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# Sea-Cards for the Impetuous Muse: A Reading of Shaftesbury's Characteristicks

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SEA-CARDS FOR THE IMPETUOUS MUSE:  
A READING OF SHAFTESBURY'S CHARACTERISTICKS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

TRAVIS SEAN COOK

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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To my wife, MICHELLE,  
and to my children,  
ADAM, SAMUEL, and WILLIAM.

*Socrate, tout en réprouvant l'abus que les Sophistes faisaient du droit de douter, était pourtant de leur école. Comme eux, il repoussait l'empire de la tradition, et croyait que les règles de la conduite étaient gravées dans la conscience humaine. Il ne différait d'eux qu'en ce qu'il étudiait cette conscience religieusement et avec le ferme désir d'y trouver l'obligation d'être juste et de faire le bien. Il mettait la vérité au-dessus de la coutume, la justice au-dessus de la loi. Il dégagait la morale de la religion ; avant lui, on ne concevait le devoir que comme un arrêt des anciens dieux; il montra que le principe du devoir est dans l'âme de l'homme. En tout cela, qu'il le voulût ou non, il faisait la guerre aux cultes de la cité. En vain prenait-il soin d'assister à toutes les fêtes et de prendre part aux sacrifices; ses croyances et ses paroles démentaient sa conduite. Il fondait une religion nouvelle, qui était le contraire de la religion de la cité. On l'accusa avec vérité « de ne pas adorer les dieux que l'État adorait ». On le fit périr pour avoir attaqué les coutumes et les croyances des ancêtres, ou, comme on disait, pour avoir corrompu la génération présente. L'impopularité de Socrate et les violentes colères de ses concitoyens s'expliquent, si l'on songe aux habitudes religieuses de cette société athénienne, où il y avait tant de prêtres, et où ils étaient si puissants. Mais la révolution que les Sophistes avaient commencée, et que Socrate avait reprise avec plus de mesure, ne fut pas arrêtée par la mort d'un vieillard. La société grecque s'affranchit de jour en jour davantage de l'empire des vieilles croyances et des vieilles institutions.*

--Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité Antique* V.1

*Hoc tamen solo delectabar in illa exhortatione, quod non illam aut illam sectam, sed ipsam quaecumque esset sapientiam ut diligerem et quaererem et assequerem et tenerem atque amplexarem fortiter.*

--Augustinus, *Confessionum* III 4.8

## PREFACE

### SHAFTESBURY, PHILOSOPHY, AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

While contemporary scholars disagree about the extent to which Locke was a sincere Christian,<sup>1</sup> his former pupil Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, seems to have considered him one. Shaftesbury's papers contain an odd letter addressed "to a friend" describing his reaction to Locke's sentiments about dying.<sup>2</sup> His reaction, it must be said, is scornful.

Shortly before his death in October of 1704, John Locke writes a letter to be delivered to his friend Anthony Collins upon his decease. Locke writes,

may you live long and happy in the enjoyment of health, freedom, content, and all those blessings which providence has bestowed on you, and your virtue entitles you to. I know you loved me living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead. All the use to be made of it is, 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. This is what I can say upon experience; and

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<sup>1</sup> John Dunn, for example, argues that Locke was religious theorist, while Richard Ashcraft presents him as Nonconformist. John Marshall thinks Locke was tempted toward Unitarianism. John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke : An Historical Account of the Argument of the 'Two Treatises of Government'*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics & Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986). John Marshall, *John Locke : Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History*. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Michael Zuckert, on the other hand, denies that Locke was a believer at all. Michael P. Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism : On Lockean Political Philosophy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London, New York: S. Sonnenschein & Company, The Macmillan Company, 1900), 344-47.



what you will find to be true, when you come to make up the account. Adieu; I leave my best wishes with you.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to know what to make of a parting letter. Locke speaks of the transience of this life and the hopes of a life to come. Perhaps he intends to console his friend; perhaps he consoles himself. Shaftesbury himself finds no consolation in Locke's account of beatitude. He writes,

the piece of a letter you sent me savours of the good and Christian. It puts me in mind of one of those dying speeches which come out under the title of a Christian warning piece. I should never have guessed it to have been of a dying philosopher. *Consciousness* is, indeed, a high term, but those who can be conscious of doing no good, but what they are frightened or bribed into, can make but a sorry account of it, as I imagine. Now it being my turn to say something in a dying way (for so, indeed, I am looked upon), I take upon me to send you, as my disciple, this counter charge.<sup>4</sup>

Shaftesbury's letter contrasts the life of the Christian with the life of the philosopher. "Consciousness," is indeed something to be sought, although he has a different understanding of it than does Locke; it is more common to find Shaftesbury speaking of self-knowledge. The remark about consciousness intimates Shaftesbury's own understanding of philosophy. For Shaftesbury, Socrates is the model of excellence, and for Socrates, knowledge is virtue.

Shaftesbury's counter-charge takes Locke point by point. Shaftesbury extends his good wishes but denies he is offering a compliment. Instead he offers the simple acknowledgement of virtue owed to a noble friend: "the use I would have you make of it

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<sup>3</sup> August 23, 1704. "For Anthony Collins, Esq." John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols., *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke* (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1989), 418-19.

<sup>4</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 345.

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 the sake of the good, without any farther regards, nothing being truly pleasing or satisfactory but what is thus acted disinterestedly, generously, and freely." Such a legacy is its own reward, "leaving no terrible account to be made up, nor terrible idea of those who are to account with." For Shaftesbury, belief in an afterlife is a serious impediment to the practice of genuine virtue. According to Shaftesbury, genuine virtue is pursued for its own sake; it is never the result of fear of punishment or the hope for reward. Shaftesbury is not overly attached to life but not, apparently, because he thinks it is tragic:

*life is vain* ('tis true) to those that make it so. And let those cry *vanity*, for they have reason. For my own part, who never could be in love with riches or the world, nor ever made any great matter of life, so as to love it for its own sake, I have therefore no falling out with it, now at last when I can no longer keep it; so without calling names or giving hard words, I can part freely with and give it a good testimony.<sup>5</sup>

He ridicules the notion that practicing virtue is miserable without an afterlife. "Hard, hard duties, if nothing be to follow! Sad conditions at the best, but such as must be complied with for fear of what is worse." Shaftesbury is disappointed that such a view might be attributed to a "dying philosopher" and can only think that Philosophy herself has been slandered:

O Philosophy! Philosophy!—I have heard, indeed, of other philosophy heretofore, but the philosophers of our days are hugely given to wealth and bugbears; and philosophy seems at present to be the study of making virtue burdensome and death uneasy. Much good may do those improvers of misery and diminishers of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 346.

all that is good in life. I am contented that they should cry, *Vanity!* For our part, let us, on the contrary, make the most of life and least of death.<sup>6</sup>

Shaftesbury ends with a confession of sorts. He is unable, it seems, to hold a view contrary to his understanding of virtue:

This is my best advice; and what I leave with you, as that which I have lived and shall die by. Let every one answer for their own experience, and speak of happiness and good as they find it. Thank heaven I can do good and find heaven in it. I know nothing else that is heavenly. And if this disposition fits me not for heaven, I desire never to be fitted for it, nor come into the place. I ask no reward from heaven for that which is reward itself. Let my being be continued or discontinued, as in the main is best. The author of it best knows, and I trust Him with it. To me it is indifferent, and always shall be so.<sup>7</sup>



Shaftesbury's letter to a friend strikes me as more of a personal meditation on the nature of happiness than the words of a philosopher to a disciple. I believe that this brief piece reveals much about the worldview of Shaftesbury. In it we encounter in the strongest language his dismissal of an afterlife and his contempt for Christianity; his fondness for ridicule and soaring rhetoric; his emphasis on virtue and praise of friendship; and his rejection of modern philosophy as debasing (and with modern philosophy, his former tutor, John Locke). Also present, however subtly, is Shaftesbury's understanding of true philosophy. Just what that understand is I hope to make clear through a careful reading of his great work, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 344-45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 1732 ed., 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001).

The project was undertaken in the belief that Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* had yet to be studied adequately. I mean by this that no scholar had yet to read Shaftesbury as he himself recommends. While I hold sympathetic reading to be a sound principle of hermeneutics, at least on first encountering a text, it seems especially wise in the case of Shaftesbury. One must attend to the manner of presentation in the *Characteristicks* because presentation is itself a major theme of the work. The book is not concerned with presentation as an end in itself, however. Shaftesbury's mode of writing is in the service of an ambitious philosophical project. Shaftesbury moves beyond the political circumstances of his day to address more fundamental questions. He leads us from the question of the relationship between religion and politics to questions of psychology and moral anthropology, and ultimately to the question what is man? Such questions were of course *au currant* among the thinkers of his age; Shaftesbury stands out, however, as an early dissenter from the general Enlightenment project as it came to be understood in the eighteenth century. In brief, my claim is that scholars have failed to understand Shaftesbury as he understood himself, that is, as a classical political philosopher in the Socratic tradition. A defense of this claim, I hope, is sustained in the following chapters.

This work makes the following arguments. Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* marks an important dissent from the general trend of early modern philosophy. The book undertakes nothing less than the restoration of the classical understanding of philosophy in contradistinction to the understanding presented by the writings of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and other modern thinkers. Shaftesbury's primary concern seems to be the

preservation of the distinctly human things as understood by the ancients. This concern is behind his defense of the noble or the beautiful, which can be seen most conspicuously in his account of moral virtue and perhaps more subtly in his account of art and in his cosmological hymns to nature. In pursuit of this end, Shaftesbury reintroduces the classical notion of the soul by reasserting the distinction between reason and the passions, which had been challenged by the moral theories of Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke.

Essential to his project is a critique of Christianity. Shaftesbury shares the critique of Christianity offered by Hobbes and Locke but he departs their company by his response. As Shaftesbury presents the matter, modern philosophy had declared war on Christianity in the name of humanity, which it believed had been degraded morally, politically, and philosophically by the reign of Christendom. According to Shaftesbury, modern philosophy introduces a sweeping method of radical skepticism in order to combat Christianity. Yet according to Shaftesbury, this radical skepticism turns out to be at least as corrosive to natural human life as the worldview it hopes to undermine. Shaftesbury proposes as an alternative the restoration of the classical critique of religion. The classical critique made possible the coexistence of philosophy and religion and was accompanied by the political toleration of a variety of religious practices. The reassertion of the classical view is accompanied by an attempt to save a notion of "enthusiasm," which had come under attack by the Enlightenment as coextensive with zealous and sectarian Christianity. Shaftesbury tries to distinguish a noble form of enthusiasm, which according to his account is the source of all higher human aspirations, including Socratic philosophy. As a companion to his critique of Christianity, Shaftesbury advances an attack on modern

philosophy's political teaching as presented by Hobbes and Locke. He tries to restore the classical view by showing that man is social by nature.

In order to accomplish this project, Shaftesbury attempts to revive the Socratic method of dialogue in the form of what he calls "soliloquy." This method is accompanied by the use of raillery, which I believe is Shaftesbury's way of presenting Socratic irony. For Shaftesbury, the aim of philosophy is self-knowledge, understood from the point of view of the individual soul as well as the point of view of human nature. Both of these presuppose a defense of common sense, which according to the Socratic philosophy advanced by Shaftesbury, is the only possible beginning place for philosophical inquiry.

Finally, the dissertation suggests that Shaftesbury's reputation as a theistic proto-romantic is misguided. The culmination of the *Characteristicks*, a dialogue entitled *The Moralists*, seems to many scholars to advance a teleological cosmology. Scholars have largely assumed that the philosophical hero of this dialogue is one Theocles; they have also assumed that Theocles is the spokesman for Shaftesbury's own opinions. This interpretation, however, ignores the importance of the dialogue form as presented by Shaftesbury under the method of "soliloquy." I believe that Shaftesbury's opinions only emerge by reading *The Moralists* precisely as a dialogue as opposed to a series of speeches presented in the garb preferred by the "polite" audience of his day. My reading of the dialogue consequently attends to its well-planned structure while also placing it within the interpretive framework of the *Characteristicks* as a whole.

I conclude that Shaftesbury's understanding of philosophy is ultimately zetetic regarding metaphysical questions. This is to say that Shaftesbury himself provides the tools for raising questions about each of the hypotheses presented by the characters as the most probable account of the nature of the *cosmos*. This suggests that Philocles rather than Theocles is the true hero of the dialogue insofar as the reader is left with more questions than answers. The aim of this moderate form of skepticism is Socratic as well; it is an attempt to foster appreciation for the knowledge of ignorance. It is, therefore, unclear whether Shaftesbury believes the world is orderly and reflective of an organizing mind or merely chaotic. For Shaftesbury, the questions and their plausible answers--what he calls "hypotheses"--remain more apparent than any evidence for preferring one claim over another.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAN  
OF SHAFTESBURY'S *CHARACTERISTICKS*

**A Neglected Work**

There is little question as to the historical importance of the *Characteristicks*. As Stanley Grean observed forty years ago, "if the influence of Locke can be gauged by the nineteen editions that his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* went through in the eighteenth century, the somewhat less but still great influence of Shaftesbury can be seen in the thirteen editions of his *Characteristics* between 1711 and 1790."<sup>1</sup>

While this measure is impressive in itself, it can be added that the *Characteristicks* was read (and praised or attacked) by many of the leading minds of the eighteenth century. A partial list would include Bernard Mandeville,<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Swift,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics; a Study in Enthusiasm* ([Athens]: Ohio University Press, 1967), ix.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Bernard Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (London: T. Jauncy & J. Roberts, 1700), p. 239, where Shaftesbury is quoted at length and favorably; and unfavorably in *The Fable of the Bees, or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 1924, edited by F.B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), *Remark T.*, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Swift denies having written or even read Shaftesbury's *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* in his "An Apology" for *Tale of the Tub*; but as A.O. Aldridge has pointed out, there is considerable reason to doubt Swift's candor here. See Alfred Owen Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia), New Series 41, no. 2 (1951), pp. 371-372.

Francis Hutcheson,<sup>4</sup> George Berkeley,<sup>5</sup> and David Hume;<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bayle,<sup>7</sup> Jean Le Clerc,<sup>8</sup> Denis Diderot,<sup>9</sup> and Rousseau;<sup>10</sup> Wieland,<sup>11</sup> Lessing,<sup>12</sup> Mendelssohn,<sup>13</sup> Herder,<sup>14</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> Hutcheson's first book is a defense of Shaftesbury. See, for example *An Inquiry Into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue: In Two Treatises*, edited by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), "Preface," pp. 7 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Berkeley's dialogue "Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher" contains an extended response to Shaftesbury. George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley*, 1901, *Volume II: Philosophical Works, 1732-33*, edited by A.C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

<sup>6</sup> Hume mentions Shaftesbury in numerous places, including the *Enquiry concerning Principles of Morals*, and the *Essays*.

<sup>7</sup> Bayle was a frequent correspondent of Shaftesbury's and apparently a good friend. D. B. Schlegel, *Shaftesbury and the French Deists* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Le Clerc reviewed *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* in 1709 and approved of the *An Inquiry concerning Morals*; Thomas Fowler, *Shaftesbury and Hutcheson* (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1883), pp. 135 ff.

<sup>9</sup> In a peculiar passage, Diderot writes that:

there are very few errors in Locke, and too few truths in milord Shaftesbury: the former is only a man of vast intellect, penetrating and exact, while the latter is a genius of the first order. Locke has seen; Shaftesbury has created, constructed, and edified. To Locke we owe some great truths coldly preserved, methodically developed, and dryly presented; and to Shaftesbury, some brilliant schemes often poorly grounded, though full of sublime truths. Even in his moments of error he pleases and persuades by the charm of his eloquence.

"Génie," (Philosophie & Littér.), *L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*. Vol. VII, p. 583; Diderot, Denis, *Oeuvres Esthétiques*. Paris, Editions Garnier freres [c1965].

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *Émile; Éducation, Morale, Botanique, Lettres Morales*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. IV, p. 1091.

<sup>11</sup> See Charles Elson, *Wieland and Shaftesbury* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913).

<sup>12</sup> I think a case could be made for the influence of Shaftesbury's *Second Characters* on Lessing's Laocoön. See *Laokoön [sic.]: Lessing, Herder, Goethe*, 1910, edited by William Guild Howard (New York: Henry Holt and Company), p. lxxviii footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Mendelssohn was first loaned Shaftesbury's works by Lessing. He later undertook a project to translate Shaftesbury into German. Alexander Altman, *Moses Mendelssohn, A Biographical Study*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), p. 109. See also David Dowdey's review of *Moses Mendelssohn und die Aufklärungsaesthetik im 18. Jahrhundert* by Klaus-Werner Segreff in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 606-608.

Kant,<sup>15</sup> the neo-classical poets James Thomson and Mark Aikenside,<sup>16</sup> Alexander Pope,<sup>17</sup> and the novelist Henry Fielding.<sup>18</sup> The catalogue alone of contemporary Anglican Divines, who praised or attacked (and perhaps even read) Shaftesbury, is itself quite extensive.<sup>19</sup>

The philosophical importance of the *Characteristicks* can be seen in the ideas taken up by the aforementioned thinkers, but I will single out remarks by Montesquieu and Leibniz for brief consideration. Montesquieu calls Shaftesbury one of the four great poets of the West, along with Plato, Montaigne, and Malebranche.<sup>20</sup> While this statement

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<sup>14</sup> “But why do you mention only two people and forget a third name, my dear philosopher, one whose human wisdom and social temper are just as great? The friend of our old Leibniz, who owes so much to him and whom he loved to read – the philosophical scoffer whose laughter contains more truth than do other people’s coughs and spittle – in short, Lord *Shaftesburi* [*sic.*].” Letter to Kant from Johann Gottfried Herder, November 1768. 15 [41] (39). (Incidentally, Rousseau spells it *Shaftesburi* too.)

<sup>15</sup> “For the time being, I shall lecture on *universal practical philosophy* and the *doctrine of virtue*. . . The attempts of *Shaftesbury*, Hutcheson and Hume, although incomplete and defective, have nonetheless penetrated furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of all morality.” Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, edited and translated by David Waldorf, Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 298.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Harrison Marsh, *Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> If perhaps indirectly through Bolingbroke, who is thought by some to have failed in recognizing his own debt to Shaftesbury. See Cecil A. Moore, *Backgrounds of English Literature, 1700-1760* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1953), pp. 32 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Consider the famous conversation between the Rev. Mr. Thwakum and “the philosopher” Mr. Square in *Tom Jones*, book 3 chapter 2:

Square said, "It was a mere abuse of words to call those things evils, in which there was no moral unfitness: that pain, which was the worst consequence of such accidents, was the most contemptible thing in the world"; with more of the like sentences, extracted out of the second book of Tully's Tusculan questions, and from the great Lord Shaftesbury.

<sup>19</sup> Aldridge 1951, pp. 371 ff.

<sup>20</sup> "Platon fait partie des quatre grands « poètes » aux côtés de Montaigne, Malebranche et Shaftesbury." Charles de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, *Oeuvres Complètes, Publiées Sous La Direction De Andre Masson*, ed. Andre Masson, 3 vols. (Paris :: Nagel, 1950), 2.490, n° 1092

would require careful attention (instantly one wonders about Homer, Vergil, Dante, and a couple others) it is nevertheless striking. Certainly the company of Plato is one that Shaftesbury himself would be proud to own (although given Shaftesbury's alleged disapproval of the modern essay, the relationship to Montaigne might be more troubling to him). In placing him in this company, I believe that Montesquieu is calling attention to the inseparability of Shaftesbury's thought and his mode of presentation. For Shaftesbury, poetry and philosophy are ultimately inseparable.

The praise by Leibniz is easier to grasp and can be found in an extended review of Shaftesbury's work written at the request of Pierre Coste. Leibniz writes of the fifth part of the *Characteristicks*, entitled *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody*, that "it lacks almost nothing but my pre-established harmony, my elimination of death, and my reduction of matter or of plurality to unities or simple substances. I had expected merely to find a philosophy like Mr. Locke's but was led beyond Plato and Descartes. If I had seen this work before my *Theodicy* was published, I should have profited as I ought and should have borrowed its great passages."<sup>21</sup> Shaftesbury indeed looks back to Plato (and Montaigne) but also forward to Leibniz, Rousseau, Hume, and other dissenters from the more radical aspects of the Enlightenment project. His interest in authorship and modes of writing may even be said to anticipate certain "postmodern" trends as well.<sup>22</sup> As we

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<sup>21</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Remarks on the Three Volumes Entitled *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* [1712: G., III, 423-31]," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters, Vol. II*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 1022-32.

<sup>22</sup> I have a number of things in mind, but for one example consider Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, which explicitly mentions Shaftesbury as a predecessor. *Truth and Method*. 1975. tr. Joel Weisenheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2d ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 10-39.

shall see, Shaftesbury intends to lead his reader beyond Descartes, and insofar as he must encounter the claims of revelation as presented in the Bible, perhaps beyond Plato as well.<sup>23</sup>

Yet despite the extraordinary enthusiasm which surrounded Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century saw a steep decline in his direct influence. By 1902, Sir Leslie Stephen could write that "the Lord Shaftesbury is one of the writers whose reputation is scarcely commensurate with the influence which he once exerted."<sup>24</sup> Insofar as he is remembered by philosophers, Shaftesbury is known primarily as the progenitor of the "moral sense" doctrine of ethics, as an early expositor whose work has been developed and improved over time. According to the influential work of Henry Sidgwick, for example, Shaftesbury initiated an important turn in ethics "from presenting the principle of social duty as an abstract reason" to the attempt to demonstrate a natural harmony between social affections and man's "reflective self-regard."<sup>25</sup> Sidgwick rightly worries that a "sense" doctrine of morality quickly yields to the view that morality is a matter of individual taste; that the "fundamental questions 'What is right' and 'Why'" drop too far into the background; and that the mere existence

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<sup>23</sup> It is a real question in my mind whether Shaftesbury distinguishes between myth as understood by Plato and revelation as it comes to light in the Bible. I hope to have something useful to say about this in Chapter two.

<sup>24</sup> Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 2. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, Third Ed. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1896), p. 184.

of a moral sentiment is insufficient reason to obey it.<sup>26</sup> According to the analytic tradition, philosophy has continued to wrestle with this last concern especially by trying to articulate a thesis of “internalism” adequate to the task of making men into authentic moral agents.<sup>27</sup> Alternative interpretations of Shaftesbury trace his thought to his philosophic predecessors, be they the Stoics,<sup>28</sup> neo-Platonists,<sup>29</sup> or Cambridge Platonists.<sup>30</sup> While none of these views is wholly wrong, I hope to show that they are inadequate.

Not surprisingly, the field of literary criticism has been more attentive to the conspicuous role style plays in the *Characteristicks*.<sup>31</sup> Yet here the scholarship, while very good, is insufficiently attentive to the main philosophic themes of the *Characteristicks*. So too with the field of the history of aesthetics.

Historians of thought have also addressed Shaftesbury, but these scholars have neglected the substance of his concerns by emphasizing the cultural or political

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<sup>26</sup> Sidgwick 1896, p 233.

<sup>27</sup> See Henry Sidgwick, *The Method of Ethics*, 1874, Sixth (London, New York: Macmillan and Company, 1901), chapter 9. For a more recent account, see Stephen L. Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal "Ought," 1640-1740* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Ester A. Tiffany, "Shaftesbury as Stoic," *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America* 37 (1923): 642-84.

<sup>29</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, translated by James P. Pettigrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953).

<sup>30</sup> John A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth, An Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1951).

<sup>31</sup> For examples see Charles Lamb's "The Genteel Style," in *The Works of Charles Lamb; in Two Volumes*, edited by Sir Thomas Noon Talford (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875); William E. Alderman, "The Style of Shaftesbury," *Modern Language Notes* 38, no. 4 (Apr. 1923): 209-15; R. L. Brett, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury; a Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (London, New York, Hutchinson's University Library [1951]); Robert Harrison Marsh, *Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).



environment in which he wrote. While many of these works are indeed excellent,<sup>32</sup> none has yet to construe Shaftesbury's project accurately in its philosophic context. The recent and very subtle study by Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, takes Shaftesbury to have a serious project, but one too immediately Whiggish to do justice to the concerns of the *Characteristicks*. Once again, the historical scholarship is good and correct as far as it goes. Still it is insufficient.

Most importantly, perhaps, the decline of his influence might be attributed to success: on the one hand, to the successful assimilation of many of his ideas by his progeny; and on the other, the apparent success of the Enlightenment project he resisted. There is some question as to whether the philosophic approach of Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Locke, and later, of Rousseau and Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger, have provided an adequate reply to the challenge presented to philosophy by revelation. Modern philosophy might have been naïve in its belief that it could refute the claims of revelation through its critique of miracles (Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Kant) and through the production of charitable works (stable political life, economic prosperity, and the conquest of nature through technology). The apparently antique philosophy of Shaftesbury may well present an alternative to this modern approach; at the very least, it presents an attractive alternative perspective from which one might examine the successes and failures of modern philosophy. Shaftesbury's philosophy seeks a solution

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<sup>32</sup> The work of Isabel Rivers, which considers his influence on the Scottish Enlightenment, is especially impressive. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

to the challenges which political life and religion present philosophy that does not alienate human beings from nature. In his view, both Christianity and modern philosophy do this, and by doing this, present new obstacles to the real task of philosophy, self-knowledge.

What follows in this chapter is a sketch of the *Characteristicks*. I first explore the way in which Shaftesbury hoped he would be read. The treatment is necessarily brief but, I hope, sufficient to prepare the way for the sustained project of the dissertation. Next, I offer an overview of each of the compositions which make up the *Characteristicks*. This overview points us toward what I take to be the central concern of his work, namely, the relationship among religion, politics, and philosophy. I will conclude with an overview of the remainder of the dissertation.



