogy is miscegenation between humanity and Oankali and the results of this reproduction between the two disparate species. Butler, while conceiving of miscegenation in an extraordinary fashion, nonetheless participates in an American literary tradition that focuses on the important issues surrounding multiracial heritages. American literary critic Earl E. Fritz has suggested that many

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Contemporary writers in the twenty-first century continue to deal with ‘issues of interracial sex, and the progeny produced by it,’ while still remaining acutely aware of ‘the stubborn persistence of racism in the Americas and the world at large.’

The persistence of miscegenation as a literary theme in America is partly a result of the fervor of eugenic discourse and the attitudes towards race that were sharpened in the early twentieth century. The expression of sexual desire for those whom society had deemed biologically incompatible was thus couched in terms of the desire for interspecies sex. Butler explores the idea of interracial sex as being characterized as interspecies sex in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. In the series, reactionary humans accuse the alien species of debasing and dehumanizing them. These same human characters also oppose the alien species and their sympathizers partly because of their feelings of emasculation brought about by the alteration of the mechanics of heterosexual intercourse. Here, Butler comments on how historical conceptions of sexuality have been described as either natural or unnatural to validate particular ideological perspectives that are largely dominated by the racial theories of the time. Lemire’s characterization of how interracial sex was framed to reflect the prejudices of the historical moment when anti-miscegenation laws were conceived and enacted also informs the human responses to the Oankali mediation of sexuality in the series. Lemire comments that

*Intra-racial desire was imagined… as an instinct to perpetuate what were imagined as distinct biological entities. Blacks were depicted as the near relatives of primates and thus a separate species from whites so that inter-racial sex… could be declared against the biological laws of Nature. In the wake of abolitionism, this rhetoric of blood and species allowed the demonization of inter-racial sex and marriage and the concomitant invention of intra-racial desire to seem completely unrelated to the prejudicial ideas on which the demonization was founded.*

Lemire argues that social constructions of sexual desire throughout the course of the nineteenth-century were transformed into biological ones by the deployment of racist arguments about species. The racial hierarchies under slavery were then intensified and exacerbated in the post-abolition period by invoking biological rhetoric of species

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to characterize superficial racial differences. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, the male characters in *Xenogenesis* feel that the Oankali offer sexual unions that are unnatural both in terms of dehumanization, as the sex act is mediated by a non-human participant, as well as emasculation resulting from the Oankali penetration of both male and female characters. Indeed, as I discuss shortly, one character describes the sensation of alien/human sexual interaction as being ‘taken like a woman.’ Butler’s conflation of race and gender reflects a deep understanding of the historical and contemporary importance of sex and sexism in framing debates about miscegenation. The male characters who cannot accept the change to both gender and racial hierarchies that the alien species institute are sidelined from participating in the utopian project of using eugenically directed miscegenation to eliminate racism and sexism from the human genome.

Butler’s reliance on depictions of miscegenation as a means to overcome problems arising from visible difference forces her to engage with eugenic ideas of inheritance. As well as differences of skin color and hair texture, eugenicists including Davenport also extended racial traits to include amorphous behavioral characteristics. Such traits that Davenport attributed to African-Americans included: ‘strong-sex instinct, without corresponding self-control…a certain lack of genuineness…a premature cessation of intellectual development…[and] a lack of resistance to tuberculosis and pneumonia.’ Such descriptions of African American behavior and physiology were couched in scientific rhetoric and allowed the racial establishment to construe sexual desire for those outside of one’s superficial racial category as deviant and against the laws of Nature. This meant that sexual desire (as well as the desire for marriage and reproduction) for other members of one’s own race was construed as natural. By contrast, miscegenation became an affront to this racist system, which had naturalized desire for racial similarity as immutable biological truth. For Lemire, the idea of a category for inter-racial sexual relations is an expression of white supremacy, since the very concept of ‘race’ in the USA was based on an ‘imagined composite of skin color, hair color…lip thickness…and smell.’ Put differently, the idea of miscegenation is premised on the idea of fixed, stable and separate categories of race from which distinctly separate biological entities of species were then deduced.

22 Davenport. 1913, p.34.
23 *ibid*, p.3.
Without clear distinctions of race, there can be no race mixing and no interracial reproduction.

It is, then, no coincidence that Butler chooses to engage with miscegenation in terms of species. By making interspecies reproduction an allegory for interracial sex and reproduction, Butler sharpens concepts of race as a genetically determined entity. While she theorizes an escape from racial prejudice, this escape is oddly premised on the breeding out of species’ character traits intrinsically determined in the human genome. Butler’s utopian blueprint for racial harmony is to eradicate racial difference using miscegenation controlled by eugenic genetic manipulation. Hopkins, writing over eighty years earlier, similarly presented a vision of racial utopia premised on eugenically inspired miscegenation. In doing so, she revealed a eugenic role for African American women as race, and indeed species, guardians. Carol Allen has opined that Hopkins ‘remained consistent in her desire to aid black citizens in their struggle to gain the full range of rights due them.’ However, the eugenic thinking of early twentieth-century America permeated her ideas about who qualified for the full range of rights. As Nickel again posits, ‘Women’s primary role in Hopkins’s racial uplift program is, in effect, to perform appropriately a biological function.’ Such a function was to limit ‘unsuitable marital choices,’ which of course included anyone in the ‘lower class.’ Eugenic thinking in Hopkins’s novels, just as in Butler’s, dominates the decision surrounding who qualifies for the racially homogenous utopia presented by interracial (and interspecies) reproduction.

Butler is certainly not alone in exploring interracial sex and reproduction as central concerns in her fiction. Indeed, the issue of interracial sexuality and reproduction is a motif that has been explored by numerous African-American authors and critics since the American civil war. Miscegenation as a matter of both pseudoscientific fact and literary trope has been a contentious topic in American history and literature. It has

25 Nickel. 2003, p.139.
26 ibid, p.139.
even contributed to the formation of legislature and entered into debates about race, religion and human rights from the time of the declaration of independence to today. Writing of the importance of miscegenation in America’s history, Lovalerie King asserts, ‘Thirty-eight states enacted miscegenation statutes in the nineteenth century for the primary purpose of outlawing interracial marriage...In 1951, twenty-nine miscegenation statutes still remained active.’28 While these remaining statutes have since been repealed, it is a staggering fact that as late as 1967 the only state of the remaining 29 to end its prohibition on miscegenation was California.29 These anti-miscegenation laws arose, at least in part, as an attempt by the white population to fortify their power over African-Americans by legally refusing to acknowledge ‘mulatto’ children of slaves. As King again posits, ‘Race mixing led to the enactment of laws rendering the child of an enslaved woman the legal and enslaved property of her owner (the child following the condition of the mother).’30 Essentially, such laws protected white male slave owners from having to provide for their illegitimate offspring. Under the conditions of slavery, one could also increase their slave holdings by having children with female slaves. After the abolition of slavery the prohibition of miscegenation can be viewed as an expression of the growing anxiety concerning racial purity that the new discourse of eugenics was both playing upon and to which it was contributing. As such, miscegenation as a concept is embedded within slavery as well as in the biologized racial concepts of the eugenics movement. Both the heritage of slavery and the intensification of racist dogma after abolition in America are present in Butler’s depictions of miscegenation in the Xenogenesis trilogy. The ways in which the Oankali use humans’ compassion for their children to ensnare them in captive breeding programs echoes the kinds of control of reproduction that were endemic to both slavery and eugenic discourse. The Oankali, much like eugenicists of the early twentieth century, see the right kind of children as the way to utopia. This social engineering by genetic manipulation is predicated on an unwavering faith in genes to accurately predict and thus shape human behavior.

29 ibid, p.96.
30 ibid, p.96.
Genetic determinism, Biological essentialism, Eugenics and Identity Politics

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the debate regarding Butler’s approach to identity forms the majority of the criticism of her novels. However, because of her refusal to conceive of a social utopia free from drastic genetic intervention, I see Butler’s fiction as representing a desire for eugenic utopia. As I discussed in the previous chapter, utopia and eugenics are theoretically linked and Butler’s conception of social utopia is entirely premised on genetic similarity, which dictates that Butler’s fiction is extremely biologically deterministic.

Biological essentialism (sometimes called biological determinism) has occasionally been a pejorative label applied to Butler’s fiction. Critics, including Hoda Zaki, argue that Butler’s representations of identity reveal a belief that certain behaviors are innate and reflect an ‘essence’ that is beyond discursive construction. In such interpretations, the identity politics of Butler’s fiction becomes the battle between essential modes of being, where identity is located in the body, versus the idea that identity is temporary, precarious, and without firm grounding in biology. In short, environmental, social and ideological factors play a more integral role in determining behavior than genes. As I discussed in my introduction, this is often characterized in the critical literature as a debate between describing Butler as a biological essentialist or as the spokesperson for ‘cyborg’ feminism. Biological essentialism raises the important question of the extent to which human behavior is genetically determined. Genetic determinism assumes that an essential identity revolving around membership of a specific race, gender or sexual preference is located in the body and thus has a genetic determinant. Bioethicist Ted Peters has described this ‘growing popular image of the almighty gene as the all-determining factor in the human condition.’

Butler’s trilogy depicts both concepts of genetic determinism as puppet and Promethean in that the human characters are victims of their genetics, and the alien species are the Promethean master manipulators of genetics. In any case, the result of genetic determinism and its subsequent manipulation by the genetic engineering aliens results in the abolition of physical difference through miscegenation.

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utopian goal of the series is to create a single racial identity out of two wildly disparate species.

The achievement of perfection characterized by the erasure of physical difference occurs in *Imago*, the conclusion to the trilogy, when Jhodas becomes ooloi (alien third sex responsible for mixing genes). Nikanj, who is Lilith’s ooloi, allows the pre-adult human-born ‘construct’ child to identify with it and thus become ooloi.

Nikanj analyzes the young Jhodas throughout the novel stating, ‘Your development is exactly right. I can’t find any flaw in you.’ Nikanj repeats this sentiment, even calling the young ooloi ‘perfect.’ Jhodas’ perfection is the result of its malleability, which allows itself to change in order to seduce new ‘trade’ partners by appealing to their biological desires, which the Oankali read with ease. Gregory Jerome Hampton sees the ability to change within the body as an example of coming to terms with the perspective of the ‘other’, which is ‘essential in overcoming superficial and superfluous boundaries used to establish destructive hierarchies and hegemonies.’

By this logic, ‘malleability is written as the desirable, if not perfect, state of the survivor.’ However, malleability also allows Jhodas to eradicate the perceived difference between itself and humans. Rather than reflecting a coming to terms with otherness inside the self, Jhodas’ ability to appear more human allows the Oankali to assimilate the remaining human ‘resisters’ and finally breed out the human ‘contradiction’ for good. As such, Jhodas is actually the achievement of the final eradication of difference, whereby human revulsion towards breeding with the Oankali is negated by its ability to become attractive to both men and women.

Indeed, Jhodas’ malleability not only eradicates species and racial differences, it also eliminates gender difference, as it alters its appearance to please both human genders. Perfection for Butler is contingent on the eradication of all markers of physical difference.

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33 ‘Construct child’ is the name given to children born of reproduction between Oankali and humans. The reproductive combination is an Oankali and human female, an Oankali and human male, and an ooloi. The normative reproductive group this extends from two to five beings, which greatly increases the biodiversity of reproduction.

34 Butler. 2000, p.538.

35 Hampton. 2010, p.68.

36 *ibid*, p.68.
With such a focus on genetic engineering, cross-species reproduction and the abolition of difference, Butler creates a narrative that is permeated by eugenic ideology. Indeed, genetic determinism and genetic engineering inevitably raise the important issue of eugenics, which was described by Galton as simply the science of ‘the improvement of inborn qualities, or stock.’\(^{37}\) Although such claims have since been radically problematized because of the application of eugenics to justify genocide, there was little doubt about the benevolent scientific impulse that permeated early eugenic discourse as a tool to aid human health and social development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The original utopian goal of Galton is being recast as liberal eugenics by modern spokespersons for human improvement, including John Glad and Nicolas Agar. Agar suggests that liberal eugenics must be ‘broadly true to Galton’s original concept of human improvement.’ However, he goes on to comment that, ‘Anyone advocating such a [eugenic] programme must demonstrate an awareness of the errors of the past.’\(^{38}\) Agar isolates the importance of eugenic thinking in improving the genetic character of humanity. The key difference from any historical application of eugenics is that it is free of state intervention and remains a liberal choice of the individual. As discussed in the previous chapter, Butler is less concerned with liberal incarnations of eugenics and is more interested in what occurs when humans are given a choice to breed away their own species by forced unions with an alien other. As such, eugenics is the inevitable outcome of genetic engineering and genetic determinism in the trilogy. Genetic determinism decides both wanted and unwanted traits and genetic engineering concentrates what is desirable and eliminates unwanted characteristics. Troy Duster has argued that genetics is bound to American eugenics and that there has always been a link between human biology and social theory,\(^{39}\) which can be seen in the endless attempts to find genetic bases for all forms of human behavior.

The conflation of biological and social behaviors is a crucial factor in Butler’s presentation of eugenic utopia. Eugenic theory’s deference to biology as a sacred epistemology is given textual treatment in *Xenogenesis*. Butler’s Oankali embody the


benevolent eugenicist, while simultaneously displaying the more insidious elements of eugenic ideology in relation to control and manipulation of reproduction, specifically, female reproductive rights. Duster argues that America’s popular concepts of genetic determinism are again leading to a slippery slope into eugenics owing to the widespread ‘connection between genes and social outcomes.’ In this sense, questions of eugenics are inevitably raised when genes are invoked as the primary constituents of our identities and continued evolution. This is particularly true when undesirable or anti-evolutionary behavior is described as a product of genetic flaws, as they are in Butler’s trilogy. It is in this murky territory that Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy plants itself. Her uneasy relationship to hybridity, essentialism, genes, and eugenics show the ethical difficulties of tampering with evolution, even though this tampering is presented as the sole necessity for survival.

Hybridity and Haraway: Butler’s Xenogenesis as reflections on post-humanity

There is a point in the Xenogenesis trilogy where the elimination of the biological causes of difference intersects with Haraway’s concepts of the diffusion of the binaries that have characterized oppression in Western discourse. Haraway theorizes the importance of Western dualisms in enabling oppression of the ‘other.’ In her words:

`certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self.‘

Haraway explores potential modes of identity that confuse the dualisms that have been so intrinsic to domination in Western culture. The cyborg is constructed as a revolutionary agent that confuses and obscures such boundaries. She argues that ‘cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine.’ Haraway sees potential liberation amidst the white noise of postmodernism’s rejection of universal and exclusionary epistemologies.

40 ibid, p.142.
42 ibid, p.34.
Rather than lamenting loss of unity, she suggests that the destruction of the illusion of wholeness is the necessary step in changing the narrow power distribution in Western civilization. Butler’s depictions of alien and human sex can be read as fictionalizing Haraway’s rejection of binary opposites and enabling feminist resistance to oppressive patriarchy. However, while Butler can and often has been interpreted as narrating the collapse of traditional boundaries of Western patriarchy in regards to heterosexual intercourse, this does not inevitably amount to a rejection of biological essentialism. The eugenic aspirations behind sexual intercourse reveal an obsessive focus on manipulating reproductive outcomes to create a socially stable utopia. For Butler, social stability means racial stability.

The Xenogenesis trilogy’s narration of the birth of a new hybrid species has led critics including Meltzer (2006), Green (1994), and Hampton (2010) to analyze it in relation to Haraway’s cyborg feminism. Haraway forms a feminist aesthetic that embraces fractured and hybrid identities. She writes manifestos demanding that feminism move away from the ‘radical feminism’ that has often been seen as ‘essentialist and ahistorical.’ Instead, her feminist project can be seen as working in what Julia Kristeva calls a ‘third space’ of feminist interrogation. In Toril Moi’s words: ‘feminism from now on must operate in a third space: that which deconstructs all identity, all binary oppositions, all phallogocentric logic.’ As Moi suggests, feminism, in the wake of postmodernist challenges to authoritative discourse, cannot oppose patriarchy by merely creating its inverse image, as the oppressive logic that sustains both patriarchy and matriarchy is founded on the same dualistic principles. It is in the ‘third space’ of deconstructing all binaries that Haraway sees Butler’s fiction as operating, which implicitly weds her fiction to postmodern feminist attacks on discursive structures. Haraway also rejects the notion of the sanctity and unity of the body. The construction of the human body as whole and separate entities divided along racial and gender lines is a feature of patriarchal epistemology’s domination over those who can be construed as ‘others’. Haraway’s theories can be seen in contrast to other types of political resistance that organize around an idea of an essential identity, such as radical feminism which relied upon the essential

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differences between men and women. Haraway argues that by breaking down the dichotomous logic that has characterized Western modernity, feminists can create a system of political resistance that incorporates difference, rather than replicating oppositional politics, which she sees as endemic to oppressive behavior, particularly with regard to gender identities.

The dissolving of the boundaries which have characterized Western patriarchy is most visible in how Butler alters heterosexual intercourse. Lilith’s first sexual encounter with the alien ooloi and her human partner Joseph reveals how Butler uses the alien species to edit heterosexuality’s dualistic nature:

Now their delight in one another ignited and burned. They moved together, sustaining an impossible intensity, both of them tireless, perfectly matched, ablaze in sensation, lost in one another. They seemed to rush upward. A long time later, they seemed to drift down slowly, gradually, savoring a few more moments wholly together.

It is in sexual encounters that the humans feel the most pronounced dissolution of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ which Butler characterizes here as the diffusion of the self into the pleasure of the sexual experience. Butler also describes the equality of the sexual experience, stating that the lovers are ‘perfectly matched.’ Clearly defined gender roles in heterosexual practice disappear, owing to the presence of the alien third sex, the ooloi, who control and manipulate the sexual experience between men and women. The essential categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are dispensed with, as the sexual encounter becomes a fugue of sensation that disbands the experience of the body as a unified object. In this sense, the triadic sexual experience deconstructs ‘phallogocentric’ logic by eliminating human physical interaction in the sex act. From this perspective, Butler’s depictions of alien and human sex are examples of post-modern feminist reimagining that creates a new level of equality in heterosexual sex between men and women. Heterosexual intercourse’s association with dominance and subordination in Western patriarchy is overtly challenged by

45 Aura Schussler describes radical feminism as simply a power struggle between ‘dominant and dominated.’ For Radical feminists this binary is characterized by the polar relationship between men (dominant) and women (dominated), so the project of radical feminism ‘militates against masculine domination, patriarchy, sexism, discrimination.’ Schussler, Aura. ‘The Relationship Between Feminism and Pornography.’ The Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies. Vol.3, no.5, 2012, p.66.
46 Butler. 2000, p.162.
abandoning male penetration of the female, which can be viewed in terms of cyborg politics that undermine clear patriarchal distinctions between men and women, based on physiological difference.

