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SHAFTESBURY RECONSIDERED: STOIC ETHICS AND THE UNREASONABLENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

TIM STUART-BUTTLE

Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, is a complex figure in the intellectual history of eighteenth-century Britain. He can easily appear as an anachronism, contemptuous or ignorant of the advances in learning underway in the age in which he lived. In the original index to the second edition of his *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1714), ‘Metaphysicks’ is followed by ‘*necessary Knowledge of nothing knowable or known*’. Under ‘Philosophers’ are the entries ‘*See CLOWN*’, and ‘*Moral Philosophers of a modern sort, more ignorant and corrupt than the mere Vulgar*’.¹ One seeks an entry for ‘Newton, Isaac’ in vain; and whilst Bacon had the honour of being cited by Shaftesbury—once—it was only to establish that he had been fortunate to have ‘*escap’d being call’d an ATHEIST*’ by his contemporaries, an oversight Shaftesbury was eager to remedy.² Rather than trouble himself with the productions of a modern age whose philosophy he considered to be ‘rotten’, Shaftesbury unabashedly proclaimed his preference for the Stoic moralists of classical antiquity. In his *General Dictionary* (1739), Thomas Birch noted that Shaftesbury ‘carried always with him’ the ‘moral works of Xenophon, Horace, the Commentaries and Enchiridion

¹ Shaftesbury’s original index can be found in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. D. Den Uyl (3 vols., Indianapolis, 2001), iii, 253–92. Three scholarly editions of *Characteristicks* have recently been published, but the Liberty Fund edition presents the text in the format closest to that in which eighteenth-century readers would have encountered it. For a discussion of the respective merits of the various editions, see Michael B. Prince, ‘Editing Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks*’, *Essays in Criticism*, 54 (2004): 38–59. The Liberty Fund text, used here, is based on the third edition of 1732.

² *Miscellany II* [1711], in *Characteristicks*, iii, 45.

of Epictetus as published by Arrian, and Marcus Antoninus'.³

In two notebooks crammed with citations drawn from the writings of these classical philosophers (the *Askēmata*), largely compiled from the later 1690s, Shaftesbury's contempt for the degenerate age in which he lived is laid bare.⁴ The greatest threat to the tranquillity (*apatheia*) he sought through philosophy, Shaftesbury repeatedly reminded himself, was his concern that 'the ancients be remembered', their 'generous sentiments...restored' and philosophy thereby reclaimed from the 'superstition, barbarity, darkness and night' into which it had fallen.⁵ It would be beyond the capabilities of even the best and wisest of men, Shaftesbury noted, to achieve such an objective. Following Epictetus's maxim that the wise man restrained his desires to the pursuit of those things that were within his 'power', Shaftesbury sought strictly to discipline himself against relapsing into the mournful reflection on 'those more glorious times' from which 'all the regret and trouble arose', and by which his tranquillity was repeatedly disturbed:

But why are there no more roses?—This is not the season, let that content thee...Let others speak magnificently of virtue, not thou. It is enough if thou act thy part silently and quietly, keeping thy rules and principles to thyself; and not hoping ever to make these understood by others. What could even Socrates or Epictetus do if now alive? For suppose they had

³ *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical* (10 vols., London, 1734–41), ix (1739), 186 n. Q. Much of the content for the entry on Shaftesbury was provided by his son (the fourth earl) and his nephew James Harris, which explains the sympathetic account it provides. On this, see Isabel Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries and their Uses from Bayle to Chalmers', in id. (ed.), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London, 2001), 161–62.

⁴ The National Archives [NA], 30/24/27/10. These were published, albeit incompletely and with unreliable dating, in Benjamin Rand (ed.), *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury* (New York, 1900; repr. London, 1992). Where accurate, I cite from Rand's edition. For discussion of the *Askēmata*, see Laurent Jaffro, 'Les Exercices de Shaftesbury: un Stoïcisme Crépusculaire', in P.-F. Moreau (ed.), *Le Stoïcisme au XVe et au XVIIe Siècle: le Retour des Philosophies à L'Âge Classique* (Paris, 1999), 340–54.

⁵ 'Human Affairs', in *Life, Letters*, 77.

lived with children only, and not with men: what if with Moors or Barbarians, what if with Goths, or a nation of Turks?—Consider what we now are; amongst whom; what opinions; what lives; and where those are whom we can call men. [...] Fear nothing but losing thyself.⁶

Shaftesbury's classicism has been portrayed in various ways, most of which have been dismissive of his profundity as a philosopher. Ernst Cassirer, for example, argued that Shaftesbury's classicism reflected an 'aloofness from his own time', and a lack of interest in 'the problems affecting his era, or [in] the intellectual and practical decisions' it sought to formulate.⁷ D. D. Raphael portrays Shaftesbury as the founder of the 'moral sense' school, yet argues that he was unable to develop his insights systematically. One finds in Shaftesbury's writings [we are told] 'no coherent view...about moral theory in general'. That task was left to abler philosophers such as Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith.⁸ Meanwhile Raphael, following Smith, regards the *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699) as Shaftesbury's sole significant contribution to the field.⁹

Scholars in other disciplines have, however, increasingly offered an interpretation of Shaftesbury, in explicit contrast to Cassirer, as a thinker keenly engaged with contemporary political, cultural and literary currents. Yet in so doing, they have tended to downplay the interpretative importance of Shaftesbury's profound

⁶ 'Self', in *Life, Letters*, 118; and see Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, trans. N. P. White (Indianapolis, 1983), 1 (§1), 19 (§19). This act of self-discipline was both arduous and relentless: 'Arise! Up! Or art thou weary of this work? Is it ever to cease? is it ever to relax? Why shrink then? why draw back? what effeminacy is this?' ('Maxims', in *Life, Letters*, 230).

⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F. C. A. Koelln & J. P. Pettegrove (Princeton, 1951), 313.

⁸ D. D. Raphael, *The Moral Sense* (London, 1947), 17.

⁹ The following anthologies include extracts from the *Inquiry*: L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), *British Moralists* (2 vols., Oxford, 1897), i, 1–66; D. D. Raphael (ed.), *British Moralists, 1650–1800* (2 vols., Oxford, 1969), i, 195–223; and J. B. Schneewind (ed.), *British Moralists from Montaigne to Kant* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1990), ii, 488–500.

classicism for an understanding of his philosophical objectives, and to neglect the substantive content of that philosophy itself. Laurence Klein argues that Shaftesbury possessed a ‘self-consciously modern outlook’, and that his classicism was entirely subordinated to his ‘cultural politics’. Shaftesbury’s ‘polite’ philosophy is most notable for its highly original ‘deployment of discursive strategies’.¹⁰ Klein’s ‘philosopher of sociability’ does indeed seem strikingly ‘modern’. This Shaftesbury bears a marked (and perhaps suspicious) resemblance to the pre-eminent theorist of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, offering a theory of communicative action and an ethics as well as a politics of discourse, with an ideal speech situation as a model not merely for the pursuit of truth but for a just form of human life.¹¹ Michael Prince has questioned Klein’s interpretation but abandoned the context of antiquity altogether, whilst accepting that in the case of Shaftesbury one cannot speak of a ‘coherent philosophical output’. Prince’s interpretation once again rests on a low estimation of Shaftesbury’s place in the history of philosophy. Shaftesbury’s lack of depth in reasoning was, however, offset by his willingness to play with language and form; and it is here that he is of greatest scholarly interest.¹²

This article makes a case for taking Shaftesbury seriously as thinker who sought to explore questions in and about philosophy that were of urgent contemporary interest. This alone explains why the great and good of the European republic of letters felt compelled to respond to Shaftesbury and even, in the case of

¹⁰ Laurence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness* (Cambridge, 1994), 1, 20–21, 47, 111.

¹¹ For Habermas, see Anthony Giddens, ‘Jürgen Habermas’, in Q. Skinner (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985), 121–39. For insightful critical discussion of the Habermasian interpretation of the late Stuart period, see Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005), 48–53.

¹² Michael B. Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment. Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), 23–73.

Smith, to resort to *ad hominem* attacks.¹³ In developing this case this essay makes two related claims. The first is that Shaftesbury was profoundly perturbed by Locke's moral theology, to an extent that has largely been overlooked. William Spellman claims that Shaftesbury was an inattentive, even 'erroneous reader' of Locke: his 'disagreement with Locke was significant, but only in the context of his failure, shared by so many others in the seventeenth century, to understand Locke's position on the origins of universal morality'. This verdict needs revising.¹⁴

This leads to the second argument advanced in this essay. Shaftesbury's classicism finds its most important (though not exclusive) context in Locke's distinctive treatment of classical moral philosophy. Shaftesbury's concern to respond to Locke saw him offer an alternative, and quite original, narrative of philosophy's history. This was a story of progressive degeneracy in which Christianity was centrally implicated; and it had seen the Stoic tradition corrupted by Christian apologists who had sought to reconcile its teachings with—and to subordinate them to—Christian doctrine. Here Shaftesbury engaged with debates regarding the historical relationship between moral philosophy and religious belief—both idolatrous and Christian—which preoccupied European philologists and religious apologists from

¹³ Smith was scathingly critical of Shaftesbury, whom he considered to be 'of no great depth in Reasoning', something reflected in his inability to engage in abstract thought of the kind demanded by metaphysics: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*, ed. J. C. Boyce & A. S. Skinner (Oxford, 1983), 57–58, 142. For rather inconclusive discussion of Smith's uncharacteristic enmity towards Shaftesbury, see Douglas Den Uyl, 'Das Shaftesbury Problem', and the responses by James Otteson and Ryan Patrick Hanley, in *The Adam Smith Review*, 6, ed. F. Forman-Barzilai (Abingdon, 2011), 209–31.

¹⁴ William M. Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford, 1988), 201. Jason Aronson, 'Critical Note: Shaftesbury on Locke', *American Political Science Review*, 53 (1959): 1101–4, in contrast, observes that Shaftesbury, as a 'highly intelligent and articulate man' who was close to Locke, was 'singularly competent to comprehend his tutor's system and appreciate its originality before it became the common coin of later decades'.

at least G. J. Vossius's *De Theologia Gentili et Physiologia Christiana* (1641) onwards.

In recent years scholars have begun to recover the importance of the fields of sacred history and the history of scholarship for our understanding of early Enlightenment moral, political and religious thought.¹⁵ Shaftesbury's contribution to these fields of inquiry, largely occluded in the scholarship, is essential for a better understanding of the meaning, significance and originality of his philosophy taken as a whole.

§1.

In a letter of 1708 to his protégé Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury held his former tutor Locke primarily culpable for the profoundly impoverished state of contemporary moral philosophy:

'Twas Mr. LOCKE, that struck the home Blow: For Mr. HOBBS's Character and base slavish Principles in Government took off the Poyson of his Philosophy. 'Twas Mr. LOCKE that struck at all Fundamentals, threw all *Order* and *Virtue* out of the World, and made the very *Ideas* of these (which are the same as those of GOD) *unnatural*, and without Foundation in our Minds.¹⁶

Here Shaftesbury touched on a theme to which he later returned in his published works. 'I have learnt', Shaftesbury declared in *Sensus Communis* (1709), 'that Virtue is never such a Sufferer, by being *contested*, as by being *betray'd*. My Fear is not so much from its witty *Antagonists*, who give it Exercise, and put it on its Defense, as from its tender *Nurses*, who are apt to over-lay it, and kill it, with Excess of Care and Cherishing'.¹⁷ Hobbes had already

¹⁵ For a concise, critical overview, see Dimitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to "Enlightenment"', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 1117–60.

¹⁶ Shaftesbury to Michael Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man at the University* (London, 1716), 39.

¹⁷ *Sensus Communis* [1709], in *Characteristicks*, i, [Part] 2. [Sect.] 3, 61.

been referred to a few pages earlier as ‘an able and witty Philosopher of our Nation’ and ‘a mere political Writer’, whose sole objective had been to offer an antidote to the ruinous doctrines of the ‘Fanatics and Enthusiasts’ by whom he had been surrounded. Given that antinomians found in their superficial reading of classical philosophy a means of defending their seditious political and religious tenets, Hobbes had found it expedient to advocate the ‘Extirpation of antient Literature’ altogether ‘in favour of his Leviathan-Hypothesis, and new Philosophy’. *Leviathan* represented a political intervention, rather than a genuine contribution to moral and religious philosophy. It was not to be taken seriously.¹⁸

The case of ‘the credulous Mr. LOCKE’ was, however, quite different. Locke had genuinely sought to defend the sacred causes of virtue and religion; and his political philosophy and defence of toleration had justly gained him an authority over a broad readership.¹⁹ Locke, Shaftesbury suggested, would have been able easily to repel Hobbes’s superficial (though witty) barbs had he ‘known but ever so little of antiquity, or been tolerably learned in the state of philosophy with the ancients’.²⁰ This knowledge would have alerted Locke to the timeless verity that there were—and are—but two genuine philosophies, irreconcilable one with the other, only one of which might allow for a just understanding (and defence) of both a deity which was genuinely worthy of men’s reverence and of an immutable and eternal moral law to which men were obligated. This was a point understood by all true philosophers—most especially Horace, who Shaftesbury argued had fluctuated between these two philosophical traditions before he finally made his choice.²¹ It was from Horace’s writings

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.1, 56 n.