### **Reading Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks***

At first glance, Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.*<sup>33</sup> might seem to be nothing more than a collection of occasional pieces. It is well known, for example, that of the six treatises which make up the *Characteristicks*, the first five appeared separately, at different times, and in various forms. Indeed, each piece seems to confess as much since they bear their original publication dates on separate title

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<sup>33</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*. There are two other recent scholarly editions of the *Characteristicks*. The new Cambridge Text edition has valuable notes and a very helpful general introduction by Lawrence Klein. I prefer the Liberty Fund edition because it restores the structure and illustrations designed by Shaftesbury himself. Oxford University Press recently released an edition as well. Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip J. Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; published in the United States by Oxford University Press, 1999).

pages. Yet Shaftesbury claims in the sixth treatise of the *Characteristicks* that the pieces were designed to fit together as a unified whole. This sixth treatise, entitled *Miscellaneous Reflections on the preceding Treatises, and other Critical Subjects*, takes the form of five essays or "miscellanies," with one miscellany devoted to each of the previous five treatises. As the author of the *Miscellaneous Reflections*, Shaftesbury speaks of the author of the other treatises in the third person while he keeps an ironic distance from the work as a whole. In order to distinguish between the authorial voices of these works, I will refer to the author of the *Miscellaneous Reflections* as "the Critic," while calling Shaftesbury the author of the work as a whole.<sup>34</sup> As we shall soon see, the Critic offers an interpretation of the first five treatises, and claims to discover a complicated rhetorical strategy at work in Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*.

We begin with a few observations about the architectural features of the text. Shaftesbury placed footnotes throughout the *Characteristicks* and also prepared a peculiar index for his book. While the footnotes sometimes serve the conventional scholarly purpose of citing other works, they frequently direct the reader's attention to other places in the *Characteristicks* itself. This complex lattice of footnotes has generally been ignored or dismissed by scholars of Shaftesbury as an afterthought on his part. For example, Robert B. Voitle, author of a thorough biography of Shaftesbury, remarks that the author developed "a huge index and an elaborate system of cross-references."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Critic does not himself call Shaftesbury the author of the *Characteristicks*, but refers to him only as "our author."

<sup>35</sup> Robert Voitle, "Shaftesbury's Moral Sense," *Studies in Philology* 52, no. 1 (1955): 18.

Nevertheless, Voitle claims that "a study of Shaftesbury's methods of indexing and footnoting reveals that a principal object of these devices in *Characteristics* is to give heterogeneous material a semblance of unity. For Shaftesbury, even the most tenuous of relationships is sufficient excuse for a cross-reference in the footnotes or a joint entry in the index."<sup>36</sup>

Yet contrary to Voitle, these cross-references indicate, if not a unified plan, a certain consistency of themes addressed by Shaftesbury. The footnotes are also replete with references to classical authors, particularly to the Roman satirists and to various stoics. Careful attention to the structure and content of the footnotes will assist us in uncovering what I will argue is in fact a consistent and unified plan for the *Characteristicks*.

The book as originally published was organized into three volumes. Volume I contains treatises one, two, and three; volume II contains treatises four and five; volume III contains treatise six. We will see that the first volume serves as a preparation for reading the second volume, just as the last volume, with its *Miscellaneous Reflections*, serves as a commentary on the first two volumes. This seems to suggest that the heart of the *Characteristicks* is volume II; but let us leave this question aside for now. Here, then, is a table of contents for the *Characteristicks* as originally published:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. This opinion is shared by more recent scholars as well. Lawrence E. Klein somewhat more generously remarks that "*Characteristicks* was an expedient reassembling of previously published writings with a unifying gloss." Lawrence Eliot Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness : Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111.

**Volume I:**

- Treatise 1) *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord Sommers*  
 Treatise 2) *Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor*  
 Treatise 3) *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*

**Volume II:**

- Treatise 4) *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*  
 Treatise 5) *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody*

**Volume III:**

- Treatise 6) *Miscellaneous Reflections on the Preceding Treatises, etc.*

We can see from the table of contents the remarkable variety of literary forms which the *Characteristicks* employs: a letter, an essay, something Shaftesbury calls a soliloquy, a treatise proper, a dialogue Shaftesbury calls a rhapsody, and the aforementioned miscellany or common essay. This variety invariably complicates any attempt to offer an account of the work as a unified whole. And yet this is exactly what Shaftesbury suggests we should do in the Preface to the book, where he calls this collection "unified Tracts."<sup>37</sup>

The Critic who writes the *Miscellaneous Reflections* seems to agree with this judgment. This opinion emerges gradually through the five chapters of the sixth treatise as the Critic discusses a large variety of subjects. The Critic begins his reflections as a whole by discussing the character of the miscellany as a literary form; we will see that this character will stand in stark contrast to the method of the *Characteristicks* as the Critic explains it. We first learn that the miscellany is a recently invented form of

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<sup>37</sup> "Preface," Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1.xxi.

writing, and, according to the Critic, a happy one "for the harvest of Wit."<sup>38</sup> In the past, "*Regularity and Order* were thought essential in a Treatise." Strict rules of composition once imposed "*a Yoke*" which modern writers have thrown off. Literary efforts now come into the world without "the invidious Distinctions of *Bastardy and Legitimacy*," and consequently, a work is received without much "examination of *the Kind*, or censure of *the Form*." As a result of the introduction of the form of miscellany, which is in effect a loosening of the strict rules of composition observed in the past, more people have proven willing to try their hand at literary efforts. According to the old rules of composition, a work was esteemed graceful and beautiful when it betrayed a unified "Plan of Workmanship." The miscellany, on the other hand, has made a virtue of the want of a clear plan; it is more likely to celebrate the "*Odd and Pretty* over the *Graceful and Beautiful*."<sup>39</sup> In the old manner, the unity of the work was effected by an intimate connection between form and content. What is lost, according to the Critic, by abandoning the painful constraint of "Justness and Accuracy of Thought" is compensated by "the agreeable and more easy Commerce of *Gallantry* and modern *Wit*." The Critic attributes this profitable trade to the turning of the miscellany writer from models of form offered in nature to some other source of inspiration. He writes that "where there is nothing like *Nature*, there is no room for the troublesome part of *Thought* or *Contemplation*. . . A *Coherence*, a *Design*, a *Meaning*, is against their purpose, and

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<sup>38</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany I*, 3.4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.6.

destroys the very Spirit and Genius of their Workmanship."<sup>40</sup> It should be clear already that the Critic is not without an ironic attitude about his own activity. One of the many things to be considered eventually is the ambiguous relationship borne by the Critic toward the miscellany as a literary form. However this may be, the Critic wholeheartedly embraces the "Title of a Miscellaneous *Writer*" throughout the *Miscellaneous Reflections*.<sup>41</sup> We, on the other hand, will have to attend to the particular form of each treatise presented by Shaftesbury.

The Critic tells us in the first "Miscellany" that "my chief Intention in the following Sheets is to descant cursorily upon some late Pieces of a *British* Author." He intends to take full advantage of the "miscellaneous Taste" of his age. "According to this Method," he writes, "whilst I serve as Critick or Interpreter to this new Writer, I may the better correct his Flegm, and give him more of the fashionable Air and Manner of the World; especially in what relates to the Subject and Manner of his two last Pieces, which are contain'd in his second Volume."<sup>42</sup> This said, he will not feel confined by the content of these treatises, but follow ideas as he sees fit (hence the full title of this treatise, *Miscellaneous Reflections on the preceding Treatises, and other Critical Subjects*). The Critic has reserved for himself the right "to use Order or lay it aside."<sup>43</sup> This is not, however, the procedure followed by Shaftesbury in the *Characteristicks* as a whole. Our

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.82.

critic tells us in his "Miscellany III," which among other things offers an interpretation of the *Soliloquy*, that while the first two treatises of the *Characteristicks* are very skeptical in tone, when examined with care they reveal Shaftesbury as a "real *Dogmatist*, as strong as any *Devotee* or *Religionist* of 'em all."<sup>44</sup> In other words, although Shaftesbury's first two treatises are largely critical or skeptical of other people's "schemes," he nevertheless "holds a certain Plan or System peculiar to him-self, or such at least, in which he has at present but few Companions or Followers."<sup>45</sup> The Critic compares Shaftesbury to an ambitious architect, "who being call'd perhaps to prop a Roof, redress a leaning Wall, or add to some particular apartment, is not contented with this small Specimen of his Mastership: but pretending to demonstrate the Unserviceableness and Inconvenience of the *old* Fabrick, forms the Design of a *new* Building, and longs to shew his Skill in the principal Parts of Architecture and Mechanicks."<sup>46</sup> It is far easier to tear down an old structure than it is to build a new one; and Shaftesbury has thus far "kept up his *sapping* Method and *unravelling* Humour," while offering only "very slender hints" of his "pretence to a real architect-capacity." The Critic tells us in a footnote where to look for these hints, and we will look for them presently.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 3.82-83. [This image invites comparison to and eventual contrast with Descartes' project as explained in *Discours*, e.g., "Ainsi voit-on que les bâtiments qu'un seul architecte a entrepris et achevés ont coutume d'être plus beaux et mieux ordonnés que ceux que plusieurs ont tâché de raccommoder, en faisant servir de vieilles murailles qui avoient été bâties à d'autres fins."]



According to the Critic, the third treatise, the *Soliloquy*, bears the same "sceptical mein [*sic*]" as the first two, but whispers to anyone who is attentive of a larger, positive project contained in the *Characteristicks*. "What he [that is, our Author] offers by way of *Project* or *Hypothesis* is very faint, hardly spoken aloud; but mutter'd to himself in a kind of . . . feign'd Soliloquy."<sup>47</sup> A few pages later the Critic tells us that, more than hints now, Shaftesbury's "philosophy itself. . . lies concealed in this treatise."<sup>48</sup> The *Soliloquy* contains an introduction to Shaftesbury's philosophy proper, but what he reveals of his "*Form and Method*" is presented with the "random *Miscellaneous Air*" and may be mistaken for mere raillery. One might remark in passing that the *Soliloquy* is itself the central treatise of the five attributed by the Critic to our Author. It certainly will be central in teaching us how to bring the positive project of Shaftesbury to light as it indeed contains an introduction to Shaftesbury's manner of philosophizing.

The Critic claims that Shaftesbury comes out of hiding for *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*, the fourth treatise of the *Characteristicks*. There, "he discovers himself openly, as a plain *Dogmatist*, a *Formalist*, and *Man of Method*; with his Hypotheses tack'd to him, and his Opinions so close-sticking, as wou'd force one to call to mind the Figure of some precise and strait-lac'd Professor in a University."<sup>49</sup> We must ask ourselves why Shaftesbury would bother to conceal his philosophy in the first three treatises, only to reveal it outright in the fourth. We are also free to wonder whether the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3.83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3.84.

Critic is himself fully candid; he may put things too simply here. We should also note that the Critic has not done all the work for us; we still must work to discover just what this philosophy of Shaftesbury is. Part of this work will be deciding for ourselves what to make of the alleged "plain dogmatism" of the *Inquiry*. We will be in a better position to speculate when we have a better understanding of the plan of the *Characteristicks* as a whole.

The Critic reveals more of this plan in the beginning of "Miscellany IV," which is itself devoted to the *Inquiry*. Here the Critic tells us that although the five treatises first appeared separately and at different times, they were designed to fit together as a whole. He writes that "it will appear therefore in this *Joint-Edition* of our Author's *Five Treatises*, that the *Three* former are preparatory to the *Fourth*, on which we are now enter'd; and the *Fifth* (with which he concludes) a kind of *Apology* for this reviv'd Treatise concerning *Virtue* and *Religion*."<sup>50</sup> According to the Critic, the division of the *Characteristicks* into three volumes is more than a publisher's convenience. Each volume serves its purpose in the design of the whole work: the first as an introduction to the second, and the third as an interpretation of the first two. The first and third volumes point to the central importance of the second volume, containing *An Inquiry* and *The Moralists*. What sort of preparation does one need to read the *Inquiry*? And why does it need an apology in the form of *The Moralists*? In what way are these treatises central to Shaftesbury's plan? In short, why does Shaftesbury present his philosophy in such a

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<sup>50</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

complicated manner? An answer to this question will emerge only from a careful reading of the *Characteristicks*, with the assistance of the Critic, of course, but also with the good sense to investigate for ourselves. The remainder of this study will attempt to do precisely this. In order to see the continuous thread that we will follow throughout the course of our discussion, however, we need to look briefly at the treatises of "our Author" as they present themselves.



The first treatise of the *Characteristicks* is entitled *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm, to My Lord Sommers*. It is, as we have seen, the first of three treatises contained in Volume I. First published in 1708, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* had as its occasion the appearance in England of a controversial sect of French Huguenots who claimed to have personal revelations through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>51</sup> The *Letter* is only marginally concerned with this sect, however, taking as its real goal the distinction between a true and false species of enthusiasm. Generally used as a pejorative by early Enlightenment philosophers, enthusiasm was widely regarded as a presumption to revelation born only by "laying by reason" and out of the psychological illness of "melancholy."<sup>52</sup> While he is not the first to identify a positive species of enthusiasm,<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For an account, see Hillel Schwartz. *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Hillel Schwartz. *Knives, Fools, Madmen, and That Subtile Effluvium: A Study of the Opposition to the French Prophets in England, 1706-1710*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, II vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 430.. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Faulkner, Thomas, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the essay "*Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*,"

Shaftesbury undertakes a radical transformation of the concept and places it at the heart of his philosophy. In the words of the Critic, "so far is [our Author] from degrading *Enthusiasm*, or disclaiming it in himself; that he looks on this Passion, simply consider'd, as the most *natural* and its Object as the *justest* in the World. Even VIRTUE it-self he takes to be no other than a noble *Enthusiasm* justly directed, and regulated by that high Standard which he supposes in the Nature of Things."<sup>54</sup> Shaftesbury thinks that it is essential to preserve the part of the soul where the passion called enthusiasm dwells. This is essential because of enthusiasm's connection to all the higher aspirations of human beings. In short, I believe that enthusiasm occupies for Shaftesbury the central place held by *eros* in Platonic philosophy. It is this passion which, when corrected by reason, raises men above themselves to the contemplation of the apparent "Numbers, Harmony, Proportion, and Beauty," found naturally in the cosmos.<sup>55</sup> So important to Shaftesbury is enthusiasm rightly understood that he identifies it with the sense of wonder which is the beginning of genuine philosophic inquiry.<sup>56</sup>

*A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* caused considerable controversy in England, especially among Anglican divines, who took the piece to be an attack upon Christianity. While later scholars have often been more likely to allow Shaftesbury the name of Christian (albeit of the latitudinarian variety) there is good reason to think that

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<sup>54</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.22.

<sup>55</sup> *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, 2.43. *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.20.

<sup>56</sup> *The Moralists; a Philosophical Rhapsody*, 2.124 in footnotes. The reference is to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 982b 10 ff.

Shaftesbury's contemporaries were more perspicacious in this regard.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, a thoughtful reading of the second treatise of the *Characteristicks* will reveal that Shaftesbury largely shares the Enlightenment critique of the political effects of Christianity found in such thinkers as Hobbes and Locke.

*Sensus Communis* is in part a defense of the "Freedom of Wit and Humor," that is, raillery or satire, especially as it is applied to religion. Shaftesbury is also wary, however, of what he takes to be an overreaction by modern philosophy to the political influence of Christianity. Throughout the second treatise, and indeed throughout the *Characteristicks* as a whole, Shaftesbury is at pains to teach his reader moderation, which, like Aristotle, he presents as a mean between extremes. Shaftesbury undertakes in *Sensus Communis* a defense of common sense not only from what he identifies as the false enthusiasms of certain understandings of Christianity, but also from the radical skepticism of modern philosophy. He recommends a return to an earlier mode of philosophy, which he thinks is more than adequate for a response to religious fanaticism and avoids what he presents as the vices of modern philosophy, radical skepticism and reductionism of the human soul to simplistic and low passions.

It is the task of *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* to offer an alternative to this reductionism. This third and final treatise in Volume I undertakes nothing less than the

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<sup>57</sup> A. O. Aldridge writes, e.g., that Shaftesbury "cannot be justly accused of affronting either Christ or Christianity." Alfred Owen Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 41, no. 2 (1951): 318. See also S. G. Hefelbower, *The Relation of John Locke to English Deism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), p. 174-176. For an early concern about Shaftesbury's piety, however, see George Berkeley's *Alciphron*, III, *The Works of George Berkeley*, volume 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871) and John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics of the Earl of Shaftesbury* (Hildesheim, New York, G. Olms, 1969, 1751).

revival of the distinction between reason and the passions which Shaftesbury believes to have been collapsed by modern philosophy. There he recommends the establishment of an "*Inspector or Auditor*" to take account of the opinions and fancies of the soul. Shaftesbury rejects the new understanding of the passions introduced by Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke, in favor of this older understanding which he identifies with the philosophy of Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Cicero. As Shaftesbury once explained to his former tutor Locke, "what I count true learning, and all we can profit by, is to know ourselves." Toward this end, "there is no labour, no study, no learning that I would not undertake."<sup>58</sup> It begins to emerge in *Soliloquy* that the *Characteristicks* was written in large part to reawaken the notion that true learning and the genuine end of philosophy is self-knowledge in the classical sense.

As we have already seen, the three treatises of Volume I are intended to be preparatory to the fourth, that is, *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*. It is this treatise that is best known to contemporary academic philosophers, probably because it is more recognizable to them as philosophy rather than literature. The *Inquiry* is clearly presented in the form of a "proper" philosophic treatise. Yet it's difficult to know exactly what to make of this supposedly straightforward treatise in light of the Critic's remarks that Shaftesbury discloses himself as a "plain dogmatist" in it.<sup>59</sup> This is presumably not meant as praise, nor is the description of the treatise as "*dry PHILOSOPHY*" and the

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<sup>58</sup> John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, vol. 5 (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1976), 5.150.

<sup>59</sup> Although this remark might help explain its contemporary appeal!

manner as "grave" and "rigid." The Critic goes so far as to invite the "more humorous Reader" to skip a chapter or two of the Miscellany as he proceeds, promising to return to more entertaining topics soon enough!

In fact, *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* seems to be a continuation of "that moral Speculation or INQUIRY, which we call the *Study of our-selves*."<sup>60</sup> The centrality of this concern for Shaftesbury cannot be exaggerated. As the Critic remarks, "that all Knowledg whatsoever depends upon this *previous-one*: 'And that we can in reality be assur'd of nothing, till we are first assur'd of What *we are* Our-selves.' For by this alone can we know what *Certainty* and *Assurance* is."<sup>61</sup>

The *Inquiry* has a broader scope than the *Soliloquy* in that it examines human nature apart from the internal reflection of the individual. A large part of this treatise is devoted to demonstrative argument against the individualist anthropology of Hobbes and Locke. Yet if the *Inquiry* were merely this, it would hardly be in need of an apology in the form of the fifth treatise, as we have seen the Critic claim. The *Inquiry* is also an extensive consideration of the difference between natural virtue and religion; it explicitly raises the question of whether religion necessarily entails virtue and whether an atheist can be virtuous. We will see that while Shaftesbury takes pains to identify himself as "a *Theist*" in the *Inquiry*, there is reason to expect that his positions will not be well received by the more orthodox members of the British clergy. That Shaftesbury himself has this

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<sup>60</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

concern emerges in a remark by the Critic. The Apology in the form of *The Moralists* is, we learn, particularly concerned to address "what relates to *reveal'd Religion*, and a *World to come*."<sup>62</sup> This remark of the Critic is illuminating. It calls attention to the fact that while the *Inquiry* embraces a peculiar form of natural religion, it is mostly silent on the importance of revelation. Shaftesbury seems to have been quite alive to the touchiness of his argument, which we can see from the publication history of this treatise. The *Inquiry* seems to have been published first in 1699, but apparently without Shaftesbury's permission. In his "Sketch of the Life of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury," Shaftesbury's son, the Fourth Earl, reports that "during my father's stay in Holland, an imperfect edition of his *Inquiry after Virtue* was printed, surreptitiously taken from a rough draft, sketched when he was but twenty years of age. He was greatly chagrined at this, and immediately bought up the whole impression before many of the books were sold, and set about completing the Treatise which he published himself not long after."<sup>63</sup> Some later scholars have challenged this account, but if the Fourth Earl is correct, it seems that Shaftesbury did not want the *Inquiry* to appear outside of the context provided by the *Characteristicks* as a whole.

In the "Fifth Miscellany," we receive an interesting suggestion about the complexity of Shaftesbury's presentation in *The Moralists*, which I must quote at length.<sup>64</sup> The Critic remarks there that our author

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> In Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, xxiii.

<sup>64</sup> The full title of the fifth treatise is *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody*.



dares not, in his own Model and Principal performance [namely, *The Moralists*], attempt to unite his Philosophy in one solid and uniform Body, nor carry on his Argument in one continu'd Chain or Thred. Here our Author's Timorousness is visible. In the very Plan or Model of his Work, he is apparently put to a hard shift, to contrive how or with what probability he might introduce Men of any Note or Fashion, reasoning expressly and purposely, without play or trifling, for two or three hours together, on mere PHILOSOPHY and MORALS. He finds these Subjects (as he confesses) so wide of common Conversation, and, by long Custom, so appropriated to the *School*, the *University-Chair*, or *Pulpit*, that he thinks it hardly safe or practicable to treat of them elsewhere, or in a different tone. He is forc'd therefore to raise particular *Machines*, and constrain his principal Characters, in order to carry a better Face, and bear himself out, against the appearance of *Pedantry*.<sup>65</sup>

Shaftesbury is aware that the characteristics of manners and opinions, and consequently of men themselves, have changed with modernity. He therefore adapts his rhetoric to be more practicable, to appeal more to the common conversation of his day by mixing men of note and fashion, at play and trifling, into his considerations of philosophy and morals. What is more important to note here, however, is that these subjects are considered by most of his contemporaries to be the proper domain of the Pulpit and the University (itself of course still largely subject to the Church). For this reason, the Critic tells us, "[the Author's] *Gentleman-Philosopher* THEOCLES, before he enters into his real Character, becomes a feign'd *Preacher*. And even when his real Character comes on, he hardly dares stand it out; but to deal the better with his *Sceptick-Friend*, he falls again to personating, and takes up the Humour of the *Poet* and *Enthusiast*."<sup>66</sup> Here we see here another hint about the two antagonists of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*: Christianity and modern philosophy. In this, his "Model and Principal performance,"

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<sup>65</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany V*, 3.176.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.176-77.

Shaftesbury's modern Socratic figure Theocles feigns being a preacher and an enthusiast. I suspect that the preaching counters the charge of atheism while his enthusiasm resists the temptation to radical skepticism.

In summary, the *Characteristicks* hopes to restore a classical worldview to philosophy. This is the burden of Chapter 2. We will see in Chapter 3 that Shaftesbury maintains that Christianity introduced a new political challenge to the life of philosophy. He is an early dissenter, however, from the ambitious project of the Enlightenment to remake philosophy in the face of this challenge. We examine this concern in Chapter 4. Shaftesbury's project ultimately attempts to keep the classical notion of philosophy as self-knowledge alive in the face of both Christianity and the radical skepticism of modern philosophy. Shaftesbury writes his dialogue *The Moralists* as a model of the proper mode of philosophic inquiry, combining therein each of the concerns we encounter in the earlier treatises. We will examine this dialogue in Chapter 5. Throughout the dissertation we turn for guidance to the Critic, Shaftesbury's own critical voice leading readers through the complicated trail of *Characteristicks*.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN "AUDITOR ESTABLISH'D WITHIN":

#### REASON, PASSION, AND RESOLUTION OF CHARACTER

##### **General Introduction: Common Opinion and Philosophy**

It is characteristic of modern philosophy to disparage traditional philosophy for its uncertainty. In the words of that famous skeptic Descartes, "philosophy has been cultivated over several centuries by the most excellent minds who have ever lived and...nevertheless, there is nothing about which there is not some dispute--and thus nothing which is not doubtful."<sup>1</sup> The judgment of man is weakened by the prejudice he has been taught through common opinion, and more fundamentally, by the defects of his own body. Descartes introduces his famous radical doubt of all received opinion as an attempt to clear the ground of this faulty "pre-scientific" understanding. As he remarks in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, "several years have now passed since I first realized how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true, and thus how doubtful were all those that I had subsequently built upon them. And thus I realized

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane, and G. R. T. Ross, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, *Dover Philosophical Classics*. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003).

that once in my life I had to raze everything down to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences."<sup>2</sup>

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, is an early dissenter from this project of modern philosophy. Shaftesbury rejects this new understanding of philosophy, along with its practical intention of raising new inventions, in favor of an older understanding. As he explains in a letter to Locke, "what I count true learning, and all we can profit by, is to know ourselves." Toward this end, "there is no labour, no studdy, no learning that I would not undertake."<sup>3</sup>

Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.* was written to reawaken the notion that true learning is to know ourselves.<sup>4</sup> In the course of this undertaking, Shaftesbury finds it necessary to confront the radical skepticism advanced by modern philosophy, a skepticism that would reject all received opinion in favor of scientifically derived knowledge. This tendency toward radical skepticism and Shaftesbury's response to it will be examined more closely in Chapter 4.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter we will consider Shaftesbury's own approach to common opinion, which I hope to show is primarily indebted to the classical understanding of the relationship the between philosophy and common life.

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<sup>2</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, trans. Roger Ariew and Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 5.150.

<sup>4</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 4: "The Economy of the Passions": Modern Philosophy and the Diminution of the Human.