The sexual relationships between men, women and ooloi can be read as ‘cyborg’ relationships, in that its participants are exposed to multiple realities in which boundaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’ implode in a milieu of sexual exchanges. The sexual encounters between Lilith, Joseph and Nikanj (ooloi), demonstrates how each character experiences triangular intercourse:

She…immediately received Joseph as a blanket of warmth and security…She never knew whether she was receiving Nikanj’s approximation of what Joseph was feeling, some combination of truth and approximation, or just a pleasant fiction…It seemed to her that she had always been with him. She had no sensation of shifting gear, no “time alone” to contrast with the present “time together.” He had always been there, part of her, essential…Nikanj could give her an intimacy with Joseph that was beyond ordinary human experience. And what it gave, it also experienced.47

Here, Lilith’s sense of essential identity actually includes her male partner, showing how Butler disintegrates the unified category of the self, as the other is visible in the reflection of the self. The above passage reveals not only a breakdown of a clear definition of selfhood in the sexual encounter, but it also shows Lilith’s loss of faith in her ability to discern ‘true’ experience from illusion. She is unconcerned with traditional boundaries such as fact and fiction, self and other, choosing to interpret her sexual experience as an altered form of consciousness that allows, encourages, and provides agency to experiences that do not conform to traditional oppositional Western logic. The altering of heterosexual relationships reflected in this passage shows Butler’s willingness to depict implosions of traditional oppositional dichotomies of patriarchal heterosexuality. Thus, the ‘potent fusion’ – as Haraway would call it – of Joseph, Lilith and Nikanj, redefines normative heterosexual sex. The problematized view of heterosexuality is based on rejecting opposition, as the ooloi blurs the boundary of a clearly defined ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ role in sexual intercourse. The sexual experience between Lilith, Joseph and Nikanj

dispenses with autonomous perspectives, as each participant experiences the others’ sexual sensations through their own consciousness.

In this particular context, Butler’s approach to sexuality and sexual practice can be seen as congruent with Haraway’s postmodern feminist project. However, this commonality is undermined in some important ways. Butler characterizes human behavior as innately violent, self-destructive and irrationally intolerant of difference, which expresses a sense that racist patriarchy exists as humanity’s natural state. Butler also constructs human behavior as inherently hierarchical. The Oankali describe humanity as intelligent and hierarchical, which is never denied or interrogated, but is supported by constant examples of violent and oppressive behavior by the human resisters. In so doing, Butler suggests that violence towards difference is intrinsic to human DNA.

For Butler, oppression, violence and expressions of gender, race, and class-based domination cannot be undone by attacking patriarchy’s discursive structures. Rather, humanity’s oppression of difference is specifically the result of the limitations of our own biological evolution. Butler’s focus on genetic advancement as the crux of social development is in direct opposition to postmodern ideology that sees discursive crises as liberation from the prohibitions of Western epistemological systems. In Craig Owens’ words, this conception of postmodernism can be seen in the following terms:

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged – not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among these prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women.

48 In *Adulthood Rites* one resister village is described as particularly wealthy as it had ‘more women than any other villages because it traded metal for them.’ Butler, 2007, p.345. The humans who abduct Akin try to cut off his tentacles to make him more ‘human’ even though it would blind him. (p.395). Akin later returns to Phoenix (resister village) to discover that the humans ‘were killing each other. There always seemed to be a reason for Humans to kill each other. (p.497). All the violence amongst humans in the series reveals Butler’s ultimate pessimism about human nature, a nature that is specifically located in the body.

Haraway’s project is postmodernist in that it exposes, and tries to theorize outside of, the systems of binary logic that have been used to exclude and deny agency to women, people of color and minority groups. At times, Butler can also be seen as challenging heterosexual norms that have historically been used to oppress those construed as ‘other.’ However, Butler’s approach to liberating those characterized by their otherness is to demand genetic change through miscegenation, thereby collapsing boundaries, but doing so at the expense of difference, not as a celebration of polymorphous identities existing within the one body. Butler appears to unsettle essentialist concepts of sexual identity in heterosexual intercourse. However, by persistently characterizing human behavior as innately violent, and irrationally fearful of difference, she ultimately presents humanity as determined by its faulty genetics. As such, liberation from human hierarchical behavior is entirely contingent on genetic manipulation to breed out this unwanted behavioral trait. The ability to change and overthrow oppressive elements of humanity becomes a question of eugenics and genetic engineering, not intellectual, political, or philosophical challenges to binary logic. Although binaries are dispensed with during sexual encounters, the main concern of the novel is the reproductive outcomes themselves, not so much the sexual identities of the characters. Indeed, sexual behaviors are intrinsically bound to reproductive outcomes, which is why there are no examples of homosexuality in the series. For Butler, the rejection of binaries in heterosexual intercourse leads not so much to a general celebration of difference as it does to a complete eradication of genetic diversity in an attempt to create a racially homogenous utopian society.

While Butler explores alternative mediations of heterosexual practices and reshapes clearly defined patriarchal gender roles within them, she ultimately returns to presenting sexuality and sexual attraction as chemically controlled and thus reducible to a process of unconscious biological impulses. Furthermore, the mediation of heterosexuality practiced by the ooloi is not necessarily a feminist imagination of sexual equality. Rather, the ooloi may represent the final control of the human body and the ultimate appropriation of desire into a homogenized, controllable reduction of chemical stimuli that can be administered to subdue individuals and placate opposition when required. For example, the scene preceding Lilith, Nikanj and Joseph’s sexual act reveals Lilith’s suspicions about the way the Oankali operate:
Nikanj coiled the end of one sensory arm around her wrist... She said nothing, but the
eagerness that suddenly blossomed in her was so intense, it was suspicious... It released her,
but was now completely focused on her. It had felt her body’s leap of response to its
wordless suggestion – or its chemical suggestion. “Did you do that?” she demanded. “Did
you... inject something?”

Nikanj coiling its sensory arm around her wrist invokes an image of imprisonment
rather than affection, yet her physiological response seems completely at odds with
the potentially sinister undertones of being ensnared in the alien’s grip. Here, Lilith
fears that her feelings and her chemical responses can be manipulated by the ooloi to
make her sexually desire something against her own will. This is understandable, as
the other people onboard the ship have been subdued by the ooloi drugs:

Lilith looked around the room. There were no more struggles, no manifest terror. People
who could not control themselves were unconscious. Others were totally focused on their
ooloi and suffering through confused combinations of fear and drug-induced well-being.

The ooloi’s knowledge of genetics and their ability to tamper with human
biochemistry allow them to control people and seduce them into sexual relationships
without their consent and against their immediate wishes. The implication here is
that humans in the novels can be completely controlled by the manipulation of
biochemistry, thus reducing them to a set of biological responses. If the sexual
relationships between men, women and ooloi are to serve as an example of the
rejection of essential categories, I believe it falls short, because the ooloi can
manipulate humans so easily using their own biochemistry. Butler unashamedly
posits that humans can be controlled by biochemical stimuli, which effectively
privileges biology as the main constituent of being. She depicts dissolutions of the
self and the other on a superficial level. However, she often reshapes and redeployes
essentialist identity based around biology and genetics. The major motive behind
Oankali genetic engineering is revealed as an entirely eugenic merger of the best
genetic attributes of humanity with the best genetic traits of Oankali. Here, Butler

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51 ibid, p.187.
reveals her theorization of utopia as being premised on eugenic manipulation to create genetically superior beings from two disparate species.

The ‘Human Contradiction’: Butler’s genetic determinism

I am not entirely alone in seeing Butler’s fiction as biologically deterministic. Hoda M. Zaki’s article ‘Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler’ (1990) is the most prominent example of criticism that examines Butler’s trilogy as presenting human behavior as biologically determined. Zaki sees the human characters as dominated by essentialism. However, she neglects to apply the same deterministic tag to the alien society. In failing to isolate the genetic determinism in the aliens’ political structure, Zaki ignores the eugenic desire to create genetic similarity as a means to achieve genuine political utopia that is so pervasive in the trilogy. The result is that the overtly eugenic impulse of Butler’s series is either ignored or rejected because of eugenic ideology’s historical association with oppressive atrocities.

In the trilogy, humanity is rigidly described as having a genetic flaw that needs to be fixed if it is to avoid annihilating itself. Jdahya, the alien Oankali who wakes Lilith after the nuclear war between Russia and America has all but destroyed Earth, replies to Lilith’s disbelief with regards to the genetic flaw,

    Intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike. But your denial doesn’t matter. A cancer growing in someone’s body will go on growing in spite of denial. And a complex combination of genes that work together to make you intelligent as well as hierarchical will still handicap you whether you acknowledge it or not.\textsuperscript{52}

For the Oankali, genetics simply cannot be overridden by employing individual intellectual agency. Moreover, any kind of political action is futile as the genetic compulsion towards self-destruction utterly pervades humans’ every attempt at collective action. Humans, while allowed to establish their own ‘pure’ colony on Mars after the tireless efforts of Akin (Lilith’s half Oankali half human child), are

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{ibid}, p.39.
nonetheless characterized as doomed because they still contain the flaw. Jhodas muses on the Mars colony,

The Martian environment they were headed for was harsher than they had known. We would see that they had the best possible chance to survive. Many would live to bear children on their new world. But they would suffer so. And in the end, it would all be for nothing. Their own genetic conflict had betrayed them once. It will do so again.\textsuperscript{53}

Jhodas even states directly to a human, ‘I’m Oankali enough to know that you will eventually destroy yourselves again.’\textsuperscript{54} The Oankali’s faith in the flaw as precipitating humanity’s self destruction is never challenged. Even Jhodas, who is part human, is utterly convinced by his Oankali physiology that the flaw cannot be overridden by human agency. Much in the same way that Lauren’s faith in science is never overtly interrogated in the \textit{Parable} novels (see Chapter 3), the Oankali’s unwavering faith in their truth becomes the sacred epistemology that is above the arena of dissent. Vint disagrees with me here, as she posits that ‘while genetics may offer clues to our identity and potential, it is not a script that determines our fate.’\textsuperscript{55} However, for the Oankali, genes are precisely that: a script determining the fates of all beings. They know that humanity will destroy itself. In \textit{Imago}, Jhodas describes to a human the way the Oankali see humanity. It states: ‘The Oankali believe…the Oankali \textit{know to the bone} that it’s wrong to help the human species regenerate unchanged because it \textit{will} destroy itself again. To them it’s like deliberately causing the conception of a child who is so defective that it must die in infancy.’\textsuperscript{56} The narrative leaves the humans in a sense of foreign finality, excluded and eliminated from the gene pool, alone in the desolate isolation of Mars and not mentioned again after this exchange between human émigrés and Jhodas.

Furthermore, there is a decidedly eugenic impulse in the creation of the Mars colony. The humans who refuse to breed with the Oankali are separated permanently from the gene pool. The establishment of a colony on Mars invokes eugenic ideas of segregation so as to remove unwanted character traits. For the Oankali, the

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid.} 529-530.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{ibid.} p.530.
\textsuperscript{55} Vint. 2007, p.68.
\textsuperscript{56} Butler. 2000, p.532.
compulsion towards self-inflicted oblivion that the human contradiction dictates represents the worst ‘dysgenic’ possibility of life. While the colony allows humans to continue in their pure form, the dysgenic nature of their biology means they are not permitted to reside with those willing to breed out their deficiencies. Jhodas sees the Mars colony as a reminder of humanity’s ultimate destruction and their permanent separation from the utopia of Oankali and human miscegenation. Jhodas states, ‘The construct children are free of inherent flaws. What we build will last.’ In a reactionary response to Jhodas’s pessimism for the survival of humanity a departing resister contends that ‘We might outlast your people here on Earth.’ Jhodas’s internal monologue reflects a deep pathos and a lament for the humans leaving for the Mars colony who are unavoidably doomed to species annihilation:

We would not be here – the Earth he knew would not be here – for more than a few centuries. We, Oankali and construct, were space-going people, as curious about other life and as acquisitive of it as Humans were hierarchical…We would leave this solar system in perhaps three centuries. I would live to see the leave-taking myself. And when we broke and scattered, we would leave behind a lump of stripped rock more like the moon than like this blue Earth.

In their desire to remain ‘pure’ the resisters condemn themselves to race and species suicide, completely and utterly segregated from the racial utopia. The Mars colony emerges as a genetic prison, an infirmary where humans are free to repeat the teleology which has already resulted in self-destruction and will do so again. The Mars colony appears to provide agency and autonomy to those outside the hierarchy of genetic value. However, Butler is really cutting away the biological deadwood of an ancient archaic species who irrationally hates difference. It is perhaps ironic then that it is through her characters’ intrinsic hatred of difference that she reflects her own opinion that racial uniformity is the only means to overcome derision and subjugation of the other.

Butler’s abandonment of political action in favor of genetically engineering solutions to problems of human diversity has led critics including Zaki to criticize her as biologically essentialist. For Zaki, Butler’s approach to politics is the most pervasive

57 ibid, p.530.
58 ibid, p.531.
example of her essentialism. In stark contrast to Haraway’s argument that the post-nuclear war setting of *Xenogenesis* severs humanity from its history of atrocity, Zaki sees Butler’s post-apocalyptic environment as typifying her essentialist view. She contends that,

The public arena of politics, where dialogue and dissent occur, is nullified... by her [Butler’s] construction of permanent states of emergency, which pre-empt any full exploration of the moral and ethical dimensions of political decisions: there can be no room for real debate when the very survival of the individual or group is at stake.\(^59\)

I agree with Zaki on this point, in that the overwhelming ethical concern of all of Butler’s novels is survival. This does, to a large extent, sideline real political debate and diminishes the ability for collective action to have any significant effect in causing social change. However, the purpose behind Butler’s post-apocalyptic environment is not to completely sideline political coalition. Rather, her presentation of a biologically determined and controlled world is to force her readers to examine the ethics of eugenics through genetic engineering. It is, after all, only through genetic manipulation that humanity can be rid of its destructive nature, which has culminated in a nuclear apocalypse. Consequently, the nuclear war is the apocalyptic event that serves as a catalyst for biological and evolutionary advancement, just as the disease was the apocalyptic catalyst in *Clay’s Ark*.\(^60\) The desire to rid humanity of its destructive tendencies reflects the pervasive impulse that cannot seem to imagine utopian human coalition without racial homogeneity.

The disturbing feature of the trilogy, and indeed the majority of Butler’s fiction, is that she sees human conflict as so intrinsic to our genetic evolution that the only way to be rid of it is to biologically breed out difference. In opposition to Vint, who sees Butler as rejecting eugenic methods of separating and isolating ‘defectives’\(^61\), by looking at the treatment of violent humans it is evident that the Oankali simply exclude those too violent to participate in their eugenic project. As Christina Braid has commented:

Because the Humans are seen as being in a perpetual state of denial, the Oankali incarcerate

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60 See Chapter 3: Utopia, Dystopia, Eugenics and Apocalypse in *Clay’s Ark*
61 Vint. 2007, p.68.
Humans who violate alien rules of pacifism. Primarily, the exile to the Oankali ship is used as a preventative measure to limit individual engagement in further acts of aggression. Seeing no need to provide any true rehabilitative solutions to Human violence, the Oankali merely erase Human memory and allocate violent Human bodies to the ship for testing and further Oankali study.  

The erasure of human memory, as Baird puts it, becomes a symbol for the literal erasure of the human genetic structure that causes the violent reactions of humans in the first place. Rehabilitation is not an option because defective genetic structures will yield the same results every time. This thinking strongly resembles eugenic segregation of defectives, who were analogously used for study and often mutilated in the name of science and eugenics. The Oankali’s creation of a human genome is entirely predicated on the assimilation of humans into their society characterized by correct and licit reproductive habits, or utter exile to a foreign planet. Such an approach to social engineering is strikingly similar to policies of positive and negative eugenics: segregation and sterilization of the dysgenic elements of society.

In Zaki’s reading, Butler refuses to endow humanity with any political utopianism, but instead focuses all her aspirations for utopia on the alien society. In this view, Butler presents Oankali politics as superior and genuinely utopian in that it is based on complete consensus reached through political processes of ‘communication and dissent.’ If this is an example of political utopia because it is free of the deterministic logic that pervades the characterizations of human behavior, then Zaki has overlooked an important element of the Oankali ‘consensus.’ While there is little doubt that the Oankali debate in a public forum to determine the fate of both themselves and the human species, their communication is based around perceiving the biological impulses of the collective group. The ‘Akjai’ – Oankali not taking part in the trade on Earth – speaks to the group through the ship, itself a biological entity. The consensus is ‘experienced’ and perceived as a physiological ‘transmission.’

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62 Braid, Christina. ‘Contemplating and Contesting Violence in Dystopia: Violence in Octavia Butler’s XENOCENESIS.’ Contemporary Justice Review. vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, p.53.
63 A particularly horrific occurrence of atrocities committed in the name of eugenic science in America was the castration of a ‘mongoloid dwarf’ in an asylum. The experiment was conducted by Davenport with assistance from T.S Painter, who later became famous for his work on counting chromosomes. Lombardo, Paul A. ‘Dwarves: Uninformed Consent and Eugenic Research.’ Ethics and Medicine. vol.25, no.3, 2009, p.149.
65 Butler. 2000, p.469.
More importantly, what the Oankali know to be true is based around perceptions of biological composition transmitted by the ooloi. Therefore, the Oankali’s political consensus is actually entirely reliant on reaching a state of biological homogeneity that is seen through the interpretation of the ooloi. Zaki is correct that the alien species is genuinely utopian in the literal sense, owing to its utter otherness from the reader’s world. However, the Oankali utopia is not contingent on the political processes of collective action based around dialogue and dissent as much as it is reliant on reaching a state of biological uniformity through the interpretations of nature presented exclusively by the ooloi.