¹⁹ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, 38–39.

²⁰ Shaftesbury to General James Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, 413–17.

that Shaftesbury claimed to draw the following insight, which he invited Locke's French translator, Pierre Coste, to consider:

Nor were there, indeed, any more than two real distinct philosophies, the one derived from Socrates, and passing into the old Academic, the Peripatetic, and Stoic; the other derived in reality from Democritus, and passing into the Cyrenaic and Epicurean. For as that mere sceptic, and new Academic, it had no certain precepts, and so was an exercise or sophistry rather than a philosophy. The first, therefore, of these two philosophies recommended action, concernment in civil affairs, religion. The second derided all, and advised inaction and retreat, and with good reason. For the first maintained that society, right and wrong was founded in Nature, and Nature had a meaning, and was herself, that is to say in her wits, well governed and administered by a simple and perfect intelligence. The second again derided this, and made Providence and Dame Nature not so sensible as a doting woman. The first, therefore, of these philosophies is to be called the civil, social, Theistic; the second, the contrary.²²

That Shaftesbury chose to bring this point to Coste's attention is not coincidental. Under Shaftesbury's influence, Coste's interpretation and estimation of Locke's moral theory altered significantly. From viewing Locke as a valuable ally in the effort to discredit Hobbes, Coste subsequently agreed with Shaftesbury—whose *Sensus Communis* he translated in 1710—

²¹ For the highly idiosyncratic and personal nature of Shaftesbury's reading of Horace, whom he saw to have begun as a Stoic, converted to Epicureanism under the influence of Maecenas' court and gradually (and finally) re-converted to Stoicism, see Frank Stack, *Pope and Horace: Studies in Imitation* (Cambridge, 1985), 1–17, 116–22, 150–53, 222–27, 245–51; and Laurent Jaffro and Christian Maurer, 'Reading Shaftesbury's *Pathologia*: An Illustration and Defence of the Stoic Account of the Emotions', *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013): 208–9. For the hostility of many interpretations of Horace in an age rather misleadingly termed the 'Augustan', see Howard D. Weinbrot, 'History, Horace, and Augustus Caesar: Some Implications for Eighteenth-Century Satire', in id., *Eighteenth-Century Satire: Essays on Text and Context from Dryden to Peter Pindar* (Cambridge, 1988), 21–33.

²² Shaftesbury to Pierre Coste, 1 Oct. 1706, in *Life, Letters*, 359. Shaftesbury presented this passage as a faithful translation of the *Epistles*, but exercised considerable latitude to expand vastly on the original. Compare with Horace, *Epistles: Book I*, ed. R. Mayer (Cambridge, 1994), 1.16 (55).

that Locke had, quite disastrously, erected his moral theory on broadly Hobbesian foundations.²³

The ‘two real distinct philosophies’ identified by Horace had, Shaftesbury argued, sought to provide men with a ‘*Vitae Dux*’ (guide to life) and a ‘regimen’ that encouraged the suppression of those affections considered to impede men’s acquisition of self-mastery and constancy.²⁴ Here it is important to note, as historians have largely failed to do, that in his writings those considered true disciples of Epicureanism—‘honest Epicurus’ himself, Lucretius and Pierre Bayle—were treated with considerable sympathy by Shaftesbury.²⁵ Epicurus had not denied that men were naturally possessed of ‘social affections’. On the contrary, it was because men’s love of society and concern for the good of others were so strong that he considered them to be so dangerous.

²³ For the attribution of the French translation of *Sensus Communis* (*Essai sur L’Usage de la Raillerie* (La Haye, 1710)) to Coste, see James Dybikowski, ‘Letters from Solitude: Pierre Coste’s Correspondence with the Third Earl of Shaftesbury’, in P. -Y. Beaurepaire, J. Häslér & A. McKenna (eds.), *Réseaux de Correspondance à L’Age Classique (XVIe–XVIIIe Siècle)* (Saint-Etienne, 2006), 109–33. For a more general discussion of Shaftesbury’s influence on Coste’s increasingly hostile attitude to Locke, see id., “‘Aspers’d and Blacken’d’: Pierre Coste’s Critique of Locke’s Moral Theory”, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 23 (2004–2007), 1–23; and J. R. Milton, ‘Pierre Coste, John Locke, and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury’, in S. Hutton & P. Schuurman (ed.), *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy* (Dordrecht, 2008), 195–223. Shaftesbury was far from alone in interpreting Locke’s moral theory as indebted to Hobbes in regrettable ways: Thomas Burnet, Henry Lee, James Lowde and Isaac Newton—to name only some of those who responded to Locke in his lifetime—expressed similar reservations.

²⁴ The claim that philosophy could alone furnish men with a ‘*Vitae Dux*’ is found in *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* [1710], in *Characteristicks*, i, 3.1, 184, and immediately precedes a concerted assault on Lockean epistemology. The continued, early-modern conception of philosophy as an activity concerned above all with self-cultivation is emphasised by Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (London, 2011); and Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. A. I. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Oxford, 1995).

²⁵ See, for example, Klein’s claim that Shaftesbury saw Hobbes as an ‘Epicurean revivalist’: *Culture of Politeness*, 60–69. It is more accurate to say that he considered Hobbes’s philosophy as a grievously perverted form of true Epicureanism.

It was only in a Christian world that natural sociability and the ‘social affections’ had been denied altogether, and only with Locke that a moral theory had been constructed upon these foundations. In Locke’s hands, Shaftesbury argued, philosophy had been denied its role as queen of the sciences, and stripped of its fundamental purpose—‘to correct *Manners*, and regulate *Lives*’.²⁶ Instead men were reduced to necessitous brutes continually moved by an uneasiness caused by a desire for external objects, from which relief might only be found in the uncertain hope of salvation. After all, Locke had followed Hobbes in denying that reason alone could acquire a just idea of man’s true end (the *summum bonum*).²⁷ As had Hobbes, Locke mocked the claims of both the Stoics and Epicureans that philosophy could allow the sage to enjoy a respite from the turbulent desires by which most men were held captive. This tranquillity and peace (*apatheia* or *ataraxia*) might with God’s grace be attainable in the world to come, but was certainly not within man’s reach in this life and to think otherwise was as vain as the effort to which it led was futile. All his philosophical enquiries had taught him, Locke declared in a private letter written from his deathbed, was that ‘this life is a scene of vanity that soon passes away and affords no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing well and in the hopes of another life’.²⁸ Upon receipt of a transcribed copy of this letter shortly after his tutor’s passing, Shaftesbury quipped with distaste that ‘I should never have guessed it to have been of a dying philosopher’. In response, Shaftesbury penned his own mock-valedictory epistle to

²⁶ *Miscellany III* [1711], in *Characteristicks*, iii, 114.

²⁷ Compare John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), II.xxi.55, 269–70; with Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. N. Malcolm (3 vols., Oxford, 2012), ii, I.xi, 150.

²⁸ Locke to Anthony Collins, 23 Aug. 1704, in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. de Beer (8 vols., Oxford, 1976–89), viii, 417–19 (Locke died on 18 Oct.). For this life as a scene of vanity, Ecclesiastes 1:2–18 (to which Locke clearly refers); and for a markedly similar use, see Locke’s uncle, Peter’s letter of 17 Sept. 1682: *Correspondence*, ii, #733, 547–50.

his ‘disciple’: ‘The use I would have you make of it is, that our life, thank heaven, has been a scene of friendship of long duration, with much and solid satisfaction, founded on the consciousness of doing good *for good’s sake, without any farther regards*...and if this disposition fits me not for heaven, I desire never to be fitted for it’.²⁹ In a passage in *Characteristicks*, drawn almost verbatim from this earlier letter, Shaftesbury continued in much the same vein: ‘Philosopher! Let me hear concerning what is of some moment to me. Let me hear concerning *Life*; what the right notion is; and what I am to stand to, upon occasion: that I may not, when Life seems retiring, or has run it-self out to the very Dregs, cry *Vanity!*, condemn the World, and at the same time complain, that *Life is short and passing!*’ Shaftesbury characteristically refrained from identifying Locke as the target of his disparagement in his published work.³⁰

For Shaftesbury, the banishment of the *summum bonum* and denial that philosophy could offer a guide to life reflected the fact that those who now laid claim to the title of philosopher no longer ‘contemplated the *Man*, as *real MAN*, and as a human Agent, but as a *Watch* or common *Machine*’.³¹ Man was no longer considered to be, if only potentially, a rational, autonomous and self-legislating moral agent, able to identify and pursue the good. From Shaftesbury’s perspective, if empirical natural philosophy reduced the world to ‘atoms and chance’, Lockean epistemology posited an ‘atomism of the mind’.³² Both Bacon and Locke had

²⁹ Shaftesbury to Anon., 2 Dec. 1704, in *Life, Letters*, 344–47.

³⁰ *Soliloquy*, 3.1, 186–87. William Warburton later upbraided Shaftesbury for this supposedly cowardly attack on Locke, and interpreted it—not implausibly—as indicating the ‘inveterate Rancour he indulged against Christianity’ (Shaftesbury described Locke’s letter as akin to ‘one of those dying speeches which come out under the title of a Christian warning piece’): *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist* (2 vols., London, 1738–41), i, xxii–xxiv.

³¹ *Soliloquy*, 3.1, 181.

³² The phrase ‘atomism of the mind’ is taken from Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), 167.

sought to combine a distinctly Epicurean (atomistic) account of man and nature with the continued defence of religion, whereas Epicurus himself had recognised fully that the sole argument for a divine intelligence was to be found in man's good nature and the providential order of the universe. It was for this reason that 'honest EPICURUS' had raised 'his DEITIES aloft in the imaginary spaces; and setting 'em apart out of the Universe and Nature of Things, makes nothing of 'em beyond *a Word*'.³³ Here Shaftesbury's willingness to 'answer for [Locke's] Sincerity as a most zealous *Christian* and Believer' reads less like a defence of Locke's character than as an explanation of why Locke had seen fit to push beyond philosophical ground shared in antiquity by all wise men (Stoics as well as Epicureans).³⁴

§2.

Shaftesbury's reluctance in his published writings to make public the profound nature of his philosophical disagreement with one he considered to be his 'friend and foster-father' partly explains why commentators have not dwelt on the significance and depth of the division between the two men.³⁵ Shaftesbury's reticence owed more to their personal ties than to any temperamental aversion to philosophical conflict, as his contemptuous treatment of Bacon suggests. Shaftesbury's grandfather had tasked Locke with the supervision of Lord Ashley's education, and his choice of tutor (Elizabeth Birch) ensured that the youth acquired an early proficiency in Latin and Greek (he was fluent in both by the age of eleven).³⁶ Moreover, from an early age it seems that Locke discussed philosophical questions directly with his pupil:

³³ *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody* [1709], in *Characteristicks*, ii, [Pt] 2. [Sect] 3, 151.

³⁴ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, 39.

³⁵ Shaftesbury to Jean Le Clerc, 8 Feb. 1705, in *Life, Letters*, 332.

³⁶ See the 'Life' of the third earl, composed by his son the fourth earl, in *Life, Letters*, xix.

‘you...conferr’d with me upon Subjects as though you were really better for not being alone’.³⁷ As a consequence of his residual affection for Locke, Shaftesbury ‘ever concealed my differences’ from ‘my old tutor and governor’.³⁸ The only explicit reference to Locke in his published works is a positive one.³⁹ Nonetheless it is clear from Shaftesbury’s correspondence that, by 1694 at the latest, he recognised those differences to be fundamental.