Classical philosophy agrees with modern philosophy that opinion is not the same thing as knowledge. Socrates, for example, formulates the distinction this way: "opinion is dependent on one thing and knowledge on another, each according to its own power."<sup>6</sup> But rather than regarding received opinion as the chief obstacle to knowledge, classical philosophy takes opinion as the best starting point for obtaining knowledge. While opinion is not knowledge, it is not complete ignorance either; it is, rather, again in the words of Socrates, somehow "between the two."<sup>7</sup> Classical philosophy starts from opinions--namely, those opinions "which are accepted by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them"--and proceeds dialectically, by comparing contrary opinions and criticizing them in turn.<sup>8</sup> This *dialectical* way of inquiry would test unexamined opinions for the elements of the truth they contain, and try to draw them upward toward a better understanding.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Shaftesbury, it is a chief goal of philosophy "rectify opinion, on which all depends."<sup>10</sup>

Shaftesbury's classical philosophy proves unwilling to assume from the beginning that all common opinion is the product of "chance" and is held only "according to the

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan David Bloom, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 477b.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 478d.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. E. S. Forster and Hugh Tredennick, *The Loeb Classical Library*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), Book 1, 100 b 18 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 533d.

<sup>10</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 1.121.

reign of fashion, and the ascendant power of education."<sup>11</sup> The *Characteristicks* as a whole encourages men "to trust [their] eyes, and take for real the whole creation, and the fair forms which lie before us."<sup>12</sup>

Shaftesbury seems to believe that a naïve trust is the necessary presupposition for any understanding of the world by human beings, although it need not be--indeed, cannot be--philosophy's final word. By attacking all pre-scientific understandings as defective, radical skepticism of the sort introduced by modern philosophy unsettles the natural grasp men have of the world. As we shall see, Shaftesbury believes that philosophy can change or disrupt opinions as well as improve them. Shaftesbury undertakes his defense partly to edify the moral opinions he would like to see flourish; yet he has a theoretical motive as well, for reputable opinions are the best beginning point for serious contemplation of the world.

We begin our consideration of Shaftesbury's philosophic project with the third treatise of the *Characteristicks*, entitled *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*.<sup>13</sup> By investigating the advice Shaftesbury will offer to writers, we hope to find important clues as to how we should read Shaftesbury himself. As we proceed we will take into consideration what might cautiously be regarded as the definitive commentator on Shaftesbury, namely the "Critic" responsible for the *Miscellaneous Reflections* which

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<sup>11</sup> *Moralists*, 2.233 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.129.

<sup>13</sup> *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. Hereafter referred to as *Soliloquy*.

comprise Volume III. The Critic will claim that the subjects taken up in the third treatise, that is, "reflections upon *Authors* in general, and *the Rise and Progress of Arts*," actually "make the Inlet or Introduction to his *Philosophy*"<sup>14</sup>

### **General Overview of Shaftesbury's *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author***

The Critic begins his account of Shaftesbury's third treatise in his own "Miscellany III."<sup>15</sup> After a brief reminder that this treatise must be understood as part of Shaftesbury's larger project in the *Characteristicks*, the Critic tells us that the first two pieces of our author (namely, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* and *Sensus Communis*) "kept up his *sapping* Method, and *unraveling* Humor, with tolerable good Grace."<sup>16</sup> While this "skeptical Mein" [*sic*] continues into the *Soliloquy*, whispers of Shaftesbury's overall project can be overheard as if the author "mutter'd to himself, in a kind of dubious Whisper, or feign'd Soliloquy."<sup>17</sup> The Soliloquy is feigned in part, of course, because the author is aware that he has an audience. By the end of "Miscellany III" the critic will be even clearer. According to the Critic, "[Shaftesbury's] pretence has been to *advise Authors*, and polish *Styles*; but his Aim has been to correct *Manners*, and regulate *Lives*. He has affected Soliloquy, as pretending only to censure Himself; but he has taken

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<sup>14</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* and *Sensus Communis* are discussed below in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

<sup>17</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.84-85.

occasion to bring others into his Company, and make bold with *Personages* and *Characters* of no inferior Rank."<sup>18</sup> As we shall see in this chapter, Shaftesbury "holds a certain Plan or System peculiar to him-self, or such, at least, in which he has a present but few Companions or Followers."<sup>19</sup> As an author, Shaftesbury has as one of his ambitions to create an audience capable of following him in his plan. After we bring the plan of *Soliloquy* to light we will be in a better position to see what the critic means when he writes that the treatises of Volume I (that is, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm, Sensus Communis*, and *Soliloquy*) are "preparatory to the *Fourth*" treatise (*An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*).

*Soliloquy* is the most symmetrical of the treatises in its structure. The treatise is divided into three parts, and each part is in turn divided into three sections. The general discussion of the treatise unfolds as follows. Part I introduces the reader to the theme of dialogue through the literary conceit of the soliloquy.<sup>20</sup> The first section raises the question of how one can offer advice effectively when men seldom think of themselves as unwise. Shaftesbury recommends the method of soliloquy as a way to counterbalance the defects of human temperament, especially when made worse by modern thought.

Through the soliloquy a man divides himself into two persons, "preceptor and pupil." The dialogue which emerges when this regimen is applied to private use

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.114.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.82.

<sup>20</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.97-130.



inculcates a habit of self-examination. Section two connects the practice of soliloquy to the Delphic injunction for men to know themselves. In this section Shaftesbury shows the reader that soliloquy is no simple practice when pursued properly; there are, it seems, pretenders to the practice that hardly deserve the name. We also learn that the practice of soliloquy will allow Shaftesbury to distinguish reason from the passions, which have been conflated by modern projectors to the detriment of philosophic reflection. Reason, Shaftesbury will argue, is necessary for a well-ordered soul and manifests itself in what he will describe as "resolution of will." The third section connects what we must now call the art of soliloquy to liberal education, primarily as represented by its great progenitor Socrates. This section will also show the way in which the ancient manner of the Socratic dialogue as a literary form is the natural companion to the self-examination Shaftesbury is recommending. We will discuss the style and substance of self-examination below, but we will also need to consider the lessons of dialogue as they relate more broadly to Shaftesbury's writing as a whole.

Part II examines several possible obstacles and helpmates to self-examination. Section one discusses "grandees" and the way magistrates and patrons can help and hinder the progress of arts and letters.<sup>21</sup> Section two takes up the topic of "the critic," a category of author that includes what we would generally consider critics today (sophists, say, or intellectuals) but at its highest involves those engaged in genuine philosophic reflection. In this section--the middle section of the middle part--Shaftesbury offers a

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1.130-73.

natural cycle of the rise and progress of the arts; he indicates that this cycle unfolds only in free societies. The third section of Part II considers the proper relationship between an author and his public and it argues that authors ought to improve the taste of their audience rather than pander to their fancies. We will discuss this relationship of the author to the culture.

Part III undertakes a preliminary consideration of what a "better Self" would look like.<sup>22</sup> In section one, Shaftesbury recalls his reader to the classical notion of philosophy, namely, that "'tis the known Province of Philosophy to teach us *ourselves*, keep us the *self-same* Persons, and so regulate our governing Fancys, Passions, and Humours, as to make us comprehensible to our selves, and knowable by other Features than those of a bare Countenance. For 'tis not certainly by virtue of our Face merely, that we are *ourselves*."<sup>23</sup> In filling out his portrait of self-knowledge, Shaftesbury begins to identify the philosophic missteps he thinks Descartes, Locke, and other modern projectors have made. He indicates that these "Counter-Philosophers" neglect the most important job of philosophy--the examination of opinions. In the third and final section of Part III, Shaftesbury connects the art of the soliloquy to the development of noble sentiments and a love for the truth.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 1.173-224.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.176.

## ***Advice to an Author, Part I: The Method of Soliloquy***

### **Part I, § 1: The Regimen of Self-Practice**

A closer examination of *Soliloquy: Or, Advice to an Author* will help us understand the way in which matters of literary style inform Shaftesbury's overall project in the *Characteristicks*. In advising authors Shaftesbury will offer important clues to us as readers of his book as well. After working through his advice, we should then be better prepared to undertake an examination of his critiques of religion and modern philosophy.

The engraved frontispiece of *Soliloquy* displays a triptych. In the center panel we see through a balconied window a desk with a book and quill and ink. On the wall in front of the desk is what appears to be a large mirror, angled so that an author might glance up and see himself. On either side of the central panel are panels each containing a standing figure holding a looking-glass. In the panel on the left, the figure examines himself in the looking-glass. Three birds fly freely overhead. In the right-hand panel, the figure is distracted by three monstrous creatures, one of whom wears a crown or miter. The figure is frowning and does not look at himself in his looking-glass. Above the central panel, two bas-relief faces--perhaps Socrates and Plato--look off toward the left, in the direction of the self-examining figure. As we will soon see, the frontispiece offers a glimpse into the deepest concerns of the treatise, how one is to obtain self-knowledge.

Shaftesbury opens the treatise with a reflection on the common maxim "that, as to what related to private Conduct, No-one was ever the better for Advice."<sup>24</sup> This is not surprising given the fact that advice-givers generally want to show their own wisdom at the expense of another's defects. This is especially true in questions relating to the conduct of our own lives. Men "can bear a Master in Mathematicks, in Musick, or in any other Science; but not in Understanding and Good Sense "<sup>25</sup> This puts authors in a difficult position, for they are generally the "profess'd Masters of Understanding to the Age." At one time, poets were considered sages, and it was their custom to disguise their didactic intention. While ancient authors "profess only to please, they secretly advise and give Instruction."

Shaftesbury's challenge is all the more serious because he hopes to prescribe to these professed masters, authors themselves. He is excused, he maintains, because his

pretension is not so much to give Advice, as to consider of the Way and Manner of advising. My Science, if it be any, is no better than that of a Language-Master, or a Logician. For I have taken it strongly into my head, that there is a certain Knack or Legerdemain in Argument, by which we may safely proceed to the dangerous part of advising, and make sure of the good fortune to have our Advice accepted, if it be any thing worth.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This common maxim appears at the beginning of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, part one. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), 1. Hobbes makes a similar point at the beginning of part I, chapter 13 in *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson, Pelican Classics ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). The maxim seems to be drawn from Montaigne's essay, "Of Presumption." Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times : A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 207-11.

<sup>25</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

We can expect at the very least, then, to learn about a style of discourse which, through its artfulness, makes a reader receptive to hearing advice. Since men cannot bear taking a master when it comes to matters of understanding and good sense, Shaftesbury will prepare his reader to take advice from himself. He will introduce us to the art of soliloquy.

Shaftesbury likens his practice to surgery. Where is one to learn the art of his sort of surgery, he wonders. We are fortunate to have hospitals to train surgeons of the body and also "meek patients who wou'd bear any Incisions, and be prob'd or tented at our pleasure." Over time, a surgeon of the body might develop the requisite "tenderness of hand" and be able to combine it with the "greatest Resolution and Boldness."<sup>27</sup> In the case of Shaftesbury's art there are no such hospitals; and while at first one might wonder where to find a meek patient for practice, in fact one need not seek far: "we have each of us Our Selves to practice on."<sup>28</sup>

At first this seems paradoxical, for after all, how is a man to be two men at once, serving as physician and patient at the same time? To remedy this difficulty, Shaftesbury borrows from the poets a literary device of self-conversation called the soliloquy. Through this device, a character "becomes two distinct Persons. He is Pupil and Preceptor." Unlike the stage device of soliloquy, however, Shaftesbury recommends that when we speak aloud to ourselves, we do it without an audience present, and it is here

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1.99.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

that we get our first glimpse of the aim of this self-surgery: "company is an extreme Provocative to Fancy; and, like a hot Bed in Gardening, is apt to make our Imaginations sprout too fast. But by this anticipating Remedy of Soliloquy, we may effectually provide against the Inconvenience."<sup>29</sup>

Soliloquy, we will see, will serve the salutary purpose of pruning the imagination. This is not its only purpose, however. Shaftesbury relates a story about a whole nation that adopted soliloquy as "their Custom...their Religion, and their Law," with the intention of being identical to themselves whether they were alone or in the company of others. He speculates that it was introduced by a wise legislator to cure "*the Leprosy of Eloquence*" suffered by that people.<sup>30</sup>

Shaftesbury has no hopes that "our present Manners" would allow such a drastic measure, but he does hope to show how soliloquy can be applied to private use, "especially in the case of *Authors*."<sup>31</sup> All truly great wits, according to Shaftesbury, have considered themselves laughable in public "for their great Loquacity by themselves, and their profound Taciturnity in Company." Whether they are poets, orators, or philosophers, great wits are generally said to be either "composing or raving," and men of the world cannot seem to distinguish the two. Shaftesbury calls this odd manner--this "Method of Evacuation"--somehow natural to them. For the more worldly, however,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.100.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1.101.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1.102.

their meditations are "obstructed by the fear of a nonconforming Mein [*sic*] in Conversation."<sup>32</sup> Modern "writers of Memoirs and Essays" are especially guilty of this vice. While such authors pretend to be practicing the art of soliloquy, they are of course keenly aware of their audience. This sort of public soliloquy is indecent, and is no different than a man "taking his Physick in Public." Because they do not practice the art of soliloquy in the proper way, these authors are able to bring nothing of value to the public. Shaftesbury remarks that "tho they are often retir'd, they are never by themselves."<sup>33</sup> Also guilty are many "*sanctify'd*" authors who pretend they practice soliloquy when in fact "they can allow nothing to lie conceal'd, which passes in this religious Commerce and way of Dialogue between them and their Soul." The sanctified soliloquizer is even worse because of his scorn for "Rules of Criticism and profane Learning." As we will see when we consider Part II of *Soliloquy*, the rules of criticism must take a central role in this didactic art.

In short, Shaftesbury claims that unless a person has examined himself, he will always be vulnerable to the criticisms of others. Before an author ventures out to an audience he had better be sure that his writing and his ideas are sound. "'Tis the hardest thing in the world to be a good Thinker," he cautions, "without being a strong Self-Examiner, and thorow-pac'd Dialogist, in this solitary way."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1.103.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1.106.

**Part I, § 2: The Daemonic Companion, or the Better Self**

Becoming a good thinker is taken up again in section 2 of Part I, and this is connected by Shaftesbury to moving the conversation more directly to the topic of morals. Shaftesbury begins his discussion by reviving a literary conceit from the ancients, offering us a hint of what his model of good thinking will most resemble. "I might perhaps very justifiably take occasion here to enter into a spacious Field of Learning, to shew the Antiquity of that Opinion, 'That we have each of us a *Daemon, Genius, Angel, or Guardian-Spirit*, to whom we were strictly join'd, and committed, from our earliest Dawn of Reason, or Moment of our Birth."<sup>35</sup> While Shaftesbury denies that this notion was taken as literally true by ancient authors, it served as a useful purpose. It is no slight thing to compare a human faculty to a divine guest in our soul: by elevating the origin of this companion our reverence is increased; on the other hand, ignoring one's daemon would be an act of sacrilege. If, as Shaftesbury has suggested, it is possible to find a patient or pupil in ourselves, it may also be possible to locate an appropriate preceptor. The duplicity of soul recommended by the art of soliloquy follows this long-established conceit of the ancients. According to this ancient practice of private retreat,

as this *Recess* was deep and intimate, and the *Dual* Number practically form'd in Us, we were suppos'd to advance in Morals and true Wisdom. This, they thought, was the only way of *composing* Matters in our Breast, and establishing that Subordinacy, which alone cou'd make Us agree with our-selves, and be of a-piece within. They esteem'd this a more religious Work than any Prayers, or other Duty in the Temple. And this they advis'd Us to carry thither, as the best Offering which cou'd be made.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



The practice was a way of following the famous inscription over the temple of Delphi: "Recognize Your-self which was as much as to say, Divide yourself, or Be Two. For if the Division were rightly made, all within wou'd of course, they thought, be rightly understood, and prudently manag'd."<sup>37</sup> This is not only good advice; it is a divine injunction.

But how are we to make this division in the right way? Shaftesbury indicates that it is no easy matter. Only philosophers and wise men practice this art in its fullest sense. Knaves and fools are never *truly* alone, regardless of their pretense. Shaftesbury does not mean by this that they are troubled by their conscience whenever they have time for reflection. The problem is rather that they fail to make the proper division and cannot raise "a *Companion*; who being fairly admitted into Partnership, wou'd quickly mend his Partner, and set his Affairs on a right foot." There are many pretenders to this art of soliloquy. In fact, Shaftesbury suspects that the reader will think the profound Lover to be "no stranger to our propos'd Method of Practice."<sup>38</sup> Yet even when retiring to the woods, the impassioned lover imagines himself to be with his mistress. So too with the Mystic, who "instead of looking narrowly into his own Nature and Mind, that he may be no longer a Mystery to himself...is taken up with the Contemplation of other mysterious Natures, which he can never explain or comprehend."<sup>39</sup> The false practitioner is not

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1.107.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1.109.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1.110.

sincerely seeking self-knowledge, which Shaftesbury identifies with carefully scrutinizing his own "Nature and Mind."

How is it that man is a mystery to himself? At first glance it might seem a small thing to know our own minds; people generally think that they do. Who better than each for himself to say "what our main Scope was; what we plainly drove at, and what we propos'd to our-selves, as our End, in every Occurrence of our Lives?" Yet this commonplace opinion fails to see the extent to which our very thoughts are formed by the world around us. Shaftesbury writes, "our Thoughts have generally such an obscure implicit Language, that 'tis the hardest thing in the world to make 'em speak out distinctly."<sup>40</sup> The goal of philosophy is to make these obscured thoughts of men come more clearly into view. Philosophy would have us hold a "vocal Looking-Glass" up so that we can see ourselves honestly or "in the plainest manner."<sup>41</sup> The true practitioner of soliloquy will have at his disposal a method that lays bare his deepest opinions. It is easy for a man to deceive himself and appear foolish when he is in the company of others; it is more difficult, however, to appear a fool to one's truest self. When practicing honestly, the soliloquizer will, it is hoped, come to abhor the lie of the soul, "for so true a Reverence has every-one for himself, when he comes clearly to appear before his close Companion, that he had rather profess the vilest things of himself in open Company, than

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1.107.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1.108.

hear his Character privately from his own Mouth."<sup>42</sup> As we shall see, Shaftesbury is perfectly aware that men generally lack self-knowledge, and what is more, that they often go to great lengths to avoid having it. In public especially, men are encouraged to consult their "interests" above the better aspects of their character. Part of Shaftesbury's intention in *Advice to an Author* is to make the prospect of a better self attractive again.

Shaftesbury shares a story to caution the reader that it is no easy thing to know oneself. The story involves "A VIRTUOUS young Prince of a heroick Soul, capable of Love and Friendship" and a young nobleman, who was a favorite of the Prince. Once upon a time the Prince made war on a hateful tyrant, and through his "clemency and bounty" as much as his martial virtues, the Prince won to his side many of the tyrant's former subjects. It came to pass, however, that the castle of a potentate still loyal to the tyrant fell to the forces of the virtuous Prince. The young nobleman discovered in this castle the new bride of the vanquished potentate, and taking her captive he quickly sought out his friend the Prince. The youth praised the beauty and manner of the captive as beyond his ability to describe and urged the prince to see this wonder. Much to the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 109. Socrates famously suggests in the *Republic* (382A-C) that no man would willingly hold a lie in his soul about "the things that are." For Shaftesbury, as for Plato, knowledge of reality is intimately connected to honesty *with oneself*. Neither seems to be opposed to lies in speech under certain circumstances. (That Socrates holds such a view can be seen both in the "noble lie" and the claim at the end of Book II that lies in speech are often useful. I discuss the view of Shaftesbury below in the section on raillery.) Yet the less-than-true things that emerge in common speech--in large part because of the beautiful "lies" of poets--are dangerous to the soul when they are not seen for what they are (which is to say, when they are not seen as better or worse *images* of reality rather than reality itself). Insofar as the soul as described by Socrates can be likened to a city, one might say that the true objection to lying is that it is potentially "subversive and destructive" of the soul (389D) because of the danger it poses to the rulers, that is, to reason.

surprise of the youth the Prince declines to meet her. The Prince does not want her beauty to distract him from more urgent business.

"Wou'd you, Sir! persuade me then," said the young Nobleman, smiling, "that a fair Face can have such Power as to force *the Will* it-self, and constrain a Man in any respect to act contrary to what he thinks becoming him? Are we to hearken to the Poets in what they tell us of that Incendiary Love, and his irresistible Flames? A real Flame, we see, burns all alike. But that imaginary one of Beauty hurts only those who are consenting. It affects no otherwise, than as we ourselves are pleas'd to allow it. In many Cases we absolutely command it: as where Relation and Consanguinity are in the nearest degree. Authority and Law, we see, can master it. But 'twou'd be vain as well as unjust, for any Law to intermeddle or prescribe, were not the Case voluntary, and our *Will* entirely *free*."<sup>43</sup>

In this speech, the youth shows how little he understands about human psychology. Our freedom of will can be constrained by our passions, which seem to have their own necessity at times. Don't men fall in love and lose their liberty, wonders the Prince? The youth replies that this is true only for wretches. Such men use "*irresistible Necessity*" as an excuse to commit many offenses. Only the debauched become victims of beauty and love: "they who are honest and just, can admire and love whatever is beautiful; without offering at anything beyond what is allow'd." The youth observes that he has spoken with this beauty and "yet am *my-self* still." With this, the Prince makes the beautiful captive a ward of the noble youth, requesting that he "be ever the same Man: and look to your *Charge* carefully, as becomes you."<sup>44</sup>

Of course the noble youth by degrees becomes more familiar with his ward and eventually falls hopelessly in love; he then sinks into a deep *melancholia*. It is in this

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1.112.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1.113.

shameful condition that the Prince finds him. The Prince assumes responsibility for the youth's condition, for he should have known better than to match him against "that unequal Adversary" Love.<sup>45</sup> As a remedy for the youth's ailment, the Prince asks him to "retire only for a while." In his absence the youth learns to study himself more carefully and upon his return the youth announces that:

"well am I now satisfy'd, that I have in reality within me *two distinct separate Souls*. This Lesson of Philosophy I have learnt from that villanous Sophister Love. For 'tis impossible to believe, that having one and the same Soul, it shou'd be actually both Good and Bad, passionate for Virtue and Vice, desirous of Contrarys. No. There must of necessity be *Two*: and when *the Good* prevails, 'tis then we act handsomly; when *the Ill*, then basely and villanously. Such was my Case. For lately *the Ill* Soul was wholly Master. But now *the Good* prevails, by your assistance; and I am plainly a new Creature, with quite another *Apprehension*, another *Reason*, another *Will*."<sup>46</sup>

Thus the noble youth learns the philosophic "doctrine of *Two Persons* in one individual *self*," although not, it should be noted, without help from the Prince. Without assistance he was not able "to form this *Distinction* justly and according to Art." Shaftesbury will emphasize the role of art in the pursuit of self-knowledge in the next section.

Shaftesbury draws the following lesson from the story: "Let Will be ever so free, *Humour* and *Fancy*, we see, govern it."<sup>47</sup> As long as we are subject to shifting fancies, we will never enjoy firmness of will, for our fancies will move us without our consent or

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.114.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1.115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

understanding. Yet it may be that we are not entirely powerless in their face.

Shaftesbury writes,

and by what I can observe of the World, *Fancy* and *Opinion* stand pretty much upon the same bottom. So that if there be no certain *Inspector* or *Auditor* establish'd within us, to take account of these Opinions and Fancys in due form, and minutely to animadvert upon their several Growths and Habits, we are as little like to continue a Day in the same *Will*, as a Tree, during a Summer, in the same *Shape*, without the Gard'ner's Assistance, and the vigorous Application of the Sheers and Pruning-Knife.<sup>42</sup>

With the help of an internal inspector or auditor, our opinions and fancies can be examined and known for what they really are.<sup>48</sup> Only by knowing the opinions which inform our character can we can develop resolution or a firmness of will. Solid character is in this sense the result of deliberate pruning. While we will investigate the response of Shaftesbury to Hobbes at length in Chapter 4, we should note in passing that Shaftesbury's concern for developing a resolute will stands as a challenge to the definition of will offered by Hobbes. According to Hobbes, the will is merely the last relevant moment of deliberation before a man acts. "In *Deliberation*," he writes, "the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhaering to the action or omission, thereof, is that wee call the WILL; the ACT, (not the faculty,) of *Willing*."<sup>49</sup> Shaftesbury's better self--a second soul--works to restore the common-sense notion that the will is indeed a faculty, free to

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<sup>48</sup> Shaftesbury's internal inspector seems to anticipate the "impartial spectator" Smith discusses in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (chapters 3 & 4 of Part III). I would argue, however, that Shaftesbury seems more concerned than Smith with reason's ability to perceive reality.

<sup>49</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 127.

deliberate. It is not merely the pre-determined moment at the end of a sequence of cause and effect.