Biological and racial homogeneity is the condition for utopia in the series. Lilith feels that the Oankali ‘seemed to tell the truth as they perceived it, always.’ For the Oankali this perception of truth is the reading of genetic material, which can never be inaccurate, and is something that remains completely unchallenged throughout all three novels. As Nikanj describes after Joseph rejects its sexual advances, ‘Your body has made a different choice…Your body said one thing. Your words said another.’ This clear division of mind and body enables the Oankali to perform actions that are seemingly against the humans’ will. Nikanj impregnates Lilith without her consent and despite her voicing her objections: ‘You’ll have a daughter…And you are ready to be her mother. You could never have said so. Just as Joseph could never have invited me into his bed – no matter how much he wanted me there. Nothing but your words reject this child.’ Far from signifying the rejection of the boundaries of Western patriarchy, the ooloi (Nikanj) speaks with the linguistic characteristics of patriarchy as it seize control of female reproduction just as it enforced its own reproductive desire on to Joseph. This looks suspiciously like rape. At this point, Nikanj has already impregnated Lilith because it read her body as expressing a deep loneliness. Again, the Oankali justify their actions by stating that they merely answer the desires of the body, rather than investing too much importance in the spoken language of the humans. The eagerness with which the aliens enter into reproduction with humanity reflects Butler’s desire to create biological uniformity by breeding out the human genetic contradiction. As humans

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66 ibid, p.59.
67 ibid, pp.189-190.
68 ibid, p.246.
and Oankali merge into one species through miscegenation, biology is increasingly privileged. The Oankali exalt the body and treat it as a superior indicator of the desires of humanity and, as such, their whole epistemological outlook defies dissent. With truth so invariably tied to biology, the Oankali see the entire world in terms of biochemistry that is unquestionably accurate and outside the sphere of dissent and dialogue.

In contrast to Zaki’s characterization of Oankali politics as utopian, based on the presence of collective action based around dialogue and dissent, Oankali politics is even more bound to biological determinism than humanity’s. In privileging the signals of the body, the Oankali actually perpetrate acts that many humans would find completely unethical, such as impregnation without consent. If we take Zaki’s presumption that dialogue and dissent are the necessary conditions for political action, the Oankali appear to be more of an embodiment of a completely deterministic society than a utopia based on collective political action. While the Oankali seek consensus amongst their own, the way they enforce their own genetic determinism upon the humans leads to complete control of the human body at the expense of traditional human notions of autonomy. This is not to discredit the claim that the Oankali present a utopian future for humanity, as I believe they do. However, the utopia they offer humanity is one of genetic and biological assimilation. Indeed, for Butler, utopia is the absence of racial difference. Diversity inevitably leads to conflict and a failure to act in the collective best interests of the group. Miscegenation therefore emerges as a means to create racial uniformity on which a stable and functional utopia can then operate. While the path to this utopian uniform state is fraught and challenging, the impulse directing all behavior towards this ultimate goal is no less pervasive.

**Genetic Determinism: Genetic Slavery?**

The Oankali utterly reject political action or intellectual coalition as means by which humanity can avoid self-destruction. Enforced genetic engineering is the only option that provides the Oankali with any belief in humanity’s power to survive its most dangerous enemy: itself. Jdahya reveals the Onakali’s relentless pursuit of genetically mixing with humanity as he states that the Oankali are ‘committed to the
trade.’ He goes on to contend, ‘We are as committed to the trade as your body is to breathing. We were overdue for it when we found you. Now it will be done – to the rebirth of your people and mine.’ The Oankali’s commitment to the trade, and their assertiveness in entering into reproductive relationships with the humans despite their resistance, has led Amanda Boulter to argue for what Jeffrey A. Tucker has labeled the ‘slavery hypothesis.’ Tucker suggests that the human/Oankali relationships depicted in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy can be seen in terms of ‘mirroring that between slaves and their owners during the era of American slavery.’ Boulter has echoed many feminists’ approach to reproduction in suggesting that Lilith experiences her pregnancy as an invasion of her body, which is particularly convincing in light of her shock and sense of betrayal at being impregnated without her verbal consent. Boulter continues to point out the characteristics of reading *Xenogenesis* as a neo-slave narrative by commenting that ‘Lilith’s response to her pregnancy echoes the ambivalent feelings of these women slaves whose pregnancies were the result of forced matings or rape.’ This is obviously an argument that runs completely counter to Haraway’s and is far more convincing, owing to Butler’s obsessive focus on miscegenation as a tool for achieving eugenic utopia. Rather than ushering in the dawn of a new hybrid identity that undermines the ‘Second Coming’ of the sacred image the Oankali/human relationship does exactly the opposite, in that it merely replicates the apparently ever-perpetuating master/slave relationship. The inherent problem with reading the Oankali/human relationship as a mere master/slave relationship is the desire for miscegenation. Cross-species reproduction exists, not as a sexual fetish, but as a reproductive imperative to breed away the difference between the two species.

However, Lilith naturally feels enslaved because of her loss of autonomy. The sense of being utterly enslaved is expressed by Lilith’s fear that she is an ‘experimental animal.’ Lilith’s internal monologue continues:

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69 ibid, pp.42-43.
71 ibid, p.172.
She was intended to live and reproduce, not to die. Experimental animal, parent to domesticated animals? Or… nearly extinct animal, part of a captive breeding program…Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced “donations” of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth…Humans had done these things to captive breeders. 74

Here, Lilith fears enslavement so extreme that she is reduced to the status of a caged animal and experimented upon by the ‘biologist’ Oankali. Reading the Xenogenesis trilogy as a slave-narrative, while seemingly justified, ignores the implications of miscegenation for the Oankali themselves. The Oankali, while coercively approaching reproduction, nonetheless seek change for themselves to the same extent as they seek change for humanity. The narrative is therefore not exclusively about enslavement. Rather, the series is about the desire to form a meaningful, lasting utopia where the difficulties of human intolerances to differences have been transcended through cross-breeding between humans and the alien Oankali. In this respect, the novels reflect Butler’s own belief that utopia is predicated on stability, and that this stability is entirely reliant on racial uniformity, even though the path to such homogeneity is unquestionably difficult and ethically fraught.

The path to creating the kind of racial uniformity that leads to utopia is not linear. There are further examples where Xenogenesis can be seen as dealing with the issues of genetic enslavement, which reveals Butler’s acknowledgment that a utopia premised on uniformity inevitably commits atrocities in its genesis. This is particularly the case with regards to the ooloi’s manipulation of human chemistry for reproductive purposes in Dawn. In the following passage, the ooloi can be seen as enslaving and raping humanity, which is certainly felt by some of the male characters such as Peter, whose reaction shows how the ooloi control and manipulate desire:

Under their influence, he accepted union and pleasure. When that influence was allowed to wane and Peter began to think, he apparently decided he had been humiliated and enslaved. The drug seemed to him to be not a less painful way of getting used to frightening

74 Butler. 2000, p.60.
nonhumans, but a way of turning him against himself, causing him to demean himself in alien perversions. His humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away.\textsuperscript{75}

In this passage Butler explicitly conflates the male character’s loss of manhood with sexual perversion and a denial of humanity. The Oankali cannot see this as subjugation, as they are merely responding to the biochemical desire of the human body and their own cravings for genetic difference. However, it is clear from Peter’s reaction that his mind is completely at odds with the apparent desires of his flesh. Another male character, Gabe also expresses this sentiment:

“He’s not in control even of what his own body does and feels. He’s taken like a woman and…no don’t explain!”... “He knows ooloi aren’t male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can’t let them get away with that”.\textsuperscript{76}

Gabe characterizes the loss of masculinity as a complete loss of autonomy. For the humans, the most disturbing aspect of their encounter with the aliens is the inability to trust their senses, characterized particularly by Peter’s sense that his identity was being turned against itself. In direct contrast to Haraway’s reading, this alien/human sexual encounter does not reveal a potent fusion of post-humanism, but brings out the worst patriarchal response in the human males who react with violence to losing control of their own bodies. Here, Butler critiques patriarchy; by construing the male’s responses to the Oankali as violent and irrational she immediately places the reader’s sympathies with the alien species, which serves both to validate their project of breeding out humanity’s violence and segregating those who cannot accept such a eugenic assignment. The biological control that the Oankali have over humanity has all the indications of a master/slave relationship. Indeed, the men react with such vehemence precisely because of their feelings of enslavement, which they feel more acutely as they have more to lose with the dissolution of hierarchy.

However, while humans are to a certain extent enslaved by the Oankli, Butler again shows that it is because of their genetic predisposition that men react so violently to their loss of power. The Oankali explain this by stating that adult males ‘bear more

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{ibid}, p.192.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{ibid}, p.201.
of the human [genetic] contradiction than any other people.\textsuperscript{77} For the Oankali, who privilege genetics over every other epistemology, males exhibit a compulsion towards competitive hierarchy because of their genetic structure rather than any social or economic gain that being at the top of a hierarchy entails. As such, the male characters’ reactions to the Oankali are more reflective of their own thirst for power and dominance than those of the Oankali’s. Here, Butler seems more concerned with pointing out the genetic origins of defective human behavior than she does with narrating a parable of slavery. Indeed, the slavery hypothesis is fraught because, as Naomi Jacob asserts the, ‘loss of choice and agency’ that the Oankali precipitate is problematized by the Oankali’s lack of ‘greed and lust,’ but is borne from their own biological imperative to seek out difference.\textsuperscript{78} In contrast to the history of slavery in America where reproduction from forced matings and rape was often produced by an economic desire to increase slave holdings,\textsuperscript{79} the Oankali’s motive is the genetic exchange of difference and the subsequent winnowing of defective genes, rather than a display of complete dominance. From this perspective, it appears that the Oankali’s eugenic project emerges from a desire to eradicate gender-based and race-based hierarchies, which illuminates how different their eugenics are compared to historical eugenics, which primarily served to bolster and rigidify gender distinctions and hierarchies. However, the desire to transcend difference by eliminating it is entirely congruent with historical eugenics.

\textbf{Genetic determinism as a critique: cancer, incest, eugenics and colonialism}

Butler’s focus on miscegenation as a tool for eugenic utopia means that she reinterprets the sociobiological narrative of competitive and hierarchical evolution. Cathy Peppers refers to Lilith’s cancer as a way in which Butler critiques the conventional sociobiological narrative by reimagining genetic disadvantage and transforming it into an evolutionary positive. At the beginning of \textit{Dawn}, Lilith is told

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{ibid}, p.442.
\textsuperscript{78} Jacob, Naomi in Tucker. 2007, p.174.
\textsuperscript{79} Furthermore, as …suggests, a white man could be legally married to a white woman and still have sexual relations with black women as they did not qualify as a full human agent. In her words, ‘the laws of slaveholding supported violations by slave owners against slave women.’ Millward, Jessica. ‘The Relics of Slavery: Interracial Sex and Manumission in the American South.’ \textit{Frontier}. vol, 31, no.3, 2010 p.22.
that she had ‘A cancer’ that was got rid of, ‘Otherwise, it would have killed you.’\textsuperscript{80} Jdahya explains to Lilith that not only did she have a tendency towards producing cancerous growths, but that she had a ‘talent for cancer.’\textsuperscript{81} Even by the use of language (here the description of genetic predisposition as a ‘talent’) it is evident that the Oankali have a completely different approach to human biology, one that focuses on the genetic potential of all elements of the human body. Where humans see disease and imperfection, the Oankali see potential for change and evolution by incorporating such imperfections into their own genetic structure, thereby eliminating all negative genetic characteristics. The key catalyst for this elimination of genetic imperfection is crossbreeding with humans, as it is in physical contact, particularly in reproduction, that the aliens can most clearly see the human genetic map. Lilith’s ‘talent’ provides the Oankali with exciting evolutionary directions only because they can interpret the body clearly and without ambiguity, discarding negative genetic attributes as they go. Jdahya states that the human talent for cancer has the potential to provide subsequent generations with abilities that include increased longevity, controlled malleability and even the regeneration of lost limbs.\textsuperscript{82} As I have shown, this controlled malleability is achieved, particularly by the character Jhodas, who is able to make itself appear more human in order to be less threateningly alien to humans it encounters. For Peppers, ‘Seeing cancer in this way not only puts a positive spin on something we normally find hideous (and fatal), it also disrupts the usual sociobiological story of human evolution, which assumes that every biological characteristic has a clear purpose either favouring or disfavouring survival.’\textsuperscript{83} I agree with Peppers here to the extent that Butler does try to reimagine cancer as a tool for evolutionary advantage rather than as an incurable fatal disease. By rewriting cancer as an evolutionary aid, Butler doesn’t necessarily reject genetic determinism or evolutionary advancement couched in a genetically combative sense. If anything, the Oankali are more attracted to humanity precisely because of their genetic afflictions. Jdahya describes to Lilith that her cancer was ‘beautiful, but simple to prevent.’\textsuperscript{84} Lilith’s cancer is hereditary and, as such, the Oankali are attracted to her and other cancer sufferers because of the genetic possibilities of ‘trade’ with such people.

\textsuperscript{80} Butler. 2000, p.21.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{ibid}, p.22.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{ibid}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{83} Peppers, Cathy. ‘Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler’s Xenogenesis.’ \textit{Science Fiction Studies}. vol.22, no.1, 1995, p.52.
\textsuperscript{84} Butler. 2000, p.22.
These possibilities involve incorporating the cancer cells’ rapid growth to use in growing new limbs and changing their appearance to appear less frightening to other humans. The malleability of physical appearance exists only in human/alien offspring. This malleability effectively eradicates the physical markers of difference and shows how Butler premises utopia on the reproduction of similarity, not necessarily the celebration of difference. By using human genetics, the Oankali’s merger with humanity leads to a dissolving of the physical differences between the two species. This dissolution of physical difference reveals Butler’s utopian yearning for racial uniformity. Because the Oankali, specifically the oooloi, can accurately interpret the language of genetics and manipulate it to their benefit, cancer opens up unlimited potential to evolve at a more rapid rate because of the aggressive speed at which cancer cells reproduce. Here, Butler certainly reinterprets traditional conceptions of what is genetically appealing, but this in no way challenges the legitimacy of reducing evolutionary potential to being a product of favorable genetics. In fact, the Oankali’s eagerness to merge with humanity reveals their desire to create racial homogeneity between the two species and to create a new utopian society out of biological similarity.

Reading the relationships that underpin Oankali sexuality reveals the extent of Butler’s fascination with eugenics in the pursuit of biological similarity. I noted earlier that sexual acts between humans and Oankali provide the only examples in which Haraway’s cyborg boundary transgression occurs. However, rather than depicting postmodern cyborg identity politics, alien sexuality is completely determined by favorable genetic outcomes. For example, the Oankali differ greatly from humanity in that brothers and sisters form sexual relationships. The sexual pairing of siblings is presented as an inevitability of their biology: brother and sister form a sexual relationship with an oooloi from different kin. For example: ‘She [Ahajas] and Dichaan were brother and sister as usual in Oankali matings. Males and females were closely related and oooloi were outsiders. One translation of the word oooloi was “treasured strangers”’. Butler characterizes this sibling relationship as a means for the Oankali to breed certain specific traits: ‘The male and the female concentrated desirable characteristics and the oooloi prevented the wrong kind of

85 ibid, p.106.
concentrations. The ooloi are essential for sexual reproduction as they prevent genetic mutations that breeding within kin groups may cause. The sexual pairing of siblings shows how Oankali sexuality is determined by the most favorable genetic outcomes and demonstrates Butler’s preoccupation with biological reasons for sexual behaviors. Furthermore, the biological implication of breeding between siblings is that genetic similarity is what is genetically favorable. The Oankali preference for breeding amongst immediate family reveals Butler’s impulse towards biological similarity as a utopian project, as breeding within kin groups leads not to biological defectiveness, but a concentration of favorable biological essences. The mating of siblings is a textual symbol for the desire to create a genetic map of racial similarity.

Although Oankali are sexless as children, their sexual relationships are formed during this time of genderless existence. A more detailed analysis of Akin reveals that while Butler may appear to detach sexual desire from biological inscription she once again returns to genetic determinism as the main drive of sexual practice and desire. Akin is abducted by human ‘resisters’ and is separated from his sibling at the crucial stage of their sexual development. Akin expresses his grief at the realization that his relationship with his sister is untenable:

“My sibling?” Silence. Sadness. “It remembers you as something there then not there. Nikanj kept you in its thoughts for a while…they [resister humans] knew they had deprived you of your sibling…” “It’s…too late for bonding.” He knew it was.

The fact that Akin cannot bond with his sibling after pre-sexual separation demonstrates the rigidity of Oankali and construct sexuality. Akin’s exclusion from sexual fulfillment is extremely biologically deterministic as sexual desire is only possible with one partner, based on the desired genetic outcomes of that inevitable union. Genetics dictate sexual desire and practice for the Oankali. If that sexual union is denied, as it is for Akin, that character is prevented from having any meaningful sexual and relational fulfillment, as they cannot hope to achieve the same genetic concentration pairing with others as pairing with their siblings. While Akin finds intellectual fulfillment in helping the resister humans to form their Martian

86 ibid, p.106.
87 ibid, p.414.
colony, it is implied that his sexual and reproductive potential cannot be realized, as any attempt to mate with a female other than his sister would result in less favorable genetic results and would thus be pointless in the Oankali reproductive system. This sexual pairing of siblings to ensure desired genetic outcomes shows the eugenic nature of the Oankali, as ideologies of genetic improvement are entirely naturalized by the alien species’ rigid sexuality. Akin does not reproduce because of the failure to sexually bond with his sibling. This illustrates the extent to which Butler’s utopianism is contingent on the proliferation of similarity at the expense of difference. The coupling of siblings reflects the desire to reproduce biological similarities. Butler reiterates time and time again that the stability required for utopia is entirely contingent on the eradication of biological roots of physical difference.

The Oankali’s convention of sexual pairing of siblings also becomes a feature of human relationships in *Imago*. Jhodas seduces two humans who are brother and sister and forms a strong sexual bond with them. This is not particularly taboo for Tomas and Jesusa, who are from an isolated mountain village that has managed to reproduce despite the Oankali’s forced sterilization of those humans not prepared to crossbreed. This ‘resister’ village has purely human children who are crippled by genetic disorders because their gene pool is far too small. The necessary condition for the reproduction of genetic similarity lies in miscegenation with the alien species, not in reproducing amongst humans alone. Tomas describes to Jhodas and Lilith’s family: ‘Sometimes people have only brown spots and no tumors. Sometimes they have both. Sometimes their minds are affected. Sometimes there are other troubles and they die. Children die.’