In the sole letter in which Shaftesbury discussed, in rambling terms, his own philosophical ideas with Locke, written in 1694, he noted that ‘what I count True Learning, and all that wee can profitt by, is to know ourselves’. Unless it showed men how they might be ‘Honester or Better Creatures’ philosophy was both useless and pernicious. All too many modern philosophers, like the ancient sophists denounced by Socrates, were ‘curiose in what signify’d nothing’. Their philosophy ‘gives a Man no help in the persuanee of what he has learnt to bee his Duty; Assists him not in the Government of the Irrationall and Brutall Part of himself; which neither makes him more truly satisfy’d with what God does in the World (for that is *Loving God*) nor more Sociable more Honest or more Just, by removing of those Passions which hee has allways to Struggle with, that he may preserve himself so’.⁴⁰

The primary purpose of philosophy was to allow the individual to attain a stable sense of self-worth. Shaftesbury explored this at length the *Askēmata*: ‘How goes the world?—No matter; but how go I? This is a matter, and the only matter. This is of concern. This mine, and at my peril.—How do I govern? The world?—No. But how do I govern MYSELF?—How do matters stand with

³⁷ Shaftesbury to Locke, 3 Mar. 1692, in Locke, *Correspondence*, iv, 403–5; and *Life, Letters*, 288–89. Shaftesbury’s claim is supported by a letter of 31 July 1689, which refers to their discussion of the subject of the immateriality of the soul: Locke, *Correspondence*, iii, 666–71.

³⁸ Shaftesbury to Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, 416.

³⁹ *Moralists*, 2.4, 161 n.

⁴⁰ Shaftesbury to Locke, 29 Sept. 1694, in Locke, *Correspondence*, v, 150–54.

me?’⁴¹ In an entry from 1699, later reproduced verbatim in *Soliloquy* (1710), it is made clear that Shaftesbury considered a philosophy that occupied itself with ‘the formation of ideas, their comparisons, agreement and disagreement’ as a peculiarly modern form of sophistry.⁴² Concerned solely with men’s ‘opinions’ or ‘principles’, it failed to recognise that these were themselves dictated by men’s ‘TASTE, or *Relish* in the Concerns of *Life*’ (in other words, their estimations of where happiness was to be found). In erecting his moral theory on the basis of his new way of ideas, Locke’s efforts were ‘wasted Labour’.⁴³

Shaftesbury returned to Horace in order to develop the contention that was fundamental to his repudiation of Lockean epistemology and moral theory. Horace, along with all the disciples of the ‘severe Philosophy’ (Stoicism), had brought ‘*Passion...under the Head of Opinion*’.⁴⁴ It was men’s ‘Temper’, ‘Fancies’ or ‘Affections’ that governed their ‘Opinions’ and ‘Principles’. Crucially, this was as true in matters of religion as in those of morality. Unless the individual were able to interrogate his appetites and subordinate them to the ‘magisterial’ authority of reason, he must lead ‘a Life distracted, incoherent, full of

⁴¹ ‘Political Affairs’, in *Life, Letters*, 102. Klein dismisses the *Askēmata* as the product of an ‘existential crisis’ from which Shaftesbury supposedly emerged in the 1700s, which steadfastly ignores his continual (if studiously elliptical) advocacy of ‘the severe philosophy’ and his repeated self-description as a ‘formalist’ or ‘dogmatist’: *Culture of Politeness*, 70–80. For a still valuable corrective, see E. A. Tiffany, ‘Shaftesbury as a Stoic’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 38 (1923): 642–84.

⁴² ‘Philosophy’, in *Life, Letters*, 267; *Soliloquy*, 3.1, 184–85.

⁴³ *Miscellany III*, 109.

⁴⁴ *Sensus Communis*, 3.1, 65 n. Shaftesbury also composed a Latin manuscript in c.1706, which offered a reconstruction of the Stoic theory of the passions to establish precisely this point. It has now been published as ‘*Pathologia, A Theory of the Passions*’, ed. L. Jaffro, C. Maurer and A. Petit, *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013), 221–40.

Irresolution, Repentance, and Self-disapprobation'.⁴⁵ Such an individual would lack any stable sense of 'Self', unable to acquire the constancy of temper upon which depended 'that Uniformity of Opinion which is necessary to hold us to *one Will*, and preserve us in the same mind, from one day to another'. Philosophy was for Shaftesbury 'severe' precisely because it required men 'to be thus magisterial with our-selves; thus strict over our Imaginations, and with all the airs of a real Pedagogue to be solicitously taken up in the sour Care and Tutorage of so many boyish Fancys, unlucky Appetites and Desires, which are perpetually playing truant, and need Correction'.⁴⁶ Unless one subordinated one's recalcitrant 'Fancys' to reason, one would remain always captive to them, and transported to inherently unstable joy or despair by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

In the 'rotten' modern age, however, men were discouraged from exercising such self-discipline. Shaftesbury repeatedly expressed his frustration with those 'polite' gentlemen who were incapable of 'reasoning expresly and purposely, without play or trifling, for two or three hours together, on mere PHILOSOPHY and MORALS'.⁴⁷ 'Who', Shaftesbury asked rhetorically, 'is so just to himself, as to recal his FANCY from the power of *Fashion* and *Education*, to that of REASON?'⁴⁸ By affirming Hobbes's hedonic account of human motivation and legislative view of ethics, and endorsing his scornful assessment of Stoic moral philosophy, Locke appeared to deny that men could or should make any such attempt at moral self-governance. In this regard Locke's philosophy perfectly suited a 'Refin'd, Polite, and...Deliciouse Age' in which 'in a little time neither the name

⁴⁵ *Miscellany V* [1711], in *Characteristicks*, iii, 185–86.

⁴⁶ *Soliloquy* 1.2, 116.

⁴⁷ *Miscellany V*, 176.

⁴⁸ *Miscellany III*, 114.

of Socrates, or Epictetus or Marcus, [will] remain'.⁴⁹ It was because he lived in such a degenerate age, Shaftesbury claimed, that he was forced to resort to a multiplicity of literary forms in *Characteristicks*. The analogy between aesthetic taste and morality, Shaftesbury confessed, was likewise intended to 'serve instead as an agreeable vehicle for the moral potion, which by itself is become mere *physic* and loathsome to mankind, so as to require a little sweetening to help it down'.⁵⁰ Here again Horace served as a model given that he, too, had lived in a degenerate and decadent period. Horace had similarly been compelled 'artfully' to conceal 'his rigid philosophy', giving it an 'air of raillery' which might secure it an audience at Maecenas's court.⁵¹

In a further letter to Locke of 1694, Shaftesbury alluded to a project upon which he was engaged, but which he refused to show Locke or to publish 'in such a Turn of an Age and Time as this present one'. His thoughts, he felt, would be dismissed as 'either too ridiculously Absurd, or too odiously true'.⁵² He referred to *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, which was finally published (perhaps against his wishes) in 1699, and later incorporated with largely stylistic revisions into *Characteristicks* (1711).⁵³ This work can be read not merely as a direct response to

⁴⁹ Shaftesbury to Locke, 8 Sept. 1694, in Locke, *Correspondence*, v, 123–25; 'Human Affairs', in *Life, Letters*, 76.

⁵⁰ Shaftesbury to Coste, 25 July 1712, in *Life, Letters*, 503–4. On this analogy, see Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2006), 98–149; Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, 2013), 11–21; and Dabney Townsend, 'From Shaftesbury to Kant: The Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987): 287–306.

⁵¹ Shaftesbury to Coste, 1 Oct. 1706, in *Life, Letters*, 363–65.

⁵² Shaftesbury to Locke, 8 Sept. 1694, in Locke, *Correspondence*, v, 123–25; *Life, Letters*, 296–99.

⁵³ In the *Characteristicks* of 1711, Shaftesbury suggested the *Inquiry* was published in 1699 as 'an unshapen foetus or false birth' (*Miscellany V*, 419), and the fourth earl claimed that John Toland had it printed without its author's consent (*Life, Letters*,

Locke's *Essay*, but more specifically to the second edition published in 1694.⁵⁴ This contention is supported by Shaftesbury's focus on two specific questions, which were foregrounded by Locke in 1694.

The first concerned the central place of 'uneasiness' in Locke's hedonic account of human action, of both thought and deed. Locke had initially suggested that human action was motivated by a broadly rational concern for the 'greater good'.⁵⁵ This, however, had raised a difficulty, which Locke addressed in the second edition of the work. If this were true, how could one explain the curious fact that most Christians lived as though oblivious of what was, by far, their greatest good and happiness: the eternal rewards on offer in a world to come?⁵⁶ In 1694, Locke more unequivocally endorsed his insight that men were driven by their passions, particularly by pleasure and pain, which tended to prioritise proximate over more distant objects. Without the stimulus provided by the 'unease' that resulted from 'a desire for

xxiii). This is questionable, not least since Shaftesbury encouraged Pierre Desmaizeaux to translate the work into French in 1701: see Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671–1713* (London, 1984), 133–35; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: a Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1991–2000), ii, 100–1; and *General Dictionary*, ix, 180. A. O. Aldridge, 'Two Versions of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 13 (1950): 207–14, compares the two editions.

⁵⁴ Voitle similarly dates the *Inquiry* to 1694 on the basis of Shaftesbury's letters to Locke and reads it primarily as a response to the *Essay*, but makes no mention of the important revisions Locke made to his second edition: *Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, 59–70. Klein ignores Voitle's suggestion and dates the work to the late 1690s, without providing any substantiation for his claim: *Culture of Politeness*, 48–49. Birch suggested that a 'rough draft' of the work was sketched even earlier, 'when he was but twenty years of age' (c.1691), a suggestion which is not implausible even as there is no other corroborating evidence: *General Dictionary*, ix, 180.

⁵⁵ In the first edition, the section appears at II.xxi.28–38 (II.xxi.28–60 in the second edition). It is printed by Nidditch in the notes, running concurrently beneath the main text.

⁵⁶ William Molyneux was quick to bring this problem—and its implications—to Locke's attention: Molyneux to Locke, 22 Dec. 1692, in Locke, *Correspondence*, iv, 599–602.

Happiness, and an aversion to Misery’, Locke argued, men would remain idle as though ‘in a lazy lethargick Dream’.⁵⁷ This was directly contradicted by Shaftesbury: ‘To love, and to be kind; to have social or natural Affection, Complacency and Good-will, is to feel immediate Satisfaction and genuine Content. ’Tis in it-self *original Joy*, depending on no preceding Pain or Uneasiness; and producing nothing beside Satisfaction merely’ (*I* 2.2.3, 96).⁵⁸

The second question was intimately related to the first. This concerned the centrality of a future state in Locke’s theory of moral obligation. The fundamental objective of the *Inquiry* was to expose the chimerical nature of any attempt to establish what Spellman refers to as ‘the origins of universal morality’ in the uncertain ‘hope’ of reward in a future state.⁵⁹

In this regard Shaftesbury claimed that the distinction Locke drew between moral motivation and obligation was untenable. The ‘true’ foundation of moral obligation in God’s law and the additional motivation to virtue provided by eternal sanctions had, Locke argued, been revealed rather than discovered. In this regard the Christian revelation had provided what the ancient philosophers had claimed but failed to offer—a compelling account of moral obligation, a point later developed by Locke at considerably greater length in the *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). Yet those who had not heard the Word might still live broadly in accordance with the law of nature, even if they were motivated to do so by two other, man-made laws: the ‘Law of *Reputation*’ and the ‘Civil Law’.⁶⁰ ‘It must be allowed’, Locke

⁵⁷ Locke, *Essay*, I.ii.3; II.vii.3.

⁵⁸ *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit* [1699], in *Characteristicks*, ii: references to Book, Part, Section and page number are given in brackets in the text.

⁵⁹ Spellman, *Locke and Depravity*, 201.

⁶⁰ On this, see especially Locke, *Essay*, II.xxviii.11. For a discussion of Locke’s ‘three laws’, see James Tully, ‘Governing Conduct’, in E. Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), 12–71, reprinted in id., *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), 179–241.

had argued, ‘that several Moral Rules, may receive, from Mankind, a very general Approbation, without either knowing, or admitting the true ground of Morality’. Because God in His goodness had, ‘by an inseparable Connexion, joined *Virtue* and publick Happiness together’, what was found publicly useful informed these man-made laws in ways which rendered them broadly consistent with God’s (revealed) will, even as men had remained ignorant of the latter.⁶¹ Divine design, then, ensured that utility (*utile*) and truth (*honestum*), reason and revelation were entirely consistent with one another. This was a point, Locke repeatedly intimated, which Cicero as an academic sceptic—a tradition of philosophy the existence of which Shaftesbury denied in his letter to Coste—had recognised in placing utility at the heart of his explanation of moral duties in *De Officiis*.⁶² Whereas Cicero had illustrated the public and private benefits that resulted from the performance of moral duties, the Gospels, ‘soaring beyond the Reach of Reason’, had revealed why all men were *obligated* to perform them.⁶³

For Shaftesbury, Locke’s increasing willingness precariously to ground moral obligation and the possibility of a normative ethic upon articles of faith—the existence of God and a future state—which Locke himself had done notably little to establish

⁶¹ Locke, *Essay*, I.iii.6. For important discussion of how a divine teleology structured all aspects of Locke’s thinking, see especially Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1994); and Timothy Stanton, ‘Natural Law, Nonconformity, and Toleration: Two Stages on Locke’s Way’, in J. Parkin & T. Stanton (eds.), *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2013), 25–57.