Without the assistance of the Prince, the young nobleman found that he could not govern his passions. The Prince understood this because he understood better the true nature of mankind. According to Shaftesbury, appetite and reason are brothers, but appetite is older of the two. It should come as no surprise that appetite, being naturally older and stronger than reason, will have the advantage in any contest. Shaftesbury compares the struggle to control the will to a contested "top or foot-ball." The brothers are poorly matched until "the youngest, instead of now and then a Kick or Lash bestow'd to little purpose, forsakes the Ball or Top it-self, and begins to lay about his elder Brother."<sup>50</sup> Only after such harsh treatment will the older brother, like a coward, grow civil and play fair. It is here that Shaftesbury's method of soliloquy must be deployed:

when by a certain powerful Figure of inward Rhetorick, the Mind apostrophizes its own Fancys, raises 'em in their proper *Shapes* and *Personages*, and addresses 'em familiarly, without the least Ceremony or Respect. By this means it will soon happen, that Two form'd *Partys* will erect themselves *within*. For the Imaginations or Fancys being thus roundly treated, are forc'd to declare themselves, and take party. Those on the side of the elder Brother Appetite, are strangely subtle and insinuating. They have always the Faculty to speak by Nods and Winks. By this practice they conceal half their meaning, and, like modern Politicians, pass for deeply wise, and adorn themselves with the finest Pretext and most specious Glosses imaginable; till being confronted with their Fellows of a plainer Language and Expression, they are forc'd to quit their mysterious Manner, and discover themselves mere *Sophisters* and *Impostors*, who have not the least to do with the Party of Reason and *good Sense*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.117.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

The method of soliloquy compels our fancies and opinions to show themselves as they are. We will have to see if Shaftesbury is able to trace opinions back to something more solid than mere convention. He will indicate how we might begin to do this in the third part of this treatise.

If the company of others is an "extreme Provocative to Fancy" akin to a "hot Bed" or greenhouse, the art of soliloquy is a tool for the careful gardener. One of Shaftesbury's aims in *Soliloquy* is to encourage the reader to undertake the regimen necessary to develop such a gardener within, whom he calls an inspector or auditor. He confesses "we hope also that our *Patient* (for such we naturally suppose our *Reader*) will consider duly with himself, that what he endures in this Operation is for no inconsiderable end, since 'tis to gain him a Will, and insure him a certain Resolution; by which he shall know where to find himself."<sup>52</sup> Through a "Legerdemain in Argument" which he had alerted us to expect, Shaftesbury has assumed the role of Prince to his noble reader. Men in general will benefit from this advice, but the prospective author must without question undertake the exercise Shaftesbury recommends. "He who deals in Characters, must of necessity know his own; or he will know nothing."<sup>53</sup>

### **Part I, § 3: The Art of the Dialogue**

We remarked that the young nobleman was unable to begin the hard work of scrutinizing his fancies without the assistance of the Prince. While Shaftesbury

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1.116.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1.117.



encourages his reader to honor reason as a daemon, genius, or angel, he recognizes that good sense does not spring forth fully-formed. In section 3 of Part I he begins to address the role of art in shaping human nature. He begins by considering the "*Action and Grace*" of a person who has been taught by "Nature only" to one who has benefited from "Reflection, and the assistance of Art."<sup>54</sup> Shaftesbury concedes that there are individuals whose nature is so extraordinary that they are able to achieve some measure of "Grace and Comeliness" despite having received the rudest of educations. There are also individuals who, while receiving the best of educations, fail to achieve any measure of gracefulness. Nevertheless, "'tis undeniable however, that the Perfection of Grace and Comeliness in Action and Behaviour, can be found only among the People of a liberal Education. And even among the graceful of this kind, those still are found the gracefulest, who early in their Youth have learnt their Exercises, and form'd their Motions under the best *Masters*."<sup>55</sup> Education can make a tremendous difference in the development of a gentleman. Since the ostensible concern of Shaftesbury in this treatise is to advise authors, however, he must speak not of a gentleman's tutors but of "*Philosophers, and Philosophy*."

Just as a gentleman must practice in private before performing "exercises of the genteeler kind" in public, so the writer must master the "several Motions, Counterpoises and Balances of the Mind and Passions." According to Shaftesbury, there are no better

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1.118.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1.118-19.

masters for this than Socrates and his disciples. He quotes Horace's *Ars Poetica* to illustrate the point:

Sound knowledge is the first requisite for writing well;  
The books of Socrates' school will yield you the matter.<sup>56</sup>

Ordinary gentlemen or writers, those who have no ambition to write for the age or posterity, need not penetrate the "vast Depths into Learning or Philosophy." But should writers aspire to produce excellent work and "of a nature to intitle 'em to hold the Rank of Authors," serious study and practice are necessary. Even a fraud can acquire the equipment of an artist without mastering an art:

the Horse alone can never make *the Horseman*; nor Limbs *the Wrestler* or *the Dancer*. No more can a Genius alone make *a Poet*; or good Parts *a Writer*, in any considerable kind. The Skill and Grace of Writing is founded, as our wise Poet tells us, in *Knowledg* and *good Sense*: and not barely in that Knowledg, which is to be learnt from common Authors, or the general Conversation of the World; but from those particular Rules of Art, which Philosophy alone exhibits.<sup>57</sup>

Nowhere are the rules of this art better exhibited than in the classical form of the Socratic dialogue, which for Shaftesbury forms the core of a liberal education. As a literary form, the dialogue works to school a reader in the method of soliloquy. Dialogues educate a person in soliloquy through their attention to "*Characters* and *Manners*." Shaftesbury seems to disagree with those modern scholars (largely of the analytic school) who would

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<sup>56</sup> He also refers his reader to a similar passage in Petronius. It is interesting to note that from this passage Shaftesbury drew the title of an early, unfinished project to collect writings on Socrates and to provide original essays to accompany them. It was to be called "*SOCRATICAE CHARTAE*."

<sup>57</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.120-21.

distinguish a "philosopher Plato" from a "literary Plato."<sup>58</sup> In the account of *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury explains his own approach to reading dialogues.

According to Shaftesbury, it is essential to the dialogic form that:

they were either real *Dialogues*, or Recitals of such *personated Discourses*; where the Persons themselves had their Characters preserv'd thro'out; their Manners, Humours, and distinct Turns of Temper and Understanding maintain'd, according to the most exact *poetical Truth*. 'Twas not enough that these Pieces treated fundamentally of *Morals*, and in consequence pointed out *real Characters* and *Manners*: They exhibited 'em *alive*, and set the Countenances and Complexions of Men plainly in view. And by this means they not only taught Us to know *Others*; but, what was principal and of highest virtue in 'em, they taught us to know *Our-selves*.<sup>59</sup>

The action and temperament of the characters in a dialogue are more than a way of making abstruse arguments agreeable to a reader. Poetical truth fuses "*action* and *imitation*" to the treatment of the subject. The characters of the dialogue acted and behaved in such a way that their very "countenances and complexions" were part of the philosophic argument advanced. It is only by considering character that we can discern the full lesson of a dialogue; only then will they teach us "to know *Our-selves*"<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> An example of this approach would be found in the work of Gregory Vlastos (both prior to and after his discovery of *elenchus* around 1983). Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 11 (1982). A useful discussion of "literary Plato" controversy can be found in Hayden Weir Ausland, "On Reading Plato Mimetically," *American Journal of Philology* 118, no. 3. See also Charles Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature* 46, no. 1 (2002). And William A. Johnson, "Dramatic Frame and Philosophic Idea in Plato," *American Journal of Philology* 119, no. 4 (1988). Shaftesbury clearly reads Plato as a poet as poet and philosopher both.

<sup>59</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

<sup>60</sup> In the words of Schleiermacher discussing Plato, "form and content are inseparable; each sentence can be properly understood only where it is placed, within the connections and limitations that Plato provided for it." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 14. See also Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 3-9.

But just how does this work? Everyone knows that the dialogical poems of antiquity had a "Philosophical *Hero*...whose Name they carry'd both in their Body and Front, and whose Genius and Manner they were made to represent, was in himself *a perfect Character*." It is no accident that we speak of a "Socratic Method" and "The Socratic Dialogue."<sup>61</sup> Yet understanding this philosophical hero is not a straightforward matter; Socrates is notoriously ironical. Shaftesbury observes that while Socrates might seem easy to reckon in the dialogues, he actually appeared "in some respects, so veil'd, and in a Cloud, that to the unattentive Surveyor he seem'd often to be very different from what he really was: and this chiefly by reason of a certain exquisite and refin'd Raillery which belong'd to his Manner, and by virtue of which he cou'd treat the highest Subjects, and those of the commonest Capacity both together, and render 'em explanatory of each other."<sup>62</sup> The philosophic hero of the dialogue remains somewhat mysterious because the dialogue manages to combine "the heroick and the simple, the tragick, and the comick Vein." It is, however, the secondary characters who hold the most interest for Shaftesbury here. These "*second Characters* shew'd human Nature more distinctly, and to the Life" than Socrates because we recognize ourselves in them immediately. The secondary

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<sup>61</sup> For a somewhat useful discussion, see George Grote, *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates* (London: J. Murray, 1865), 114 ff. Many examples could be adduced from antiquity to support this position. Here is one from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: "The narration should depict character; to which end you must know what makes it do so. One such thing is the indication of choice; the quality of purpose indicated determines the quality of character depicted and is itself determined by the end pursued. Thus it is that mathematical discourses depict no character; they have nothing to do with choice, for they represent nobody as pursuing any end. On the other hand, the Socratic dialogues do depict character." Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle : The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, *Bollingen Series* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), *Rhetoric* iii.16.

<sup>62</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

characters invite us to the hard work of self-knowledge. Shaftesbury writes, "we might here, therefore, as in a *Looking-Glass*, discover our-selves, and see our minutest Features nicely delineated, and suited to our own Apprehension and Cognizance. No-one who was ever so little a-while an Inspector, cou'd fail of becoming acquainted with his own Heart."<sup>63</sup> Through a long acquaintance with this form of self-scrutiny, a person acquires a "peculiar *speculative Habit* such that they have a "*Pocket-Mirroure*" always at their disposal. Having internalized the habit of inspection, they are able to see both persons of their single self when they gaze into the mirror, "*One* of them, like the commanding Genius, the Leader and Chief above-mention'd; the *other* like that rude, undisciplin'd and headstrong Creature, whom we ourselves in our natural Capacity most exactly resembled."<sup>64</sup> Socratic dialogues teach attentive men the proper relationship between reason and the passions not simply through so-called Platonic doctrines but through the very form of writing.

Shaftesbury traces the origin of the dialogue to early poets who wrote "*Mimes*" and observes that "poetry it-self was defin'd *an Imitation* chiefly of Men and Manners: and was that in an exalted and noble degree, which in a low one we call *Mimickry*." For Shaftesbury, Homer, "Father and Prince of Poets," showed the world that poetry could

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 1.122. "Second Characters" was the name intended for the book Shaftesbury was writing at the time of his death. While this book deals largely with the visual or "plastic" arts, the "second characters" are also a catalogue of obstacles to philosophical reflection. Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Second Characters; or, the Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914).

<sup>64</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.122.

mirror reality in a way that provoked contemplation. His descriptions of character and event are so compelling that they serve as their own interpreter. Homer:

describes no Qualitys or Virtues; censures no Manners: makes no Encomiums, nor gives Characters himself; but brings his Actors still in view. 'Tis they who shew themselves. 'Tis they who speak in such a manner, as distinguishes 'em in all things from all others, and makes 'em ever like themselves. Their different Compositions and Allays so justly made, and equally carry'd on, thro' every particle of the Action, give more Instruction than all the Comments or Glosses in the world.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, dialogues are so self-contained that the reader is brought into direct contact with the character as thinker.

As a literary mode, dialogue works to put the reader directly into the conversation. Shaftesbury observes that, "here the Author is annihilated; and the Reader being no way apply'd to, stands for Nobody."<sup>66</sup> Both author and reader recede into the background and the reader, should he choose, is presented with the characters and their arguments directly. Yet in a dialogue it is not simply the soundness of the argument that is in question. Arguments are presented by a certain character and embedded in a particular conversation. The reader of a dialogue must survey the drama as well as the argument and consider the motives, the background, the education, and the moral and intellectual faculties of the characters. "The understanding here must have its Mark, its characteristick Note, by which it may be distinguish'd. It must be such and such an Understanding; as when we say, for instance, such or such a face: since Nature has

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 1.123.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1.125.

characteriz'd Tempers and Minds as peculiarly as Faces."<sup>67</sup> Unlike mathematical treatises and prayers, dialogues are both *ab homine* and *ad hominem*.

It should not be thought that lending the flavor of a particular place and time to a work is sufficient to make a dialogue, however. Shaftesbury briefly recounts a dialogue, "fram'd, after the manner of our antient Authours." In his parody, the characters have affected archaic speech: "You are going then...to pay your Devotions yonder at the temple?"<sup>68</sup> As he borrows this sketch from Plato's *Euthyphro*, Shaftesbury anticipates "a thousand Ridicules arising from the Manner, the Circumstances and Action it-self, compar'd with modern Breeding and Civility." He proposes introducing modern clothing and accents, and modern mores as well: "bows, and simpering Faces...Preludes, Excuses, Compliments," and other affectations of "Ceremony."<sup>69</sup>

This remedy proves inadequate. Much as he deplores the fact, Shaftesbury fears that the "Coquetry of a modern Author" somehow suits the manners and mores of the modern "fashionable world." Should an author hold the mirror of dialogue up to a modern face, modern man would recoil at his own ugliness. "If we avoid Ceremony, we are unnatural: if we use it, and appear as we naturally are, as we salute, and meet, and treat

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 1.125-26.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 1.126.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 1.127.

one another, we hate the Sight." Sadly, one might have to conclude that the art of "dialogue is at an end."<sup>70</sup>

The Ancients could bear the honest tool of dialogue but moderns apparently cannot: "Ugly Instrument! And for this reason to be hated." Yet modern authors still have the written works of antiquity, "those *Philosophical Sea-Cards*, by which the adventurous Genius's of the Times were wont to steer their Courses, and govern their impetuous Muse."<sup>71</sup> To find one's better self, Shaftesbury recommends taking ancient masters:

and thus Poetry and the *Writer's Art*, as in many respects it resembles the *Statuary's* and the *Painter's*, so in this more particularly, that it has its original *Draughts* and *Models* for Study and Practice; not for Ostentation, to be shown abroad, or copy'd for publick view. These are the antient *Busts*; the *Trunks* of Statues; the Pieces of *Anatomy*; the masterly rough *Drawings* which are kept within; as the secret Learning, the Mystery, and fundamental Knowledg of the Art.<sup>72</sup>

Since the writer deals immediately with matters of the soul, Shaftesbury maintains that by submitting to "real masters" writers will inevitably improve and be amended "in their better Part."

Shaftesbury does not call on authors to become mere antiquarians, however. Having obtained a truer notion of writing, and consequently of soulcraft, through the study of dialogue, Shaftesbury hopes that authors will come to "deserve the Name of Poet." A

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1.128.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



true poet "can describe both Men and Manners, and give to an Action its just Body and proportions." Such is the art of the poet, but according to Shaftesbury this activity is inevitably moral in its compass:

such a *Poet* is indeed a second *Maker*; a just Prometheus, under Jove. Like that Sovereign Artist or universal Plastick Nature, he forms a *Whole*, coherent and proportion'd in it-self, with due Subjection and Subordinacy of constituent Parts. He notes the Boundarys of the Passions, and knows their exact *Tones* and *Measures*; by which he justly represents them, marks *the Sublime* of Sentiments and Action, and distinguishes *the Beautiful* from *the Deform 'd*, *the Amiable* from *the Odious*. The moral Artist, who can thus imitate the Creator, and is thus knowing in the inward Form and Structure of his Fellow-Creature, will hardly, I presume, be found unknowing in *Himself* or at a loss in those Numbers which make the Harmony of a Mind. For *Knavery* is mere *Dissonance* and *Disproportion*. And tho Villains may have strong *Tones* and natural Capacities of Action; 'tis impossible that true *Judgment* and *Ingenuity* shou'd reside, where *Harmony* and *Honesty* have no being.<sup>73</sup>

The true poet "forms a Whole" in imitation of the Creator. But what exactly is the poet to take as his model for imitation? It is defensible to argue that poetry has an inevitable moral effect, but is it equally defensible to claim that the effect is salutary? Shaftesbury himself argues that modern poets fail to improve men. How then are we to know what the true model for man is, apart from the "coquetry" we find around us? What evidence is there that "'tis impossible that true *Judgment* and *Ingenuity* shou'd reside, where *Harmony* and *Honesty* have no being?" We will have to see whether Shaftesbury, beyond leading men to a certain *aporia*, is also able to make them moral, and whether he is able to offer us a naturally defensible model of the good. It is a question we must return to in our

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 1.129.

consideration of Part III. (Even a tentative answer to that question will have to await Chapter 5.)

### ***Advice to an Author, Part II: the Rise and Progress of the Arts***

Having introduced the reader to the "Discipline, and qualifying Method of *Self-Examination*," Shaftesbury interrupts his account of "this *Mystery*" to consider other important matters. Part II, to which we now turn our attention, calls us from looking inward to look outward: now "we shou'd consider the Advantages or Disadvantages our Authors may possibly meet with, *from abroad*: and how far their Genius may be depress'd or rais'd by any external Causes, arising from the Humour or Judgment of the *World*."<sup>74</sup> In Part II, Shaftesbury presents a complicated analysis of morals and manners and their relationship to the arts. The first section considers the way political arrangements shape the culture by setting the conditions for the rise and progress of the arts. This analysis continues in the second section, where Shaftesbury presents an account of this progress in more detail and with an eye toward poetic craftsmanship. I will show that Shaftesbury is especially interested in the "serious play" of the comic style, which enables the philosopher to examine the solemn and grave opinions of his age with greater freedom. We will take that opportunity to consider the role humor plays in Shaftesbury's own work by casting a glance at the account of "raillery" Shaftesbury offers in the treatise *Sensus Communis*. This will allow us to understand better the way Volume I works to prepare the reader for the treatises of Volume II. The last part of section two

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 1.130.

draws parallels between the poetical styles he has discussed and the development of philosophy. Finally, we will turn to the last section of Part II, which invites contemporary authors to take the lead in polishing the tastes of the public.

**Part II, § 1: Grandees and the Importance Of Liberty**

While Shaftesbury takes Socrates as his literary and philosophic model, he is not as likely as Socrates to be "overwhelmed with ridicule" on account of his political schemes.<sup>75</sup> Unlike Plato's Socrates, who seems to have proposed a regime where philosophers ruled, Shaftesbury proposes the opposite. Shaftesbury does not hope for another Solomon who will be an "*Author-Sovereign*." He writes that "however it be, I wou'd not willingly take upon me to recommend this *Author-Character* to our future Princes. Whatever Crowns or Laurels their renown'd Predecessors may have gather'd in this Field of Honour; I shou'd think that for the future, the speculative Province might more properly be committed to private Heads."<sup>76</sup> Shaftesbury's advice is based in part on his doubt that absolute monarchs are likely to practice the art of soliloquy. "Single and absolute Persons in Government, I'm sensible, can hardly be consider'd as any other than *single* and *absolute* in Morals. They have no *Inmate-Controuler* to cavil with 'em, or dispute their Pleasure." They are unlikely to have an occasion to call themselves into question. "Inclination and Will in such as these, admit as little Restraint or Check in private Meditation as in publick Company. The World, which serves as a Tutor to

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<sup>75</sup> Plato, *Republic* 473C-D. It is unnecessary to enter into the controversy over whether Socrates proposed his "best regime" in earnest.

<sup>76</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.133.

Persons of an inferior rank, is submissive to these *Royal Pupils*; who from their earliest days are us'd to see even their *Instructors* bend before 'em, and hear every thing applauded which they themselves perform."<sup>77</sup>

This passage might come as a surprise given the general tenor of Part I. It is not so surprising that magistrates will seldom find compelling reasons to doubt their own opinions; but in what way are we to see "the World" as a tutor, given Shaftesbury's concern that company inflames and confuses the imagination?

The reader is offered a clue in the Critic's "Third Miscellany." The Critic observes there that the scope of "our Author" extends beyond the reform of the literary style of individual writers. His "design is to advance something *new*, or at least something *different* from what is commonly current in Philosophy and Morals."<sup>78</sup> While Shaftesbury begins close to home with the method of soliloquy, this art of "self-discourse" is not self-sufficient. The *method* itself is to be learned at the hand of ancient masters; but the *content* of the self is to be drawn from the world around us; and the *practice* is to be undertaken by individuals for themselves. While reflection requires a habit of solitary contemplation, the world provides the opinions to be considered. The Critic writes,

this Correspondence, according to his Computation, is wholly impracticable, without a previous Commerce with the World: And the larger this Commerce is, the more practicable and improving the other, he thinks, is likely to prove. The Sources of this improving Art of *Self-correspondence* he derives from the highest

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 1.131.

<sup>78</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.95.

Politeness and Elegance of antient *Dialogue*, and *Debate*, in matters of Wit, Knowledge, and Ingenuity.<sup>79</sup>

While Shaftesbury has shown disdain for modern fashions and mores and while he will prove critical of the sophisticated opinions of his day, his philosophy is meant to be a living activity. Just as dialectic begins by considering opinions "which are accepted by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them," Shaftesbury will address the most prominent opinions of his day. In Chapter 3 ("A *Storm of Devotion and Zeal*") we will consider his treatment of Christianity and political life. In Chapter 4 ("The *Economy of the Passions*") we take up the prominent opinions of modern philosophy. Throughout the *Characteristicks* Shaftesbury will show particular interest in morally serious gentlemen, those "gentlemen of fashion...to whom a natural good genius, or force of good education, has given a sense of what is naturally graceful or becoming."<sup>80</sup> We'll see that it is such gentlemen who are the most receptive to "the fair forms," are most likely to "call the universe an order but not a disorder," and are most likely to follow Shaftesbury's lead in seeking self-knowledge.<sup>81</sup> As the Critic observes,

nothing, according to our Author, can so well revive this *self-corresponding* Practice, as the same Search and Study of the highest Politeness in modern *Conversation*. For this, we must necessarily be at the pains of going further abroad than the Province we call Home. And, by this Account, it appears that our Author has little hopes of being either relish'd or comprehended by any other of his Country-men, than those who delight in the open and *free* Commerce of the World, and are rejoic'd to gather Views, and receive Light from every Quarter; in

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.95-96.

<sup>80</sup> *Sensus Communis; an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, 1.84.

<sup>81</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.21.

order to judg the best of what is perfect, and according to a just *Standard*, and true Taste in every kind.<sup>82</sup>

Not willing to leave matters to chance, however, the *Characteristicks* as a whole will be working to help such views make their way in the world.<sup>83</sup> In section two, we will see that he is concerned with cultivating such conversation among his countrymen as well.

Toward this end, Shaftesbury has turned his attention to the ways authors receive advantages and disadvantages from "Grandees and Men in Power." We have already remarked Shaftesbury's preference that the Sovereign abstain from writing books. This concern will reappear in his policy recommendations to the magistrate regarding Christianity, and is connected to his desires to see greater liberty for authors and thinkers.<sup>84</sup> Shaftesbury's Whiggery is apparent in this concern:

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<sup>82</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.96. The question of a proper standard by which to evaluate taste anticipates the later discussion undertaken by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. See, for example, Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue : In Two Treatises*, The third edition, corrected. ed. (London: Printed for J. and J. Knapton [and 10 others], 1729). Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste (1759): Together with Observations concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry* (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1963). Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, (Reprografischer Nachdruck der Ausg. London 1790.) ed., *Anglistica & Americana* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968). Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). The *locus classicus* for this investigation can be found in Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste." David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Rev. ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987). For an argument that such an approach is not equivalent to subjectivism, see the discussion of this essay in John W. Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason : Recovering the Human Sciences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>83</sup> For an historical account of Shaftesbury's educational project, see Lawrence Klein, "The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18, no. 2 (1984).

<sup>84</sup> Regarding his concerns about Christianity (and most likely its march under the Spanish and French flags), Shaftesbury writes "we are still held in a perpetual Alarm by the Aspect of Affairs abroad, and by the Terror of that Power, which ere Mankind had well recover'd the Misery of those barbarous Ages consequent to the *Roman Yoke*, has again threaten'd the World with a Universal Monarchy, and a new Abyss of Ignorance and Superstition." *Soliloquy*, 1.134.

'tis scarce a quarter of an Age since such a happy Balance of Power was settled between our Prince and People, as has firmly secur'd our hitherto precarious Libertys, and remov'd from us the Fear of civil Commotions, Wars and Violence, either on account of Religion and Worship, the Property of the Subject, or the contending Titles of the Crown. But as the greatest Advantages of this World are not to be bought at easy Prices; we are still at this moment expending both our Blood and Treasure, to secure to our-selves this inestimable Purchase of *our Free Government and National Constitution*.<sup>85</sup>

In *Soliloquy*, however, he is most concerned about tilling to make the soil better for authors. Shaftesbury traces the rise and progress of the arts to the existence of free government: poetic liberty correlates with political liberty. The Critic emphasizes that Shaftesbury's reflections on authors combined with "*the Rise and Progress of Arts*" provides "the Inlet or Introduction to his *Philosophy*." As we will see in our discussion of the central section of Part II, "*Philosophy it-self, as a Science and known Profession* worthy of that name, cannot with any probability be suppos'd to have risen (as our Author shews) till other *Arts* had been rais'd, and, in a certain proportion, advanc'd before it."<sup>86</sup> According to the Critic, Shaftesbury has noticed in his study of the ancients "the real *Lineage and Succession of Wit*." This lineage is "plainly founded in *Nature*: as our Author has endeavour'd to make appear both from *History* and *Fact*."<sup>87</sup> While many early nations seemed to have discovered useful arts (the Critic mentions the Egyptians and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. For an account of Shaftesbury's Whiggery, which was of the "Country Whig" variety that remained loyal to King William, see Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 206-09. For a classic study of the Commonwealthmen, see Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman ; Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>86</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.84.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3.85.

others), it is only in "the Greek *Nation*" that the polite arts and sciences developed. The Critic traces this fact to the "fortunate Constitution of that People." He writes,

for tho compos'd of different Nations, distinct in Laws and Governments, divided by Seas and Continents, dispers'd in distant Islands; yet being originally of the same Extract, united by one single Language, and animated by that social, publick and *free* Spirit, which notwithstanding the Animosity of their several warring States, induc'd them to erect such heroick Congresses and Powers as those which constituted the Amphictonian *Councils*, the Olympick, Isthmian, and other *Games*; they cou'd not but naturally polish and refine each other.<sup>88</sup>

The Critic denies that the Greeks imported their arts from other nations. "The utmost which cou'd be nam'd, wou'd amount to no more than raw *Materials*, of a rude and barbarous form. And thus the Nation was evidently *Original* in Art." This is a very important distinction, for in it we see that for Shaftesbury the progress of the arts is connected to nature more than what will come to be called the spirit of history. His model appeals to the way human beings naturally respond to a confluence of circumstances. With the Greeks, the arts were "*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."<sup>89</sup> Having said this, however, it seems reasonable to see the roots of historical thinking in this account, especially as it comes to light in Shaftesbury's descendants in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Be that as it may, Shaftesbury connects the flourishing of the arts to free government. For this reason, he is hopeful that England is ripe for a revival and advance

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 3.85-86.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 3.87.



of the arts and sciences. "We are now in an Age when Liberty is once again in its Ascendant. And we are our-selves the happy Nation, who not only enjoy it at home, but by our Greatness and Power give Life and Vigour to it abroad; and are the Head and Chief of the European *League*, founded on this *Common Cause*."<sup>90</sup> On account of this, Shaftesbury suggests that only a respite from war would be needed for the "arts and studys" to enjoy great improvement.