Again the language of eugenics is invoked, as the worst possible reproductive outcomes are infant deaths, owing to poor genetic health. The Oankali actually feel pain to hear the tales of children dying, as the genetic ‘waste’ of a being dying in infancy causes a physiological reaction in them. Jhodas then becomes both lover and genetic savior to Tomas and Jesusa. It describes its experience of healing Jesusa’s genetic disorder and her subsequent attachment to it: ‘The genetic error that had caused her and her people so much misery was as obvious to me as a single cloud in an otherwise clear sky…Her body cells would be easy to

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88 *ibid*, p.664.
alter…the sex cells, though, the ova, would have to be replaced.”\textsuperscript{89} Here Jhodas reveals the persistence of Oankali genetic determinism in construct identity, as he is able to read the immutable truths of the flesh. This passage also demonstrates the Oankali and constructs’ conflation of sexual desire and genetic health, as it is through sexual contact that the ooloi can best interpret the genetic structure of the human body. As such, sexual touch becomes irrevocably bound to healing and health, as the ooloi is genetically compelled to fix problems it encounters while in contact with the humans. Because Jhodas is so geared towards reading and manipulating genes, it receives intense pleasure at correcting the deformities of humans, which it then shares with its human mates. This in turn sparks a physiological addiction in the humans, which reveals Butler’s insistence that even emotional states like love and friendship have an initial biochemical determinacy. Jhodas describes this new relationship with Jesusa: ‘what she felt now went beyond liking, beyond loving, into deep biological attachment of adulthood. Literal physical addiction to another person.’\textsuperscript{90} Here, the Oankali privileging of biology is all too evident. While they characterize the human genetic flaw as the combination of intelligence with hierarchy, their own epistemology is clearly founded on the hierarchical system they so vehemently oppose: intellectual affinity is subordinate to the language of the flesh. In this regard Butler’s approach reflects a eugenic outlook that sees all relationships in terms of obtaining desired genetic outcomes.

Butler’s narrative suggests that with advancement in genetic technologies, the question of eugenics and how best to manipulate human evolution inevitably comes to the forefront. She does this to highlight that humanity needs to evolve now if it is to survive, but also to show that we can’t be trusted to direct that evolution responsibly. Her allusions to eugenics sharpen this contradiction, as eugenic ideology has led humans to commit unspeakable atrocities. Yet, Butler presents humans as incapable of avoiding self-destruction without altering their own biology. Butler’s depiction of this human contradiction characterizes what she sees as the ever-perpetuating power imbalances that are endemic to all human existence. The Oankali and human relationship, while not merely standing for a master/slave relationship, does fictionalize power imbalances. The fact that the Oankali assertion of humanity’s

\textsuperscript{89} ibid, p.678.
\textsuperscript{90} ibid, p.679.
genetic inferiority remains unchallenged shows that, while acquisitive and supposedly non-hierarchical, the alien species is in a position of power over humanity. This is the necessary condition for survival. Survival, which for Butler is characterized by the ability to continue reproducing, becomes the primary way that the unsettling and destructive force of racial difference is eradicated. The possibility for utopia is entirely pinned on the Oankali and human miscegenated society, which reveals Butler’s insistence on genetically determined utopia and her refusal to entertain utopia premised on political coalition amongst diverse heritages.

Butler’s emphasis on eugenically managed miscegenation as the necessary condition for racial utopia diminishes in the period between the publication of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and *Parable of the Talents*. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, the *Parable* novels are Butler’s attempt to establish an ethical framework centered on evolution rather than Christian idealism. While the *Parable* books are about eradicating difference, miscegenation as the key catalyst in eliminating this difference seems to disappear until Butler’s final published novel, *Fledgling* (2005). This book deals directly with the same key issues as *Xenogenesis*. In particular, using eugenically designed miscegenation between two disparate species to attain a racial utopia that is premised on the eradication of physical difference brought about by biological difference.
In this chapter, I continue to analyze Butler’s focus on miscegenation as a means to eradicate racial difference as the sole means of achieving utopia. As I argued in the previous chapter, Butler increasingly expresses the opinion that intolerance and oppression of difference can only be overcome by eradicating the biological differences that result in physical otherness. In *Fledgling* (2005), as in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Butler imagines miscegenation as facilitated by genetic engineering. She continues to explore genetic technology as a way to engineer evolutionary changes by combining genetic traits from two disparate species: human and vampire. This is not to say that reproduction amongst human’s and vampire’s own species ceases as it does in *Xenogenesis*, but that Butler points towards miscegenation across these species boundaries as the seeds of a utopian hybrid species. In doing so, she creates a world where the struggle for power, autonomy, communal and individual freedom becomes inextricably linked to the struggle to read, manipulate, and control biology.

In *Fledgling*, Butler crosses genres by using a figure from countless popular novels, movies, and television series: the vampire. All of Butler’s novels to this point have dealt with figures who are mostly confined to the realm of science fiction. While she reinterprets tropes of aliens, disease, time travel, shape shifting, space colonization, and genetic engineering, these concepts are nonetheless staples of science fiction. By employing the figure of the vampire, Butler extends her reimagining of traditional science fiction themes by invoking figures from other popular genres of horror and romance. She reinterprets the myths surrounding vampires at a time when depictions of human/vampire relations exploded into a global phenomenon with the publication of *The Sookie Stackhouse* series (2001-) and *Twilight* (2005), among others. Butler uses the popular visibility of vampires and rewrites the vampire bite as facilitating a communal utopia, rather than precipitating blood pollution and corruption of human purity. In doing so, she treats the vampire in science fiction terms. The vampire’s connection to supernaturalism is destroyed and the species emerges as an evolutionary cousin to humanity, not as the spiritually damned villain. By breaking
the ties with demonism, Butler’s characterization of vampirism can be interpreted as an elaborate allegory of racial identity and racial otherness discussed in relation to species. Her desire to show miscegenation as facilitating utopia across two different species again reveals her fascination with eradicating racial difference as the necessary condition to achieve racial utopia.

Butler discusses eugenics in *Fledgling* by presenting genetically engineered cross breeding from two disparate species to achieve evolutionary goals. She does not literally depict miscegenation in terms of interracial reproduction among humans, but rewrites the myth of the vampire to discuss race in terms of inter-species relationships. Her deployment of the vampire figure in science fiction strips vampirism of its connection to sin, immorality and taboo, and simultaneously disconnects miscegenation entirely from its history of association with degeneracy in American culture throughout the age of eugenics.\(^1\) While rejecting vampirism’s overtly supernatural conventions, Butler’s protagonist, Shori, still drinks human blood\(^2\), which links *Fledgling* with the fetishization of blood in American gothic literature. Toni Morrison has argued that blood is a ‘pervasive fetish’ in American Gothic literature. This fetishization of blood is visible in Butler’s depictions of the Ina bite in *Fledgling*. In the story, the vampire bite is the locus of a utopian impulse where genetic and biological nourishment of the human characters occurs in conjunction with the material and physical nourishment of the vampires. This conflation of material nourishment with spiritual and erotic fulfillment shows how the exchange of blood emerges as a particular fetish of *Fledgling*. Morrison continues to say that ‘fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery.’\(^3\) For Morrison, the fetishization of blood is a symptom of Gothic literature’s tendency to formulate rigid boundaries of civilization and cast all

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\(^1\) The vampire’s connection to sin and blood pollution is most visibly with publication of Bram Stoker’s classic, *Dracula* (1897). However, despite *Dracula*’s conflation of sin and blood pollution, it was nonetheless engendered with medical properties. As Aimir Shahzad has mentioned, *Dracula* appears to have a ‘medical basis’ in that both ‘vampirism and rabies are infectious conditions…’ Shahzad, Aimir, ‘Hereditary Somnambulism in *Dracula.*’ *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.* vol.96. 2003, p.52. Butler maintains the medical nature of vampire blood infection but dispenses with its connection to sin and soul corruption typified by vampires since *Dracula.*

\(^2\) This is in direct contrast to other depictions of ‘good’ vampires in popular culture. Such noble vampires include Angel in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, (Whedon, Joss. WB, 1997-2003) and The Cullen family in *Twilight*, (Myer, Stephanie. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), who all subsist on animal blood so as to avoid killing humans.

those outside the narrow parameters of culture as savages. However, such a clear and absolute conception of civilized versus savage is challenged by the vampire. Vampires, since before the publication of Dracula in 1897, have embodied a problematic relationship to the civilized/savage dichotomy, as they represent both the civilized idealism of aristocratic urbanity as well as the savage brutality of cannibalistic bloodlust. Le Fanu’s 1872 story Carmilla also dealt with the dichotomous relationship between humans and vampires as reflecting dichotomies of human existence and human sexuality. As William Veeder has commented, ‘Those who see ‘Carmilla’ as the tale of a Victorian heroine saved from a deadly predator will define the dualism as vampire-human; those who find a second, sexual layer will add lesbian-heterosexual.’

Throughout Victorian literature, with the publication of ‘Carmilla’ (1872), then of course with Stoker’s Dracula (1897), the vampire emerged as a popular figure with the potential to embody discussions about a range of human behaviors including race, gender and class issues.

Butler seizes on the vampire as a vehicle for dealing with contemporary anxieties about race and gender, as well as the civilization/savage dichotomies so visible in Dracula and issues of sexual identity discussed covertly in ‘Carmilla’. Although blood as a fetish remains a significant feature of Fledgling, Butler further undermines a clear delineation of civilization and savagery as humans and vampires undertake a complex symbiotic relationship with one another where humans are neither killed nor turned into vampires as a product of vampire feeding. However, the power of blood, whilst demystified and construed in purely scientific terms, is nonetheless fetishized as the integral element of both vampire and human identity. The fetishization of blood in the novel is thus characterized by blood’s utopian potential as the agent of biological mixing. By reading the exchange of blood as a symbol of the exchange of genetic material, the mixing of human and vampire blood reveals how intrinsic racial amalgamation is in the pursuit of racial utopia. In Fledgling, the vampire still exists in its historical form as an allegory of racial otherness, but it is through interspecies miscegenation that the eradication of perceivable differences between human and vampire is achieved. The novel further expresses Butler’s rejection of political

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coalition to achieve utopia and instead focuses on the eugenic pursuit of biological similarity as the path to creating the racial stability required for societal stability.

In contrast to reading Butler as yearning for eugenically inspired racial homogeneity, most critics of *Fledgling* including Fink (2010), Lacey (2010) and Strong (2011), have indicated that Butler uses hybrid identities as a means to interrogate contemporary structures of power. Their analyses assert that Butler’s interest in power relations reflects her drive to subvert rigid boundaries of identity, which includes undermining essentialist and deterministic logic. Melissa Strong draws the link between Butler’s approach to power and Haraway’s conception of the rejection of binary logic. She contends that *Fledgling’s* protagonist is like ‘Haraway’s cyborg’, signaling a pleasurable and disturbing coupling across previously disparate, self-contained boundaries. Such analyses read Butler in terms of Haraway’s concepts of boundary crossing and the subversion of essentialist concepts of identity. Haraway describes her approach to identity: ‘I am not interested in the policing of boundaries between nature and culture – quite the opposite, I am edified by the traffic.’ It is this ‘traffic’, the point at which transport across boundaries becomes so abundant as to render those very lines of distinction obsolete, that the above critics seem compelled to read in Butler’s fiction. Such ultimate blurring of boundaries has a distinctly utopian sensibility. While eugenics has often been characterized in terms of obsession about racial purity and anxiety about the erosion of racial difference, African-American concepts of eugenics, particularly those of Pauline Hopkins, often looked to carefully directed miscegenation as the means by which accelerated evolution could be achieved. Butler is operating in this historical context of miscegenation as eroding the binaries on which racist ideology is premised. Boundary erosion in the novel is indicative of the breakdown of a racial binary. However, this binary collapses, only to be superseded by a new, essential, racially mixed identity that achieves definition through the eradication of racial difference, as

5 Strong, Melissa J. ‘The Limits of Newness: Hybridity in Octavia Butler’s Fledgling.’ *Femspec.* vol.11, no.1, 2011, p.34.
7 Pauline Hopkins was an African-American author and critic whose magazine novel *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901-1902), championed eugenically guided miscegenation between African and Anglo Americans as a way to create a genetically superior mulatto race where racism would no longer be viable owing to the physical uniformity of mixed-race identity. For more detail see Chapter 4.
opposed to Haraway’s celebration of traffic across boundaries as a means of resistance. An aspect of Butler’s challenge to the reader is to present the product of interspecies reproduction as superseding human hegemony as the dominant species on the planet.

Butler’s depiction of miscegenation as a tool for utopian eugenics dictates that identity is genetically determined. Her focus on biological motives for behavior is characteristic of the eugenic approaches to identity of Galton, Davenport and Hopkins. Eugenic aspirations of genetically altering identity are entirely contingent on the ability to isolate and explain human behavior as biologically motivated. None of the above-mentioned critics (Fink, Lacey, Stong and Haraway) see Butler’s use of genetic engineering and eugenics as depicting belief in biological essentialism. They focus rather on the erosion of racial boundaries as undermining Western patriarchal logic. By contrast, in this chapter I show how Butler’s depictions of genetic engineering bolster essentialist and deterministic ideas of identity, as the motives that underpin hybrid identity in *Fledgling* are entirely biological. Butler’s insistence that genes are ultimately the primary constituents that dictate behavior means that the only way to evolve beyond the current limitations of human social structures is to eugenically engineer a solution. This is not to say that Butler naïvely posits eugenics as an unproblematic utopian solution, as she also draws the reader’s attention to the ethically fraught nature inherent to any discussion of genetic improvement. It is, however, to say that Butler rewrites miscegenation as a tool to achieve a racial utopia guided by eugenic practices. Butler presents miscegenation as evolutionary advancement by eugenically selecting desirable genetic traits across boundaries of race and species. Butler ultimately presents eugenically inspired genetic manipulation as a necessary means to achieving the racial harmony that is crucial for utopia. The blending of human and vampire genetic lineages does not point towards a potent fusion in the amorphous sense of Haraway’s cyborg politics. Rather, it reiterates Hopkins’s ideas about miscegenation resulting in evolutionary advancement if guided by sound eugenic practices. This reinterpretation of miscegenation illuminates Butler’s belief that society can be engineered through the manipulation of genetics and reproduction. Although she depicts anxiety about the loss of cultural and communal identity surrounding the elimination of race as a visible signifier of identity, Butler never waives from presenting the utopian promise of eugenically
controlled miscegenation. Again, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, Butler insists that genes hold the key to social engineering. While the path to evolutionary change is fraught and often costs many individual freedoms, even lives, *Fledgling* further suggests that this price is worth paying when the result is evolutionary advancement.

**A Brief History of Vampires in Literature: Vampires and Blood Corruption**

The figure of the vampire might seem like a radical departure from the more conventional tropes of science fiction Butler has employed until now. However, her engagement with vampirirism serves a very similar function as those of the alien, the genetically sick, the contagiously sick and the immortal. It is seemingly odd that Butler dispenses with more conventional science fiction tropes that often rely on futuristic environments, instead employing the figure of the vampire. However, vampires and aliens both embody fictional explorations of human encounters with racial otherness. In both *Xenogenesis* and *Fledgling*, Butler forces her human characters to interact and enter into reproductive and sexual relationships with members of different species in order to eliminate physical difference between two disparate groups. The vampires or ‘Ina’ in *Fledgling*, as with the Oankali, the Clayarks, Patternists, Doro, and Anyanwu, are a vehicle for Butler to force humans to confront radical difference. The vampire’s historical liminality means its deployment is entirely congruent with Butler’s use of other marginalized figures in her writing. Furthermore, as in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the species otherness of both vampires and aliens allow Butler to discuss miscegenation between radically different people as a potential utopian project.

Despite vampire fiction’s characterization as mostly a staple of the horror genre, the use of the vampire in science fiction is not entirely new. Science fiction, such as George R.R. Martin’s *Fevre Dream* (1984), has occasionally dealt with vampires precisely because of their ‘otherness’ to mainstream society. In the same way that aliens provide a vehicle to discuss crises arising from encounters with the other, so too does the vampire present the intrepid science fiction author with an opportunity to interrogate race, gender, and class based hierarchies with a specific focus on blood and identity. However, by characterizing her vampire community in terms of eugenic
utopia, Butler does what few other treatments of vampirism would dare: she puts forward a fictional blueprint for the eradication of racial difference through miscegenation. In stark contrast to the litany of vampire fiction in recent times, Butler looks to the dilution of blood as a means to achieve utopia, not as a corruption of an immortal soul or the perversion of human purity. Embedded within this goal of racial utopia is a revision of gender that reverses the lack of female agency and the control of the female body that is rife in contemporary depictions of vampire/human relations.\(^8\) While Butler’s depiction of gender and sexuality in *Fledgling* is revolutionary in light of the current conservatism in popular vampire literature typified by the *Twilight* saga (2005-2011), she reinforces her own gender and sexual traditionalism in that she inflexibly ties sexual identity to reproduction. Indeed, she creates a hierarchy of sexual activity that separates reproductive sex from playful sex, characterizing the former as real, sacred and the ultimate outcome of existence. In doing so, Butler again betrays her genetic determinism. Sex, race, gender and ethics become about the genetic development of the species less than expressions of the significance of individual autonomy. In *Fledgling*, the genetic future of the species becomes the sublimation of boundaries of race into the eugenically manipulated hybrid.

Butler’s depiction of vampirism in *Fledgling* attempts to alter patriarchal conceptions of gender and rewrite the elements of its conservative lineage. Bram Stoker’s classic *Dracula* (1897) has left an indelible mark on popular literature, movies and television, as the bloodsucking count has migrated from the pages of the gothic novel to a television staple of the twenty-first century. The vampire as a metaphor has drawn a range of treatments from a wide variety of authors owing to its potential to unsettle societal norms, particularly with regards to so-called ‘illicit’ sexual relationships.\(^9\) Butler commented in an interview that she became interested in

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\(^8\) Most disturbingly visible is Stephanie Myer’s *Twilight* saga, the first novel of which was published the same year as *Fledgling*. *Twilight* has been ruthlessly ridiculed by feminists for its fetishization of sexual abstinence and its depictions of the lack of female agency in self-protection and reproductive choice. It has even been described as ‘abstinence porn.’ The ‘abstinence message is so strong,’ that it could be used to ‘convince teenagers that sexual self-denial is actually sexy.’ Puente, Maria. ‘A Total “Eclipse” of the Heart?’ *USA Today*, Jul 07, 2010. Read more cynically the abstinence message can be seen as fetishizing power imbalances that are predicated on the extraordinary fragility of female sexuality and constitute the ultimate control of feminine sexual identity by an impossibly strong male.

vampires because of how female authors had reinterpreted them as attractive and sexually enticing. She states

I belong to more book clubs than I should... And I wound up with a book that was a kind of vampire romance. It was hot! And I thought, “Wow.” And I looked around for other authors that might be doing that. And I found some and I begin to play with some ideas.\(^{10}\)

While Butler’s statement is somewhat humorous, it does reflect her interest in using the vampire’s liminality to interrogate sexual relationships.\(^{11}\) Cynthia Freeland has described the vampire’s attractiveness as a figure to discuss sexuality and gender. She contends that ‘the vampire violates the norms of femininity and masculinity, as allegedly directed through the heterosexual desire to marriage and reproduction’.\(^{12}\)

For Freeland, the vampire occupies a liminal space where normative heterosexuality is rejected and challenged by the fact that vampires are ‘polymorphously perverse: in their search for blood, they can find physical intimacy with a person of almost any gender, age, race, or social class.’\(^{13}\) Such an interpretation assumes that the act of biting is inherently intimate, which perhaps neglects to acknowledge the animalistic and frightening nature of being eaten. Nonetheless, the dissolution of boundaries of gender, race and class embodied in the vampire’s lust for the consumption of blood render the vampire the ultimate societal other, as its apparent failure to distinguish between people of different genders, races, and classes threatens to unravel the very fabric of patriarchal heterosexism. The challenge to patriarchal norms has centered on the vampire’s sexual exploits. John Allen Stevenson wrote of Dracula that the Count is guilty of ‘interracial sexual competition.’\(^{14}\) Margaret L. Carter has adopted Stevenson’s argument to suggest that ‘the vampire is dangerous because he corrupts and steals “our” women, releasing their sexuality in demonic ways. With his “omnivorous appetite for difference, for novelty,” the Count gives his victims sexual

\(^{10}\) Butler, Octavia E. in Govan, Sandra. ‘Going to See the Woman: A Visit With Octavia E. Butler.’ Obsidian III: Literature in the African Diaspora. vol.6, no.2, 2005, p.35.