⁶² For insightful discussion of Locke’s esteem for *De Officiis*, see Phillip Mitsis, ‘Locke’s Offices’, in J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2003), 45–61. A more comprehensive discussion of Locke’s interpretation of Cicero will be offered in my *From Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy: Cicero, Christianity and Visions of Mankind from Locke to Hume* (Forthcoming, Oxford 2017), ch. 1.

⁶³ *The Reasonableness of Christianity* [1695], in V. Nuovo (ed.), *Writings on Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 89–210, at 203–4.

by reasoned argument was disastrous.⁶⁴ Locke's account of moral motivation, meanwhile, suggested that in practice it was the historically-contingent and mutable dictates of custom and positive law which guided most men's moral conduct. Locke offered a moral theology which suggested that 'Experience and our Catechism teaches us all': a position which Shaftesbury set out to undermine.⁶⁵ 'There can be nothing more fatal to virtue', Shaftesbury declared in the *Inquiry*, 'than the weak and uncertain Belief of a future Reward and Punishment. For the stress being laid wholly here, if this Foundation come to fail, there is no further Prop or Security to Mens Morals. And thus Virtue is supplanted and betray'd' (*I* 1.3.3, 39–40).

By proposing to consider 'Virtue' and 'Religion' separately, which were 'generally presum'd inseparable Companions', Shaftesbury sought to uncover the fundamental error at the heart of Locke's moral theory (*I* 1.1.1, 3). As his index entry for 'Philosophy' attests, Shaftesbury's overarching objective was to challenge the '*Unhappy Mixture or Conjunction of Philosophy with Religion*' which had occurred in a Christian world, and to expose the '*Monstrous Issue and Product of this Union*'.⁶⁶ This led Shaftesbury to consider the question of 'whether it be a true Saying, *That it is impossible for an Atheist to be virtuous, or share any real degree of Honesty, or MERIT*' (*I* 1.1.1, 4). This had been raised in characteristically provocative fashion by Pierre Bayle, an acquaintance of Locke and later Shaftesbury, in his

⁶⁴ More recent commentators have similarly considered Locke's ethical theory to be a 'tragic' failure, 'incoherent' and 'broken-backed', for much the same reason: see especially John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: an Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge, 1969), 81, 187, 221; and John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), 157.

⁶⁵ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, 39–41.

⁶⁶ *Characteristicks*, iii, 280, s.v. 'Philosophy'.

Pensées Diverses sur la Comète (1680; 1683).⁶⁷ Locke engaged with this issue only indirectly: he explained how men might live tolerably moral lives without knowledge of God and His plan; yet without this knowledge the obligatory nature of the moral duties could not be comprehended, and those who denied the existence of the Creator *a priori* undermined the bonds of society and had no right to toleration.⁶⁸ Shaftesbury occupied a position much closer to Bayle's, arguing that men's conduct depended on their affections rather than their professed speculative principles. Establishing that men's 'Opinions' or 'Principles' were dependent upon their 'Desires', Shaftesbury proceeded to argue that only if the latter were to some degree fixed might the individual be able to entertain a steady belief in both a divine intelligence and *perhaps* the prospect of a future state.⁶⁹ Philosophy, in other words, must necessarily precede theology. It was '*Philosophy*, which, by Nature, has the Pre-eminence above all other Science and Knowledg', and '[b]y this Science *Religion* it-self is judg'd'.⁷⁰ It was philosophy alone that could lead men to recognise the capacity of an intelligent mind to establish a harmony and order within themselves and, by analogy, in the

⁶⁷ Shaftesbury would appear to have made Bayle's acquaintance during his first retreat in Rotterdam in 1698–9: Voitle, *Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, 86–91. For the importance of Bayle's question for the broader development of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, see John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁶⁸ Locke, 'An Essay concerning Toleration' (1667), and *A Letter concerning Toleration* (1689), in *Political Writings*, ed. D. Wootton (Indianapolis, 1993), 188, 426. For Locke's complex treatment of this subject, see J. K. Numao, 'Locke on Atheism', *History of Political Thought*, 34 (2013), 252–72. On Locke's indirect engagement with Bayle, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, 190–1, 280–89.

⁶⁹ In due course Shaftesbury would make it clear that he did not consider immortality to be taught by true (Socratic) philosophy: see below, 196–98. It is likely that he had reached this conclusion—with the assistance of his Stoic guides like Aurelius—by 1694. This is suggested by his comments on the subject in his exchange with Locke, referred to above, n. 37.

⁷⁰ *Soliloquy*, 3.1, 183–84.

universe as a whole.

Here Shaftesbury identified two antithetical cosmologies, which gave rise to contrasting estimations of what it was for a man to live according to his nature—the central question of philosophy. ‘In the Whole of Things (or in the Universe)’, Shaftesbury contended, ‘either all is according to a good Order, and the most agreeable to a general Interest: *or* there is that which is otherwise, and might possibly have been better constituted, more wisely contriv’d, and with more advantage to the general Interest of Beings, or of the Whole’. If—as Bayle’s treatment of theodicy implied—one considered the universe to be in any sense ‘defective’, one could hardly sustain the idea of ‘a designing Principle or Mind’ as the ‘Cause of *all* things’, or locate man’s ‘End’ and happiness ‘in Nature’. One would instead be compelled to consider man in lowlier terms, rather than as a ‘Part’ of a coherent larger ‘Whole’ (*I* 1.1.2, 5–6).

Shaftesbury identified the ‘perfect THEIST’ as the individual who ‘at all Seasons, and on all Occasions’ was able to support the ‘Belief of a supreme Wisdom’. The ‘perfect ATHEIST’ was similarly able to ‘think always consistently’ on the question, but reached the opposite conclusion regarding order and design, and consequently dismissed the notion of an intelligent ordering mind altogether. In setting out these diametrically opposed ideal standpoints, Shaftesbury re-established the irreconcilable division between Stoicism and Epicureanism which he later discussed in his letter to Coste. Shaftesbury provided an ‘*OEconomy of the Passions*’ which vindicated both the Stoic and Epicurean sage. He argued that there were two ‘sorts’ of ‘Affections’ natural to man. These were the ‘social’, which led the individual to exert himself within society; and the ‘selfish’ or ‘private’, which ensured that he did not lose sight of what was required for his immediate self-preservation. These two types of ‘Affection’ could potentially pull in different directions, and a man’s view of happiness and his true interest varied according to the strength of each. As such, it was entirely valid to ask which ought to be preferred, and to seek to suppress those that led him away from what he thereby

identified as being his ‘true *Scope* or *End*’. As Shaftesbury would later note in *Sensus Communis* (1709), a work which developed many of the arguments propounded in the *Inquiry*, ‘’tis the height of Wisdom, no doubt, to be rightly *selfish*’.

The question remained as to where one’s true interest lay. This required the individual to perform the act seemingly discouraged by Locke, and employ his reason to identify his true end and happiness (the *summum bonum*):

For in this we shou’d all agree, that Happiness was to be pursu’d, and in fact was always sought after: but whether found in *following Nature* and giving way to *common* Affection; or in suppressing it, and turning every Passion towards *private* Advantage, a narrow *Self*-end, or the Preservation of *mere Life*; this wou’d be the matter in debate between us. The Question wou’d not be, “Who *lov’d* himself, or Who *not*”; but “Who *lov’d* and serv’d himself the *rightest*, and after the truest manner”.⁷¹

Until this was resolved, the individual remained in a liminal state. He experienced ‘the frequent Successions of alternate Hatred and Love, Aversion and Inclination’, which ‘must of necessity create continual Disturbance and Disgust’, repentance and remorse (*I* 2.2.1, 64).

Only the ‘two real distinct philosophies’ that were espoused by the ‘perfect THEIST’ and the ‘perfect ATHEIST’ provided rules by which to establish that constancy of temper which could lead a man to a stable sense of self and to a just conformity between his principles and his conduct. The ‘perfect ATHEIST’ had a stable sense of self. Even as he was incapable of ‘Virtue’, his constancy of temper ensured that he remained the same man from one moment to the next, an essential prerequisite for friendship and mutual trust.

Shaftesbury conceded that he could not be relied upon to the same degree as the ‘perfect THEIST’, however. He would eventually discover that his attempt to suppress his ‘social’ affections was futile, and be thrown back into a maelstrom of

⁷¹ *Sensus Communis*, 3.3, 76.

melancholic bitterness and resentment (*I* 2.2.1, 74–75). Nonetheless he did not positively advocate principles or practices that were destructive of human society. True Epicurean philosophy advocated ‘a steddly and deliberate Pursuit of the most narrowly confin’d *Self-interest*’. It necessarily led the individual to withdraw from society, but there was no reason why it would lead him actively to seek to disrupt it (*I* 2.1.1, 46). As Shaftesbury noted, ‘when Men are *easy* in themselves, they let others remain so; and can readily comply with what seems *plausible*, and is thought conducing to *the Quiet* or *good Correspondence* of Mankind’.⁷²

Only the ‘perfect THEIST’ (the Stoic sage) was capable of truly virtuous action in Shaftesbury’s austere account. His virtue was clearly not a consequence of his theism, rather the opposite. His recognition that his true ‘End’ and happiness were to be realised in society (interpreted in the broadest terms as ‘mankind’) was not the consequence of ‘dry reasoning’. Shaftesbury made notably little effort to defend his cosmic optimism on the grounds of ‘right reason’—a term that scarcely appears in his writings—or his belief in a divine intelligence on the argument from design. Here he departed significantly from his Stoic guides.⁷³ Instead it was to sentiment that Shaftesbury appealed in an account that was radically subjectivist in intent. Shaftesbury exhorted his reader to ‘Converse *with himself*’. If he did so, he would recognise that all enjoyment came from a settled temper free of bitterness, and that this could only be acquired if he reconciled himself to providence (meaning external fortune) and learnt to despise those external ‘things’ that were not in his

⁷² *Miscellany II*, 68.

⁷³ A point noted by Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 249–59. On the changing valences of the concept of ‘right reason’ in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, see John Spurr, “‘Rational Religion’ in Restoration England”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), 563–85.

‘power’.⁷⁴

Through this process of self-examination, the individual would be led to affirm that ‘there is no State of outward Prosperity, or flowing Fortune, where *Inclination* and *Desire* are always satisfy’d, *Fancy* and *Humour* pleas’d’ (*I* 2.2.1, 66). Rather than experiencing excessive joy or melancholy due to external circumstances, Shaftesbury argued that he would recognise that all that matters is what passes within. He would discover with a degree of ‘Evidence as great as that which is found in Numbers, or Mathematicks’—here Shaftesbury aped Locke’s terminology—that it is in the pleasures of the mind rather than the senses that the greatest and most constant contentment is to be found (*I*, ‘Conclusion’, 99). The mind took pleasure in order, harmony and ease (*apatheia*); and this could only be achieved through the (temperate) exercise of those social affections which lead a man to ‘love and serve’ (the Shaftesbury family motto). The just philosopher would act virtuously because he recognised that it was in his nature to do so; because his greatest interest lay in realising his true nature, in this higher sense virtue and interest were united.

Insofar as Shaftesbury endorsed a concept of ‘moral sense’ it must be understood in this light, as the supposedly universal desire of men for a happiness defined as a stable sense of self that could only result from ‘the Order or Symmetry of this *inward Part*’ (*I*, 2.1.2, 48).⁷⁵ In Shaftesbury’s reformulation of core Stoic arguments, it was the arduous attempt to understand one’s true end (the *summum bonum*) that led one both to acquiesce with what appeared to be an unjust external world of men (‘providence’), and to recognise and worship a perfectly wise and

⁷⁴ Shaftesbury’s concept of providence is, like that of Aurelius, considerably closer to Machiavelli’s *fortuna* than to Locke’s Christianised and teleological concept.