Shaftesbury encourages the grandees to maintain a "generous and impartial regard to Merit in the arts," for "wherever the *Author-Practice* and *Liberty of the Pen* has in the least prevail'd, the Governors of the State must be either considerable Gainers, or Sufferers by its means." Still, he exhorts them to patronize the arts generously while leaving the making of art to the true poets.

### **Part II, § 2: Criticks and the Importance of Craftsmanship**

In section one of Part II, Shaftesbury introduced the reader to the importance of liberty for the "*the Rise and Progress of Arts*." He continues this theme into section two, where he will offer a natural pattern for that progress as a corrective to the modern view of poetry and philosophy. According to Shaftesbury, the modern understanding of poetic creation holds "that by his Genius alone, and a natural Rapidity of Style and Thought, [the poet] is able to carry all before him; that he plays with his Business, does things in passing, at a venture, and in the quickest period of Time."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.137-38.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.144.

The model is one of inspiration, emphasizing the role of the divine and minimizing the role of craftsmanship in the making of poetry. What is more, the modern style encourages boasting in the form of "prefaces, dedications, and introductions." This is the opposite of the spirit responsible for the greatness of antiquity. Shaftesbury recommends an "Attick Elegance" which hides the labor of the writer under a demeanor of carelessness:

when [ancient poets] had so polish'd their piece, and render'd it so natural and easy, that it *seem'd* only a lucky flight, a hit of thought, or flowing vein of humour; they were then chiefly concern'd lest it should *in reality* pass for such, and their artifice remain undiscover'd. They were willing it shou'd be known how serious their play was; and how elaborate their freedom and facility.<sup>92</sup>

While Shaftesbury's style is always playful, it is always in the service of a serious purpose. (We discuss Shaftesbury's use of serious play when we turn to his treatment of "raillery," below.)

Excellent craftsmanship requires judgment honed by what Shaftesbury calls Criticism. He writes, "accuracy of Workmanship requires a Critick's *Eye*. 'Tis lost upon a vulgar Judgment. Nothing grieves *a real Artist* more than that indifference of the Publick, which suffers *Work* to pass *uncriticiz'd*." A man's genius alone is insufficient, which at best accomplishes an outward show serving to "to turn the Eye from a direct and steady Survey of his Piece."<sup>93</sup> For this reason, Shaftesbury resists the tendency of his age to complain about "criticks." Far from being the enemy of the "Commonwealth of Wit

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1.143,44.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1.144.

and Letters," he argues that "they are the *Props* and *Pillars* of this Building; and that without the Encouragement and Propagation of such a Race, we shou'd remain as Gothick *Architects* as ever."

According to Shaftesbury, the faculty of language in human beings is open to extensive refinement. The highest achievements of such refinement come about, however, as the result of deliberate advancing of the art of poetry by men. One is unlikely to find mastery of language when men are in a rude state; language would at best facilitate mutual understanding for the sake of providing for necessities:

their expos'd and indigent State cou'd not be presum'd to afford 'em either that full Leisure, or easy Disposition which was requisite to raise 'em to any Curiosity of Speculation. They who were neither safe from Violence, nor secure of Plenty, were unlikely to engage in unnecessary Arts. Nor cou'd it be expected they shou'd turn their Attention towards the Numbers of their Language, and the harmonious Sounds which they accidentally emitted.<sup>94</sup>

As society came to rest on a more solid foundation, however, and matters of public importance had to be debated and decided, men soon learned the value of persuasion. Shaftesbury suggests that "*the Goddess Persuasion* must have been in a manner the Mother of *Poetry, Rhetorick, Musick*, and the other kindred Arts." Those men who were able to form not only the best arguments but those who could speak most beautifully came to the fore in a polity; such men used speech "to charm *the Publick Ear*, and to incline *the Heart*, by the Agreeableness of Expression."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 1.146.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Shaftesbury points out that the most ancient traditions suggest that the founders of great cities were musicians and poets. Such men were students of "the Numbers of *Speech*," and through their "proportionable Improvements in the Study of mere Sounds and *natural Harmony*" they contributed to the softening of the manners of their newly formed nation. Because persuasion is unnecessary where public affairs are decided by force, it is only the free society, "made by Consent and voluntary Association," that acts as a nursery for the arts. Because free societies esteem elocution, public men undertake the study of rhetoric. The softer manners and temperament of free people made them "more treatable in a way of Reason and Understanding, and more subject to be led by Men of Science and Erudition." In turn, "they who rose by Science, and Politeness in the higher Arts, cou'd not fail to promote that *Taste* and *Relish* to which they ow'd their personal Distinction and Pre-eminence."<sup>96</sup>

While the advance of the "persuasive Arts" would attract the "forward *Wits* and aspiring *Genius's* of the Times," they would also give encouragement to those interested in the arts as ends in themselves. Those interested in "*Contemplation*" alone would arise. Such men, identified by Shaftesbury as "**Criticks**," would make extensive contributions to the refinement of the arts themselves and also raise the standards of taste in society:

for to all Musick there must be an Ear proportionable. There must be an Art of *Hearing* found, ere the performing Arts can have their due effect, or any thing exquisite in the kind be felt or comprehended. The just Performers therefore in each Art wou'd naturally be the most desirous of improving and refining the publick Ear; which they cou'd no way so well effect as by the help of those latter

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 1.147.

*Genius's*, who were in a manner their *Interpreters* to the People; and who by their Example taught the Publick to discover what was just and excellent in each Performance.<sup>97</sup>

Those critics who sought a public reputation were called Sophists, which did not begin as a pejorative title. Even the "gravest *Philosophers*, who were Censors of Manners, and Criticks of a higher degree"--perhaps especially these moral philosophers--attended to "the power of *Argument* and *Persuasion*."

Drawing on accounts found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and Longinus's *On the Sublime*, Shaftesbury presents a genealogy of styles as they grew up in the poetic arts. He imagines that the earliest style "was the *Miraculous*, the *Pompous*, or what we generally call the SUBLIME."<sup>98</sup> The **sublime** style works on the passion of "astonishment," and is most prevalent among children and rude peoples who are still in their infancy as nations. Barbarians, he says, make music filled with "hideous and astonishing Sounds" and are attracted to enormous figures of odd colors. The sublime appears in poetry in the form of metaphors and images. This manner of expression is the most distant from "ordinary Use." As we saw earlier, Homer the "Father-Poet" was the first to purge poetry of the most extravagant elements of the sublime: "he retain'd only what was decent of *the figurative* or *metaphorick* Style, introduc'd the *natural* and *simple*;

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1.148.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.149.

and turn'd his thoughts towards the real Beauty of Composition, the Unity of Design, the Truth of Characters, and the just Imitation of Nature in each particular."<sup>99</sup>

Homer was also the first poet of repute to show a model of both tragedy and comedy. According to Shaftesbury (who follows Aristotle here), tragedy naturally reaches perfection as an art before comedy. The art of comedy is more subtle than that of tragedy, and while the elements of comedy arise early, it is only with the art of criticism that it reaches its true form. Prior to just criticism, comic poetry lacked "Truth of Characters, the Beauty of Order, and the simple Imitation of Nature."<sup>100</sup>

Although comedy reached a perfection only late in the development of the arts, it served a supremely important purpose from the beginning. Comedy "'twas of admirable use to explode *the false Sublime* of early Poets, and such as in its own Age were on every occasion ready to relapse into that vicious Manner. The good Tragedians themselves could hardly escape its Lashes. The pompous Orators were its never-failing Subjects. Every thing which might be imposing, by a false Gravity or Solemnity, was forc'd to endure the Trial of this Touchstone."<sup>101</sup> Shaftesbury suggests that there is something natural in the order of this development. The bombast of early sublime poetry gives way to more measured tragic presentations, which in turn invite comic parodies. He compares this development to the way a natural body works to preserve itself:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 1.150.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1.152.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1.152-53.

for in healthy Bodys, Nature dictates Remedys of her own, and provides for the Cure of what has happen'd amiss in the Growth and Progress of a Constitution. The Affairs of this free People being in the Increase; and their Ability and Judgment every day improving, as Letters and Arts advanc'd; they wou'd of course find in themselves a Strength of Nature, which by the help of good Ferments, and a wholesom opposition of Humours, wou'd correct in one way whatever was excessive, or *peccant* (as Physicians say) in another. Thus the florid and over-sanguine Humour of the *high Style* was allay'd by something of a contrary nature. The *Comick* Genius was apply'd, as a kind of *Caustick*, to those Exuberances and *Fungus's* of the swoln Dialect, and magnificent manner of Speech. But after a-while, even this Remedy it-self was found to turn into a Disease: as Medicines, we know, grow corrosive, when the fouler Matters on which they wrought are sufficiently purg'd, and the Obstructions remov'd.<sup>102</sup>

These two passages offer us important clues to the proper relationship between nature and the arts according to Shaftesbury. Art is not presented here as an alternative to nature but as a complement arising from the natural social activity of men. Shaftesbury's own rhetorical style seems to arise from the understanding of comedy he presents here. For Shaftesbury, comedy can act to dispel the power of "false Sublime;" it can also run to excess. While we will consider Shaftesbury's treatment of the *opinions* of his age more directly in the next two chapters, we should note here that Shaftesbury uses a similar strategy in dealing with both Christianity and modern philosophy. It is, therefore, appropriate to digress from our consideration of progress in the arts to examine Shaftesbury's own use of comedy, which he calls "raillery."




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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1.153-54.

As I mentioned earlier, the Critic claims that the "skeptical Mein" [*sic*] of the treatises in Volume I is accompanied by a "*sapping* Method, and *unraveling* Humor."<sup>103</sup> In the comic style of antiquity, "Manners and Characters, as well as Speech and Writings, were discuss'd with the greatest freedom." It is this model, especially as exemplified by the classical satire of Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, that Shaftesbury adopts for the first Volume of the *Characteristicks*. The second treatise, which has as its primary task the defense of raillery, takes up this theme explicitly.<sup>104</sup>

*Sensus Communis* employs aspects of the art of the dialogue, for allows the reader to listen in on a conversation between a wise friend and his decent companion. As readers we must reconstruct the action of this dialogue because its narration is concealed under the conceit of a letter written from one friend to another. The epistolary form in the context of the *Characteristicks* is to be read neither as private correspondence nor as a straightforward formal treatise or essay.<sup>105</sup> According to the Critic, *Sensus Communis* is indeed to be approached as a real letter rather than a "treatise, design'd for publick view." Shaftesbury intends it as part of the artifice that the reader imagines the particular person to whom (or the character to which) the fictional letter was written. The Critic indicates that in this Shaftesbury follows the classical tradition of philosophical letter-writing as

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<sup>103</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.83.

<sup>104</sup> For Shaftesbury's contemporaries, "raillery" referred to good-humored ridicule or banter. R. W. Burchfield, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary : Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>105</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.14.



practiced by Cicero and Horace. He explains that the thoughtful reader of Horace's epistles "will comprehend that the concealment of order and method, in this manner of writing, makes the chief beauty of the work."<sup>106</sup> As one might expect from the account of dialogue we have considered--and, for that matter, from a book whose very title is *Characteristicks of Men, etc.*--Shaftesbury the author creates a friend we can recognize as one of the fine gentlemen with whom Shaftesbury the moralist is particularly concerned.

We learn that Shaftesbury writes his letter in response to a friend's surprise that he had recently spoken in "commendation of *Raillery*." The friend seems to understand by raillery an unjust form of conversation in which a speaker ridicules any opinion which disagrees with his own. Shaftesbury explains that his friend's caution would have been proper had Shaftesbury left his own opinions aside as too "grave or solemn" for ridicule. He asks "whether it be not just and reasonable, to make as free with our own opinions, as with those of other people," and agrees that to spare one's own opinions would be considered "a piece of selfishness."<sup>107</sup> (One might go farther in light of *Soliloquy* and call it a piece of folly as well.) In the opinion of some people such hypocrisy would betray a blind adherence to unexamined opinions. Shaftesbury describes this accusation in language reminiscent of Bacon's *New Organon*:

we may be charg'd perhaps with willful Ignorance and blind Idolatry, for having taken opinions upon trust, and consecrated in our-selves certain Idol-Notions, which we will never suffer to be unveil'd, or seen in open light. They may perhaps be monsters and not divinities, or sacred truths, which are kept thus choicely, in

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 3.15.

<sup>107</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.40.

some dark corner of our minds: the specters may impose on us, whilst we refuse to turn 'em every way, and view their shapes and complexions in every light.<sup>108</sup>

Shaftesbury knows that there may be some received opinions which would wither under the attack of raillery; and we will see that some of the opinions considered most solemn and grave may actually be "*Deform'd*" and "*Odious*."<sup>109</sup> But the defenders of raillery hold that the truth has nothing to fear from this style of conversation. He writes that "truth, 'tis supposed, may bear all lights; and one of those principle lights or natural mediums, by which things are to be view'd, in order to a thorow recognition, is ridicule it-self."<sup>110</sup>

This is not the impression of Shaftesbury's friend, however, who had recently observed a free conversation between Shaftesbury and his friends which left him unsettled. The friend is of the opinion that Shaftesbury ought to have condemned the group with "great gravity" for their speech. The friend seems to have been upset in part by the skeptical *manner* of the conversation, which ending abruptly and in "a sort of Confusion...almost brought to nothing whatever had been advanc'd in the discourse before."<sup>111</sup> Regarding the *substance* of the conversation Shaftesbury provides few details because "some particulars of this conversation may not perhaps be so proper to commit to paper." We learn a few pages later, however, that the conversation had a very serious

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.129.

<sup>110</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.40.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 1.44.

subject indeed, namely "morality and religion."<sup>112</sup> The *aporia* of the conversation must have been especially disturbing to his upright friend given its topics. Shaftesbury concedes that "a great many fine schemes...were destroy'd; many grave reasonings overturn'd," but observes that the conversation was conducted "without offense to the partys concern'd."<sup>113</sup>

Surely this is not correct, for the friend was sufficiently indignant to wonder why Shaftesbury had not condemned the free conversationalists. Yet Shaftesbury understands that people do not like to see their moral and religious opinions ridiculed, and he condemns the callous mockery of men's opinions as an unjust form of speech. Shaftesbury remarks that a certain style of raillery has become the fashion of the age. Men of business, politicians, and authors, have all become practiced at banter, buffoonery, and burlesque.<sup>114</sup> Even the most solemn Divines attempt to lend their "grim aspect" a playful mien when entering into controversies. They find they must "be jocose and pleasant with an adversary, whom they wou'd chuse to treat in a very different manner" if they could.<sup>115</sup>

Shaftesbury blames the spread of this vulgar raillery on the fierceness of religious persecution in his day. Buffoonery is a natural reaction against zealotry which brooks no disagreement. Persecution has raised a "bantering" spirit which "strains the just measure

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 1.150.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 1.44-45.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 1.41.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 1.43.

of what we call urbanity."<sup>116</sup> This excessive raillery grows worse with the increase of persecution: "the higher the slavery," he writes, "the more exquisite the buffoonery."<sup>117</sup> It has the consequence of leading the *railleur* himself to acquire the habit of "inconsiderateness."<sup>118</sup> A "gross sort of raillery" indulges in ridicule for its own sake; its temper, "all air and humour," takes nothing seriously.<sup>119</sup> So while buffoonery has the ill effect of offending the decent opinions of gentlemen, it also is a symptom of enfeebled reason. He writes,

nor is it a wonder that men are generally such faint reasoners, and care to argue strictly on any trivial subject in company; when they dare so little exert their reason in greater matters, and are forc'd to argue lamely, where they have need of the greatest activity and strength. The same thing therefore happens here as in strong and healthy bodys, which are debar'd their natural exercise, and confin'd to narrow space. They have a sort of action, and move still, tho with the worst grace imaginable.<sup>120</sup>

Buffoonery, a vice which attends the exercise of raillery, openly ridicules received opinions. This leads some gentleman (such as Shaftesbury's friend) to condemn all raillery as a threat to decency. Buffoonery itself discredits reason and encourages gentlemen to prefer foolish diversion to thinking about serious matters.<sup>121</sup> Shaftesbury holds that there is a just form of raillery, however.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 1.46-47.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 1.47.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1.14.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 1.46.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 1.15.

Just raillery arises from the climate of persecution because the zealot opposes not only the *ridicule* of received opinions but the very *questioning* of them. "When [zealots] hear principles examin'd, sciences and arts inquir'd into, and matters of importance treated with this frankness of humour, they imagine presently that all professions must fall to the ground, all establishments come to ruin, and nothing orderly or decent be left standing in the world."<sup>122</sup> They oppose all liberty of thought and speech, even when it is privately and prudently managed. As a result of this fact, serious men turn to a just form of raillery, also known as irony. "If men are forbid to speak their minds seriously on certain subjects, they will do it ironically. If they are forbid to speak at all upon such subjects, or if they find it really dangerous to do so; they will then redouble their disguise, involve themselves in mysteriousness, and talk so as hardly to be understood, or at least not plainly interpreted, by those who are dispos'd to do 'em a mischief."<sup>123</sup>

Shaftesbury explains that there is a kind of "defensive raillery" which might be employed "when the spirit of curiosity wou'd force a discovery of more truth than can conveniently be told."<sup>124</sup> This defensive raillery protects the truth--not to mention the truth-teller--by disguising it, because "we can never do more injury to truth, than by discovering too much of it on some occasions." We have yet to see whether Shaftesbury agrees that the truth itself may bear all lights, but he clearly does not think human beings

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 1.46.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 1.41.

are equally suited to see the truth. "'Tis the same with understandings as with eyes: to such a certain size and make just so much light is necessary, and no more. Whatever is beyond brings darkness and confusion."<sup>125</sup> For this reason it is "real humanity and kindness, to hide strong truths from tender eyes."

Shaftesbury identifies Socrates as the supreme practitioner of this humane art. This observation helps us understand better what Shaftesbury meant when he remarked that Socrates was "so veil'd, and in a Cloud, that to the unattentive surveyor he seem'd often to be very different from what he really was; and this chiefly by reason of a certain exquisite and refin'd raillery which belong'd to his manner."<sup>126</sup> Through his "genius and manner," Socrates would "treat the highest subjects, and those of the commonest capacity both together, and render 'em explanatory of each other."

Shaftesbury praises the friends who out of respect for decent opinion took their freedom only amongst their fellow gentlemen. "To start questions, or manage debates, which offend the publick ear, is to be wanting in that respect which is due to common society." Delicate subjects, he writes, "shou'd either not be treated at all in publick, or in such a manner as to occasion no scandal or disturbance."<sup>127</sup> This is surely prudent advice to anyone who would prefer not to experience the anger of the public, and it seems to be

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

<sup>127</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.49.

the policy followed by Shaftesbury himself.<sup>128</sup> While, as we have seen, Shaftesbury prefers that the magistrate foster an environment of liberty, he nevertheless relies on the prudence of authors not to abuse their liberty.

While defensive raillery protects the reputation of the truth-seeker, it also protects the reputation of the activity of truth-seeking. By distinguishing just raillery from unjust raillery, Shaftesbury tries to preserve the reputation of serious inquiry among gentlemen like his friend. Shaftesbury insists that the difference between just and gross raillery is as real "as between fair-dealing and hypocrisy; or between the genteelest wit and the most scurrilous buffoonery."<sup>129</sup> Just raillery is distinguished by its genuine concern for the truth. As Shaftesbury wants to discourage thoughtless raillery which takes nothing seriously, he also denounces dishonest raillery which sets out "industriously to confound men, in a mysterious manner, and to make advantage or draw pleasure from that perplexity they are thrown into, by such uncertain talk."<sup>130</sup> It is a foolish sort of wit that amuses all but "leaves the most sensible man, and even a friend, equally in doubt, and at a loss to understand what one's real mind is, upon any subject." When divorced from a concern for the truth, raillery is merely a tool for sophistry.

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<sup>128</sup> We are told at several points in the *Characteristicks* that authors wishing to avoid the reputation for atheism or even skepticism have avoided discussing "any Holy Mysteries of our Religion, or Sacred Articles of our Belief." *Miscellany V*, 3.193. We are also told by the Critic that the author himself "on all occasions submits most willingly, and with full confidence and trust to the opinions by law established." *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.46. One would have to notice, however, that Shaftesbury himself was not especially successful in avoiding the reputation for having unorthodox views.

<sup>129</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.42.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.41.

Yet concern for the potential free thinker is not Shaftesbury's only motivation. He seems to be motivated by real humanity and kindness in his efforts not to disrupt common opinion. He writes that "it belongs to men of slavish principles, to affect a superiority over the vulgar, and to despise the multitude. The lovers of mankind respect and honor conventions and societies of men."<sup>131</sup>

Shaftesbury writes to his friend that in addition to offending no one, the good-humored style of raillery left the friends eager to continue their debate in the future. Indeed, Shaftesbury continues, reason gained more from the easy manner of free raillery than from the "usual stiff adherence to a particular opinion."<sup>132</sup> Shaftesbury commends raillery as the style most suitable to his age. "The Temper of the Pedagogue suits not with the Age," he writes, "and the world, however it may be taught, will not be tutor'd."<sup>133</sup> The pedagogue "demands reverence and awe," but his temper serves only "to keep understandings at a distance, and out of reach."<sup>134</sup> According to Shaftesbury, it is no small thing that pleasure be found in the "unraveling or refuting of any argument," for "'tis the habit alone of reasoning, which can make the reasoner."<sup>135</sup> Shaftesbury's notion of reasoning, he tells us, cannot be learned from the "written treatises of the learned" or

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 1.49.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 1.45.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 1.44.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 1.46.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 1.45.



from hearing long orations and declamations. It is only the "question and reply" of a "free conference"--that is, dialogue--which develops the ability to reason.



Having considered, then, the deeper meaning of raillery for Shaftesbury, we can return to *Soliloquy*. We have already seen, Shaftesbury identifies his notion of reasoning with the art of the dialogue as practiced by the writers of antiquity. The free give and take of a polite conversation or a dialogue is an image of the thinker engaged in soliloquy. Under the discipline of the soliloquy as taught by our philosopher-critic, the *rallieur's* works will be more likely to discern the "truth of Characters, the Beauty of Order, and the simple Imitation of Nature." Corrected by the proper self-reflection, authors will be in a position to improve their readers in addition to pleasing them. At the very least, they are likely to start thinking about the opinions that they had heretofore taken for granted. This would be the beginning of a real liberal education.

Yet Shaftesbury does not think that the authors of his age are prepared for the simple imitation of Nature. The spirits of banter and buffoonery are in fashion; there is little taste for "real simplicity" among his contemporaries. Because of this, a straightforward methodical manner will not find a suitable audience. So too he rejects most of the other forms available to authors; the sublime and the didactic forms are unsuitable. This leaves only one option to be recommended:

the only Manner left, in which Criticism can have its just Force amongst us, is the *antient* Comick; of which kind were the first *Roman* Miscellanys, or *Satirick* Pieces: a sort of original Writing of their own, refin'd afterwards by the best Genius, and politest Poet of that Nation; who, notwithstanding, owns the Manner

to have been taken from the *Greek Comedy* above-mention'd. And if our Home-Wits wou'd refine upon this Pattern, they might perhaps meet with considerable Success.<sup>136</sup>

As we have seen, this is precisely what Shaftesbury himself strives to do in the *Characteristicks*. He closes the section of Part II devoted to critics by reminding his readers that in modern times as well as ancient, the interests of the critic is the same as "that of Wit, Learning, and Good Sense."

### **Part II, § 3: The Publick**

Having considered the mixed influence of the "grandees," and the salutary influence of true criticism on authors, Shaftesbury turns to consider the mutual influence of author and audience. Shaftesbury playfully professes surprise that modern authors are so insipid when even the common artisan strives to produce works of integrity. He writes that "when one considers this Zeal and Honesty of inferiour Artists, one wou'd wonder to see those who pretend to Skill and Science in a higher kind, have so little regard to *Truth*, and *the Perfection of their Art*. One wou'd expect it of our *Writers*, that if they had real Ability, they shou'd draw *the World* to *them*; and not meanly sute *themselves* to the World, in its weak State."<sup>137</sup>

Again, Shaftesbury makes an unfavorable comparison with the poets of antiquity. Those poets did not always expect to receive applause for their work; had they done so, "they had not done their Countrymen such Service, nor themselves such Honour as we

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<sup>136</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.161.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.163.

find they did, by conforming to Truth and Nature. The generous Spirits who first essay'd the Way, had not always *the* World on their side: but soon drew after 'em *the best Judgments*; and soon afterwards the World itself."<sup>125</sup> As we can see from the account of raillery, Shaftesbury does not advocate treating the public with open contempt. Modern authors will have to write with an understanding of the fancies and opinion of their times. Yet, as authors, Shaftesbury hopes that they will look to form their work with the advice of a better self. With the proper use of their "geniuses," authors would command their audience rather than the reverse, and the public would learn "good taste" from moderns too.