\(^{11}\) Particularly influential for Butler was Jewel Gomez’s lesbian vampire novel The Gilda Stories (1991). Butler describes that vampire fiction by women tends to contain an eroticism that is less evident in vampire fiction by men. She comments that, ‘I’ve noticed that when men write about vampires they’re evil nasty monsters who want to kill you. And when women write about vampires, they’re interestingly sexy.’ ibid, p.38.


\(^{13}\) ibid, p.125.

experiences which the male heroes of the novel cannot match.¹⁵ The sexual prowess of vampires eclipsing the ‘normal’ males of vampire fiction is still prevalent in vampire fiction and is a key motif in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *True Blood* (2008 ongoing), *Twilight* (2005), and *Fledgling* (2005). In conservative stories the narrative is fulfilled by the vampire’s ultimate destruction by a patriarchal figure. In the case of *Dracula*, Van Helsing, who appears as the scientific authority, overcomes the supernatural otherness of the Count.¹⁶

However, vampires from Dracula onwards have come to embody a sensuality and sexual enticement that seems at odds with the horror genre. Shori, the chief protagonist of *Fledgling* is no exception. As well as presenting a problematic and taboo sexual identity based around her appearance of being a ten-year-old girl, Shori’s bite contains a strong and addictive chemical that tethers her human partners to her. Freeland suggests, ‘sexuality is rife in the vampire genre, which is unusual in horror for its eroticism and beauty.’¹⁷ The polymorphously perverse nature of the vampire’s conflation of sex and consumption makes it a symbol to interrogate gender relations in the twenty-first century. The vampire symbolizes the exploration of sexuality and liminal otherness since the late nineteenth century. Butler seize up this tradition of vampires as marginal others. Shori’s position is marginal on multiple fronts: she is young, dark skinned, alone, and has completely lost her memory. As such, she typifies the words of Margaret Carter, who characterizes the vampire ‘As a rebellious outsider, as a persecuted minority, as an endangered species, and as a member of a different “race” that legend portrays as sexually omnicompetent, the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction.’¹⁸ Shori is all these things, but her true power as revolutionary and utopian hero resides not in the emphasis of her vampire characteristics, but in her ability to more totally assimilate into human society and eradicate the visible difference between the two disparate species. Shori is the ultimate evolution in vampirism, one that through miscegenation and genetic engineering is able to completely eliminate the perceivable difference between vampires and humans.

¹⁵ Carter, Margaret L. 1997, p.28.
¹⁶ Freedland. 2000, p.128.
¹⁷ *ibid*, p.125.
The vampire’s teleology as a source of blood pollution ties the myth to early twentieth-century eugenic thinking. Eugenic discourse in both Britain and America sought scientific validation for the inheritance of particular bloodlines, which were seen by eugenicists such as Galton and Davenport as containing the blueprints for identity.\(^{19}\) Vampire fiction’s fetishization of blood corresponds with eugenic discourse’s equal fascination with legitimizing bloodlines. Clive Leatherdale has suggested that ‘the concept of the vampire is founded on two precepts: the belief in life after death, and the magical power of blood.’\(^{20}\) While Butler dispenses with any supernatural notion of an afterlife and couches vampirism in scientific terms, in \textit{Fledgling} blood is still endowed with scientifically verifiable, but nonetheless, miraculous, and inheritable, healing properties. The historical vampire’s combination of supernaturalism and the imagined source of racial identity (blood) has given rise to ‘arguably the most potent literary myth of the twentieth century.’\(^{21}\) \textit{Dracula} plays upon the mystical approach to blood handed down through antiquity, but it can also be seen as reflective of attitudes towards race blood in the context of the burgeoning eugenics movement.

H.L. Malchow has noted that the vampire has an historical association with anti-Semitism, and has long been identified in terms of anxieties about race pollution. He contends, ‘In \textit{Dracula}, an association of sexual perversion with Jewish pollution…locates the work in the mainstream of late-nineteenth-century European prejudice in general and, in particular, within a quite specific racial discourse.’\(^{22}\) Here, Malchow delineates how Dracula embodies both sexual perversion and racial

\(^{19}\) For example, Davenport stated in 1921 that ‘In general, our vocations…are determined by our sensory structure and this is hereditary.’ Davenport, Charles Benedict. ‘Research in Eugenics.’ \textit{Eugenics Genetics and the Family Volume 1: Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics} (New York: September 22-28 1921). Baltimore: Williams &Wilkins Company, 1923, p.24. For Davenport, suitability for jobs as varied as authors to sailors, were all a product of the genetic heritage of the individual. While this sounds no different to the current popular dicta of inheritance, Davenport concluded that the fact that ‘our mental and temperamental characteristics have a hereditary basis has certain important social bearings. It leads us to regard more charitably the limitations of our fellow men.’\(^{19}\) Reading Davenport with the benefit of historical hindsight, it is easy to see here how Davenport conceived of eugenics as a means to validate his own classes scientific legitimacy.


\(^{21}\) \textit{ibid}, p.11.

pollution, which in turn presents the mythic figure as symbolizing threats to the dominant race and gender ideologies of the time. Shori reflects Malchow’s description of the vampire as threatening to the racial order of mainstream society. However, Butler presents her vampire society as institutionally racist, rather than suggesting that human fear of the vampire might be indicative of the fear of the outsider. Dracula’s liminal heritage is reinterpreted to show Shori as an other to her own kind, owing to her genetic lineage as part human. As such, Butler uses the historical fears of the vampire’s otherness to show how miscegenation between disparate identities can eliminate the difference on which oppressive systems rely.

As well as sexual and racial otherness, the vampire has been associated with illness and disease. Marty Fink has posited that since their popularization, ‘vampires have evolved as literary signifiers of racial and sexual deviance, embodying illnesses as wide-ranging as syphilis and tuberculosis.’

23 Butler’s characterization of vampirism is still grounded in the history that engendered the popular figure as a metaphorical discussion of disease, as well as sexual and racial perversion. However, in opposition to Dracula’s narrative fulfillment, which hinges upon the eradication of the vampire and the victory of the prevailing racial, gender and class-based hierarchies, Butler’s novel alludes to the eradication of racial differences by the assimilation of the vampire into human society. Rather than its destruction, the vampire is bred with human DNA to take on more human characteristics and thereby destroy its characterization as a visible other to society.

It is the opportunity for revisions of both patriarchal myths of gender and eugenic myths of racial blood purity that Butler seizes upon in Fledgling. Despite the number of female authors writing vampire fiction24, Fledgling is rare in that it narrates events through the eyes of a female vampire rather than from the perspective of a human who encounters the vampire. However, can the vampire as a metaphor, so loaded with patriarchal symbolism and ideas of racial purity ever really serve anything but the bolstering of racism and sexism? To answer this question, the following sections examine how eugenic fears of blood pollution may be seen analogously with the fear

24 Some examples of females writing vampire fiction include, Anne Rice, Deborah Harkness, Charlene Harris, Stephanie Myer, and Octavia Butler.
of the vampire as the instrument of such essential despoiling. Can there be meaningful revisions of categories of race, gender, and class if genetics is still valorized as the defining factor in determining identities, and is couched in the same language of purity and pollution? As I shall demonstrate, the genetically engineered vampire is the coalescence of the two hugely important myths of eugenics and vampirism. It is through eugenically directed miscegenation that the vampire is erased as a visible other, which reflects Butler’s insistence that utopia is only possible by eradicating visible differences.

The Rejection of Sin: Miscegenation, Utopia and the Science Fiction Vampire

The historical obsession with racial purity evident in discourses of miscegenation in the nineteenth century is still evident in contemporary American culture. In her analysis of the ‘mulatta’ in American culture, Suzanne Bost has suggested that ‘the anxiety surrounding racial definition that came with the abolition of slavery’ was, at the turn of the twenty-first century, again coming to the fore of American thought. She contends that ‘Anxiety about the breakdown of racial categories has led to an increased interest in mixture,’ which manifests not only in theories of race and racial identity but also continues to be a significant literary trope in science fiction and vampire fiction. Fledgling shows this increased interest in mixed identities. Shori, the chief protagonist of the novel, is a vampire who has been genetically engineered to be black so as to withstand sunlight. Shori suffers memory loss as a result of attacks on her family by racial purist Ina (Vampires), who disagree with her family’s attempt to eugenically improve vampire genes. As Shori is piecing together her previous life, she says to her first human symbiont, Wright, ‘I think I’m an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than…others of my kind.’ For Shori, her ‘blackness’ is the main source of her power as it enables her to withstand

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26 ibid, p.184.
27 Science fiction that deals with interracial sex and reproduction most visibly includes Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89 – see chapter 4 for more detail), but also includes such SF classics as Stranger in a Strange Land (1961). Vampire fiction has recently been inundated with human/vampire romances in Buffy (1997-2003), True Blood (2003-ongoing), Twilight (2005), A Discovery of Witches (2011). These novels and television shows all deal with the complexities of interracial (species) romances, but it is oddly only in the Twilight saga and Fledgling that interracial reproduction is overtly discussed, albeit in very different ways.
the sun, and even stay awake during the day, unlike the rest of her kind who go into states of unconsciousness during daylight. Shori’s ability to endure sunlight stems from her mixed genetic heritage, as her father Iosif explains to Wright, ‘Some of us have tried for centuries to be less vulnerable during the day. Shori is our latest and most successful effort in that direction. She’s also, through genetic engineering, part human.’

Here, Butler explicitly links Shori’s power, her ability to stay awake during the day, with her humanness and her blackness, which expresses Butler’s belief in eugenically guided miscegenation as a utopian tool. Shori’s inhabitation of both human and vampire identities emerges as both the source of her power and the instrument of her subjugation. Shori’s family is completely wiped out by a group of Ina who feel the dilution of Ina blood with human genes is an affront to the purity of the race, which demonstrates Butler’s acute awareness that genetic advancement always comes at a significant ethical price. Miscegenation for Butler is never an unproblematic solution to the complexities of racial oppression. Yet by linking cross-species reproduction to the utopian amalgamation of the best character traits of two disparate species, she presents genetic manipulation and reproduction across species lines as the only alternative to abolish the power divisions that separate the two racially distinct groups.

The way Butler achieves the merging of human and vampire identity is to strip vampirism of its supernaturalism. In contrast to fantasy and horror incarnations of the vampire, Butler’s vampires are distinctly couched in the science fiction genre in that they confirm to consistent and plausible, however fictional, scientific logic. Science fiction critic Veronica Hollinger has posited that ‘while the SF genre expands the scope and variety of the physical universe, it often does so – ironically perhaps – at the expense of what cannot be explained in terms of the super-natural or un-natural, the ontologically indeterminate area of the fantastic.’

By this logic the traditional vampire of Stoker’s Dracula cannot truly inhabit the landscape of conventional science fiction because his existence is entirely based on supernatural terms. Butler transforms vampirism from the world of gothic horror and romance to science fiction by demystifying vampire lore. As Wright tries to make sense of Shori’s vampire

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29 ibid, p.66.
existence, he tests out superstitions by giving Shori a crucifix to hold. He tells Renee (who is Shori before she is told her true name) that she is supposed to be bothered by holding the crucifix. He says, ‘This is a religious symbol, Renee – an important one. It’s supposed to hurt vampires because vampires are supposed to be evil.’ Wright’s statement is representative of folkloric views of vampirism which have historically construed the vampire as the ‘other’ to all aspects of Christian virtue: they live in the darkness, they consume human blood, and they pollute both blood and sexual purity by seducing humans away from socially acceptable forms of sex and consumption. Shori is unperturbed by important religious iconography, which exemplifies Butler’s uncoupling of vampirism from supernatural and spiritual lineage. The rejection of supernaturalism is crucial, as Butler’s eugenic utopia is formed around the vampire community and entering into its promise of longer healthier human existence. As one of Shori’s new symbionts explains to her, ‘I want to live disease free and strong, and never get feeble or senile.’ Butler’s rejection of the vampire as demonic allows her to construct a scientifically plausible image of vampirism that points towards racial and genetic amalgamation as a utopian goal between humans and vampires that provides humans with the eugenic utopian goals of living ‘disease free.’ By contrast, traditional vampire fiction (typified by Dracula, but just as evident in so-called feminist vampire fiction like Interview with the Vampire and Buffy) involves reestablishing the norms of Christian patriarchy by exterminating the corrupting force of the vampire.

Butler creates vampires as evolutionary cousins to humanity. Vampires or ‘Ina’ in Fledgling exist within the confines of plausible evolutionary parameters. As Iosif, Shori’s father, explains to Shori and Wright, ‘We have very little in common with the vampire creatures Bram Stoker described in Dracula, but we’re long-lived blood drinkers.’ Butler severs the ties to the Victorian Dracula by rejecting the key concern of Stoker’s vampire: that of altering the human condition through infecting prey with the contagious corruption of vampire identity. The parasitic aspect of Stoker’s vampire is also dispensed with, as humans co-exist with vampires in a long-lived symbiotic partnership as opposed to being entirely consumed. As Iosif

32 ibid, p.283.
33 ibid, p.63.
continues, ‘We live alongside, yet apart from, human beings, except for those humans who become our symbionts… We can’t magically convert humans into our kind.’ By making her vampires unable to change human beings through their bite, Butler strips vampires of their supernaturalism. She rejects the construction of vampires as evil, and instead presents them as just another species, simply an alternative direction of terrestrial evolution. In doing so, Butler overcomes superficial differences between Ina and humans through eugenically directed miscegenation. By making the vampires distinctly human in their jealousies and social dealings, Butler uses their species otherness as a symbol of racial difference. She couches vampirism in the idiom of evolutionary science, creating a sense of scientific plausibility rather than reinforcing the myth of the vampire as a demonic, corrupting force. In doing so, she presents vampirism as a difference in ethnicity and cultural customs that can be read as an allegory for race. It is this demystified characterization of vampirism that allows Butler to discuss miscegenation as a means to eliminate racial difference and offer a eugenic utopia, which, as was the case in the Xenogenesis trilogy, is predicated on destroying the visible differences between two different species.

Butler rejects the condition of vampirism as contagious. However, she does not altogether dispense with the vampire’s ability to dramatically alter human blood. The sense of blood contamination through interaction with the vampire is left partially intact, as humans still grapple to deal with the irrevocable change to their bodies precipitated by the alteration of their blood. By presenting human blood as able to be contaminated, changed, and even improved by the vampire bite, Butler theorizes miscegenation between the two species as a means through which difference can be engineered away. In Fledgling, humans cannot be turned into vampires, which is counter to almost all vampire traditions. As Celia says to Shori, ‘It doesn’t seem fair that you can’t convert us like all the stories say.’ Shori replies by invoking the illogical and unscientific nature of vampire lore by stating that, ‘If a dog bit a man, no one would expect the man to become a dog. He might get an infection and die, but that’s the worst.’ As well as commenting on the vampire’s emergence from

34 ibid, p.63.
35 ibid, p.123.
nineteenth-century concerns about rabies, this statement, while consigning traditional vampire mythology to the scrap heap of impossible superstition, reveals the potential for blood infection that any exchange of fluids could precipitate. While not explicitly stating the dangers of Ina feeding on human blood, the link with the animal consumption of the human body expressed in the image of the dog-bite suggests that Shori is all too aware of the Ina potential to contaminate, alter and even kill the human body through infection as well as consumption. Here, Butler explicitly rejects the key tenet of vampire lore that stresses the contagious nature of the vampiric condition, while maintaining a sense that the vampire’s otherness retains the potential to contaminate and kill. In this sense, Butler demystifies vampirism but upholds its danger to ideas of racial blood purity. By refusing to fulfill the vampire’s ability to reproduce by mere contact, Butler shifts her discussion of vampires from an anxiety about the corrupting influence of a societal other to a foray into the reproductive potentials of miscegenation from two disparate species. In so doing, she actually uses the demystified vampire to discuss more succinctly how problems ensuing from anxieties about racial difference might be overcome.

Butler’s rejection of traditional vampire lore serves as an important structural device that unsettles the fulfillment of vampire fiction’s core mythologies. As Ken Gelder has suggested, ‘vampire fiction is peculiar in this sense: although it is flexible in so many other ways, it depends upon the recollection and acting out of certain quite specific ‘lores’ for its resolution.’ For Gelder, the frustration of the fulfillment of these familiar ‘lores’ creates a ‘disillusionary function,’ where vampire mythology ceases to be a generic template that achieves narrative completion and instead becomes ‘a point of reference, trading on the reader’s familiarity.’ Butler refuses to fulfill the reader’s expectations of traditional vampire lore by rejecting vampirism as a contagious condition. She highlights the unscientific superstition of myths that construe the vampire as the corruptor of human nature by transforming normative human identity into societal otherness through a perverse sex act, relegating traditional vampire myths to archaic remnants of ghost stories. The ‘disillusionary’ effect of Butler’s vampire emerges as a challenge to the relevancy of the vampire as a

38 ibid, p.35.
fictional symbol. Nina Auerbach foregrounded Butler’s questioning of the pertinence of the vampire when in 1995 she wrote that the vampires who ‘live on’ past the 1970s and 1980s are ‘afflicted’ by a ‘lapse of initiative.’  

She continues, ‘The reversibility of vampirism in 1980s movies… suggests that at the end of the twentieth century, vampirism is wearing down and vampires need to take a long sleep.’  