⁷⁵ On the concept of the ‘moral sense’ in Shaftesbury, see Stephen Darwall, *British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’, 1640–1740* (Cambridge, 1995), 176–206; Michael B. Prince, ‘Mimetic Virtue. On Shaftesbury’s Moral Sense’, *Aufklärung*, 22 (2010), 59–76; and Robert Voitle, ‘Shaftesbury’s Moral Sense’, *Studies in Philology*, 52 (1955), 17–38.

benevolent divine being. ‘Perfect THEISM’ was the final and inevitable consequence of this search for contentment. The ‘divine Passion’ to which this gave rise further strengthened the love of order and harmony that the virtuous man had already attained within (*I* 1.3.3, 43).

Leslie Stephen’s claim that Shaftesbury possessed an ‘easy optimism’ in his theodicy and vision of human nature requires qualification.⁷⁶ It was made clear in the *Inquiry*, and even more so in the *Askēmata*, that both the ‘perfect THEIST’ and the ‘perfect ATHEIST’ were ideal types. It was quite possible that no such sages had ever lived.⁷⁷ ‘Vice and Virtue’, Shaftesbury noted, ‘are found variously mix’d and alternately prevalent in the several Characters of Mankind’, and ‘*it is as hard to find a Man wholly Ill, as wholly Good*’ (*I* 1.2.4, 22–23). Although all men possessed a ‘favourable Inclination’ towards virtue, its realisation depended upon ‘a use of Reason, sufficient to secure a right application of the Affections’ (*I* 1.2.3, 20). Very few men could be truly virtuous or genuine theists; and men had to struggle and labour to ‘become natural’. Almost all would ‘come short of that sound and well-establish’d Reason, which alone can constitute a *just Affection*, a uniform and steady *Will* and *Resolution*’ (*I* 1.2.4, 22). The constant flux most men experienced between ‘Love and Hatred, Aversion and Inclination’ was reflected in their ideas of a deity (or deities). Most were ‘DAEMONISTS’, possessed of an idea of divinity that was less than perfectly good (*I* 1.1.2, 5–8). For this reason, in matters of worship, ‘all *Moralists*, worthy of any Name’ (meaning the Stoics) had ‘prescrib’d Restraint, press’d *Moderation*, and, to all TYRO’s in Philosophy forbid the forward Use of Admiration, Rapture or Extasy’.⁷⁸ Since novices

⁷⁶ Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn (2 vols., London, 1881), ii, 18–33.

⁷⁷ The conception of the sage as representing a moral *ideal* by leading an unblemished life was a conventional Stoic claim: see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 56–59.

⁷⁸ *Miscellany II*, 24.

in philosophy lacked a stable and constant idea of the good, they might end up admiring a being that was as capricious and arbitrary as the succession of fancies they experienced within. The ‘*Moderation*’ of Stoic moralists discouraged the erection of false models for admiration.

This, for Shaftesbury, was evidently not true in a Christian age. He identified a third ‘sort’ of affections, the ‘unnatural’, which could lead men against both the interest of mankind and self-interest. Such ‘unnatural’ affections were artificially inculcated through custom and education in societies where false and pernicious ideas in religion prevailed. ‘Honest Epicurus’, banishing the gods, had in no sense cultivated these. As Shaftesbury continually noted in the *Askēmata*, drawing from Aurelius: ‘Either atoms or Deity. No medium. That multiplicity or this simplicity. No compromise—anarchy, or monarchy’.⁷⁹ The ‘perfect ATHEIST’ was capable of a ‘*real degree of Honesty or Merit*’ because he was able to attain a ‘*real degree*’ of tranquillity and self-mastery. His was a philosophically-tenable position, and Epicureanism a ‘real distinct’ philosophy. The inculcation of a religion erected on a ‘medium’ between ‘atoms or Deity’, however, compelled men to remain in a continual state of unease and self-disapprobation. Shaftesbury drew upon Plutarch’s *On Superstition*—a favourite text for freethinkers—to make this point:

The Atheist believes there is no Deity; the Religionist, or superstitious Believer, wishes there were none. If he believes, 'tis against his Will: mistrust he dares not, nor call his Thought in question. But cou'd he with Security, at once, throw off that oppressive Fear, which like the Rock of TANTALUS impends, and presses over him, he wou'd with equal Joy spurn his enslaving Thought, and embrace the Atheist's State and Opinion as his happiest Deliverance. Atheists are free of Superstition, but the Superstitious are ever willing Atheists, tho impotent in their Thought, and

⁷⁹ ‘Life’, in *Life, Letters*, 254; citing Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. M. Hammond & D. Clay (London, 2006), 4.3.2n, 6.4n.

*unable to believe of the Divine Being as they gladly wou'd.*⁸⁰

This '*corrupt Religion*, or SUPERSTITION' was alone able to impose 'many things the most horridly unnatural and inhuman' as 'excellent, good, and laudable *in themselves*' (*I* 1.3.2, 27). Shaftesbury's prime example was 'Misanthropy', defined as 'the immediate Opposite to that noble Affection, which, in ancient Language, was term'd *Hospitality*, viz. extensive Love of Mankind, and Relief of Strangers' (*I* 2.2.3, 95). This profoundly 'unnatural' affection resulted from the erection and imposition on men's minds of a model for admiration who exhibited such a quality. Although obnoxious to men's natural sense of what was 'just and equitable', through 'Art and strong Endeavour, with long Practice and Meditation' a 'second Nature' could be created which obliterated the original (*I* 1.3.1, 25).⁸¹ Men were naturally predisposed to the passion of 'Admiration' for that which was greater than themselves. The 'divine Passion' of the 'perfect THEIST' was so beneficial because it was directed towards a 'true Model and Example of the most exact Justice, and highest Goodness and Worth' (*I* 1.3.2, 29). However:

If there be a Religion which teaches the Adoration and Love of a GOD, whose Character it is to be captious, and of high resentment, subject to Wrath and Anger, furious, revengeful; and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the Offence: and if there be added to the Character of this GOD, a fraudulent Disposition, encouraging Deceit and Treachery amongst Men; favourable to a few, tho for slight causes, and

⁸⁰ *Miscellany II*, 78 n. For freethinking appeals to Plutarch, see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: the Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992), 215 n. 50.

⁸¹ The idea of custom as a second nature (*consuetudo altera natura*) can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle. The claim that it could destroy man's original nature entirely, however, was a more recent claim, advanced by Blaise Pascal ('la coutûme est une second nature qui detruit la première': *Pensées*, # 93). For a concise overview, Donald R. Kelley, 'Altera Natura: The Idea of Custom in Historical Perspective', in J. Henry & S. Hutton (eds.), *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought* (London, 1990), 83–100; and Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford, 2003), 126–51.

cruel to the rest: 'tis evident that such a Religion as this being strongly enforc'd, must of necessity raise even an Approbation and Respect towards the Vices of this kind, and breed a suitable Disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful Temper (*I*, 1.3.2, 28).

Shaftesbury alluded here to Calvinist theology, the doctrine of the Fall and Adam's imputed sin, in which 'one Person were decreed to suffer for another's fault' (*I* 1.3.2, 29).

Adam Smith argued that it was Shaftesbury's 'Puritan' education that gave his philosophy 'a different turn', and the *Askēmata* offers support for this interpretation.⁸² In his claim that devotional exercises could 'be of ill consequence and even fatal' to virtue, Shaftesbury reflected on his own concerted struggle to expurgate all remnants of his religious education:

Consider the age, vulgar religion, how thou hast been bred, and what impressions yet remaining of that sordid, shameful, nauseous idea of Deity [...] and what a wretched effect this has within [...] Therefore if thou wouldst praise, worship and adore aright, wait till other habits are confirmed and until other ideas of a certain kind are worn off, as they will be when the whole scope of life is changed; aims, aversions, inclinings and declining reversed, transferred; the whole thought, mind, purpose, will, differently modelled, new. Then it is that thou mayest soundly, unaffectedly and safely sing those hymns to God which the divine man mentions.⁸³

'The divine man' was Epictetus, and as the *Askēmata* testifies it was to his writings as well as those of Aurelius that Shaftesbury turned in order to find those exemplars worthy of just admiration and to model himself anew.

Shaftesbury's rejection of the strongly Augustinian concept of divine grace as the *sine qua non* for the virtuous life placed him

⁸² Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 57–58.

⁸³ 'Deity', in *Life, Letters*, 24. The moral necessity of purifying oneself of one's recalcitrant passions and inclinations before engaging in acts of worship was emphasised by Aurelius and Epictetus, but also by Seneca, *Natural Questions*, trans. T. H. Corcoran (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 2.59.

firmly within the mainstream of liberal Restoration Anglicanism (and alongside Locke).⁸⁴ Yet in the *Inquiry* the thrust of Shaftesbury's argument carried him considerably further. Shaftesbury argued that the opinions of one's neighbours, the civil laws, and even the doctrine of a future state (Locke's 'three Laws') might potentially instruct men 'in a Virtue, which afterwards they practice upon other grounds, and without thinking of a Penalty or Bribe'. The gallows and threat of eternal damnation were, however regrettably, necessary for the unphilosophical 'Vulgar' (the vast majority of mankind), who were incapable of leading a life according to reason. They encouraged men to 'discipline' their wayward affections, even if this was not a consequence of reasoning on their true happiness, because 'it is *Example* which chiefly influences Mankind, and forms the Character and Disposition of a People' (*I* 1.3.3, 37).

Yet the question to which this led was where the most perfect examples were ultimately to be found. It is clear that for Shaftesbury the answer was unequivocally not the Christian scriptures:

And thus it appears, that where a real Devotion and hearty Worship is paid to a supreme Being, who in his *History* or Character is represented otherwise than as really and truly just and good; there must ensue a Loss of Rectitude, a Disturbance of Thought, and a Corruption of Temper and Manners in the Believer (*I*, 1.3.2, 29; italics added)

In *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury made this point even more strongly by noting that 'such are mere *human Hearts*; that they can hardly find the least Sympathy with that only one which had the Character of being after *the Pattern* of the ALMIGHTY's'. As a result 'there is a certain perverse Humanity in us, which inwardly

⁸⁴ The widely-shared hostility to Puritan theology—and nonconformity—within Restoration Anglicanism is emphasised by John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church', *Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), 61–82. This is not to suggest that Locke himself was in any sense a 'mainstream' Anglican; merely that on the question of the need for efficacious grace Locke occupied a position shared by those Anglicans who were deeply distrustful of 'enthusiasm'.

resists the Divine Commission, tho ever so plainly reveal'd'.⁸⁵ 'That only one', clearly enough, was Christ.

Here Shaftesbury was undercutting the fundamental contention made by Locke in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*: that the divinity of Christ was attested by the moral excellence of his ministry and doctrines, which were entirely consistent with the insights garnered by philosophy even as they soared beyond the reach of mere reason. Shaftesbury fully accepted that 'GOODNESS is the only Pledg of *Truth*', and that this goodness had to be measured according to men's ideas of moral excellence as there could be no other standard.⁸⁶ The 'sole Measure' by which '*Religion* it-self is judg'd, *Spirits* are searched, *Prophecys* prov'd, *Miracles* distinguish'd' must be 'taken from *moral Rectitude*, and from the Discernment of what is sound and just in the Affections'.⁸⁷ Yet, as will be discussed in what follows, Shaftesbury was clear that the Scriptures (including Christ's ministry and teachings as reported in the Gospels) were quite incapable of providing any such pledge. The relationship between 'the Rule of Morals' identified by true philosophy, and the moral teachings of Christian theology was antagonistic, rather than harmonious as in Locke's account.⁸⁸ For Shaftesbury, all revealed religions (not least Christianity) were impositions and subverted virtue. Their most 'corrupt' professors, such as Hobbes and Locke, merely served to reveal this fact most clearly.

§3.

In *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), Shaftesbury defended his claim that religions ought not to be excluded from the 'test' of ridicule on the basis that 'whatever Humour has got the start, if it

⁸⁵ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, 220.

⁸⁶ *Moralists*, 2.5, 188.