"And thus," he writes, "we are return'd to our old Article of Advice; that main Preliminary of *Self-study* and *inward Converse*, which we have found so much wanting in the Authors of our Time." It is for this reason that "*the Poet* must necessarily borrow of *the Philosopher*."<sup>138</sup> We have yet to see, however, what constitutes good taste for Shaftesbury. For an understanding of this question we have to consider Part III.

### ***Advice to an Author, Part III: Truth and the Love of the Beautiful***

#### **Part III, § 1: Counterfeit Philosophers**

Shaftesbury opens Part III with a reflection on the moral character of the self, observing that men take great pleasure in being complimented on their character. This suggestion, which is rooted in our common sense of the matter, he connects with a bold

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 1.172.

claim: that human beings are naturally able to recognize moral beauty. He does not mean by this that men have good "Taste or *Judgment*" fully formed by nature, of course. As the Critic explains,

whatever Principles or Materials of this kind we may possibly bring with us; whatever good Facultys, Senses, or anticipating Sensations, and Imaginations, may be of Nature's Growth, and arise properly, of themselves, without our Art, Promotion, or Assistance; the general *Idea* which is form'd of all this Management, and the clear *Notion* we attain of what is preferable and principal in all these Subjects of Choice and Estimation, will not, as I imagine, by any Person, be taken for *innate*.<sup>139</sup>

As we have already seen, and as the Critic confirms, "Use, Practice and Culture must precede the *Understanding* and *Wit* of such an advanc'd Size and Growth as this. A legitimate and just Taste can neither be begotten, made, conceiv'd, or produc'd, without the antecedent *Labour* and *Pains* of Criticism."<sup>140</sup> Shaftesbury has suggested as a prelude to his philosophy that men adopt the practice of soliloquy. Through soliloquy they will gain a distance from themselves. From the perspective of their nurtured daemon, they will be able to view themselves dispassionately, that is, they will view their fancies and opinions as objects rather than as inescapable truths. He has also suggested that this practice is connected to the art of the dialogue, an art which itself must be practiced and developed with great effort and that presupposes a certain level of cultural sophistication. Shaftesbury is now ready to give us a better look at what he means by "the Reality of a *better Self*" and the standard by which it is judged: taste. A full understanding of taste,

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<sup>139</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.101.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

however, will require that we undertake the labor of Criticism, which at its highest is a sort of contemplation by the philosopher. This happens most powerfully in *The Moralists*, which will occupy our attention in our final chapter.

Shaftesbury first reminds us that there are rivals to his classical philosophy which have their own notions of self. "The misfortune is, we are seldom taught to comprehend this *Self*, by placing it in a distinct View from its Representative or Counterfeit."<sup>141</sup> The chief obstacle to our natural self is religion. Shaftesbury writes, "in our holy Religion, which for the greatest part is adapted to the very meanest Capacitys, 'tis not to be expected that a Speculation of this kind shou'd be openly advanc'd."<sup>142</sup> The other rival is the false philosophy of those "noted Headpieces," the modern projectors, who have introduced a radical skepticism which cuts men off from common opinion and establishes abstruse theoretical systems in their place. He writes,

for *the Philosopher*, who pretends to be wholly taken up in considering his higher Facultys, and examining the Powers and Principles of his Understanding; if in reality his Philosophy be foreign to the Matter profess'd; if it goes beside the mark, and reaches nothing we can truly call our Interest or Concern; it must be somewhat worse than mere Ignorance or Idiotism. The most ingenious way of becoming foolish, is *by a System*. And the surest Method to prevent good Sense, is to set up something in the room of it. The liker any thing is to Wisdom, if it be not plainly *the thing it-self*, the more directly it becomes *its opposite*.<sup>143</sup>

We will deal with these rivals and Shaftesbury's response in the next two chapters.

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<sup>141</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.174.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.176.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.180.

Shaftesbury's vision of true philosophy is Socratic and it is especially indebted to Xenophon's Socrates. Shaftesbury praises that "noble Disciple" of Socrates, who managed to combine a life of action with the life of contemplation. Xenophon "join'd what was deepest and most solid in Philosophy, with what was easiest and most refin'd in Breeding, and in the Character and Manner of a Gentleman."<sup>144</sup> According to the Critic, it is to Xenophon that "we owe an original System of Works, the politest, wisest, usefulest, and (to those who can understand the *Divineness* of a just *Simplicity*) the most *amiable*, and even the most elevating and exalting of all un-inspir'd and merely human Authors."<sup>145</sup> Socratic philosophy teaches us to know ourselves, and consequently allows us to maintain consistency of character through the examination of fancy. Like Xenophon and other Socratics, Shaftesbury will only call free that man whose passions are ordered by reason.

It is here that Shaftesbury must begin the work of challenging modern philosophy since its account of the will contradicts the Socratic distinction between reason and the passions. According to Shaftesbury, modern philosophy has fallen into a neo-scholastic mode which seeks "a method to confound Reason, and degrade the Understanding of Mankind; they could not perhaps succeeded better, than by the Establishment of such a mock-science."<sup>146</sup> To illustrate the sort of method he means, Shaftesbury tells the story

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 1.159.

<sup>145</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.152.

<sup>146</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.177-78.

of an imprisoned thinker who, given the amount of time he had on his hands, might well have benefited from soliloquy. This prisoner "was one of those whom in this Age we usually call *Philosophers*, a Successor of Paracelsus, and a Master in the occult Sciences."<sup>147</sup> As we shall see from the description of his activities, the prisoner is a more a methodical natural scientist than an alchemist (although in truth there is not much of a difference between the two for Shaftesbury).<sup>148</sup> He tells us that while the prisoner was accomplished in his field, he had abandoned "moral science, or any thing relating to Self-converse" and consequently had to apply a different method. The prisoner was not practiced in music but he was accomplished at making a variety of distinct sounds with his voice by manipulating his mouth and throat in a variety of ways, and he undertakes an important experimental study, "and thus bellowing, roaring, snarling, and otherwise variously exerting his Organs of Sound, he endeavour'd to discover what Letters of the Alphabet cou'd best design each Species, or what new Letters were to be invented, to mark the undiscover'd Modifications."<sup>149</sup> Having used his time well in "profound Speculation and long Exercise," the prisoner is able to compose a "philosophical treatise" when he is released. Shaftesbury offers us the following assessment of his scholarship: "he esteem'd himself the only Master of Voice and Language on the account of this his *radical Science*, and *fundamental Knowledg* of Sounds. But whoever had taken him to

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 1.178.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

improve their Voice, or teach 'em an agreeable or just manner of Accent or Delivery, wou'd, I believe, have found themselves considerably deluded."<sup>150</sup> Having endeavored through his "radical science" to break the human voice into its component sounds, the imprisoned philosopher becomes an expert in exactly that: sounds. Shaftesbury forces his reader to ask about the purpose of such a science. He is quick to say that he "wou'd not condemn as useless this speculative Science of *Articulation*." It may belong with other subordinate concerns such as grammar. He doubts, however, that it will lead men "in the Discovery of [their] own Natures."<sup>151</sup> Shaftesbury is profoundly interested in human speech, as our reflections on his account of dialogue suggests; but he is interested not in the sounds of speech but its meaning to human beings. By looking into the "machine of this world and their own frame" through a physiological and radical science, philosophers learn little about moral life or the frame of their own passions. In fact, Shaftesbury fears that such a science undermines our willingness to look into moral questions. "I know not to what purpose such a Philosophy can serve, except only to shut the door against better Knowledg, and introduce Impertinence and Conceit with the best Countenance of Authority."<sup>152</sup> Shaftesbury offers the method of soliloquy to serve as a corrective to the new scholasticism he sees around him. He writes, "a small Help from our familiar Method of Soliloquy may serve turn: and we may perhaps decide this matter in a more

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1.179.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 1.180.



diverting way; by confronting this super-speculative Philosophy with a more practical sort, which relates chiefly to our Acquaintance, Friendship, and good Correspondence with our-selves."<sup>153</sup> For Shaftesbury, a true science of human nature cannot be separated from questions of purpose as they arise in common life. He offers the reader the analogy of a watch. If we were to wonder about an object in the window of a watchmaker's shop is, would we try identifying its sounds, metal, colors and parts without asking "what the real Use was of such an Instrument?" He asks which method is most likely to reveal "the real Nature of the Instrument." So too, one cannot identify man to himself without an analogous concern:

shou'd a Philosopher, after the same manner, employing himself in the Study of human Nature, discover only, what Effects each Passion wrought upon the Body; what change of Aspect or Feature they produc'd; and in what different manner they affected the Limbs and Muscles; this might possibly qualify him to give Advice to an Anatomist or a Limner, but not to *Mankind* or to *Himself*: Since according to this Survey he consider'd not the real Operation or Energy of his Subject, nor contemplated the *Man*, as *real* Man, and as a human Agent; but as a *Watch* or common *Machine*.<sup>154</sup>

Here Shaftesbury refers to Descartes, whose account of the passion of fear is known first through the mechanism of the body. While Shaftesbury concedes that he grits his teeth when afraid, he denies that he knows fear and courage better because of this. As a man he is not able to connect the mechanism to his practical concerns. He remarks, "I may depend upon it, that by the most refin'd Speculation of this kind, I shall neither learn to diminish my Fears, or raise my Courage. This, however, I may be assur'd of, that 'tis the

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 1.181.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

Nature of Fear, as well as of other Passions, to have its Increase and Decrease, as it is fed by *Opinion*, and influenc'd by Custom and Practice."<sup>155</sup> According to Shaftesbury, a moral science must approach the passions first through opinion, and opinion first comes to light as "influenc'd by Custom and Practice." It is on this point that Shaftesbury is most clearly a student of Xenophon. The Socrates of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* seems to have had a similar suspicion about natural science and its desire to create novelties:

[Socrates] did not even discuss that topic so favoured by other talkers, "the Nature of the Universe": and avoided speculation on the so-called "Cosmos" of the Professors, how it works, and on the laws that govern the phenomena of the heavens: indeed he would argue that to trouble one's mind with such problems is sheer folly...Students of human nature, he said, think that they will apply their knowledge in due course for the good of themselves and any others they choose. Do those who pry into heavenly phenomena imagine that, once they have discovered the laws by which these are produced, they will create at their will winds, waters, seasons and such things to their need? Or have they no such expectation, and are they satisfied with knowing the causes of these various phenomena?<sup>156</sup>

Like Shaftesbury, Xenophon's Socrates was more interested in humane moral questions:

his own conversation was ever of human things. The problems he discussed were, What is godly, what is ungodly; what is beautiful, what is ugly; what is just, what is unjust; what is prudence, what is madness; what is courage, what is cowardice; what is a state, what is a statesman; what is government, and what is a governor;--these and others like them, of which the knowledge made a "gentleman," in his estimation, while ignorance should involve the reproach of "slavishness."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1.182.

<sup>156</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 11.

According to Shaftesbury, moral philosophy is most properly the queen of all the sciences. First philosophy is for him, as it was for Xenophon, the study of human beings in a way that leads to self-knowledge:

and thus Philosophy, which judges both of her-self, and of every thing besides; discovers her own Province, and chief Command; teaches me to distinguish between her Person and her Likeness; and shews me her immediate and real self, by that sole Privilege of teaching me *to know my-self*, and *what belongs to me*. She gives to every inferior Science its just rank; leaves some to measure *Sounds*; others to scan *Syllables*; others to weigh *Vacuums*, and define *Spaces*, and *Extensions*: but reserves to her-self her due Authority, and Majesty; keeps her State, and antient Title, of Guide of life, investigator of virtue, and the rest of those just Appellations which of old belong'd to her.<sup>158</sup>

In following Socrates and the method of soliloquy, Shaftesbury directs his reader to begin his inquiry into nature with the opinions he finds around him, those opinions "which are accepted by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them."<sup>159</sup> It is by comparing contrary opinions and criticizing them in turn that dialectic hopes to move from false views to gain a better understanding of nature. For this reason, Shaftesbury undertakes a consideration of the most notable opinions of his day, and he undertakes the inquiry with the most reputable men of his day.

### **Part III, § 2: Gentlemen of Fashion**

We have seen that Shaftesbury began the last treatise of Volume I with the "home method" of the soliloquy. The importance of this as an inlet to the overall design of the

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<sup>158</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.184.

<sup>159</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Book 1, 101a ff.

work cannot be overstated. In fact, its importance is indicated by the epigraph Shaftesbury sets at the head of *Soliloquy*:

And you need not have looked beyond yourself.<sup>160</sup>

While this is our beginning point, however, we have also learned that it is not a sufficient account of the method of soliloquy for Shaftesbury. Soliloquy is more than a kind of solipsism and in fact in its literary form it is more akin to dialogue with another person. The Critic suggested that the proper practice of soliloquy presupposed a "previous commerce with the world." The Critic remarks that "to support this Design of his, [Shaftesbury] seems intent chiefly on this single Point; 'To discover, how we may, to best advantage, form within our-selves what in the polite World is call'd *a Relish, or Good Taste*.'"<sup>161</sup>

The Critic is emphatic about the important role the concept of taste plays in the philosophical design of the *Characteristicks* and he invites us to begin our reflections in "the polite World." This is of a piece with the general concern Shaftesbury shows for morally serious gentlemen, that is, those "gentlemen of fashion...to whom a natural good genius, or force of good education, has given a sense of what is naturally graceful or becoming."<sup>162</sup> We met one such character briefly in our treatment of raillery in *Sensus Communis*, and we will have to renew our acquaintance momentarily. According to the

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<sup>160</sup> Persius, *Satire I*.

<sup>161</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.95.

<sup>162</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.84.

Critic, gentlemen of fashion have a familiarity with the world such that they have the resources within themselves to practice the "improving Art of *Self-correspondence*."<sup>163</sup>

In taking up the subject of taste, the Critic directs our attention first to the polite world. The distinguished members of this world are not themselves philosophers, or at least not generally so, and Shaftesbury has a special name for them: "VIRTUOSI, or refin'd *Wits* of the Age." In this "general Denomination" are included:

the real *fine Gentlemen*, the Lovers of *Art* and *Ingenuity*; such as have seen *the World*, and inform'd themselves of the *Manners* and *Customs* of the several Nations of Europe, search'd into their *Antiquitys*, and *Records*; consider'd their *Police*, *Laws*, and *Constitutions*; observ'd the Situation, Strength, and Ornaments of their *Citys*, their principal *Arts*, Studys, and Amusements; their *Architecture*, *Sculpture*, *Painting*, *Musick*, and their Taste in *Poetry*, *Learning*, *Language*, and *Conversation*.<sup>164</sup>

Why would such men need the method of soliloquy at all? Here we should recall the friend of the virtuous prince who assumed that "they who are honest and just, can admire and love whatever is beautiful; without offering at anything beyond what is allowed."<sup>165</sup> Through philosophy, the gentleman comes to see that the self, while seemingly unified in its will and consequently free, is in fact governed by a bundle of fancies and opinions. It is the work of philosophy to establish an auditor within the breast of man to distinguish unhealthy "Idol-Notions" from sound and healthy opinions.

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<sup>163</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.96.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.113.

In *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury is at pains to defend the natural sociability of man and the virtues which attend society because of the corrupting power of philosophy. The noble gentleman to whom he writes the letter has himself been fortunate enough to avoid a philosophic education at the hands of the modern projectors. At the close of *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury congratulates his friend on the fact that his education involved little of the "philosophers of our days."<sup>166</sup> There was a time when the best youth could safely be entrusted to philosophy with the confidence that he would learn "right practice of the world" and "a just knowledge of men and things," but it is no longer so. Had Shaftesbury's friend learned ethics and politics from modern philosophers, he writes, "I shou'd never have thought of writing a word to you upon common sense or the love of mankind." The gentleman loves virtue for its own sake rather than for some further reward or fear of reprisal. As we will see in the next two chapters, Shaftesbury takes both Christianity and modern philosophy to attack this natural perspective of the gentleman. A modern gentleman is likely to understand his passions in light of self-interest, and yet according to Shaftesbury a gentleman who asks "why should I not be nasty in private?" is no gentleman. Shaftesbury thinks that this question is more likely to arise for the person educated by modern philosophy than for a person guided by common sense. He proposes that

the truth is: as notions stand now in the world, with respect to morals, honesty is like to gain little by philosophy, or deep speculations of any kind. In the main, 'tis best to stick to common sense, and go no further. Mens first thoughts, in this

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 1.76.

matter, are generally better than their second: their natural notions better than those refined by study, or consultation with casuists. According to common speech, as well as common sense, *honesty is the best policy*: but according to refin'd sense, the only well-advised persons, as to this world, are errant knaves.<sup>167</sup>

Shaftesbury's recommends the sober use of raillery to counterbalance the confusion found in common life, for "'tis in reality a serious study, to learn to temper and regulate that humour which nature has given us, as a more lenitive remedy against vice, and a kind of specific against superstition and melancholy delusion. There is a great difference between seeking how to raise a laugh from every thing; and seeking, in every thing, what justly may be laughed at. For nothing is ridiculous except what is deformed."<sup>168</sup> Having heard a defense for balanced raillery, the gentleman of fashion will be more likely to begin the hard work of thinking critically about the most important matters.

### **Part III, § 3: Truth in Beauty**

Shaftesbury tells us near the close of the *Characteristicks* that "it has been the main scope and principle end of these volumes, 'To assert the reality of a beauty and charm in moral as well as natural subjects; and to demonstrate the reasonableness of a proportionate taste, and determinate choice, in life and manners.'"<sup>169</sup> He seems to believe that it is necessary to assert such a reality if the true nature of moral subjects is to come to light. Indeed, should men come to lose their appreciation of the nobility of moral life, men would come to resemble animals. Such a view might "leave us probably no other

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 1.83.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 1.80.

<sup>169</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.185.

employment than that of satisfying our coarsest appetites at the cheapest rate; in order to the attainment of a supine state of indolence and activity."<sup>170</sup>

So too is it necessary to assert, at least initially, the reality of a beauty and charm in natural subjects, for without such a presupposition of "a coherence, a design, a meaning," there is no possibility of knowledge as it was understood in classical philosophy.<sup>171</sup> Modern philosophy denies nature is to be contemplated, for it understood as well as Shaftesbury that "where there is nothing like Nature, there is no room for the troublesome part of thought and contemplation," and therefore no room for the persecution which can arise from the disagreement about such matters.<sup>172</sup> Modern projectors are concerned that "the habit of admiration and contemplative delight, wou'd, by over-indulgence, too easily mount into high fanaticism, or degenerate into abject superstition."<sup>173</sup> Ultimately it is the intention of Shaftesbury to show that the cultivation of such habits need not run to such extremes.

Shaftesbury accordingly ends *Sensus Communis* with an enthusiastic consideration of the relationship between beautiful manners and other forms of beauty. He directs his speech to those "gentlemen of fashion...to whom a natural good genius, or force of good education, has given a sense of what is naturally graceful or becoming."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.20.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.6.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.84.



He introduces this appeal to the most notable and reputable of men in the hopes of keeping alive the possibility that the world itself is an ordered whole or *cosmos* (κόσμος).<sup>175</sup> Common sense, he believes, has a natural appreciation of "those natural rules of proportion and truth" which are necessary for there to be natural knowledge at all.<sup>155</sup> He is confident that "even rude nature it-self, in its primitive simplicity, is a better guide to judgment, than improv'd sophistry, and pedantick learning."<sup>176</sup> He therefore turns from modern philosophy, with its "wrong ground of education," for "redress, and amendment, from that excellent school which we call the world."<sup>177</sup> So, too, *Soliloquy* ends by praising the beautiful, calling on authors in their private capacity to practice his method of self examination:

resolution enough to criticize ourselves, and call in question our high Imaginations, florid Desires, and specious Sentiments, according to the manner of Soliloquy above prescrib'd; we shall, by the natural course of things, as we grow wiser, prove less conceited; and introduce into our Character that *Modesty*, *Condescension*, and just *Humanity* which is essential to the Success of all friendly *Counsel* and *Admonition*. An honest *Home-PHILOSOPHY* must teach us the wholesom Practice within ourselves. Polite *Reading*, and *Converse* with Mankind of the better sort, will qualify us for what remains.<sup>178</sup>

If the *Soliloquy* has done its work, the reader is now prepared to begin Volume II, which raises questions of religion and natural morality directly.

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<sup>175</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.31, in footnotes.

<sup>176</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.206.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.224.

We have yet to learn whether or not Shaftesbury has an account of metaphysics that will support connecting moral life to nature in general. This question will receive its proper treatment only in chapter 5, "Shaftesbury's 'Principal Performance'--A reading of *The Moralists*." Before considering the evidence he offers, however, we must first consider the two chief obstacles he sees blocking deeper reflection, that is, Christianity and modern philosophy. We will take up these subjects in turn.

## CHAPTER 3

### "A STORM OF DEVOTION AND ZEAL": CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICAL LIFE

#### **General Introduction**

In the previous chapter we examined Shaftesbury's understanding of philosophy, primarily as it comes to light in the treatise *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. In this chapter we will consider Shaftesbury's treatment of religion. It would be difficult to exaggerate the prominence given to religion in the *Characteristicks*. While Shaftesbury is frequently (and quite reasonably) identified with eighteenth-century deism,<sup>1</sup> his own treatment of religion is fairly subtle. To understand his teaching we will need to consider his critique of Christianity, his critique of religion as such, and his critique of revelation.

I contend that Shaftesbury shares the Enlightenment *critique of Christianity* as it is advanced in the works of Hobbes and Locke. In the opinion of these "modern projectors" the consequences of Christianity have been disastrous for human beings. While I believe that aspects of what I am calling the Enlightenment critique can be observed in the writings of many philosophers, I focus attention in this chapter on Hobbes and Locke. I consider Hobbes because Shaftesbury identifies him so clearly as a philosophical foe. I will also present what I regard as Locke's iteration of this same critique.

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<sup>1</sup> Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto." Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, A Harbinger Book, H005-H006*. (New York,: Harcourt, 1962).

While the religious opinions of any one of these important figures generates legitimate scholarly controversy, I believe that Hobbes, Locke, and Shaftesbury treat Christianity in nearly identical ways. This can be seen by concentrating on three important topics, namely the psychology, rhetoric, and clericism of Christianity. Scholarly subtleties aside, I believe that Shaftesbury himself will vouchsafe this interpretation.

Shaftesbury's understanding of *religion in general* is self-consciously indebted to antiquity. Shaftesbury contrasts two possible policies toward religion, one ancient and one modern. The ancient policy treats religion as an aspect of politics; the modern policy treats politics as an aspect of religion. Shaftesbury's critique of *revelation* comes to light through his treatment of enthusiasm. Shaftesbury is often credited with having restored a positive valence to the term enthusiasm, especially as it gets taken up by poets and literary critics. Here too Shaftesbury seeks advice from classical philosophy. Just as he turns to Socratic dialogue in his attempt to distinguish reason from the passions, so he offers a classical account of the soul when considering man's relationship to the divine.

## **Shaftesbury and Religion**

### **The Question of Shaftesbury's Sincerity**

From the beginning scholars have disagreed over Shaftesbury's personal opinions about Christianity--in part, I suspect, because they disagree about what constitutes sincere adherence to Christianity. Noted divine William Warburton reports a comment made by Alexander Pope about the *Characteristicks* that puts Shaftesbury's adherence to

Christianity into considerable doubt. He writes, "Mr. Pope told me, that, to his knowledge, the *Characteristics* had done more harm to Revealed Religion in England than all the works of Infidelity put together."<sup>2</sup> One might contend, of course, that Christianity can be adequately presented as a natural religion, that is, without recourse to revelation. It would be enough for our purposes, however, to determine whether Shaftesbury himself thought this true. Noted Shaftesbury scholar A. O. Aldridge seems tempted by the contention. He argues that while Shaftesbury undeniably held to a controversial theology, much of the controversy surrounding his piety can be traced to his playful demeanor rather than the particular opinions he held.<sup>3</sup> While Aldridge himself offers an impressive catalogue of these controversial opinions, which includes a denial of miracles, the mockery of scripture, and an admiration for the apostate Emperor Julian, he seems to believe that much of Shaftesbury's contempt was directed at religious establishment rather than religion *per se*. An animus against religious establishment is undeniable, as we will see in our consideration of priestcraft; yet Shaftesbury's own religious opinions do not suggest much in the way of sincere piety even when his criticism of established religion is taken into account.