The ‘reversibility’ as Auerbach calls it, means that vampirism loses its connection with discussing differences of identity in any meaningful way. If vampirism is something to be slipped into, worn like a cloak, only to be reversed by the fulfillment of archaic ritual, then its potential to critique or confront issues of behavior become secondary to the narrative of the restoration of the pure human identity. Butler’s vampires awake reinvigorated and made relevant by their rejection of stale supernaturalism, uncannily answering Auerbach’s call. By rejecting supernaturalism and by constructing vampires as an alternative branch of evolution, Butler uses species difference as an allegory for race, as it is by combining the genetic traits of humans and vampires that she presents a viable, racially stable utopian potential. As was the case in the Xenogenesis trilogy discussed in the previous chapter, Butler’s answer to the racial problems inspired by encounters with otherness is to engineer away perceivable differences by eugenically guided miscegenation, which is contingent on the elimination of the other. Erasing racial difference appears to be the only way that Butler can conceive of curing humanity of its inherent racism. Such a stance reveals Butler’s deep pessimism towards humanity and the location of oppression within our biological composition.

The eradication of the genetic roots of physical difference in Fledgling is less obvious than in Clay’s Ark or Xenogenesis but no less pervasive. The genetic engineering of Shori is the main feature of the eradication of visible difference between humans and vampires. However, Butler’s alteration of the vampire’s bite also breaks down the genetic difference between the two species, as they each become addicted to the exchange of fluids undertaken in the feeding ritual. Iosif explains to Shori that

We [Ina/vampires] addict them [humans] to a substance in our saliva – in our venom – that floods our mouths when we feed. I’ve heard it called a powerful hypnotic drug. It makes

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40 ibid, p.192.
them highly suggestible and deeply attached to the source of the substance. They come to need it.\textsuperscript{41}

Rather than conferring death or membership of the vampire group, the Ina bite sparks a relationship of mutual co-dependence, or ‘mutualistic symbiosis.’\textsuperscript{42} As such, the vampiric exchange of blood becomes an invitation into a family community of symbionts. This bite deconstructs the nature of pure consumption that vampirism has come to signify, as there is a mutual exchange of chemicals that results in pleasure for both the vampire and its human symbiont. Butler’s detachment of vampirism from sin and evil, coupled with the rejection of the vampire as a creature of excessive wasteful consumption, reveals her perception of modern vampires as relics of hyper-capitalism. While eugenic utopia is always Butler’s primary concern, \textit{Fledgling} has an undercurrent of class-based utopia that seeks to dismantle the vampire’s modern association with wasteful consumption of the human body. By highlighting symbiosis rather than consumption, Butler implies that the very evil that is so often attributed to the vampire is premised on its hyper-capitalistic consumption of humans, which can serve as an allegory for Western modernity’s patterns of consumption.

To counter the wastefulness that contemporary vampirism has come to symbolize, Butler presents a utopian alternative community of shared living in what her Ina call ‘mutualistic symbiosis.’\textsuperscript{43} The obvious difference in symbiosis is the rejection of the wastefulness of feeding through killing. As Shori ponders to herself, ‘Who could need that much blood? Why kill a person who would willingly feed you again and again if you handled them carefully?’\textsuperscript{44} Shori implies here that the eugenic utopia of having willing human donors is buttressed by the communal utopia that rejects the wasteful excessiveness of previous incarnations of vampirism. By rejecting this mode of consumption and establishing a fringe community based around communalism and symbiosis, Butler effectively creates a new evolutionary direction premised on eugenic utopia but expressing a class utopianism as well. While ownership, slavery, and inequity across lines of gender, race and class are not entirely dispensed with in Butler’s utopian vision, the chemical exchange between Ina and

\textsuperscript{41} Butler. 2005, p.73.  
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{ibid}, p.123.  
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{ibid}, p.123.  
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{ibid}, p.37.
human alters both species so as to become entirely dependent on one another. Furthermore, Shori is half human, owing to her mother’s genetic experiments. Chemical changes to both species occur through the exchange of fluids. In addition, Shori’s human/Ina blood shows how Butler’s small community of ‘symbiosis’ appears as a new biological community. This biological community is premised on the utopian eugenic goals of societal ideals being achieved through biological evolution. Communalism is thus established to serve the biological need of the Ina to have more than one symbiont. Furthermore, the communal nature of Ina living serves the symbionts’ addiction to the vampire bite: it is not an ideal based on collective coalition but is a biological imperative, which reveals Butler’s persistence in explaining social phenomena as having biological determinants.

Butler’s refusal to detach social phenomena from biological motivations means that her utopia is contingent on eugenics. Butler is certainly not alone in reinterpreting vampirism as a means to tackle issues of identity. While the vampire’s connection with sin is made problematic by popular fiction, such as Interview With the Vampire, Buffy, and even Twilight, Butler remains unique in her use of the myth as an explicit vehicle to tackle eugenics. Popular depictions of vampires in novels, movies and television have also begun to detach sin from the concept of the vampire. However, critics including Fred Botting have criticized contemporary vampire fiction for failing to erect any totalizing unified mythology to replace confrontations between sin and virtue. By contrast, Butler’s engagement with eugenics and its role in achieving utopia replaces the vampire myth of the clash of good and evil with a mythology about the genesis of a new racial utopia. Vampire fiction’s cutting of ties to its original mode, without reference to any new mythology, reiterates Auerbach’s characterization of vampires as ‘fatigued: unable to bear continual changing times.’

Botting cites Anne Rice’s classics Interview with the Vampire (1976) and The Vampire Lestat (1984) as examples where the move to sympathize with the vampire creates an abolition of the categories of sin and evil. He comments,

Lacking sin, the symbolic system of free flowing exchanges of commodities, signs, images and bodies lacks substance and, without anchor, no longer needs distinctions of good and evil. As evil, as objects of symbolic anxiety and expulsion, vampires once occupied a (negative)

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45 Auerbach. 1995, p.192.
place ensuring the value of propriety and goodness. In a world without evil, vampires are utterly redundant…

This redundancy is contingent on the precondition of immortality, coupled with the dissolution of categories of good and evil. In contrast to the postmodern nexus of endlessly repeating simulations that Botting assigns to Rice’s novels, Butler anchors her vampires in evolutionary biology. She too dispenses with notions of vampires as expressing anxieties about proper and moral behavior couched in terms of sin, but she refuses to allow her vampires to slip into wraith-like shadows, bereft of any anchor to the reader’s reality. Butler firmly roots her conceptions of vampires in science, medically explaining their effect on the human body in entirely plausible terms:

They (humans) die if they are taken from us or if we die, but their death is caused by another component of the venom. They die of strokes and heart attacks because we aren’t there to take the extra red blood cells that our venom encourages their bodies to make.

Entering into the vampire’s embrace means entering into a committed familial relationship that is premised on the chemical symbiosis between the vampire and its human blood source. In exchange for food and companionship, human lives are both intoxicated and prolonged by the byproducts of the vampire venom, which provides grounding in communal identity, but also roots vampirism in scientific mythology that has an internal logic and a clear evolutionary narrative. Butler’s rejection of the vampire’s connection to sin does not result in its edification as a symbol of mass-consumption. Rather, by couching vampirism in scientific discourse, Butler’s rejection of sin biologizes the vampire and gives it new symbolic meaning as an allegory for evolutionary advancement and survival. Instead of mindlessly spreading themselves as a blood borne virus, Butler’s vampires present humans with a utopian choice to engage in an alternative community of ecstatic biological symbiosis. In so doing, Butler translates discussions of morality and corruption of the soul of traditional vampire fiction into the racial, gender and class-based ethics of modern genetic discourse. By converting the spiritual into the biological, Butler more explicitly opens up the vampire’s potential as an allegorical symbol of racial politics.

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47 Butler. 2005, pp.73-74.
and how the desire to eugenically alter evolution impacts on our sense of our own biological identities.

Allegories of Otherness: The eradication of the Other through Miscegenation

Butler destabilizes pure racial identities in her fiction. In *Fledgling*, human characters from different ethnic lineages live communally without any evidence of racial tensions and violence. However, the kind of language used to delineate the differences between humans and Ina invoke common racial discourse. As such, species in the novel can be seen as an allegory for race to a large extent. Butler presents Ina arguments characterizing humans in a similar vernacular to the eugenic ideas propounded by Charles Davenport. Implicit in Butler’s Silk family’s discussion of humans is the ideology of Davenport and Galton’s conceptions of dysgenic race behavior. Russell Silk echoes eugenic discourse when he describes human breeding habits. He posits that, ‘We Ina are vastly outnumbered by the human beings of this world…They destroy one another by the millions, and it makes no difference to their numbers. They breed and breed and breed, while we live long and breed slowly.’

Here, Russell reiterates eugenic fears that the working classes – the racially dysgenic – were breeding at a far more rapid rate than those of ‘good stock.’ Eugenicist A.E Wiggan wrote in 1922 that ‘the civilized races of the world are biologically plunging downward’ reflecting the eugenic fear that dysgenic individuals reproduce more rapidly than the eugenic. To quote Stephen Selden, Wiggan ‘despairs that imbeciles, weaklings, paupers, and hobos are increasing in numbers, while leadership and genius are in decline.’ This fear of racial decline through diminishing reproductive rates amongst the elite classes is visible in Russell’s characterization of human and Ina breeding patterns. Thus ideas about racial purity, as well as the division between dysgenic and eugenic reproduction drawn along racial lines, emerge as key leitmotifs of Butler’s novel.

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50 Selden. 2005, p.205.
Butler’s fiction almost always deals with crises of racial identities. As Ruth Salvaggio correctly points out, Butler’s fiction always presents heroines whose ‘worlds are filled with racial and sexual obstacles, forcing her characters to survive and eventually overcome these societal barriers to their independence.’ Here, Salvaggio encapsulates the problems facing Butler’s heroines, and Shori is no exception to this thematic formula. However, Butler achieves the removal of what Salvaggio calls ‘societal barriers’ through the eradication of racial difference by eugenic manipulation. Butler tries to resolve issues of racial hatred and violence but she often does so at the expense of difference. Difference is more often bred out than accepted and dealt with in terms of political organization, affiliation, and collective action. Her fiction is thus eugenically utopian in that racial otherness is stripped away through pandemic illness and genetic modification. The utopian impulse in Butler’s fiction is often embedded within the eugenic goal to eliminate biological otherness through positive and negative eugenic practices.

In spite of Butler’s focus on eugenic miscegenation, in Fledgling vampires and humans cannot reproduce sexually. In contrast to Xenogenesis where humans are prevented from breeding without the active control of the alien Oankali, Fledgling presents a more realistic divide of species, characterized by the inability to reproduce across this boundary. However, Shori’s mothers, proponents of human genetics and over 350 years old, manage to combine Ina DNA with an African-American woman. Shori can stay awake during the day, whereas other Ina go completely unconscious in daylight hours. As she explains, ‘I prefer to sleep during the day…but I don’t have to.’ What results from Shori’s genetically engineered heritage is a hybrid identity that has combined the traits from two previously separate biological entities. Shori’s power hinges on her ability to survive because of genetic attributes from her mixed human and Ina heritage. As Wright says to Shori, ‘You’re definitely the new improved model.’ While this statement appears as a throw away piece of banter between Wright and Shori, it reveals Butler’s blueprint for evolutionary

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52 See Chapter 4 for more detail.
53 Shori has multiple Mothers who mix their DNA with a human woman’s. Butler. 2005, pp.77-78.
54 ibid, pp.77-78.
55 ibid, p.119.
56 ibid, p.120.
survival. Shori, the improved model, appears less a celebration of difference and more as the erosion of clear physical markers of otherness between humans and vampires. While Shori’s black skin makes her utterly different from other Ina (they are all white until Shori’s mother’s experiments), her ability to assimilate into human society is enhanced by her dark skin and ability to withstand sunlight. Her inhabitation of the human world presents an argument for genetic and biological assimilation as a means to overcome societal barriers of not only racism and prejudice, but physical barriers of material participation. In this sense, Shori appears as the fictional advocate for eugenics through genetic manipulation as a means to transcend the visibility of species, and thereby racial, difference.

However, Butler does not entirely dispense with boundaries of species, but rather creates Shori as a possible eugenic symbol to overcome racist hierarchies. Boundaries of species are sometimes bolstered by Butler’s approach to sex and reproduction. In *Fledgling*, there is a clear distinction between sex for pleasure and sex for reproduction, one that is drawn along species lines which reveals Butler’s acknowledgement of how racial discourse in American history was often couched in extremely racist conceptions of species. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lemire has posited that ‘inter-racial’ was characterized as ‘inter-species’ in American biological discourse at the turn of the twentieth century. Butler’s depiction of sexual relationships in *Fledgling* reinforces Lemire’s description of how inter-racial sex was vilified. By construing interracial relations as against nature, the reproductive outcomes of such unions were also socially stigmatized. While Ina and humans indulge in sex that initially appears to break down boundaries, indeed taboos, of inter-species sex and apparent pedophilia, Butler ultimately sharpens distinctions of species with regards to sexuality. From the early stages of the novel, Butler presents the reader with a sexual relationship between Shori (vampire) and Wright (her human symbiont). This relationship is immediately problematic because of Shori’s apparent age. Despite being 53 (still a child for the long-lived Ina) she has the appearance of a ten year-old girl. As Shori explains to Wright when she senses his sexual desire for her, ‘I’m old enough to have sex with you if you want.’

57 *ibid*, p.21.
ambivalence his sexual urges take over his rational thought. Shori relates her first sexual experience with Wright:

He was very careful at first, afraid of hurting me, still afraid that I might be too young for this, too small. Then, when it was clear that I was not being hurt at all, when I had wrapped my arms and legs around him, he forgot his fears, forgot everything.\(^{58}\)

Here, Wright and Shori both abandon any fear about Shori’s age. While she feels that she is not as young as she seems, the taboo nature of this sexual encounter is immediately trivialized by Shori’s description, which characterizes her and Wright’s desire for one another as ‘natural.’ Shori’s sexuality presents a disturbing mix of childish physicality combined with obvious sexual experience that can be read as a comment on how children are increasingly sexualized in contemporary culture, but it is also an obvious ploy by Butler to unsettle her reader’s assumptions about vampire lore.

Rather than presenting an abuse of power that such an age and size difference would normally entail, Butler conflates sex and vampire feeding as part of the same dance between vampire and human. Shori continues, ‘I forgot myself too. I bit him again just below his left nipple and took a little more blood. He shouted and squeezed the breath from me. The he collapsed on me, empty, spent.\(^{59}\) Here, in this overt reference to *Dracula* where Mina drinks the Count’s blood from his breast,\(^{60}\) feeding and sex are conflated. Furthermore, both parties in sexual intercourse experience penetration, as the exchange of bodily fluid for nourishment occurs simultaneously as the exchange of bodily fluid for pleasure. This explicit conflation of feeding for sustenance and sex for pleasure serves to trivialize sex between Ina and human. Shori does not engage in sexual acts with other Ina, because she must wait until she ‘comes of age.’ Although sexual enjoyment can be shared across boundaries of species, reproduction cannot occur, which again trivializes human/Ina sex as merely a kind of play. Reproductive sex between Ina is burdened with a solemn gravitas, yet it is only through genetic engineering that inter-species reproduction and true evolutionary

\(^{58}\) *ibid*, p.22.
\(^{59}\) *ibid*, p.22.
\(^{60}\) Carter, 1997, p.28.
advantages can be achieved. This again demonstrates Butler’s fascination with eugenics as the only real avenue to create meaningful social change.

Despite the utopian characteristics of long, disease free life, there is however, a distinct power imbalance in the relationships between humans and vampires. Shori, as a product of cross-species reproduction between human and Ina, more acutely recognizes the potential gulf of power that resides between the two species, as her human heritage makes her more sympathetic to their perspectives than others of her kind. This gulf is primarily biological. The Ina are stronger and longer-lived than humans. As well as their physical power, Ina can mentally control humans using their venom. In a similar situation to *Xenogenesis* where the unproblematic utopian potential of ‘trade’ is undermined by the Oankali ability to manipulate human biochemistry, the Ina community’s potential for universal utopianism is similarly subverted by their physiological superiority to humanity. Rather than rejecting genetic engineering because of its potential to result in genetic enslavement, Butler insists that the ability to chemically control people opens up utopian potentials in the face of dystopian fears of the loss of autonomy. Wright expresses his concern at the loss of autonomy that entering into ‘symbiosis’ with Shori could entail. Shori says, ‘I told you you weren’t bound to me then. I offered you freedom. I told you I wouldn’t be able to offer it again.’ Wright, distressed at having to share Shori with other people, accuses her of ensnaring him in a ‘harem,’ and goes on to reveal that surrendering to the increased pleasure of symbiosis is scary because of the loss of autonomy. He says of Shori’s father and his symbionts:

> I think the scariest thing about all of this so far is that all three of those symbionts seem genuinely happy…Old Iosif (Shori’s father) told them they were living in the best of all possible worlds, and they bought it because as far as they’re concerned, he’s God?\(^3\)

From Wright’s perspective, the human/Ina relationship seems contingent on an unfair exchange of addictive chemicals that strip away the human ability to reject the Ina family structure as inherently slave-oriented. In Wright’s characterization of Ina

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63 *ibid*, p.87.
identity, mastery over human biology becomes inexorably linked to godliness, which actually reveals Butler’s polemic that the successful manipulation of biology holds the keys to continued survival. Wright’s discomfort with his loss of autonomy symbolizes unwillingness to relinquish the patriarchal primacy of masculine identity. Butler inverts racist patriarchy by creating a strong, black female heroine around whom new societal structures are formed. However, by associating godliness with genes and the control of biology, Butler also reinforces biological and genetic essentialism, as Shori’s power is directly attributed to her mixed genetic heritage. Genetic technologies do create spaces for chemical enslavement. By showing how genetic engineering also provides much needed evolutionary advancement, Butler regards the potential dystopian consequences of eugenics as worth risking in pursuing the utopian goal of the diffusion of species difference achieved by genetically engineered miscegenation.