⁸⁷ *Soliloquy*, 3.1, 184.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

be unnatural, it cannot hold; and *the Ridicule*, if ill-plac'd at first, will certainly fall at last where it deserves'.⁸⁹ To substantiate this claim, advanced throughout *Characteristicks*, that 'Nature will not be mock'd', Shaftesbury turned to the example of Socrates.⁹⁰ When submitted to the base raillery of Aristophanes in *The Clouds*, 'the divinest Man who had ever appear'd in the Heathen World' was content to play along, a sure indication that 'there was no Imposture either in his Character or Opinions'.⁹¹ The 'Ridicule', as a consequence, fell where it deserved— on Aristophanes. This held true for all 'the well-deserving Antients'. The 'Truth and Reason' of their productions rendered them resistant to mockery. It followed that they 'will have always a strong Party among the Wise and Learned of every Age'.⁹² It was for this reason that the early Church Fathers had eventually met with scorn and contempt in their attempts to discredit them. Their raillery was returned on them with interest, showing the '*ill Policy* as well as *Barbarity* of this *Zealot-Enmity* against the Works of the Antients'.⁹³

For Shaftesbury, the contention that 'Nature will not be mock'd' was synonymous with the claim that 'the Works of the Antients' were impervious to raillery: 'a Hand happily form'd on Nature and the Antients' was one and the same thing.⁹⁴ Shaftesbury went to considerable lengths to show that the Socratic tradition in philosophy and the Homeric in poetry were entirely indigenous to 'the politest of all Nations' (ancient

⁸⁹ *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* [1708], in *Characteristicks*, i, [Sect] II, 7.

⁹⁰ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, 218.

⁹¹ *Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, III, 20.

⁹² *Soliloquy*, 2.3, 166.

⁹³ *Miscellany V*, 146 n.

⁹⁴ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, 209.

Greece).⁹⁵ ‘Every noble Study and Science’ in Greece, Shaftesbury emphasised, was ‘*self-form’d*, wrought out of Nature, and drawn from the necessary Operation and Course of things, working, as it were, of their own accord, and proper inclination’.⁹⁶ The arts and sciences were able to develop ‘naturally’ in Greece due to a combination of political liberty and artistic emulation. They were ‘*free* Communitys, made by Consent and voluntary Association’. To win an audience, artists were required to charm the ear and appeal to the heart. Emulation was encouraged between communities that were independent but connected by shared trade, language and culture. Homer was the ‘*grand poetick SIRE*’, and Socrates the ‘*philosophical PATRIARCH*’, ‘the greatest of *Philosophers*, the very Founder of Philosophy it-self’.⁹⁷ The ‘vulgar Religion’ of ancient Greece originated from the ‘miraculous Narrations’ of the former. In his fables Homer drew his characters after ‘the *Moral Rule*’, and they were reflective of ‘the justest *Moral Truths*, and exhibitiv of the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners’. It was for this (moral) reason that ‘the wiser and better sort’ respected the ‘vulgar Religion’, even if they interpreted its narrations allegorically. It encouraged men to discipline their affections through the fabulous stories it relayed.⁹⁸

In Locke’s account the pagan religion contained no ethical content whatsoever.⁹⁹ For Shaftesbury, conversely, it served a

⁹⁵ *Miscellany V*, 141. For Shaftesbury’s idealised portrayal of ancient Greece, see Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, 199–206.

⁹⁶ *Miscellany III*, 86.

⁹⁷ *Soliloquy*, 2.2, 147, 158; *Miscellany V*, 149.

⁹⁸ *Miscellany V*, 141, 159 n.

⁹⁹ In the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, as elsewhere, Locke laboured the point that heathen religion in Rome and Greece contained no moral teachings. It was philosophers, rather than priests, who professed to instruct men in their moral duties. Only with Christ was this division between moral philosophy and divinity finally broken down.

crucial ethical purpose in reforming men's moral sentiments. Meanwhile, Shaftesbury continued, it was from Socratic origins that the various branches or formal variations of philosophy were developed, not least the comic (with Antisthenes and Diogenes), the sublime and poetic (culminating with Plato), and the methodical and analytic (with Aristotle).¹⁰⁰

The 'natural' development of the 'civil, social, Theistic' philosophy was further emphasised by Shaftesbury in his draft of a projected 'History of Socrates' (also entitled 'Chartae Socraticae').¹⁰¹ This manuscript has received regrettably little historical attention, but it shines considerable light on Shaftesbury's objectives in his published writings. Shaftesbury began work on this manuscript during his first retreat in Rotterdam in 1698–9, and returned to it sporadically over the following decade.¹⁰²

Shaftesbury recognised his project to be difficult for two, related reasons. The first was due to the nature of the sources upon which any account of Socrates' life and teachings had to be constructed. As Shaftesbury would later note in *Characteristicks*, Socrates was similar to Christ, the 'Founder of Philosophy' and 'the *Founder of our Religion*', in that neither was a writer.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Soliloquy*, 2.2, 157–60. Here Shaftesbury was clearly working within the doxographical tradition established by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, as noted by Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, 43 n. 45. Nonetheless Shaftesbury judged Diogenes harshly, perhaps on account of his praise of Epicurus and the sceptics: in the 'Chartae Socraticae', Shaftesbury condemned him as 'an uncorrect Writer of no Judgment [speak more modestly]' (CS 15).

¹⁰¹ The National Archives [NA] 30/24/27/14.

¹⁰² The only concerted, though superficial, discussion of the work is to be found in Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, 107–11. It has now been published, with a useful introduction, as Volume V of Series II of *Standard Edition: Complete Works, Selected Letters and Posthumous Writings*, ed. W. Benda, C. Jackson-Holzberg, F. A. Uelhein & E. Wolff (Stuttgart, 2008). This edition is not widely available, however, and page references (given in brackets in the text) are to the original in the NA.

¹⁰³ *Miscellany V*, 149–50. A comparison between Christ and Socrates was a staple of freethinking assaults on Christian doctrines and institutions. Charles Blount and

They left it to others to compose a written record of their character and words. In the case of Socrates, the most thorough and contemporaneous accounts were provided by Xenophon and Plato, but their reports differed in important respects and the question arose as to how (or whether) they might be reconciled.

Scholars of classical reception consider what has been termed ‘the Socratic Problem’ to have arisen only with Brucker, Lessing and Mosheim from the mid-eighteenth century, but Shaftesbury intended to confront it directly.¹⁰⁴

The second difficulty concerned the highly controversial nature of the fundamental message Shaftesbury intended to convey in the work. This was that as ‘the Antients excel us in Policy & Government so in the knowledg of this sort (viz. morals) they were not less happily knowing’. Two notes were added in the margin: ‘speak modestly’, and ‘take care of the Objection. viz. the Morall of the Gospell’ (CS 59). Ancient republics had encouraged public-spiritedness and a tolerance for diverse opinions in a manner which cast a profoundly negative light on Christian polities. This was not an especially delicate point: an admiration for classical republicanism was widely shared by Shaftesbury’s contemporaries—both Whig and ‘Country’ Tory—and did not need to be couched in excessively ‘modest’ terms. It was his claim about ‘knowledg of this sort’ which Shaftesbury recognised to be delicate; and it was this which he was most keen to emphasise in the work. Here as

Matthew Tindal, for example, both compared Christ’s crucifixion unfavourably with the suicides of Cato and Socrates: Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture* (Manchester, 2003), 156–58.

¹⁰⁴ James W. Hulse, *The Reputation of Socrates: the Afterlife of a Gadfly* (New York, 1995), 87–121; Mario Montuori, *De Socrate Iuste Damnato: The Rise of the Socratic Problem in the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1981), 9–25; Ian Macgregor Morris, ‘The Refutation of Democracy? Socrates in the Enlightenment’, in M. Trapp (ed.), *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, 2007), 209–28; and William J. Prior, ‘The Socratic Problem’, in H.H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato* (Oxford, 2006), 25–35. Only Hulse discusses Shaftesbury but seems to have been unaware of the ‘Chartae Socraticae’, which explains why he follows Cassirer in interpreting him as dedicated ‘to explaining the work of the Cambridge Platonists’ and remaining ‘firmly within the Christian tradition’ (95).

elsewhere, and in sharp contrast to Locke, Shaftesbury's claim was that the moral law revealed in the Gospels had contributed nothing to, indeed it had positively contradicted, the 'moral science' established by the Socratic philosophers by means of reason alone. This was the crux of the argument Shaftesbury intended to develop in the 'Chartae Socraticae'. It was aimed squarely at Locke's attempt in his moral theology to render 'virtue' synonymous with Christian 'duty', and to present the Gospels as alone providing men with a guide to life.

For Shaftesbury the most important of the many differences between Plato and Xenophon concerned the explanation each offered of the 'daemonic sign' (ποτρεπτικός). This was an inner voice Socrates claimed to hear when he was about to make a mistake.¹⁰⁵ Plato's interpretation, most especially in *Phaedo*, implied that Socrates' character and teachings owed much to 'Divine inspiration & [the] infusion of Goodness' (CS 74–75). It was this Platonic presentation of Socrates upon which Christian syncretists drew—such as Theophilus Gale in *The Court of the Gentiles* (1669–78), which asserted that 'Socrates had very Metaphysic contemplations of Divine Mysteries'. In accordance with his central thesis, Gale then proceeded to argue that Socrates' distinctly proto-Christian theism, and that of Plato, derived 'originally from the Jewish Church' (that is, from the Mosaic revelation).¹⁰⁶ Henry More and Thomas Stanley similarly presented Socrates as a believer in the immateriality of the soul on the basis of the account provided by Plato, and later by Plutarch and Lactantius.¹⁰⁷ It was this suggestion that Socrates

¹⁰⁵ On which, see Anthony A. Long, 'How Does Socrates' Divine Sign Communicate with Him?', in S. Ahbel-Rappe & R. Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates* (Oxford, 2006), 63–74.

¹⁰⁶ Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles* (Oxford, 1669–78), Part II (1670), 217.

¹⁰⁷ Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum* (London, 1668), [Bk.] III, [Ch.] 10, [Para.] 5; Thomas Stanley, *The History of Philosophy* [1655–62], 4th edn (London, 1743), [Part] III, 113–15.

considered himself to be divinely inspired, and that it was his sincere belief in a future state of rewards and punishments that reconciled him to his death, that Shaftesbury was anxious to repudiate. In this regard Shaftesbury's preference for Xenophon was overwhelming, and his contempt for Plato unmistakable. 'Plato recedes from Truth', Shaftesbury argued, 'chiefly & almost wholly in this alone in drawing Socrates into Metaphisicall & Theological Notions' (CS 40).¹⁰⁸ Yet as his repeated self-cautions illustrate, Shaftesbury recognised the need to tread carefully: 'Socrates, unmoveably following whatever he thought ποτρεπτικός, which plainly was Reason [speak modestly however]' (CS 134). Socrates would have endorsed 'the Definition of Virtue as a Science', one deducible only by 'those Philosophers amongst the rest who know Necessity, the Nature of Evill, Providence particular & General' (CS 74–75; 52–53). Socrates had accomplished this 'Science' on the basis of reason alone, as had Shaftesbury in the *Inquiry*. There was nothing 'supernaturall' about his understanding of morality or religion. Meanwhile:

If we could assert this of Socrates viz: that he thus strenuously maintained the Immortality of the Soul we should be glad as honouring our Hero: but truth will not permitt (as has been at length discours'd above) and we had rather he should suffer than violate truth [take care of appearance of irony] (CS 48).

For Shaftesbury, it is evident, Socrates was no believer in immortality, let alone immateriality (as Plato suggested in *Phaedo*). Socrates was quite willing and able to establish an account of moral obligation that had no need for the doctrine of a

¹⁰⁸ It seems clear that Shaftesbury associated 'metaphysics' almost entirely with the attempt to establish the existence of immaterial substances (and, consequently, the immortality of the soul). This definition seems to have been fairly conventional. In his translation of Descartes' *Meditations*, Locke's friend William Molyneux defined it in precisely this way: *Six Metaphysical Meditations; Wherein it is Proved that there is a God. And that Mans Mind is really Distinct from his Body* (London, 1680), esp. sig. A2^v (I owe this reference to Dimitri Levitin). This explains Shaftesbury's profound contempt for the subject, as expressed in the index to *Characteristicks*.

future state. This was precisely the position Shaftesbury sought to vindicate against Locke. This point is related to Shaftesbury's presentation of the Socratic tradition as entirely '*self-formed*' in two distinct senses.