Shaftesbury was deliberately guarded in his treatment of Christianity. Aldridge himself claims that Shaftesbury's irony infuriated his contemporary critics, according to whom Shaftesbury "eludes the arguments of the defenders of Christianity and at the same

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<sup>2</sup> William Warburton, Richard Hurd, and Charles Yorke, *Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of His Friends*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Aldridge, "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto," 268-370.

time artfully enregisters himself among the number of faithful Christians."<sup>4</sup> There is substantial evidence for this opinion. John Leland, for example, in *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers*, concedes that some have claimed that Shaftesbury was a true friend of Christianity. He writes that

passages are produced out of some of his writings, in which [Shaftesbury] expresseth very favourable sentiments of Christianity. This he doth particularly in a preface, which, and I believe justly, is ascribed to his Lordship as the author, prefixed to a volume of select sermons of Dr. Benjamin Whichcot, published in 1698. In that preface he finds fault with those in this profane age that represent not only the institution of preaching, but even the gospel itself, and our holy religion, to be a fraud. He expresseth his hope, that from some things in these sermons, even they that are prejudiced against Christianity may be induced to like it the better; and that the vein of goodness which appears throughout these discourses will make such as are already Christians prize Christianity the more; and the fairness, ingenuity, and impartiality, which they learn from hence, will be a security to them against the contrary temper of those other irreconcilable enemies to our holy faith. In 1716 some of his letters were published at London, under the title of *Several Letters written by a noble Lord to a Young Man in the University*. In these letters, which were written a few years before the Earl of Shaftesbury's death, in the years 1707, 1708, 1709, there are excellent sentiments and advices, and some which seem to discover a real regard for the Christian religion.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, Shaftesbury does not elude the careful eye of John Leland. Leland advances evidence that *Characteristicks* contains many passages "which seem to have a bad aspect on religion, and to be of a dangerous influence and tendency."<sup>6</sup> Leland quotes

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 357.

<sup>5</sup> John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers, That Have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century; with Observations Upon Them, and Some Account of the Answers That Have Been Published against Them. In Several Letters to a Friend* (London,: Printed for T. Tegg and son, 1837), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 41.

several which deny and contemn "the doctrine of future rewards and punishments."<sup>7</sup>

According to Leland this opinion alone is sufficient evidence of Shaftesbury's hostility to Christianity, but there is more. Shaftesbury

hath taken occasion to expose the Scripture, as far as in him lay, to ridicule and contempt, of which many instances might be produced. Not to mention the insinuations he has thrown out relating to particular passages both in the Old Testament and the New, he hath endeavoured to expose the spirit of prophecy, and made a ludicrous representation of it, and compared it with the extravagancies of the maddest enthusiasts. Miracles he will not allow to be any proofs, though ever so certain; or that there is any ground to believe their having been done, but the authority of our governors, and of those whom the state hath appointed the guardians of holy writ. He speaks with ridicule, as other deistical writers have often done, of what he calls the *specious pretence of moral certainty*, and *matter of fact*, and insinuates, that the facts recorded in the gospels are absolutely uncertain, and that, he that relies upon those accounts must be a sceptical Christian. He represents St. Paul as speaking sceptically, and as no way certain or positive as to the revelation made to him, though the contrary is manifest from the apostle's own most express declarations.<sup>8</sup>

Some apparently have difficulty reconciling the Shaftesbury of the preface to Whichcote and the patron of a young theologian with the seemingly deistical author of *Characteristicks*. Leland himself takes note that on several occasions Shaftesbury declares himself an orthodox believer. "He hath assured us, in his ironical way, of his *steady orthodoxy*, and *entire submission to the truly Christian and Catholic doctrines of our holy church, as by law established*: and that he faithfully embraces the *holy mysteries of our religion even in the minutest particulars, notwithstanding their amazing depth*."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41-44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 45.

The confusion is dispelled, however, when we remember what Shaftesbury's "ironical way" involves. As we saw in the previous chapter, Shaftesbury did not believe people were equally capable of enlightenment: "'tis the same with understandings as with eyes: to such a certain size and make just so much light is necessary, and no more. Whatever is beyond brings darkness and confusion."<sup>10</sup> Robert Voitle shows that Shaftesbury carried this view into his active life. Voitle writes that

for his servants, for his farmers, for the great mass of mankind there is no hope except by earnest and continued attention to the moral dictates of religion from the earliest age...Even among the better favored who have special opportunities or education to help them turn out right, there is always the danger of backsliding--witness the letters he was later to write...Only the very few who through intensive reading of the ancients have come to love virtue for her own sake may not need religion.<sup>11</sup>

While Voitle is correct to observe this distinction in Shaftesbury's opinions, his suggestion that it reflected "paternalism of the system" and moral snobbery fails to take note of Shaftesbury's political intention.

Here I believe Leland is more persuasive, largely because he relies on Shaftesbury's own explanation. He quotes Shaftesbury, who writes that "where the supreme Powers have given their Sanction to any religious Record, or pious writ...it becomes immoral and profane in any one, to deny absolutely, or dispute the sacred Authority of the least Line or Syllable contained in it."<sup>12</sup> This is actually one of several

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<sup>10</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.41.

<sup>11</sup> Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, 112.

<sup>12</sup> Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers*, 45-46.



statements in the *Characteristicks* maintaining the importance of obeying the lawfully established religion. The Critic reports of "our Author" that he "on all occasions submits most willingly, and with full Confidence and Trust, to the Opinions *by Law establish'd*."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere the Critic remarks, "it is certainly no small *Interest or Concern* with Men, to believe what is by Authority establish'd; since in the Case of Disbelief there can be no Choice left but either to live *a Hypocrite*, or be esteem'd *profane*."<sup>14</sup> Wherever the law does not leave men to themselves, only two alternatives are available to those who do not believe what the law requires. They can pretend to believe, in which case they are guilty of hypocrisy; or they can make no pretense about their unbelief and be regarded as profane. As the violent experience of the English Civil Wars suggests, such a choice is "no small *Interest or Concern* with Men."

The Critic offers proof that he is mindful of his own circumstances as he writes.

In assessing his own work he claims that

the only Subject on which we are perfectly secure, and without fear of any just Censure or Reproach, is that of FAITH, and *Orthodox* BELIEF. For in the first place, it will appear, that thro' a profound Respect, and religious Veneration, we have forborne so much as to name any of the sacred and solemn *Mysterys* of *Revelation*. And, in the next place, as we can with confidence declare, that we have never in any Writing, publick or private, attempted such high Researches, nor have ever in Practice acquitted our-selves otherwise than as just *Conformists* to the lawful Church; so we may, in a proper Sense, be said faithfully and dutifully *to embrace* those holy *Mysterys*, even in their minutest Particulars, and without the least Exception on account of their amazing Depth. And tho we are sensible that it wou'd be no small hardship to deprive *others* of a liberty of examining and searching, with due Modesty and Submission, into the nature of

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<sup>13</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.64.

those Subjects; yet as for *our-selves*, who have not the least scruple whatsoever, we pray not any such Grace or Favour in our behalf: being fully assur'd of our own steady *Orthodoxy, Resignation*, and intire *Submission* to the truly *Christian* and *Catholick* Doctrines of our Holy *Church*, as by *Law* establish'd.<sup>15</sup>

While the Critic neglects to mention whether he is a believing Christian or not, his tone seems overly earnest given his earlier raillery. Either way, the statement is inconclusive evidence because it could as easily be attributed to hypocrisy as sincerity.

Leland connects Shaftesbury's lawful adherence to the Church of England with his political teaching on religion in general. He writes:

that according to [Shaftesbury], Christianity has no other foundation than what will serve a false religion as well as the true. And elsewhere, in the person of the sceptick, he talks of our visible sovereign's answering for us in matters of religion. In this his Lordship exactly agrees with Mr. Hobbes: he is, indeed, far from asserting with that writer, that there is nothing good or evil in its own nature, and that virtue and vice depend wholly on human authority and laws; this he on all occasions strenuously argueth against. But he comes into another part of his scheme, the making the magistrate or supreme civil power, the sole judge of religious truth and orthodoxy, and resolving all doctrines and opinions in religion, and the authority of what shall be accounted holy writ, into the appointment of the state, a scheme which absolutely destroyeth the rights of private judgment and conscience, and which evidently condemneth the conduct and judgment of Christ and his apostles, and the primitive Christians at the first plantation of Christianity, and of those excellent men that stood up for the reformation of it since.<sup>16</sup>

Leland accuses Shaftesbury of sharing Hobbes' view that religion is to be subordinated to political ends. As we shall see in Chapter 4, Shaftesbury was undeniably familiar with the writings of Hobbes. A closer look at the *Characteristicks*, however, suggests that Shaftesbury offers a different origin for his policy toward religion. This

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.193.

<sup>16</sup> *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers*, 46.

alternative, which is identified by Shaftesbury as the "antient policy" toward religion, will turn out to be important for understanding Shaftesbury's project as a whole. To see this, however, it is necessary to explain the view Shaftesbury is rejecting. While Shaftesbury identifies Hobbes and Locke as philosophical foes, there is a remarkable amount of agreement among these philosophers about the character of Christianity. I now turn to an overview of Hobbes and Locke on Christianity. This overview allows us to contrast the important departure Shaftesbury makes from modern philosophy in his critique of religion.

## **Religion and the Enlightenment**

### **Hobbes's Critique of Christianity**

While there are few subjects treated in the works of Thomas Hobbes that do not provoke controversy, contemporary scholars are especially divided on the question of Hobbes' teaching on religion. According to the prominent Hobbes scholar Howard Warrender, for example, Hobbes' *Leviathan* presents a traditional natural law theory which itself presupposes the existence of God.<sup>17</sup> The claim that Hobbes was a sincere Christian has found support more recently in A. P. Martinich's *The Two Gods of*

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<sup>17</sup> Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, His Theory of Obligation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966). See also Francis Campbell Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964).

*Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars--many of whom follow the interpretation of Hobbes offered by Leo Strauss-- have challenged this view.<sup>19</sup>

In my opinion it is difficult to reconcile Hobbes' apparent materialism with the view that he is a sincere Christian. Hobbes scandalized his contemporaries when he described "the World" as "Corporeal, that is to say Body...and consequently every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe."<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere he writes that "the Word *Body*...signifieth that which filleth, or occupyeth some certain room, or imagined place; and dependeth not on the imagination, but is a reall part of that we call the *Universe*. For the *Universe*, being the Aggregate of all Bodies, there is no reall part thereof that is not also *Body*; nor any thing properly a *Body*, that is not also part of (that Aggregate of all *Bodies*) the *Universe*."<sup>21</sup> According to Hobbes, bodies exist of themselves and are not dependent upon the imagination. Contrary to the "sense of common people," there is no part of the universe that is not body. In common speech men falsely lend reality to the supernatural. This happens in part because bodies frequently operate beneath the ability of unaided human senses to

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<sup>18</sup> Aloysius Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan : Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Strauss's interpretation can be found in Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), and elsewhere. For an especially clear statement of the controversy, see Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity : Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 689. Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan : Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 34, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 428.

detect them. When men speak of spirits, they actually refer to one of two things: "either a subtile, fluid, and invisible Body, or a Ghost, or other Idol or Phantasme of the Imagination."<sup>22</sup> What seems not to be a possibility, according to Hobbes, is that a spiritual being in the sense of something supernatural, that is, something gratuitously given to rational beings by God and exempt from the operation of cause and effect, appears in the world or directly influences the world. This is indicated by the sequel to this passage.

Hobbes is quick to observe that there are many metaphorical senses of "spirit."

As he explains,

sometimes [spirit] is taken for Disposition or Inclination of the mind; as when for the disposition to controul the sayings of other men, we say, *A Spirit Contradiction; For A Disposition to Uncleanesse, An Unclean Spirit; for Perversenesse, A Froward Spirit; for Sullenesse, A Dumb Spirit, and for Inclination To Godlinesse, And Gods Service, the Spirit of God*: sometimes for any eminent ability, or extraordinary passion, or disease of the mind, as when *Great Wisdome* is called the *Spirit Of Wisdome*; and *Mad Men* are said to be *Possessed With A Spirit*.<sup>23</sup>

Metaphorical speech here presents noticeable phenomena in ghostly language, whereas Hobbes suggests that most of these can be explained by reference to the natural world. Common speech reflects the ease with which men will attribute any departure from what they take to be the ordinary course of things to a supernatural force; that is, to a "phantasme of the imagination." Wise men are said to be divine; men are said to be

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 430.

possessed when they are actually mad, that is, moved by passion in excess of what is normally seen in common life.

Hobbes' materialism quickly gets us to the essence of his critique of religion. Because he rejects the possibility of spiritual agency, Hobbes traces all religious experiences to prior physiological facts. It follows that any revelation is false, for divine powers do not--cannot--disclose special knowledge to men. This means that all claims to revelation must reflect delusion or fraudulent intentions on the part of the alleged prophet. It will be useful for our purposes to consider briefly the *psychology* of religion as it is presented by Hobbes. We will see that Hobbes presents religiosity as a form of mental illness. While it may ultimately have a physical seat, religiosity is for Hobbes a social as well as individual phenomenon. Religiosity is potentially contagious (perhaps quite literally in light of the fact that a spirit might betray the action of "a subtile, fluid, and invisible Body"). Because many men are vulnerable to the passions of piety, they are easily manipulated by others who will use fraudulent appeals to the spiritual world to extend their own power. For Hobbes, ecclesiastical politics emerges from the fact that men are prone to superstition. This becomes apparent in his account of *priestcraft*. We will also see that Hobbes presents *heresy* as the rhetorical tool by which Christian priestcraft was advanced.

### **Melancholy and the psychological basis of religious zeal in Hobbes**

Hobbes's explanation of religiosity relies on his account of the passions as forms of appetite and aversion.<sup>24</sup> When a man has an aversion because he expects to be hurt, he is said to have the passion of fear; when this aversion is less urgent, he also may be experiencing grief. A common source of grief in men is the opinion of powerlessness. This sort of grief is called "dejection of mind."<sup>25</sup>

Hobbes treats the psychology of religion in a chapter entitled "*Of the Vertues commonly called INTELLECTUAL; and their contrary DEFECTS.*"<sup>26</sup> As it turns out, the passions surrounding religion are among the chief contributors to *defects* of the intellect. The general discussion is presented under a form of "madnesse" known as melancholy. According to Hobbes, "stronger and more vehement Passions for any thing, than is ordinarily seen in others" is called madness by men.<sup>27</sup> He explains of madness that "sometimes the extraordinary and extravagant Passion, proceedeth from the evill constitution of the organs of the Body, or harme done them; and sometimes the hurt, and indisposition of the Organs, is caused by vehemence, or continuance of the Passion. But in both cases the Madnesse is of one and the same nature."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 188 ff. Chapter 6, "Of the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; commonly called the Passions. And the Speeches by which they are expressed."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>26</sup> Part I, Chapter 8. Ibid., 134 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 139-40.

*Melancholy* is a form of madness whereby "dejection, subjects a man to causeless fears."<sup>29</sup> Dejection, we know, is grief arising from an opinion of powerlessness. One prominent symptom of *melancholia* is superstition. Sometimes a man will come to hold "an opinion of being inspired." While inspiration is hard to spot in one person, the opinion shows itself in groups: "when many of them conspire together, the Rage of the whole multitude is visible enough." In other words, the opinion of inspiration has political consequences because it often issues in clamorous, seditious behavior. While it ultimately has a physical seat, then, religiosity is for Hobbes a social as well as individual phenomenon. Religiosity is potentially contagious--perhaps quite literally in light of the fact that a spirit might betray the action of "a subtile, fluid, and invisible Body." Even when no action comes of such *melancholia*, the very *opinion* of being inspired is for Hobbes sufficient evidence of madness. He proposes that "if some man in Bedlam should entertain you with sober discourse, and you desire in taking leave, to know what he were, that you might another time requite his civility; and he should tell you, he were God the Father; I think you need expect no extravagant action for argument of his Madnesse."<sup>30</sup>

This opinion of being inspired or having "private spirit" often begins when a man notices a common error in others but fails to notice how he came to understand the error for what it is. (We should say, rather, for what he *thinks* it is, because he himself may

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 141.



well be mistaken either about the error or his own preferred account!) The man attributes his purported insight to a special grace from God. Hobbes identifies such opinions as madness because of their similarity to the excess passion seen in drunkards--sober men, he remarks, are rarely willing to own to such passions. To put a finer point on the matter, the origin of the idea of inspiration seems to be *ignorance*. Indeed, we'll soon see that credulity in man is directly connected to his ignorance. It seems fair to say that Hobbes presents religiosity as a phenomenon arising from fear, more specifically that fear known as dejection of mind arising from an opinion of powerlessness. Weakness inclines men toward superstition and over time may even drive them mad.

Hobbes identifies two explanations for madness common both in ancient times and later. Sometimes madness is attributed to the natural workings of the passions; at other times madness is attributed to supernatural "Daemons, or Spirits, either good, or bad."<sup>31</sup> Men who are mad by virtue of the passions are simply *mad*. The inspired mad are known by a variety of names, for example "daemoniacks."<sup>32</sup>

Ancient peoples, Gentile and Jew, tended to attribute madness to spirits. The Jews, he tells us, called madmen "prophets," even when they could be explained by natural passions. Hobbes remarks that Greeks and Romans naturally blamed all sorts of things to spirits, but such an explanation is surprising in the Jews because "neither Moses, nor Abraham pretended to Prophecy by possession of a Spirit; but from the voice of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 143.

God." Nor did the laws they gave indicate a belief in "any such Enthusiasme; or any Possession."<sup>33</sup> For that matter, "neither did the other Prophets of the old Testament pretend Enthusiasme."

Hobbes explains the confusion of the Jewish people by their "want of curiosity to search naturall causes." Given their ignorance, when something seemed unusual in the operation of a man's mind, "they must needs thinke it supernaturall; and then what can it be, but that either God or the Divell is in him?" (Lest we attribute the opinion of Hobbes to anti-Semitism, it should be mentioned that Hobbes points to an exception among the Jews: the Sadducees did not themselves believe in spirits. According to Hobbes, such lack of belief "is very neere to direct Atheism." One wonders whether this remark implies something about his own theism.<sup>34</sup>)

Hobbes concedes that the New Testament seems at times to agree with the view held by the more vulgar Gentiles and Jews on this matter, but when "our Saviour" speaks of unclean spirits, "it is manifestly a Parable, alluding to a man, that after a little endeavour to quit his lusts, is vanquished by the strength of them; and becomes seven times worse than he was." Indeed, says Hobbes, "I see nothing at all in the Scripture, that requireth a believe, that Daemonicks were any other thing but Mad-men."<sup>35</sup>

Hobbes next reminds his readers of another sort of madness, whereby men speak nonsense through the misapplication of words. Such word-abuse is called "absurdity,"

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 146.

which he described earlier in the chapter "*Of Reason, and Science.*" With absurdity, the possibility of making sense of words and the ideas they are supposed to convey is "unconceivable."<sup>36</sup> This sort of madness requires education of a refined sort, and in general is the product of "the Schoole-men" and "abstruse Philosophy." Common men do not speak absurdly until they are confused by philosophers. Some men fall into absurdity through "misunderstanding of the words they have received, and repeat by rote;" others, however, willingly practice absurdity "from the intention to deceive others by obscurity."<sup>37</sup> What can one say, Hobbes wonders, about theologians who speak of "transubstantiation" and "free will"? "When men write whole volumes of such stuffe, are they not Mad, or intend to make others so?" For Hobbes absurd speech is an acquired, artificial sort of madness. Madmen go mad themselves because of a variety of possible defects, but some madness is an affliction traceable to the desire of some men to lord it over others.

Hobbes famously defines religion as a "fear of power invisible, or imagined from tales publicly allowed; not allowed, Superstition. And when the power imagined is truly such as we imagine, True Religion."<sup>38</sup> The psychology of religiosity has prepared us to consider religion in its more political manifestation. To round out our own consideration of religion and superstition in Hobbes we must turn to chapter 12, "*Of Religion.*" Here we will begin to see what Hobbes means when he distinguishes

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 112 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 124.

publically allowed tales from proscribed tales. (The question of their truth is not our concern at the moment.)

Hobbes reminds his readers of a point made earlier in the book (again, in the chapter on science), that "it is peculiar to the nature of Man, to be inquisitive into the Causes of Events they see," and especially so when an individual's own fortune is involved. So powerful is this curiosity, that "when he cannot assure himself of the true causes of things, (for the causes of good and evill fortune for the most part are invisible,) he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth to the Authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himself."<sup>39</sup> Man's ability to foresee his own suffering in pain, scarcity, and death, gives him little rest from anxiety about the future. Hobbes speculates that it is for this reason "that some of the old Poets said, that the Gods were first created by human feare." (He may well have Lucretius in mind here.<sup>40</sup>) Monotheism, he suggests, is more philosophic insofar as it is born from a persistent desire to know the causes of things. It leads the mind ever backward to some, "first, and an eternall cause of all things, which is that which men mean by the name of God: And all this without thought of their fortune, the solicitude whereof, both enclines to fear, and hinders them from the search of the causes of other things."<sup>41</sup> This cause is so remote it can barely be understood as material. It is a short

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick Vaughan, *The Tradition of Political Hedonism : From Hobbes to J.S. Mill* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 57-59; 68-83.

<sup>41</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 170.

intellectual movement from this opinion to the suspicion that man, too, has a cause which is not manifest to the senses. Since invisible causes must, generally speaking, be inferred, man's mind is led to other sorts of invisible causes and the desire to prognosticate and predict their effects. Given that man is primarily interested in his own fortunes, he will be led almost naturally to honor and worship "powers invisible."

Hobbes, then, partly explains religion through his account of its "natural seeds." Since the fancies and passions of men vary by place and time, a variety of religions arise, such that the ceremonies "used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another."<sup>42</sup> Religious rites are most often the conventions of societies, existing "according to their own invention," although Hobbes says that some developed "by Gods [*sic*] commandment, and direction."

Men are not indifferent to the origin of their sacred laws. According to Hobbes, those religions which are due to the invention of men, are part of "humane Politiques," handed down to make men "more apt to Obedience, Laws, Peace, Charity, and civill Society."<sup>43</sup> This sort of religion is given by "the founders of Commonwealths, and the Law-Givers of the Gentiles." The latter sort of religion--that given by the command and direction of God--is of "Abraham, Moses, and our Blessed Saviour; by whom have been derived unto us the Lawes of the Kingdom of God."<sup>44</sup> Among the Gentiles, there are few things which have not been worshiped in one place or another, or attributed occult

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

qualities by their poets. The world taken as a whole was "chaos"; natural forces and passions were regularly personified; each man was assumed to have his own "genius." The Gentiles "invoked also their own Wit, by the name of *Muses*; their own Ignorance, by the name of *Fortune*; their own Lust, by the name of *Cupid*," and indeed, there was no end to their poetic invention. Such inventions served to explain things about which the causes were remote and unseen.

The Gentiles developed "sciences" of divination such as "necromancy, conjuring, and witchcraft," "theomancy," and "judiciary astrology" out of their hopes to discern and control the future. Hoping for such insights they would look for revelations from prognosticators of all sorts: "sometimes in the insignificant speeches of mad-men, supposed to be possessed with a divine Spirit; which possession they called Enthusiasm."<sup>45</sup> In short, because of their fear and ignorance, and misled by the poets and charlatans, men were led to believe many improbable things.

Such religious beliefs were not without their utility, of course. Hobbes observes that

the first Founders, and Legislators of Common-wealths amongst the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace, had in all places taken care; First, to imprint in their minds a beliefe, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device. . .Secondly. . .to make it believed, that the same things were displeasing to the Gods, which were forbidden by the Lawes. Thirdly, to prescribe Ceremonies.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 177. See also Chapter 45, p. 659: the spontaneous belief in ghosts gave "occasion to the Governours of the Heathen Common-wealths to regulate this their fear, by establishing that Daemonology (in which the Poets, as Principall Priests of the Heathen Religion, were specially employed, or revered)

These prescriptions are clear examples of publically allowed tales. This usage is deceptive but not necessarily coercive. Hobbes points out that among the Romans, "men were not forbidden to deny, that which in the Poets is written of the paines, and pleasures after this life." Indeed, men "of great authority, and gravity in that state have in their *Harangues* openly derided" such beliefs about the gods as vulgar superstition.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the belief of rewards and punishments in the afterlife was a cherished (and of course, useful) view. Since "the Religion of the Gentiles was a part of their Policy," they were inclined toward toleration. Hobbes writes,

the Romans, that had conquered the greatest part of the then known World, made no scruple of tolerating any Religion whatsoever in the City of *Rome* it-self; unless it had something in it, that could not consist with their Civill Government; nor do we read, that any Religion was there forbidden, but that of the Jewes; who (being the peculiar Kingdom of God) thought it unlawfull to acknowledge subjection to any mortall King or State whatsoever.<sup>48</sup>

Regarding his natural account of the origin of religion, then, Hobbes offers the following summary: "from the propagation of Religion, it is not hard to understand the causes of the resolution of the same into its first seeds, or principles; which are only an opinion of the Deity, and Powers invisible, and supernaturall; that can never be so

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to the Public Peace, and to the Obedience of Subjects necessary thereunto; and to make some of them Good Daemons, and others Evill; the one as a Spurre to the Observance, the other, as Reines to withhold them from Violation of the Laws."

<sup>47</sup> There is no question that this is correct. Such things are openly discussed in Cicero's *De Finibus*, for example. In Book 6 of *City of God*, St. Augustine preserves an account of Varro that is also quite clear that the rulers treated the religions of Rome as a civil matter rather than one demanding interior piety. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. William Green, vol. 2, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass.: W. Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957).