The Ina ability to chemically manipulate humans is a characteristic that is mostly attached to the Silk family, who embody archaic and oppressive views towards their human symbionts. While Shori tries not to control her symbionts too much, not all Ina treat their symbionts with the same apparent egalitarianism as her and her family, which highlights just how important Shori is for the evolutionary development of both Ina and humans. Shori’s sympathetic attitude towards her human symbionts means she presents a utopian future for vampires and humans. For humans, Shori’s increased empathy means they will not have to fear the kind of barbaric manipulation of their chemistry that Brook describes as rife amongst the Silk family. As Brook explains to Shori,

Not everyone treats symbionts as people…This man liked to…amuse himself with other’s symbionts. He was very careful and protective of his own, but he liked sending them among us with instructions to start trouble, raise suspicions and jealousies, start fights…He got something sexual out of watching. The symbionts would have died if they hadn’t been symbionts – but then, they never would have been endangered if they hadn’t been symbionts.64

Here, Butler shows how the ability to chemically control behavior inevitably leads to abuses of such power. Butler’s utopianism, just as in Xenogenesis, is premised not

64 ibid, p.131.
only on the genetic advancement of humanity, but also on the ‘others’ of the fictional worlds: aliens in *Xenogenesis* and vampires in *Fledgling*. Her impulse to transform the traditional Ina/human relationship by depicting a being who shares common ancestry to both species is indicative of Butler’s compulsion to imagine utopia as premised on the elimination of racial difference in the pursuit of a more highly evolved hybrid species that is better adapted to survive an increasingly hostile Earth environment. The very human abuse of chemical power depicted in the quote above reveals how the vampire species in *Fledgling* can be read as an allegory for race. Here, Butler highlights some humans’ tendency to use any tool to advance their own position at the expense of those deemed to be racially inferior. Brook even goes so far as to describe the trouble-making Ina as a ‘man’, whose human likeness is not only a product of his human appearance but also resides in his fetish of abuses of power. Butler’s extreme pessimism about human nature’s inherent violence is attached to the worst of Ina society in *Fledgling*. In contrast to *Xenogenesis*, the inherently violent and hierarchical problems of vampire society are genetically tempered by the mixing of human genes. Shori’s mixed heritage becomes a way not only to participate in the physical mechanisms of human society (stay awake in, and withstand, sunlight) but also emerges as a means to empathize more intensely with her human symbionts to avoid the abuses of power so intrinsic to traditional Ina identity.

The hierarchical and problematic nature of the Ina illuminates Butler’s desire to combine the best elements of human society with those of the vampire. The Ina responsible for manipulating his human symbiont described in the previous passage can do so because of his ability to coerce them using his venom. The ability to chemically manipulate behavior in a similar fashion to *Xenogenesis* shows Butler’s insistence that people are slaves to their chemistry. The mere fact that humans become not only physiologically dependent on the Ina venom, but that they can be mentally manipulated by it, shows how much the Ina biology is superior to humanity’s. Here, Butler views biology in an extremely deterministic fashion. Such an hierarchical system of species identity could result in abuses of power. In contrast to the *Xenogenesis* trilogy where the alien Oankali were so piously above petty human trivialities, the Ina bear the distinct mark of vindictive human traits of reveling in another’s misfortune. Shori ponders the actions of the Silk family in killing one of
her human symbionts. She muses to herself: ‘I thought about Milo [Silk], about his contempt for me and his less lethal, but no less real, contempt for symbionts – probably for all humans.’ The contempt that Milo harbors for Shori is a direct reflection of his resentment towards humans: Shori is victimized because of her human heritage. The mutual reliance of symbiosis appears here less as a utopian mixing of difference than a kind of shameful secret of Ina identity for the Silk family. As well as being more distinctly human in appearance than the alien Oankali of *Xenogenesis*, certain Ina attitudes towards their human symbionts such as the Silks’, reveal a very humanlike racism that simultaneously both relies on, and despises, subservient races. Like historical vampires, the Ina embody both the most desirable and grotesque human attributes.

The ability to achieve the communal utopia that the Ina apparently offer is contingent on their ability to manipulate and coerce subordinate species. However, the utopia that Butler offers is not to enter into traditional Ina/human families. What she presents as the utopian goal of *Fledgling* is to exist in symbiosis with the new direction of Ina evolution: Shori. By contrasting Shori’s family with traditional human/Ina families, which can often reflect a master/slave hierarchy, Butler shows how Shori’s mixed heritage becomes a means to overcome the abuses of human biochemistry for selfish purposes. The utopia that Butler offers is thus premised on eugenic manipulation to dissolve species otherness by eradicating visible differences. The eradication of the visibility of species difference that Shori exemplifies reveals that Butler sees genetic manipulation as the sole means of transcending problems arising from difference. Eugenically directed genetic engineering is the only way to eradicate racial otherness and is crucial for a sustainable utopia.

As well as using genetic engineering to create a racially homogenous society, Butler uses Shori’s multiple heritage to create an increased empathetic bond of a shared ancestry between human and Ina. Shori’s ability to exist in the human world, to stay awake during the day, to protect her human family by being able to empathize more strongly with them, is because of her part-human genetic heritage. While Shori still has chemical power over her human symbionts, the implication of her mixed heritage

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65 *ibid*, p.257.
is that through her own genetic manipulation she immediately identifies more strongly with her human symbionts than others of her kind. By contrast, other Ina, particularly those responsible for and sympathetic to the murder of her family, challenge both Shori and her symbionts’ right to exist in Ina society, as not only is Shori ‘not Ina!’ but her humans are not symbionts.66 This old hierarchy clearly privileges Ina over symbionts, but also suggests that human symbionts are superior to humans by their mere association with Ina. Shori’s overt challenge to this system comes at the loss of Ina identity as distinctly different from human identity. The utopian promise that Butler offers is that through eugenic manipulation old hierarchies can be transcended. However, such overcoming of power-based hierarchy occurs through the elimination of the genetic difference that empowers such chemically-based hierarchy in the first place. While it is problematic and involves individual sacrifice, Shori is an advocate for the potential of miscegenation through genetic engineering to achieve racial utopia by eliminating the biological roots of physical difference between humans and Ina.

The Problems of Hybridity: Race and Species

Butler’s approach to hybridity in Fledgling links her depictions of species to issues of racial identity. Shori’s power is contingent on her mixed heritage as a result of human and Ina reproduction. As such, Butler seems to suggest that hybridity is the defining feature of power. The nature of miscegenation as a catalyst for hybridized subjectivity means that Shori inhabits a contentious space. This space is characterized by the tension between miscegenation’s negative history as a symptom of ideas of racial supremacy and the potential for hybridity to liberate those suffering racial oppression. Shori is told by Margaret, an elderly female Ina, ‘Child, do you understand your uniqueness, your great value?’67 Shori’s value to Ina society is largely contingent on her ability to ‘stay awake during the day and go out in the sun like humans.’68 The clear evolutionary advantages of Shori’s hybrid identity are met with misgiving by critics including Melissa Strong, who has suggested that Butler’s focus on miscegenation and the difficulties caused by the fixed racial identities on

66 ibid, p.304.
67 ibid p.214.
68 ibid, p.214.
which it relies causes a challenge to the very notion of hybridity itself. She contends that ‘the way certain characters cling to biological essentialism as they stubbornly refuse to accept Shori reveals the serious limitations of both Shori’s status and hybridity itself.’ By this logic the power afforded Shori by her mixed human and vampire heritage is undermined by Butler’s refusal to abandon the kind of biologically essentialist thinking that supports dividing humanity and Ina into two separate fixed categories.

With the reiteration of essentialism, Butler merely creates Shori as another version of the ‘other.’ As Strong continues, ‘Species differences become coded as racial differences, and what seems to be race stands in for hybridity. Shori’s “race” fuses to her hybridity so that one becomes shorthand for the other.’ In this interpretation, by linking power to hybridity, Butler has racialized the hybrid subject as a species other. Instead of unsettling the distinction between races by creating a hybrid character able to converse across multiple racial boundaries, Butler’s persistent essentialism means that Shori is actually confined and separated as the racial other of her own vampire species. Racism and the anxiety about the boundary of species combine at the end of the novel after the Silk family has been found guilty of the murder of Shori’s entire family. Russell Silk launches at Shori yelling, ‘Murdering black mongrel bitch…’ and ‘What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?’ Here, Russell conflates race and species explicitly linking ‘blackness’ with animals, suggesting that Shori’s racial challenge to Ina identity will result in the degradation of Ina race blood, which reiterates the themes of racial degeneration and eventual extinction that eugenicists (typified by Davenport’s treatise on the moral responsibilities of marriage and reproduction) feared. Furthermore, hybridity here is characterized by Russell as the signification of an unacceptable breach of race, species and ethics. The fact that he lumps in murder with ‘black mongrel’ reveals his fear that Shori’s heritage as a mixed-race/species being represents ‘race suicide’ of the Ina species. But hybridity in the sense of political boundary crossing is not Butler’s project. The reason the Silks are so upset by Shori’s identity is that she does represent the eradication of the Ina’s

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69 Strong. 2010, p.27.
70 ibid, p.30.
current identity. Butler challenges hybridity itself, as Strong seems to fear. Butler is less interested in the political ramifications of identification across multiple societal boundaries than she is with eugenically altering identity to eradicate visible difference as a way to overcome societal issues. Her continued biological essentialism is more fundamentally important than simply the stubbornness of certain characters. Her essentialism means that manipulating evolution emerges as the only avenue that can provide any chance of overcoming hierarchical and oppressive structures. Eugenics thus becomes inextricably linked to survival.

The desire to breed out weakness in Ina identity through introducing human genetics is an example of Butler’s use of positive eugenic discourse. The idea of using positive eugenic practices across racial boundaries has been explored by Pauline Hopkins, whose work precedes Butler’s by a century. Hopkins used the language of racial science and eugenics to construct her own racial utopias. She and intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois saw eugenics, not as a discourse to oppress African-Americans, but as a means to change the character of African-American identity through eugenic practices. DuBois wrote in 1922 that the ‘Negro’ must ‘train and breed for brains, for efficacy, for beauty.’ Hopkins went further, to suggest that miscegenation and eugenics could combine to create a new superior racial identity. As John Nickel has said, Hopkins called for the ‘comingling of white and black racial lines,’ in order to produce a ‘genetically superior race,’ which would in turn lead to the ‘amelioration of African Americans’ political and social conditions.’ In a similar fashion, Butler appropriates Hopkins’ call for racial ‘comingling’ and, like her, frames miscegenation in positive eugenic terms. While Shori, as the product of an inter-species genetic experiment, does not literally embody miscegenation between two divergent races, she is a fictional symbol for the kind of interracial reproduction that Hopkins envisioned. Shori is endowed with the best attributes from both her human and vampire heritage to transcend the racial limitations of both groups. Daniel Gordon, Shori’s promised Ina mate, echoes positive eugenic discourse in his

account of her survival. He remarks, ‘They thought mixing human genes with ours would weaken us. You proved them very wrong.’ Shori’s mere survival is proof enough for Ina such as Daniel Gordon and his family that she is a superior evolutionary development to their species. Shori’s survival through trials of struggle also echoes eugenicists’ framing of social phenomena as shaped by social Darwinist competition and conflict. Shori’s ability to survive the attacks because of her human heritage serves as a textual symbol that reiterates the sentiments of Pauline Hopkins. Hopkins imagined that racial problems in America could be solved by careful selective breeding across racial boundaries. Eugenically directed reproduction between African and Anglo-Americans would in turn dissolve the efficacy of race as determined by physical markers. In Fledgling, the function of such a metaphor revolves around the dissolution of boundaries of species, the border between human and vampire, which Shori eradicates because of her ability to pass more easily as human. What emerges from such border dissolution is the desire to use inter-species reproduction to eradicate differences between humans and vampires. The implication of Shori’s power to inhabit both worlds is that she is the future of both humanity and Ina.

The diversity between Ina and human identities in Fledgling can be read as symbolizing racial difference. Shori, who is part human and dark skinned, as opposed to all others of her species who are pallid, most acutely experiences racial marginalization amongst her own species. This appears to be a conflation of race and species. However, Butler’s Ina also suffer due to their otherness to mainstream human society. As Shori recounts Ina history to Wright,

most Ina fit in badly wherever they go – tall, ultrapale, lean, wiry people. They usually look like foreigners, and when times got bad, they were treated like foreigners – suspected, disliked, driven out, or killed.78

Here, Butler stresses how Ina were separated, feared and even killed because of their otherness, which is most sharply characterized by their physical differences.

78 Butler. 2005, p.130.
Ironically, Shori is persecuted by her own species because of her different skin color. The Ina reject her based on the presence of human genes, as well as her dark skin. Wright boils the problem down to racism: ‘Shori is black, and racists – probably Ina racists – don’t like the idea that a good part of the answer to your daytime problem is melanin.’ Shori as well as other Ina are quick to reject Wright’s all-too-human response to Shori’s attackers as she thinks to herself,

the Ina weren’t racists…Human racism meant nothing to the Ina because human races meant nothing to them. They looked for congenial human symbionts wherever they happened to be, without regard for anything but personal appeal.

In suggesting that the Ina are above petty human racism, Butler reveals an important distinction between human and Ina. The implication of the above quote is that the Ina do not discriminate between humans, as humans are subordinate to them. However, the inevitable racism associated with physical difference occurs at the first sign of otherness amongst their own species. This demonstrates Butler’s view that the hierarchical impulse leading to racism is an inherent part of our biology, to our very terrestrial existence. Butler only ever represents species who do not suffer from racist thinking as coming from outer space. Her terrestrial characters always live with racism, which signifies a belief that it is inherent to terrestrial biology. With racism imprinted in our DNA, perhaps more so than race itself, Butler presents no alternative but to engineer a way beyond such thinking. While Shori’s racial otherness, as characterized by her difference in skin color from all other members of her species, is caused by her mixed genetic heritage, the evolutionary advantage of her ability to inhabit the human world breaks down her perceivable difference from humanity. Other Ina serve as the remnants of historical racism, while Shori’s future is dictated by her ability blend in to the human world. The utopian promise of Fledgling relies on biological assimilation through miscegenation.

79 ibid, p.147.
80 ibid, p.148.
Community and the Ethics of Sexual Identity in Eugenic Utopia

Butler’s focus on miscegenation as a way to achieve eugenic utopia means that reproduction is a central concern in her fiction. Furthermore, sexual identities become equally significant as Butler conflates sexuality with consumption by depicting sexual intercourse occurring simultaneously with vampire feeding. On the one hand, Butler challenges the emerging conservative trends in contemporary vampire fiction’s gender relationships. However, she simultaneously reinforces patriarchal approaches to the control of reproduction by creating hierarchies for sexual behavior. Butler’s quests for eugenic utopia unveil the realization that it is mostly through dystopian events that utopia can be attained. For her characters, there is always an ethical tension between what can and should be tolerated as an acceptable means to desired evolutionary ends. Evolutionary success always wins, although this in no way means that she is unsympathetic or ignorant of the potential problems behind attempts to direct evolution. In particular, sexuality, gender and the relationship to reproduction emerge as significant areas of contention in Butler’s quest to eradicate racial otherness through miscegenation.

When compared to the bloodless, sexless vampires inundating airport bookshops, and television airwaves81, Shori’s vampire identity is not characterized by abstinence. She both drinks human blood and has intercourse with human men and women. Here, Butler subverts the assumption of powerlessness, virginity and childhood ascribed to young feminine identity. Shori, who appears more childlike than her contemporaneous teenage vampire fiction heroines, is nonetheless active as both a vampire and sexual agent. Butler creates an image of feminine identity that appears to upend patriarchal gender identity in order to revise eugenics through genetic engineering to achieve utopia. Shori not only takes on multiple sexual partners, but is also entrusted with the protection and continued survival of her small community.

81 Carys Crossen has characterized the influx of vampire fiction and television as ‘impotent’ depictions of vampirism. She posits that implication of the toothlessness of pop-cultural representations of vampirism is that ‘only “bad” vampires exchange bodily fluids by feeding on humans, while only “bad” women exchange bodily fluids via the medium of sexual intercourse.’ Crossen, Carys. ‘Would You Please Stop Trying to Take Your Clothes Off?: Abstinence and Impotence of Male Vampires in Contemporary Fiction and Television.’ In Davis, Laura K. and Santos, Cristina. (eds). The Monster Imagined: Humanity’s Recreation of Monsters and Monstrosity. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, p.118.
Butler rewrites the gender imbalance so rife in vampire fiction by showing both female agency and heterosexual assertiveness. When Wright becomes jealous of Shori’s need to have more than one human symbiont he accuses her of sleeping with others, which again shows how sex and feeding are conflated in the novel. Wright exclaims: ‘Sex with men and women?’ To which Shori replies, ‘With my symbionts if both they and I want it.’ As opposed to other vampire fiction of this period, it is Shori who is placed in the position of controlling her own sexual destiny. Shori defies Wright’s assumptions about female sexuality in her factual and unemotional statement that she can and will engage in sexual activity with any consenting person of her choosing. What follows is an aggressive sexual encounter:

He rolled onto me, pushing my legs apart, pushing them out of his way, then thrust into me. I bit him more deeply than I had intended and wrapped my arms and legs around him as I took his blood. He groaned, writhing against me, holding me, thrusting harder until I taken all I needed of his blood, until he had all he needed of me.

What clearly separates this passage from what Carys Crossen identifies as contemporary vampire fiction’s uncanny resemblance to rape fantasy is the reminder that Shori, while smaller, is actually vastly stronger than her human counterpart. While Shori matches Wright’s sexual aggression with her own vampiric aggression, there is nonetheless a sense from Shori’s narration that her frustration is being held in check by her obvious physical superiority. What Butler achieves here is a challenge to conservative ideas of chastity, of needing male protection, and of female sexual passivity. By making Shori appear as a ten-year-old girl but endowing her with strength and agency Butler effectively subverts patriarchal, conservative incarnations that view both feminine and childhood identities as weak and needing protection from males.

However, Butler’s approach to reproduction undermines reading Shori as a complete revision of patriarchal heterosexual identity. While Shori’s sexuality is fluid and polymorphously perverse in relation to her human symbionts, her status as a pre-adult child reveals the rigid determinacy of her vampire sexuality. As Marty Fink points

83 ibid, p.85.
84 Crossen. 2010, p.118.
out, ‘Any notion of Shori’s youth as a legal and ethical barrier to sexual consent is negated by her vampirism.’ However, this statement is only applicable to Shori’s relationship with humans. While she is old enough to indulge in sex with her symbionts, she is too young to legitimately enter into sexual relations with members of her own species. This is not because she bears no sexual interest in her own kind, as she muses of Daniel (her promised mate), ‘[he] stared at me in a way that made me want to touch him. I liked his looks as well as his scent.’ Shori and Daniel are clearly attracted to one another and participate in a frustrating, sexually charged scene that bears remarkable similarity to the unfulfilled angst ridden teenage experience of sexuality in Buffy and Twilight. Shori narrates the scene:

I gave him small, chaste kisses. I didn’t bite him. I was surprised that I wanted to. He was Ina, not human, not a potential symbiont, not a temporary food source. And yet, I wanted very much to bite into the tender flesh of his throat, to taste him, to let the sweet, smokey scent of him become flavor as well.