First, it owed nothing to other traditions, and here Shaftesbury was especially concerned to emphasise its autonomy from learning as it had developed in the 'motherland of superstition', Egypt.¹⁰⁹ In his 'Metaphysicall & Theological Notions', conversely, Plato 'drew from Chaldea Egypt Pythagoras &c.', and it was for this reason that his account of Socrates was largely to be considered a 'fiction' (CS 66). Only in these nations was the doctrine of a future state incorporated into their distinctly metaphysical moral philosophizing, not in Greece.¹¹⁰ In a series of long footnotes in the *Miscellanies* that constituted the third volume of *Characteristicks*, Shaftesbury drew from the antiquarian scholarship of Sir John Marsham and John Spencer to establish the origins of Hebraic learning and the Judeo-Christian tradition in Egyptian superstition. In this regard, he sought to reverse the thesis developed by Gale, Locke's antagonist Edward Stillingfleet, Ralph Cudworth, Pierre-Daniel Huet and Newton that heathen polytheism represented the corruption of purer Hebraic ideas concerning God's unity and providence.¹¹¹ Yet

¹⁰⁹ 'Thus GREECE, tho she *exported* Arts to other Nations, had properly for her share no *Import* of the kind': *Miscellany III*, 86.

¹¹⁰ A claim which William Warburton set out to deny in his *Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1738–41): see Brian Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 5.

¹¹¹ On this, see John Gascoigne, "'The Wisdom of the Egyptians" and the Secularisation of History in the Age of Newton', in S. Gaukroger (ed.), *The Uses of Antiquity: the Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (Dordrecht, 1991), 171–212; Richard H. Popkin, 'The Crisis of Polytheism and the Answers of Vossius, Cudworth and Newton', in J. E. Force & R. H. Popkin (eds.), *Essays on the Context, Nature and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht, 1990), 9–25; and Richard Serjeantson, 'David Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and the End of Modern Eusebianism', in S. Mortimer & J. Robertson (eds.), *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600–1750* (Leiden, 2012), 267–96.

where John Toland's hermetic interests saw him similarly assert the historical primacy of Egypt in order to lionise the tolerant civil religion he found in the *prisca sapientia*, Shaftesbury's purpose was quite different.¹¹² For Shaftesbury, a tolerant ethical theism could only be established on Socratic (and Homeric) foundations that were entirely separate from, and in conflict with, the mystical 'wisdom' of Syria, Egypt and Mosaic Israel. It followed that the Judeo-Christian tradition, born of Eastern mysticism and superstition, had corrupted a pure Hellenistic philosophical tradition—not the other way around.

This leads to the second sense in which the Socratic tradition was '*self-formed*'. It literally grew out of reflections on the self, and on the true source of happiness as lying within in constancy and order of mind. This was enshrined in the citation from Persius' *Satires* that appeared on the title-page of *Soliloquy*: '*No need to inquire outside yourself*'.¹¹³ For Shaftesbury this served to endorse the claim that truly virtuous conduct relied neither on the infusion of efficacious grace, nor on the recognition of one's accountability before an external (divine) law accompanied by (eternal) sanctions. It also suggested that the individual would find no moral assistance in the Scriptures—which spoke of law, sin and grace—and ought not to seek it there.

In the '*Chartae Socraticae*', Shaftesbury sought to appeal to 'those that are neither Enthusiasts nor Atheisticall'. 'Enthusiasts' drew upon Plato to emphasise the need for 'inspiration' and an 'infusion of goodness' for the perfection of virtue. They found in the notions of the 'sublime philosopher' a means of establishing the truth of Christianity upon the metaphysical foundations

¹¹² On Toland, see Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 99–169; id., *Republican Learning*, 165–89; and Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670–1840* (Baltimore, 2012), 1–29.

¹¹³ '*Nec te quaesiveris extra*': Persius, *Satires*, ed. S. M. Braund (Cambridge, MA, 2004), Satire 1, line 7.

provided by heathen learning (CS 74).¹¹⁴ Ultimately, such ‘enthusiasts’ developed an Aristotelian-Thomist account of grace: it super-added the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) to those cardinal virtues that man was able to identify and cultivate through his own efforts. As the example of hospitality showed, for Shaftesbury it was the purveyors of Socratic philosophy who had understood the true foundations of an extensive (universal) love of mankind. Christianity had by contrast introduced an ‘unnatural’ affection of ‘Misanthropy’ quite unknown to the heathen philosophers. In this regard, far from enlarging upon or completing the natural law, the Christian revelation had actively subverted it. Shaftesbury was also at pains to deny the claims of neo-Epicurean ‘Atheists’ such as Bacon that Socrates was a sceptic ‘of an ostentatious Nature’, who was content to leave ‘all Things in Doubt and Uncertainty’.¹¹⁵ Such an interpretation suggested that men were indelibly sinful and as incapable of certainty in moral matters as in religious. This conformed to a voluntaristic theology and account of grace that owed much to Augustine. In contrast, Shaftesbury emphasised that Socrates was really a dogmatist in his philosophy, even as he shunned the ‘Dogmatick style’ in sharing his wisdom with those of lesser capacity than himself (CS 52).

In passages scattered throughout *Characteristicks*, and especially in the *Miscellanies*, Shaftesbury provided a history of Christianity that sought to explain why its professors invariably veered between ‘Enthusiasm’ and ‘Atheism’. Shaftesbury provocatively emphasised that, had it not been either

¹¹⁴ Shaftesbury’s hostility to Plato’s ‘Metaphysicall and Theologicall Notions’, a consequence of his antipathy towards Christian soteriology more generally, calls into question his supposed sympathy with the Cambridge Platonists. For accounts that present Shaftesbury as endorsing a neo-Platonic form of Christian apologetic, see especially Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. J. P. Pettegrove (London, 1953), 157–202; and Michael B. Gill, ‘From Cambridge Platonism to Scottish Sentimentalism’, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8 (2010): 13–32.

¹¹⁵ Francis Bacon, ‘Of Vain Glory’, and ‘Of the Discredits of Learning’, in *Lord Bacon’s Essays, or Counsels Moral and Civil* (2 vols., London, 1720), i, 330; ii, 60–61.

injudiciously persecuted or (conversely) imposed by the civil magistrate, Christianity could not have established itself so widely. Julian the Apostate, a ‘generous and mild Emperor’, received his education from both heathen and Christian teachers and, as Shaftesbury noted with heavy irony, ‘very unfortunately’ chose to adhere ‘to the antient Religion of his Country and Forefathers’. All he found in Christianity was an invitation to inhumanity through the subversion of men’s natural affections; it had ‘*so little regard...to true Piety; so little Obedience to our Laws and Constitutions; however humane and tolerating*’.¹¹⁶ On the one hand, this reflected the particular species of Christianity preached by self-interested clerics. Here Shaftesbury’s historical account of the malignant effects of ‘priestcraft’ as a ‘trade’ that had developed in Syria, Egypt, Israel and subsequently Christian Rome was almost identical to the narratives provided by contemporary freethinkers such as Walter Moyle and Charles Blount.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, in Shaftesbury’s account those convinced of the truth of revealed Christianity were to some degree forced to emphasise God’s power over his goodness precisely because the Scriptures, including the Gospels, did not conform to the ‘divine and moral Truths’ established by Socratic philosophy.

In this regard, from its very inception Christianity was of necessity a ‘political’ religion—a point Hobbes had understood only too well. Unlike Grecian polytheism, it won men over by appealing to their base appetites rather than by alluding to higher moral truths. Here Shaftesbury’s interpretation of the relative moral and pedagogical consequences of polytheistic fables and Christian teaching neatly inverted Augustine’s account in the *Confessions*. Homer, argued Augustine, ‘attributed divine

¹¹⁶ *Miscellany II*, 55 n. For broad discussion of the manner in which, from Bayle to Gibbon, the interpretation of Julian offered one means for philosophers to broach the question of the moral implications and consequences of Christianity, see David Womersley, *The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1988), 156–68.

¹¹⁷ A point emphasised by Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, 210–19.

sanction to vicious acts, which had the result that immorality was no longer counted immorality and anyone who so acted would seem to follow the example not of abandoned men but the gods in heaven'.¹¹⁸ For Shaftesbury it was Christian 'Daemonism' which corrupted morality, not pagan mythology. Whereas the Grecian mythological religion encouraged men to discipline their wayward 'Fancys', and was in this respect entirely consistent with the pedagogical dictates of true philosophy, with Christianity the opposite was the case. For Locke, with Christ moral philosophy and divinity were finally united. For Shaftesbury, Christianity was the natural and necessary enemy of true philosophy and theism, which it sought systematically to obliterate. Here Shaftesbury diverged from many contemporary freethinkers, who drew from Locke (however disingenuously) to argue that gospel Christianity was entirely consistent with—and therefore reducible to—the moral insights of true philosophy (right reason).¹¹⁹ Shaftesbury would in no sense have accepted Matthew Tindal's later claim that revealed Christianity was merely the republication of the religion of nature.¹²⁰

This is indicated by Shaftesbury's mockery of *sola scriptura* Protestantism, and his pointed expressions of admiration for the 'political model' of Christianity developed by the Papacy. The Roman Church, Shaftesbury argued, sought to provide a religion that satisfied both 'Enthusiasts' and 'Atheists'. Rome simultaneously emphasised God's goodness and His power. It tolerated the mysticism of mendicant orders that established faith

¹¹⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford, 1992), 1.16.25.

¹¹⁹ On the distinction between the vocabularies of natural law ('right reason') favoured by freethinkers like Toland and Shaftesbury's ethical theory, see Laurent Jaffro, 'Toland and the Moral Teaching of the Gospel', in R. Savage (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 77–89. For an excellent discussion of the difficulties of gauging the sincerity of freethinking claims to sympathise with 'latitudinarian' strands within Restoration Anglican apologetic, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, ii, 76–83.

¹²⁰ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730).

on the (neo-Platonic) basis of '*Contemplation, and Divine Love*'. Yet its own authority and hierarchical ecclesiology relied upon the (Augustinian) claim to mediate between irretrievably sinful men and their jealous and capricious God. The '*ROMAN-Christian, and once Catholick Church*', Shaftesbury noted, 'knew how to make advantage from both the high Speculations of *Philosophy*, and the grossest *Ideas* of vulgar *Ignorance*'.¹²¹ It found much to value in the philosophy of Plato, Sextus and Epicurus but, given the cause it sought to defend, nothing at all in the moral teachings of the Socratics.

Sola scriptura Protestantism, however, claimed to find in the moral teachings of the Scriptures all the evidence required to establish the divine origins of Christianity. Here Shaftesbury again contrasted the Scriptures to the miraculous fables of ancient Greece. The latter were (rightfully) considered to be in some sense sacred on account of their entire conformity with nature and 'all divine and moral Truth'. Only 'Enthusiasts' would make this claim for the Scriptures. They were '*multifarious, voluminous, and of the most difficult Interpretation*' and, more importantly, they contradicted men's natural moral sentiments. Only by abandoning the objective standard of moral goodness and deformity found within one's breast and most fully articulated by the Socratic philosophers might the Scriptures be considered to express 'the justest *Moral Truths*'.

It was for this reason that Shaftesbury argued that 'mere *human Hearts*' would, if uncorrupted, resist 'the Divine Commission'. Only 'Enthusiasts and Fanatics' would ignore this internal guide in favour of such an arbitrary and obnoxious standard of moral excellence. Given that the Scriptures lent themselves to an infinity of interpretations, to follow them was effectively to abandon moral rules and to embrace those notions of the good suggested by one's own '*aerial Fancy, or heated Imagination*', or those presented by self-interested clerics.¹²² The

¹²¹ *Miscellany II*, 57–59.

¹²² *Miscellany V*, 141–45.

disastrous effects of such enthusiasm, and its ability to portray the most unnatural practices and affections as the height of goodness and piety, had been revealed ‘during the Times of the late great Troubles’ (the Civil War).¹²³ Hobbes’s *Leviathan* was an attempt to introduce a ‘general Scepticism’ to wean men away from placing trust in antinomian enthusiasts. Hobbes might be considered as ‘a Martyr for our Deliverance’; a ‘good sociable Man’ himself, he nonetheless painted the most execrable picture of human nature.¹²⁴ In his system of ‘Political Christianity’, Hobbes had attempted to re-establish the balance lost at the Reformation between the Christian God’s goodness and immanence, and his power and transcendence. Responding to the excessive claims for the former, Hobbes had uniformly emphasised the latter.¹²⁵

Shaftesbury remarked that the various Protestant churches now rested their authority on what he termed a ‘more generous Foundation’ than that of the moral excellence of the Scriptures. They had turned once more to the historical testimony of the Fathers and the early Councils.¹²⁶ Shaftesbury made it clear that a ‘nicely critical *Historical Faith*’ was in practice untenable; the weight of evidence spoke strongly against the credibility of such ‘antient *Facts* or *Persons*’.¹²⁷ Be that as it may, for Shaftesbury this movement towards regarding the sacred sources as merely historical documents was an indication of the gradual improvement that had taken place in Protestant nations, and

¹²³ Referred to in this manner by Shaftesbury in his preface to *Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot: in Two Parts* (London, 1698), A8^r.

¹²⁴ *Sensus Communis*, 2.1, 56–57; *Moralists*, 2.3, 153–54; *Moralists*, 2.4, 179–80.

¹²⁵ *Select Sermons*, A4^r; *Sensus Communis*, 2.1, 57

¹²⁶ On this Anglican turn to tradition and the Fathers, see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2009).

¹²⁷ *Miscellany II*, 45–47.

especially in England, ‘the *latest barbarous*, the *last civiliz’d* or *polish’d* People of EUROPE’.¹²⁸ The model of true barbarism was, for Shaftesbury, provided by ‘*Eastern Religionists*’ and the ‘*Mahometan Clergy*’. They established their religion, as misguided *sola scriptura* Protestants had all too recently sought to do in England, solely on ‘*a Book*’ (the Koran) which they claimed was ‘not only perfect, but *inimitable*’. A ‘real Man of Letters, and a just Critick’ would have little trouble exposing this claim as specious. In order to defend such a contention, they had extinguished ‘all true Learning, Science and the politer Arts’ and, most notably, banished ‘the ancient Authors and Languages’. It was the ‘moral science’ to be found in the poetry and philosophy of the ancients that most exposed the Koran— as it did the Christian scriptures and Fathers— as profoundly deficient both in style and (moral) doctrine. A similarly ‘barbaric’ enmity against ancient learning had been indulged by the early Christians. This illustrated that ‘they had no very high Idea of the *holy Scriptures*, when they supposed them such Losers by *a Comparison*’.¹²⁹ Shaftesbury’s underlying point, however, was that the early Fathers had been quite correct in this judgement.

Shaftesbury expressed an optimism that ‘there is a mighty light which spreads over the world’, and with the establishment of peace in Europe ‘it is impossible but letters and knowledge must advance in greater proportion than ever’.¹³⁰ For Shaftesbury, this advance in learning was enshrined in, and dependent upon, the revitalisation of classical moral philosophy. This was causally related to the increasing tendency to look to the Scriptures solely to attest to ‘the *principle Facts* concerning the Authority of Revelation’, rather than as the foundation of all moral truth.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *Miscellany III*, 93.

¹²⁹ *Miscellany V*, 143–44, 147.

¹³⁰ Shaftesbury to Le Clerc, 6 Mar. 1706, in *Life, Letters*, 352–54.

¹³¹ *Miscellany V*, 144–45, 159 n.

That is, it depended upon a turn away from Christian moral theology, which had subordinated and appropriated classical philosophy in order to establish both the reasonableness and moral necessity of revealed Christianity. Men might now once more be freed to look to ‘Nature and the Antients’ for ‘the justest *Moral Truths*’ and ‘the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners’ (the ‘*Vitae Dux*’). The greatest impediment to this second Renaissance, however, was Lockean philosophy.

It was Locke who had claimed the title of philosopher, and professed to defend the sacred causes of virtue and religion from Hobbes’s ‘wit’. Yet, for Shaftesbury, Locke’s primary concern as a ‘zealous *Christian* and Believer’ had been to justify the moral teachings of the Scriptures as ‘not only perfect, but *inimitable*’. His conviction that the Scriptures were ‘exhibitive of the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners’ would have been obliterated had he been but tolerably knowledgeable of the ‘state of philosophy with the ancients’. Had Locke turned to the true (Stoic) sources of classical wisdom, he would necessarily have distinguished clearly between moral philosophy and revealed theology, reason and Christian faith. This was a separation which, for Shaftesbury, represented the *sine qua non* for the advancement of ‘letters’ and (moral) ‘knowledge’. Instead Locke sought, by any means possible, to render them inseparable; and it followed that he ‘made great alterations on these points where, though a *divine* may waver, a *philosopher*, I think, never can’. The ‘great points’ to which Shaftesbury referred were ‘liberty and necessity’, which he regarded as ‘the test and touchstone of a genius in philosophy’.¹³²

Only the ‘two real distinct philosophies’ had provided durable definitions of these. Man’s ‘liberty’ lay in striving to live according to his nature and ‘true *Scope* and *End*’, thereby attaining respite from the continual ‘unease’ caused by his mutinous ‘Fancys’. For the Stoic, this demanded that he

¹³² Shaftesbury to Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, 413–17. On this, see Robert Toole, ‘The Concepts of Freedom and Necessity in Shaftesbury’s Philosophy’, *Studia Leibnitiana*, 9 (1977): 190–211.

acquiesce with the workings of an orderly providential universe, and love mankind. For the Epicurean it required that he abandon all ideas of design and order in the universe, and with it any notion of God or objective moral truth. The ‘credulous Mr. LOCKE’ sought to synthesise elements of the two by combining a hedonic psychology with a defence of morality and religion. For Shaftesbury, he sought to reconcile ‘Atoms’ with ‘God’. It followed that men ‘have scarce heard of what it is to combat with their Appetites and Senses [...] they rather raise and advance them by all possible Means, without Fear of adding Fuel to their inflam’d Desires, in a Heart, which can never burn towards GOD, till those other Fires are extinct’.¹³³ Establishing the origins of universal morality (natural law) in an external law (God’s will as expressed through revelation), Locke signally failed to ‘examine himself and consider his natural passions’. The ‘unnatural’ affection of ‘Misanthropy’, commended by the capricious God of Abraham and Isaac, was instead made ‘natural’ to all men.¹³⁴

To substantiate such a base portrayal of human nature, it was to the depictions of degenerate and barbarous nations provided by ‘Modern Wonder-Writers’ that Locke turned. In so doing, Locke ‘gave up an Argument for the *Deity*, which CICERO (tho’ a profess’d *Sceptick*) would not explode’.¹³⁵ Even Cicero had recognised that a belief in the existence of a providential order and an acknowledgment of man’s natural ‘SENSE of inward *Proportion and Regularity of Affection*’ provided the sole grounds for theistic faith. Yet on Shaftesbury’s interpretation, as Bacon had destroyed the former, so Locke had obliterated the latter.¹³⁶ In looking to Christianity and a future state to explain man’s true end, Locke had exploded what both the Stoics and Epicureans

¹³³ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 19 Nov. 1707, in *Several Letters*, 12.

¹³⁴ *Miscellany IV* [1711], 128–38.

¹³⁵ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, 39–41.

¹³⁶ *Miscellany IV*, 128–38.

had recognised to be the sole argument for theism and universal morality. Locke's moral theology represented, for Shaftesbury, a profoundly misled attempt to establish his 'Daemonism' (Christian belief) on philosophical foundations:

'Tis this must render Revelation probable, and secure that first step to it, the Belief of a Deity and Providence. A Providence must be prov'd from what we see in the Order in things present. We must contend for Order; and in this part chiefly, where Virtue is concern'd. All must not be refer'd to a *Hereafter*. For a disorder'd State, in which all present Care of Things is given up, Vice uncontroul'd, and Virtue neglected, represents the very *Chaos*, and reduces us to the belov'd Atoms, Chance, and Confusion of the Atheists.¹³⁷

§4.

The interpretation of his philosophy, and the reading of his classicism, provided in this article raises serious questions of the now-hegemonic interpretation of Shaftesbury as an apologist for the ideal of a gentlemanly coffee-house sociability suitable to a commercial, urbanised and defiantly 'Whig' modernity. In the modern world no less than the ancient, virtue was confined to those who were able and willing to recognise their true happiness as rational beings as residing in disinterested virtue, and to refer all moral actions to this ultimate end. This was a challenge that for Shaftesbury was only likely to be accepted by those few individuals who, unlike the 'polite' gentlemen by whom they were surrounded, were willing 'to spend two or three hours together, on mere PHILOSOPHY and MORALS'.¹³⁸ Indeed, the 'brutal' exercise in 'self-dissection' which this required—advocated by Shaftesbury in *Soliloquy* and practiced in the *Askēmata*—required a detachment from rather than involvement in society, since 'Company is an extreme Provocative to Fancy; and, like a hot Bed in Gardening, is apt to make our Imaginations

¹³⁷ *Moralists*, 2.3, 156–57.

¹³⁸ *Miscellany V*, 176.

sprout too fast'.¹³⁹

This is not to say that Shaftesbury discouraged active engagement in society and public life, which the true 'Theistic' philosophy demanded. Rather Shaftesbury's point was that such involvement carried grave dangers, and potentially led the individual to lose sight of his true end (loving virtue, and acting on it, for virtue's own sake). After all, the sublimation of one's recalcitrant desires out of a concern for one's reputation in the *beau monde* rendered men but '*cheaply virtuous*' (*I* 1.2.4, 22). Only philosophy, as practiced by the ancients and denigrated by the moderns, could allow for the remodelling and disciplining of the self which ought to be the aim of all who would be virtuous. Only the virtuous, in turn, ought to offer themselves up as public models to be admired.¹⁴⁰

The relative lack of scholarly interest in the content of Shaftesbury's philosophical thought has resulted in a further misunderstanding, encapsulated in Klein's claim that Shaftesbury 'talked little of Jesus and assigned him no role except that of moral exemplar'.¹⁴¹ The fundamental point Shaftesbury developed, one that intentionally struck at the foundations of Locke's moral theory and Christian apologetic, was that Christ could *not* play this role. To erect Christ as the paragon of moral excellence necessarily subverted the appreciation of truth and harmony in moral actions to which both 'Nature and the Antients' led them.

¹³⁹ *Soliloquy*, 1.1, 100.

¹⁴⁰ This might help to explain Shaftesbury's own withdrawal from public life: the *Askēmata* certainly suggests that Shaftesbury found such active involvement in public affairs to imperil his hard-won tranquillity. One of Shaftesbury's most biting critics, Bernard Mandeville, was quick to draw attention to this contradiction between 'his Lordship's' endorsement of a 'civil' and 'social' philosophy, and his notorious aversion to public office and contempt for polite society: 'A Search into the Nature of Society' [1723], in *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F.B. Kaye (2 vols., Oxford, 1924; repr. Indianapolis, 1988), i, 332–33.

¹⁴¹ Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, 158.

To be sure, in his published writings Shaftesbury was studiously elliptical in making this point. As his constant self-reminders to ‘speak modestly’ and ‘avoid the appearance of irony’ in the ‘*Chartae Socraticae*’ suggest, he exercised understandable caution in expressing himself openly. Yet a contextual reading of Shaftesbury’s published works and private papers substantiates this claim clearly enough. Christianity, both as it was delivered in the Scriptures and as it had been propagated in the world, was at odds with the moral and religious philosophy of the Socratic tradition with which he explicitly and repeatedly identified himself.

The primary objective of Shaftesbury’s philosophy was to vindicate a capacious Stoic philosophical tradition that was presented as uncompromisingly hostile to revealed Christianity. Its anti-Christian animus presented a very real challenge for those philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson, who subsequently turned to Shaftesbury in an attempt to re-establish a synthesis between a Stoic moral theory and a moderate and reasonable Christianity.¹⁴² In his highly self-conscious attempt to reformulate philosophy as ‘an agreeable vehicle for the moral potion’, Shaftesbury cast a profoundly contemptuous verdict on the unphilosophical age in which providence had seen fit to place him. Notwithstanding his ‘high *Airs of SCEPTICISM*’, Shaftesbury repeatedly emphasised that he was, like Socrates and Horace, ‘at the bottom, *a real DOGMATIST*’. His writings, as he pointed out in the *Miscellanies*, showed ‘plainly that he has his private *Opinion, Belief, or Faith*, as strong as any *Devotee* or *Religionist* of ’em all’.¹⁴³ His sacred texts, however, were the

¹⁴² Hutcheson’s increasing concern to distinguish his Christianised Stoicism from Shaftesbury’s distinctly problematic interpretation of Stoic ethics remains in need of scholarly attention. For general discussion see Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven, 2014); Simon Grote, ‘Hutcheson’s Divergence from Shaftesbury’, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 4 (2006): 159–72; and James A. Harris, ‘Religion in Hutcheson’s Moral Philosophy’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46 (2008): 205–22.

¹⁴³ *Miscellany III*, 82 (see, too, 114–15).

‘moral works of Xenophon, Horace, the Commentaries and Enchiridion of Epictetus as published by Arrian, and Marcus Antoninus’, not those of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁴⁴

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