Here, it is Shori who must resist the urge to penetrate Daniel, as she becomes the more active participant in the sexual dance. However, when Shori asks Daniel if she should bite him, thus consummating their sexual partnership, he replies: ‘No, little mate, not yet. Not for a few more years.’ Here, the ethical barrier of age is left firmly intact. Daniel and Shori both realize that Ina sexual relations are completely illicit because of Shori’s youth, which renders her not yet fertile. What Butler achieves in rigidifying Ina sexual boundaries is to place a total emphasis on sex and reproduction as evolutionary phenomena. Sex with humans is actively encouraged as it solidifies the relationship whose primary function is to feed the vampire and create dependence where the human will continue feeding the vampire. Conversely, sex between Ina cannot occur across the taboo of age as its primary function is the reproduction of more Ina, which cannot occur until Shori can genetically ‘tie’ Daniel to her. The implication of Butler’s approach to both human-to-vampire and vampire-to-vampire sexuality is that evolutionary reasons ultimately dictate sexual

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86 Butler. 2005, p.149.
87 ibid, p.219.
88 ibid, p.219.
89 ibid, p.219.
identity. This reinforces Butler’s long-held view that all facets of behavior should have a eugenic impulse that links sexual identity to the propagation of more of the right kind of beings. Continued reproductive and material survival are always the goal of sexual identities in Butler’s fiction, even if they come at the price of complete sexual and gender liberation.

Conclusion

Butler’s treatment of miscegenation in Fledgling shows her fascination with the utopian possibilities of eugenics. In Clay’s Ark, pandemic illness served as the means through which humanity was genetically altered, which resulted in the homogenization of racial identity. The alien microbe invaded all life forms so totally as to render species otherness completely obsolete. In Fledgling, Shori’s hybrid identity is an expression of this same impulse to eradicate otherness. By mixing human and Ina genes, Shori’s parents undertook a process through which miscegenation could bridge the gap between human and Ina. This is most fully realized in Shori’s ability to act like a human and stay awake during the day. Butler presents this as a clear attempt at eugenically altering Ina evolution by strengthening Ina DNA with human genes. Daniel Gordon, who promises to ‘mate’ with Shori when she comes of age, describes her attractiveness as a potential reproductive partner. He states,

Preston [Gordon family elder] wants you. He thinks you’re worth the risk. He says your mothers made genetic alterations directly to the germ line, so that you’ll be able to pass on your strengths to your children. At least some of them will be able to be awake and alert during the day, able to walk in sunlight. Preston says you have the scent of a female who will have no trouble reproducing children.

This quote reveals how reproduction is inextricably linked to the quest for evolutionary advantage, as the ‘risk’ of allowing Shori to enter the family is outweighed by the advantages her ‘germ line’ will endow her children. Butler reveals that miscegenation has a far-reaching genetic effect that trickles down through multiple generations. Shori’s attractiveness is thus couched exclusively in terms of

90 See chapter 4.
her ability to pass on her designed traits to her subsequent offspring. This not only reveals Butler’s bolstering of genetic determinism, as Shori’s survival is largely contingent on her genetic abilities, but it reveals a desire to eradicate otherness through miscegenation and to create a utopia of eugenically altered human/vampire hybrids. Shori’s ability to participate in the human world directly challenges the need to separate her as a different species living outside of humanity. From this perspective, Shori is the fictional embodiment of a utopian promise for divergent identities to become invisible through cross-species reproduction. In theorizing a new evolutionary direction for the fictional Ina, Butler likewise imagines utopian possibilities for humans, as she carves out an enclave community where human problems of disease, illness and brevity of life are eradicated by the chemical coupling of human and vampire. The effect of this eugenically-inspired miscegenation between humans and vampires is to tie utopia to genetic alteration, which shows a utopian eugenic impulse in Butler’s fiction.

Butler’s scientific vampire exists as a textual representative of eugenec utopia, as the human body is infinitely improved by the symbiotic relationship with the Ina. Health, beauty and happiness are provided by Ina venom, while humans provide blood. In this relationship the general subservience of individuality to the greater good of the community is expressed. As eugenic historian Frank Dikoiier has suggested, ‘the rejection of individual rights and an emphasis on the collectivity remains a hallmark of all eugenics movements.’ It is in the sexual relationships between Ina and their human symbionts that this submission of individualism for the greater good of the community structures is most visible. Ultimately, Butler is willing to sacrifice individual freedoms for the greater good of the community. Indeed, when utopia is so tied to the eradication of physical markers of difference, it is inevitable that individuals must perish in their refusal to relinquish pure identities. While Butler’s earlier fiction such as Wild Seed demonstrates an extreme uneasiness with placing eugenic goals above the rights of the individual, her fiction increasingly shows that evolutionary goals, the very foundation of continued survival on this planet, is contingent on pursuing eugenic aims through genetically engineering away destructive racial differences.

Conclusion

Butler’s novels after 1980 all demonstrate her increasing focus on eugenics as a tool for social change. Her persistent pessimism concerning humanity’s ability to effect change via political coalition means that she almost always presents human development as contingent upon genetic improvement. Butler suspends political affiliation and pins all utopian hopes on eugenic goals. In doing so, she redeployes the utopian verve that permeated early twentieth-century eugenic thought, exemplified by Francis Galton and Charles Davenport. In a similar fashion to Galton and Davenport’s concepts of eugenics, Butler presents utopia as contingent on the eradication of the biological antecedents of physical differences. However, while Davenport and Galton aimed to eradicate the colored races to strengthen the white race and to bolster their own constructed meritocratic conception of society, Butler reinterprets eugenic genetic determinism to abolish the visible difference of racial others to eliminate racial violence and oppression. Genetic, religious, gender, racial and class-based difference all have biological roots in Butler’s writing. For her, these areas of religion, race, class and gender are sites of contest that all reveal the human inability to cope with those unlike ourselves. Butler does not shy away from negatively delineating human behavior as irrevocably and irrationally intolerant of difference. Difference is not celebrated in her books. Rather, difference is a problem to be solved and the solution is always eugenics.

In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu’s ethical standpoint represents traditional Judeo-Christian values in relation to gender roles, reproduction, and life and death. Her ethics are overtly challenged by the morality of social Darwinist ethics that are premised on survival of the fittest. Anyanwu and Doro embody the tension between Judeo-Christian, human rights-based ethics and consequentialist social Darwinist ethics, which Butler presents as potentially guaranteeing the future survival of the human species. However, Butler is also acutely aware that consequentialism can be used to justify oppressive behavior and Doro serves as a didactic figure who warns the reader of the potential excesses not only in eugenic manipulation, but patriarchal science in general. Despite her focus on evolution, by dramatizing the atrocities that result when consequentialist ethics are employed for selfish means, Butler argues for the Christian ethic that all humans have inherent value. She suggests that individuals
should be protected against manipulations for purely utilitarian gains. For Butler, at this early point in her career, human rights ethics take precedence over consequentialist goals of human improvement en masse. Eugenic manipulations and intrusions into the rights of individuals run directly counter to the Christian belief in the inherent importance of each individual life. However, Butler’s earlier ambivalence toward eugenic ideology’s ability to avoid malicious perversion is mitigated in her later fiction. Eugenics emerges as the key catalyst to effect meaningful, systemic change, precisely because she starts presenting human problems as having biological causes.

In her *Parable* novels, Butler rejects notions of religious predestination both in terms of the Calvinist heritage of American Puritanism as well as the racial struggle put forward by the Nation of Islam and the Black Power movements of 1960s America. Butler vehemently rejects Calvinist ideologies that have God as the instigator and controller of all events in the lives of those on Earth, as they are indicative of the Puritan pattern of ethically excluding those outside its narrow moral boundary. Butler sees the Puritan ethics of Christians as the chosen people as reinvigorated in America in the 1980s by Reagan’s association with evangelical Christianity. She uses the Reagan administration, itself an example of Christian evangelical rejuvenation, as the source of her dystopian critique of religious fundamentalism. While she rejects divine determinism, Butler never dispenses with deterministic logic. Rather, she supplants religious determinism with biological determinism. Butler continually depicts humanity as innately violent and irrationally intolerant of difference. She dissolves political debate and coalition. Just talking about problems is never enough for her characters. Biological change is always the precondition for purposeful change to humanity’s predetermined genetic flaws, which means that eugenics emerges as the primary tool to pursue any kind of meaningful, sustainable utopia throughout the course of her fiction.

By using eugenics to achieve evolutionary outcomes, Butler tries to formulate an ethical perspective that is centered on evolution rather than Judeo-Christian concepts. However, the contradiction of the *Parable* novels is that Butler ends up creating *Earthseed* along similar ethical lines to Christianity. The ethical position of *Earthseed* is, at least in part, a result of her unwavering biological determinism. The
essentialist logic of Lauren’s biological conscience ends up drawing a moral boundary around an ideological identification with a closed group in the same fashion as Christianity. By never deconstructing the sacred texts, both *Earthseed* and Christianity maintain a level of mysticism that is uncannily similar, despite their obvious theological differences. *Earthseed* does provide an insightful critique of Christian theology. However, Butler’s own epistemological bias towards science results in the same ethical conclusion as Christianity: the exclusion of those outside the moral boundary, and the ultimate eradication of otherness. The problem of religious intolerance is eventually solved by biological means: repopulation of a new world that excludes those who are not true believers in *Earthseed* theology.

After tentatively presenting positive eugenics as a plausible, yet fraught, way to overcome inherent biological problems in *Wild Seed*, Butler’s novel *Clay’s Ark* weds apocalypse, pandemic illness and negative eugenics to create a new evolutionary pathway for humanity. The novel presents a dystopian image of eugenic intervention into human evolution. However, the utopian drive to create a stable eugenic utopia out of an apocalyptic trial reveals how Butler premises utopia on racial uniformity. The novel’s utopian propensities can best be characterized as the desire for the elimination of physical difference that uses apocalyptic transformation to erase the biological difference on which racial, gender and religious differences are almost always predicated. In *Clay’s Ark*, Butler does not celebrate difference. Her fiction after 1980 expresses with increasing vividness an anxiety that intolerance to difference is the crux of human self-destruction. In particular, *Clay’s Ark* yearns for biological similarity resulting from an apocalyptic winnowing of humanity. The disturbing dreams of uniformity are premised on the extermination of three quarters of the human population to create a strong, stable, new human species out of the ashes of the old. *Clay’s Ark* is a particularly extreme and vehement rejection of human agency. The inability to counteract the extraterrestrial disease, the way the microbe changes the human body to its liking or destroys it, all reveal Butler’s deep-seated pessimism that human survival may be completely reliant on drastic evolution sparked from beyond the tarnish of human hands. While brutally pessimistic, the eugenic utopian impulse of *Clay’s Ark* is further crystalized in Butler’s later works, where genetically engineered miscegenation becomes the tool for creating racial stability free from the drastic human cost of death through disease. Butler does not
limit herself to presenting apocalypse as the necessary catalyst for genetic change. Indeed, the majority of her later fiction actively engages with eugenic intervention via genetic engineering. Genetic engineering becomes the means by which Butler uses miscegenation as a further tool to eradicate the biological roots of physical difference, thereby creating the racial stability required for a genuine utopia.

Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy overtly depicts the ethical struggles of using genetic technologies to rid humanity of unwanted characteristics. Butler locates humanity’s self-destructive nature in its unique and paradoxical genetic structure. She presents humans as incapable of avoiding annihilating ourselves without altering our biology. Humanity struggles for self-determinacy against the Oankali demand for genetic change. Butler’s depictions of the struggle for reproductive control between the alien and human species reveal that she is both realistic and sympathetic to human behavioral propensities. However, her unshakable resolve that humanity be rid of its inherently hierarchical genetic structure again reveals her biological determinism. Furthermore, the Oankali assertion of humanity’s genetic inferiority remains unchallenged, and is validated by human intolerance and violence throughout the series. By contrast, the Oankali, while acquisitive and supposedly non-hierarchical amongst their own kind, are nonetheless in an important, superior position of power over humanity. Pessimistically, this experience of being subordinate to a higher power is the necessary condition for survival, as Butler has lost faith in humanity’s ability to positively control its own biological destiny. Survival for Butler is characterized by the ability to continue reproducing and reproduction becomes entirely premised on genetically engineered miscegenation between the two species. The act of reproduction in the series is the primary way that genetic flaws are eradicated and racial stability is created out of two physically disparate groups. The possibility for utopia is entirely pinned on the Oankali and human miscegenated society, which reveals Butler’s insistence on genetically determined utopia and her refusal to entertain utopia brought about by political coalition amongst diverse heritages. The Oankali’s acquisitive nature is a symbol for the desire to create similarity out of difference. Miscegenation is thus the catalyst by which Butler eradicates racial difference, thereby eliminating racial intolerance.
Butler’s treatment of miscegenation and genetic engineering in *Fledgling* also illuminates her fascination with the utopian possibilities of eugenics. Shori’s hybrid identity is an expression of the impulse to eradicate otherness. By mixing human and vampire genes, Butler casts Shori as emblematic of genetically engineered miscegenation that contains the utopian power of bridging the gap between two biologically different groups. Shori’s ability to act like a human and stay awake during the day separates her from her own species, but integrates her fully into human society. Shori symbolizes the eradication of the visible otherness of vampire identity. Butler reveals that miscegenation has a far-reaching genetic effect that impacts evolution through multiple generations. Shori’s attractiveness is often couched in terms of her ability to pass on her designed traits to her subsequent offspring. In creating Shori as a genetic mother to a new direction of miscegenated hybrids, Butler further bolsters her unceasing impulse to reduce behavior to genetic determinants. Shori’s genes dictate her existence on two levels: her survival is reliant on her genetic abilities given to her by her part human heritage, but more importantly, her attractiveness as a sexual partner because of how she will strengthen Ina offspring demonstrates how she operates as a catalyst for eliminating difference between humans and vampires. She is, by miscegenation and genetic engineering, the symbol of the emerging utopia of eugenically altered human/vampire hybrids. Shori’s ability to participate in the human world directly challenges the need to separate her as a different species living outside of humanity. From this perspective, Shori is the fictional embodiment of a utopian promise for divergent identities to become invisible through cross-species reproduction. In theorizing a new evolutionary direction for the fictional Ina, Butler likewise imagines utopian possibilities for humans. Butler creates an enclave community where human problems of disease, illness and brevity of life are eradicated by the chemical coupling of human and vampire. Utopia is thus tied to genetic alteration, and genetic alteration is concentrated on eliminating visible signs of difference.

Butler’s characters, whether they are immortal wraiths, prophets with genetic predispositions, infected super-humans, genetic engineering aliens, or vampires, all exist as textual representatives of eugenic utopia. The human body is the site of eugenic utopia, as humanity is made more capable of adapting to the dystopian environments in which Butler immerses her characters. Health, ability, strength,
endurance, and even, sometimes, happiness (or less misery) are given to humans who interact with the ‘other’ and relinquish pure racial identities. Butler’s fiction entices the reader to discover and experience difference, and it is this feature of her work that has led so many critics to describe her work as celebrating otherness.

While on the surface Butler’s fiction can be seen to celebrate difference, her persistence in presenting biological solutions for human survival and adaptation dictate that encounters with the other only result in utopian outcomes when humanity is stripped of its genetic flaws. More importantly, the desire for fictionalizing human responses to difference emerges as a tool to present genetic alteration as a utopian goal. It is, ironically, through accepting difference that difference can be, and must be, eradicated. Humans react violently against the breeding away of their species, which only strengthens the argument for human genetic change and again reiterates Butler’s notion that violence is located in the human body. Her voice as an author seems to constantly urge the reader to empathize and side with those humans who are negotiating with the fictional others of her novels. In doing so, Butler subversively equates readerly sympathy with the desire to eliminate pure human identity, which, for her, has proven itself throughout history to be the victim of faulty, self-destructive genetics.

The utopian impulse that pervades Butler’s fiction after 1980 is distinctly and unmistakably eugenic. That a female African-American author in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century would turn to eugenics as a means to create racial utopias seems unlikely, given the atrociously racist history of applied and theoretical eugenics in the twentieth century. However, I believe Butler’s compulsion to use eugenics to eliminate race is indicative of just how extreme racism in the United States, indeed, the world in general, continues to be. Butler’s desire to completely overhaul humanity’s genetic structure not only reflects her pessimism of our nature, but her pervasive insistence that racial utopia is premised on biological similarity reveals how divisive and difficult being a visibly different person can be. Without the markers of physical difference, there could be no persecution and oppression of those who are physically different. It is this point that is so clear in Butler’s work, but which has been almost entirely overlooked: without racial difference there can be no racism. This is a philosophically difficult idea, and Butler is aware that even if racial
difference were eradicated, discrimination would most likely manifest amongst 
humans in different ways. However, Butler’s focus on eliminating racial otherness 
through eugenic practices reiterates a sense that race hate, indeed, any hatred of those 
construed as others in Western society, is so destructive a force that it needs to be 
genetically removed from our societies and cultures. Moreover, it is not merely racial 
difference that Butler sees as needing to be abolished. Throughout her novels from 
*Wild Seed* onwards, she reiterates again and again that differences of race, gender and 
religion need to be eradicated for humans to avoid destroying ourselves.

I began this thesis by describing the two ethical systems that are in tension in Butler’s 
writing. All of her novels deal with the debate between what is evolutionarily needed 
and what matters, and what can be tolerated for the individual. As I have 
demonstrated, her fiction begins by reiterating the importance of the sanctity of 
human individuality in the face of evolutionary goals. However, throughout the 
course of her career, Butler comes to the realization that perhaps individuals should 
be subordinate to the wider goals of the community, indeed, the species. Her 
increasing focus on eugenics as the sole path to utopia suggests that she is a 
consequentialist more than a champion of human rights. While ethics is a fraught and 
difficult arena to comprehensively delineate in a literature thesis, it is important to see 
Butler’s fiction in the context of consequentialist and utilitarian ethics that place the 
value of the species above and beyond the sanctity of the individual. It is at this point 
that Butler’s pessimistic view of humanity also gives way to a hidden optimism. 
Humans in her books always survive. We need genetic change, we need to 
chemically rid ourselves of the systems that have enabled oppression of difference, 
and we need to do it regardless of the cost to the individual. However, the only 
reason she feels this is necessary is that vestiges of the human animal are worth 
preserving. So much is at stake in Butler’s fiction, because there is so much to save.

Butler’s consequentialist ethics demand more than a renovation of our customs. As 
such, social change is futile without the corresponding genetic alterations that will 
result in real, sustainable change. She demands that humans undertake molecular 
level changes to overcome the problems inflicted upon us from millions of years of 
brutal, hierarchical, terrestrial evolution. She insists that when presented with a 
chance to change that we take the steps to alter our genetics and relinquish the power
structures of Western patriarchy that are built on defining difference and are reflective of our biological flaws. In the end, we must unify – racially, religiously, and genetically – or perish.
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