<sup>48</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 178.

abolished out of humane nature, but that new Religions may againe be made to spring out of them, by the culture of such men, as for such purposes are in reputation."<sup>49</sup>

One might wonder whether or not Hobbes truly regards religion as ineradicable, for much of the first part of *Leviathan* is dedicated to articulating a scientific method whereby certain knowledge of cause and effect can be established.<sup>50</sup> One can imagine interest in judicial astrology waning insofar as other accounts of cause and effect come to be accepted. So too, dejection of mind would become less common as nature becomes less mysterious--that is, as nature comes to be mastered through careful anticipation of effects. As for the sincere fascination held by some for "the doctrine of Aristotle," Hobbes may well hope that his clearer science will offer an attractive and superior alternative. (After all, pure curiosity about the "First, and an Eternall cause of all things" has been, according to Hobbes, fruitless and vain: natural philosophy in the ancient schools "was rather a Dream than Science.")<sup>51</sup>

In order for a religion to become established, the multitude must have confidence that its founder is a man of good will, holiness, and superior wisdom. These attributes are taken by people to be the signs of supernatural grace. (These attributes seem to fall under the metaphorical usage of spirit we encountered earlier.) Over time, however, the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>50</sup> For clear accounts of the Enlightenment's ambition to establish clear and certain knowledge through a science of names, see John W. Danford, *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy : A Reexamination of the Foundations of Social Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). and Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason : Recovering the Human Sciences*.

<sup>51</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 686.



government of religion, which must be administered by men of a more ordinary sort, will find its wisdom, sincerity, or love in doubt. Without the "feare of the Civill Sword" at its disposal, a religion will eventually be "contradicted and rejected."<sup>52</sup> Incoherencies in its theology, scandalous behavior of its adherents, and suspicion of motives all contribute to the erosion of respect. This natural decay is not restricted to ancient Gentile religion, for it has a common source. Hobbes remarks, "I may attribute all the changes of Religion in the world, to one and the same cause; and that is, unpleasing Priests; and those not onely amongst Catholiques, but even in that Church that hath presumed most of Reformation."<sup>53</sup> The concern over eroding esteem seems to contradict the earlier claim that men of authority had been able to deride religion openly "in their *Harangues*." If magistrates introduce religion to reinforce public order, how could they indulge the few in their contemptuous opinions? If religion can be described as civil religion, how did it become such a problem for the political community?

To answer these questions we must consider the role heresy and priestcraft play Hobbes' critique. We will first look to a work entitled *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England*.<sup>54</sup> In that dialogue the origin

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hobbes, "A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury: Now First Collected and Edited by Sir William Molesworth, Bart.*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839-45), 1-160.

and development of the idea of heresy is explained. (A very similar account is present in *Behemoth* as well.<sup>55</sup>) Heresy reveals the possible consequences of absurd speech.

We have seen Hobbes distinguish religions given by men to other men "according to their own invention" from the religions given "by Gods commandment, and direction." We have also seen that the Roman magistrate did not tolerate a religion that refuses to subject itself "to any mortall King or State whatsoever." The origin of rivalry between the State and religion can be explained by the political history of priesthood. Hobbes presents an historical account of what later thinkers will call "priestcraft" in several places. We will consider a brief catalogue of historical priesthoods presented in *Behemoth: The History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England, and of the Counsels and Artifices by Which They Were Carried on from the Year 1640 to the Year 1660*.<sup>56</sup> We will be then in a position to see the extent to which Shaftesbury's account of Christianity is harmonious with the general "Enlightenment."

#### **Hobbes on the development of heresy**

In the course of their conversation in *A Dialogue*, two characters known only as the Philosopher and the Lawyer come to discuss heresy.<sup>57</sup> According to the lawyer, under Henry IV the law laid down heresy "as preaching or writing of such doctrine as is

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<sup>55</sup> "Behemoth: The History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England, and of the Counsels and Artifices by Which They Were Carried on from the Year 1640 to the Year 1660," in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury: Now First Collected and Edited by Sir William Molesworth, Bart.*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839-45), 174 ff.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-418.

<sup>57</sup> Hobbes, "A Dialogue," 96 ff.

contrary to the determination of Holy Church." The philosopher is quick to point out that what is taken for the Church changed considerably between the reigns of Henry IV (when the Roman Church was Holy) and Queen Elizabeth (when an independent Church of England ruled). The philosopher comes to his assistance by offering a definition of heresy which avoids the problem of historical shifts in the Church: "I say, heresy is a singularity of doctrine or opinion contrary to the doctrine of another man, or men; and the word properly signifies the doctrine of a sect, which doctrine is taken upon trust of some man of reputation for wisdom, that was the first author of the same."<sup>58</sup> The philosopher moves from the lawyer's definition in terms of orthodoxy as understood by the magistrate to a definition in terms of *opinion*. Opinions vary from man to man and from group to group. Indeed, we see in the course of the dialogue that the philosopher hopes to show the political consequences of this insight. The philosopher's definition is agnostic on whether a particular opinion is true--it may or may not be right (*ortho*<sup>2</sup>). Either way, orthodoxy remains an opinion (that is, *doxa*) rather than knowledge. The philosopher immediately indicates that the acceptance of an opinion rests on the trust in one "of reputation for wisdom" who, as it happens, is "the first author of the same." What, then, is the basis of this trust? As we shall see, trust is connected to authority.

The philosopher explains to the lawyer that the word heresy originally belonged to the ancient Greeks.<sup>59</sup> In the days before Alexander, Greece was home to "many

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>59</sup> The word "orthodoxy," we should note, seems to be of Hellenic rather than classical origin.

excellent wits, that employed their time in search of the truth in all manner of sciences worthy of their honour."<sup>60</sup> These classical "authors" and "wits"--namely "Pythagoras, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus and Aristotle"-- did not pursue philosophy for the sake of material gain. We learn that they "did not get their bread by their philosophy, but were able to live of their own." Still, the philosopher slyly suggests that their "deep and laborious meditation" was not without its rewards. As a consequence of their work these authors were "in honour with princes and other great personages." Indeed, they published their writings "to great honour and applause." While these great philosophers were free from necessity, the philosopher consistently calls attention to their attachment to honor. (One wonders whether Hobbes believes that there is even such a thing as the disinterested love of truth.) As wise as philosophers were, they disagreed with each other in "their doctrine." Over time, the men who followed various philosophical doctrines came to be known as Pythagoreans, Academics, Epicureans, or Peripatetics. These are examples of "heresy" for the Greeks, "which signifies no more but taking of an opinion."<sup>61</sup>

Since philosophy was "so much in fashion," men of wealth and repute sought out philosophers to educate their children. The trade of educator was soon recognized to be very profitable, and it "suggested to many idle and needy fellows an easy and compendious way of maintenance, which was to teach the philosophy, some of Plato, some of Aristotle, &c: whose books to that end they read over, but without capacity or

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<sup>60</sup> Hobbes, "A Dialogue," 98.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 99. Literally, heresy is from the Greek for "choosing."

much endeavor to examine the reasons of their doctrines, taking only the conclusions, as they lay."<sup>62</sup> We can see from this account that the reasoned opinions of philosophers were soon transmitted to others by foolish professors of philosophy. Since the opinions were not accompanied by understanding they must have been accepted on trust. The competition for students and gainful employment encouraged nastiness in these philosophy professors, yet as each was a "chooser" of a particular doctrine, the word "*haereticus*" was not regarded as a term of reproach.

The various schools maintained themselves in Greece and eventually made their way to Rome. As luck would have it, the disagreement between schools reached its height "in the times of the apostles and in the primitive Church."<sup>63</sup> While the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle were still esteemed, other schools found themselves in lesser demand.

After the death of "our Saviour," the Apostles carried the Gospel around the world, "especially in Asia the Less, in Greece, and Italy, where they constituted many Churches." The Apostles left behind bishops to "teach and direct" converts "by setting forth the life and miracles of our Saviour, as they had received them from the writings of the apostles and evangelists." The bishops were neither expected nor asked to instruct the converts in philosophy, yet former heathens entered the priesthood of the Church from "all professions and dispositions," including the academic life. As the philosopher explains,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 100.

some that had never thought of philosophy at all, but were intent upon their fortunes or their pleasures; and some that had a greater, some a less use of reason; and some that had studied philosophy, but professed it not, which were commonly the men of the better rank; and some had professed it only for their better abstinence, and had it not farther than readily to talk and wrangle; and some were Christians in good earnest, and others but counterfeit, intending to make use of the charity of those that were sincere Christians, which in those times was very great.<sup>64</sup>

The philosopher draws our attention to the variety of motives and abilities among the converts. Fortune and pleasure were common motives; and while some men had a sincere belief (perhaps those with "a less use of reason," in Hobbes's view?) others had nothing more than a desire to milk sincere Christians for charitable support.

Those who were able to "make the best use of Aristotle's rhetoric and logic" became priests and bishops. Those who were proudest of their knowledge of Plato and Aristotle were "prone to innovation" because they wanted to advance their reputation by bending scripture to their philosophical doctrines. It is here that "heresy, amongst the Christians, first came to be a reproach."<sup>65</sup> Men eventually became so quarrelsome that Councils of local bishops would meet to resolve disputes. They would issue authoritative decrees, calling themselves "Catholic" and those who refused to abandon their philosophic sects "heretics."

The Catholic Church was now officially declaring which doctrines were orthodox and which heresy but as their decrees lacked the force of law disputes continued. This changed under "the first Christian Emperor," Constantine. A theological dispute arose

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 100-01.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 101.

among the bishops around the opinions of Arius of Alexandria that provoked "sedition and much bloodshed both of citizens and soldiers of that city."<sup>66</sup> In order to restore order and prevent future sedition, Constantine himself called a council of bishops, promising that "whatsoever they agreed on he would cause to be observed." The council temporarily succeeded in having Arius banished. While he was restored to grace by the Emperor by promising future obedience, Arius "died before he could repossess his benefice."<sup>67</sup> The philosopher seems to suggest that it is easier to recover state of spiritual grace than it is to recover property; both seem to be the purview of the magistrate. Clearly Hobbes intends for us to investigate the worldly motives of the Church in identifying heretics. As for the motives of Constantine we learn that "the Emperor caused this confession to be made, not for the regard of truth of doctrine, but for the preserving of the peace, especially among his Christian soldiers, by whose valour he had gotten the empire, and by the same was to preserve it."<sup>68</sup>

Over time, the relatively mild punishment of banishment was stiffened and heresy became a capital crime under imperial law. We learn that that the papacy grew in power such that it eventually commanded obedience from emperors. "The Popes from time to time made heresies of many other points of doctrine (as they saw it conduce to the setting up of the chair above the throne)." While the magistrate first used the Church for his

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 102-03.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 101.

purposes, soon the Church was using him for its own. Apparently this precedent continued for some time, for the conversation abruptly returns to the subject of common law under Henry IV. Under Henry, the law added the penalty of "forfeiture of lands and goods" to the burning of heretics by the magistrate. The monarchs of England were wont to shift and modify the laws concerning religion and by the time of Edward VI "not only all punishments of heresy were taken away, but also the nature of it was changed to what it originally was, a private opinion."<sup>69</sup>

Hobbes makes it clear in *Behemoth* that problems persisted into the English Revolutions. Even though the monarchs of England, beginning with Henry VIII, are able to reassert the sovereignty of the magistrate over that of the Church, Christianity remained the source of political conflict. The problem of seditious opinions which seemed to have been corrected once the Church of Rome had ascendancy, reemerge with the Protestant Reformation. To see this we must turn to consider the account of priestcraft as Hobbes presents it in *Behemoth*.

#### **Priests and Presbyterians**

In Part 1 of *Behemoth*, Speaker 'A' offers an epitome of the English Civil wars. In 1640, England was governed under the monarchy of Charles I, whose rule might have been expected to be stable as he was king by a 600 year old lineage. But Charles inherited a kingdom of people who had been corrupted by a variety of seducers. 'A' identifies seven groups of seducers but we will only consider the first four.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 105.



The first three sorts of seducers were religious sects. First and most numerous were the Presbyterian ministers: "ministers, as they called themselves, of Christ; and sometimes, in their sermons to the people, God's ambassadors; pretending to have a right from God to govern every one his parish, and their assembly the whole nation."<sup>70</sup> Second but still substantial were "Papists," this "notwithstanding that the Pope's power in England, both temporal and ecclesiastical, had been by Act of Parliament abolished." Third were a collection of other sects, born partly in the wake of the troubles between the first two sorts: Independents, Anabaptists, Fifth-monarchy-men, Quakers, Adamites, and others too numerous for 'A' to recall the doctrinal differences. As 'A' summarizes, "these were the enemies which arose against his Majesty from the private interpretation of the Scripture, exposed to every man's scanning in his mother-tongue."<sup>71</sup> The fourth sort are not inspired by religious motives. They are glory-lovers and seekers of honor who have received a classical education: "there were an exceeding great number of men of the better sort, that had been so educated, as that in their youth having read the books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions; in which books the popular government was extolled by that glorious name of liberty, and monarchy disgraced by the name of tyranny; they became thereby in love with their forms of government."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Behemoth," 167.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 168.

We can see in these four kinds of seducers the two overriding political concerns which led Hobbes to construct his political theory, that is, religious factionalism and the love of glory. Both of these problems are manifestations of pride as he defines it in *Leviathan* and they are consequences of pernicious but authoritative opinions. Later in the conversation presented by in *Behemoth*, Hobbes explores the way in which philosophy, political ambition, and pretensions to divine inspiration have colluded in the past. In the course of the account of the revolt of the Presbyterians, 'A' remarks that the ministers envisioned a constitution where they could "have the delight of sharing the government, and consequently of being able to be revenged on them that do not admire their learning and help to fill their purses, and win to their service them that do."<sup>73</sup>

In the course of the conversation 'B' expresses worry about a commonwealth divided between two factions, wherein "their quarrels should be only about opinions, that is, about who has the most learning; as if their learning ought to be the rule of governing all the world." While they call it learning in divine matters, 'B' sees only philosophical disputes at work. 'A' replies that some of them do in fact "give themselves out for prophets by extraordinary inspiration." Most, however, boast of their greater skill in reading and interpreting Scripture "by reason of their breeding in the Universities, and knowledge there gotten of the Latin tongue, and some also of the Greek and Hebrew tongues, wherein the Scripture was written; besides their knowledge of natural philosophy, which is their publically taught." Philosophy and the divine studies have

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 275.

"conducted to the advancement of the professors thereof to places of the greatest authority, next to the authority of kings themselves, in most of the ancient kingdoms of the world."<sup>74</sup>

In the account that follows, 'A' offers historical evidence for this claim, citing the historians of antiquity. The Druids of Brittany and France, he reports, had among them "philosophers and theologians, that [were] exceedingly honoured, whom they also [used] as prophets." These men had the multitude obedient to them because of their skills at augury. The Magi of Persia were philosophers and astrologers, and were taken by Christians to be kings.<sup>75</sup> In Egypt, perhaps the oldest nation, "priests had the greatest power in civil affairs, that any subjects ever had in any nation." Their priesthood employed many priests at the sacrifices to the Gods, and they would "leave the same employment to their posterity, which, next to the King, have the greatest power and authority."<sup>76</sup> The power of the Egyptian priesthood extended to the courts, and the "chief-justice" would wear a necklace with a jewel called "truth." Such was the "power...acquired in civil matters by the conjecture of philosophy and divinity."<sup>77</sup>

'A' remarks that just as the Egyptians, so too the Jews established a priesthood by family right. Among the Assyrians and Chaldeans, the priests were also a political sect, and their priesthood was also heritable. Quoting Diodorus Siculus, 'A' says of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 279.

Chaldeans that they were "like to that of the Egyptian priests; for being ordained for the service of the Gods, they spend the whole time of their life in philosophy; being of exceeding great reputation in astrology, and pretending much also to prophesy..and to find out by certain incantations the preventing of harm, and the bringing to pass of good." Similar observations are made about India and Æthiopia.<sup>78</sup>

We learn that in the earlier days, Kings did not obey priests "as mastered by force and arms, but as having their reason mastered by superstition."<sup>79</sup> Yet in this history, one example stands out. 'A' relates that "in the time of Ptolemy II, Ergamenes, King of the Æthiopians, having had his breeding in philosophy after the manner of the Greeks, being the first that durst dispute their power, took heart as befitted a King; came with soldiers to a place called Abaton, where was then the golden temple of the Æthiopians; killed all the priests, abolished the custom, and rectified the kingdom according to his will."<sup>80</sup>

The account of priestcraft in Hobbes is meant to show the dire political consequences of religious sectarianism. In light of the fact that priests wield their power not through strength of arms but through the power of superstition, it is significant that Ergamenes had studied Greek philosophy. Ergamenes evidently does not hold the priesthood of the Æthiopians as sacred; presumably philosophy has freed him from such superstition and allowed him to restore the sovereignty of the state. Yet Hobbes takes

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 279-80.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 289.

Greek philosophy to be a problem in itself, especially insofar as it encourages young men to undertake violent actions in the name of liberty. He does not himself look to restore the ancient policy of religion by recommitting to the classical understanding of philosophy.

A consideration of Locke's critique of Christianity is necessary in order to evaluate Shaftesbury's claim that modernity is to be understood as a project undertaken by philosophers. As it turns out, the account of Christianity offered by Hobbes finds a striking parallel in the writings of John Locke. Locke's account is complicated in itself and a proper evaluation would consider his entire work; yet one can see in Locke the three concerns identified above. A *psychological* account of religiosity can be seen clearly in the account "Of Enthusiasm," which Locke added to the fourth edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>81</sup> On the basis of this psychological account of enthusiasm, Locke is able to present a largely political account of Christianity. A close analysis of his *Letter concerning Toleration* and *Reasonableness of Christianity*, not to mention the whole of Part IV of the *Essay*, is beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes it is enough to consider also two essays from Locke's common-place books which were unpublished during his lifetime. The concern over *heresy* can be seen in a little essay entitled "Error." The concern over *priestcraft* can be seen in an essay entitled "Sacerdos."

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<sup>81</sup> The attempt to explain either religion as such or religious fanaticism by psychological and medical accounts appears in Plato and in Cicero, but it gets a new impetus in England by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

### **Enthusiasm and the psychological basis of zeal in Locke**

As the groundbreaking studies of Ronald Knox and Susie Tucker have shown, enthusiasm enters English as a theological term of art but by Locke's day becomes a term of abuse.<sup>82</sup> In the words of Jan Goldstein, "'enthusiasm' functioned in the eighteenth century as a powerful term of opprobrium. It conjured up everything antithetical to, and rejected by, enlightened rationality."<sup>83</sup>

From the pen of a believer the term tried to distinguish false claims of divine revelation from true revelation; in the hands of a non-believer it was a term of scorn for revelation as such; either way, it had become a term with a negative valence. While Shaftesbury played an important role in shifting the meaning closer to our contemporary understanding (a word with a generally positive valence suggesting eagerness), Locke's account in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* clearly shows that he shares the pejorative use.

When considering what constitutes genuine evidence in support of an opinion, Locke writes that "whatsoever credit or authority we give to any proposition more than it receives from the principles and proofs it supports itself upon, is owing to our inclinations that way, and is so far a derogation from the love of truth as such; which, as

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<sup>82</sup> Ronald Arbuthnott Knox, *Enthusiasm; a Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (New York,; Oxford University Press, 1950). Susie I. Tucker, *Enthusiasm; a Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1972). J. G. A. Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1/2 (1997). See also Jan Goldstein, "Enthusiasm or Imagination? Eighteenth-Century Smear Words in Comparative National Context," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1/2 (1997). Michael Heyd, "The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Towards an Integrative Approach," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 4 (1981).

<sup>83</sup> Goldstein, "Enthusiasm or Imagination?."

it can receive no evidence from our passions or interests, so it should receive no tincture from them."<sup>84</sup>

With this in mind, Locke considers a "ground of assent" called *enthusiasm*, which some men would claim has the authority of (genuine) faith or reason; and which, "laying by reason, would set up revelation without it." The consequence of enthusiasm is that it "substitutes in the room of [reason and revelation] the ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain, and assumes them for a foundation both of opinion and conduct."<sup>85</sup>

According to Locke, it is much harder for a person to reason about something, or strive for authentic revelation--which is also a sort of reasoning as he defines it, that is, "natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately"--than it is "to pretend to revelation." Such pretensions to revelation have been found in all ages in men "whom melancholy has mixed with devotion, or those whose conceit of themselves has raised them into an opinion of a greater familiarity with God, and nearer admittance to his favour, than is afforded to others."<sup>86</sup>

Such melancholic spirits are ripe to accept whatever opinion is offered to their fancies. Enthusiasm is a sort of delusion which comes to men apart from reason, "rising from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain." It is an especially tenacious weed in a man's soul, because it is "freed from all restraint of reason and check of revelation,"

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<sup>84</sup> Book 4, Chapter XIX in Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 429-30.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

and worse, "it is heightened into a divine authority, in concurrence with our own temper and inclination."<sup>87</sup> Locke writes that enthusiasm "is nothing but an *ignis fatuus*, that leads them constantly round in this circle; *It is a revelation because they firmly believe it; and they believe it, because it is a revelation.*"<sup>88</sup>

It is against this formulation that Shaftesbury's own account of enthusiasm takes shape. Locke's psychological account of enthusiasm prepares the way for a more specific critique of Christianity.

### **Heresy in Locke**

In his essay "Error," Locke writes that "the great division among Christians is about opinions. Every sect has its set of them, and that is called Orthodoxy; and he who professes his assent to them, though with an implicit faith, and without examining, he is orthodox and in the way to salvation."<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, however, this concern for right opinion is inseparable from a disdain for wrong opinion. Locke continues: "but if he examines, and thereupon questions any of them, he is presently suspected of heresy, and if he oppose them or hold the contrary, he is presently condemned as in a damnable error, and in the sure way to perdition."

Like Hobbes before him, Locke denies that this demand to adhere to orthodoxy is a requirement of Christ; it is rather a later innovation made by the Church. So attached to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 432-33.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>89</sup> John Locke, *The Life and Letters of John Locke, with Extracts from His Journals and Common-Place Books*, ed. Peter King, [*Bohn's Libraries*] (London,: G. Bell, 1884), 282.



the particular dogma and articles of faith are the various sects in Christendom that Locke remarks, "opinions are preferred to life, and orthodoxy is that which they are concerned for, not morals."<sup>90</sup>

A similar account of heresy can be found in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*.<sup>91</sup> In section 34, entitled "Indifferency," Locke argues that men's opinions should always follow clear evidence. "In any other way but this," he writes,

all the world are born to orthodoxy; they imbibe at first the allowed opinions of their country and party, and so never questioning their truth, not one of an hundred ever examines. They are applauded for presuming they are in the right. He that considers is a foe to orthodoxy, because possibly he may deviate from some of the received doctrines there. And thus men, without any industry or acquisition of their own, inherit local truths (for it is not the same every where) and are inured to assent without evidence. This influences farther than is thought; for what one of an hundred of the zealous bigots in all parties, ever examined the tenets he is so stiff in; or ever thought it his business or duty so to do?<sup>92</sup>

Unfortunately for political life, however, men are not likely to examine the evidence for and the sources of their opinions. This leaves men vulnerable to those who would manipulate opinions for their own advantage.

In Christendom, Locke argues, the priesthood did just that. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke writes that priests have conspired to keep men from gaining true knowledge of God.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>91</sup> *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes*, 12th ed. (London,: Printed for C. and J. Rivington [etc.], 1824), 2:331 ff.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2:381.

in this state of darkness and ignorance of the true God, vice and superstition held the world. Nor could any help be had, or hoped for, from reason; which could not be heard, and was judged to have nothing to do in the case; priests, everywhere, to secure their empire, having excluded reason from having any thing to do in religion...The rational and thinking part of mankind, it is true, when they sought after him, they found the one supreme, invisible God; but if they acknowledged and worshipped him, it was only in their own minds. They kept this truth locked up in their own breasts as a secret, nor ever durst venture it amongst the people; much less amongst the priests, those wary guardians, of their own creeds and profitable inventions. Hence we see, that reason, speaking ever so clearly to the wise and virtuous, had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude.<sup>93</sup>

Concealing one's true thoughts on such matters became necessary as a result of the persecution which followed the demand for orthodoxy. As this passage suggests, Locke tends to trace the promulgation of such pernicious opinion to the power of the priesthood. Locke explains these views at greater length in an essay entitled "Sacerdos."

#### **Priestcraft in Locke**

We have already remarked that in the enlightenment account, heresy is not an original concern of what might be called "primitive" Christianity; it is, rather, a later innovation of the Church, articulated with the intention of exerting control over the lives of men. As Locke explains it in his essay "Sacerdos," there were in antiquity two sorts of teachers: priests and philosophers. Priests were responsible for "the arts of propitiation and atonement;" they were the official mediators between men and the gods and they concerned themselves with the traditional religious ceremonies and rites. Philosophers, on the other hand, "meddled not with the public religion, worship, or ceremonies, but left them entirely to the priests, as priests left the instruction of men in natural and moral

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 6:135.

knowledge wholly to the philosophers."<sup>94</sup> These two sorts of teachers appealed to different authorities, philosophers to reason and priests to revelation, and neither sort showed much interest in the authorities of the other. Locke draws here a division between piety and true morality, which may or may not be found among the pious.

According to Locke, pagan religion was concerned not with right opinion but with right action. He writes in *Reasonableness of Christianity* that in antiquity "all men, indeed, under pain of displeasing the gods, were to frequent the temples: every one went to their sacrifices and services: but the priests made it not their business to teach them virtue. If they were diligent in their observations and ceremonies; punctual in their feasts and solemnities, and the tricks of religion; the holy tribe assured them the gods were pleased, and they looked no farther."<sup>95</sup>

Such practices were less demanding than the practice of virtue; a quick sacrifice would suffice to clear a guilty conscience.<sup>96</sup> Contrary to the understanding which developed in the wake of Christianity, "religion was everywhere distinguished from, and preferred to virtue; and...it was dangerous heresy and profaneness to think the contrary." Pagan religion was interested only in practice, and the magistrate took a special interest in religion for political reasons:

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<sup>94</sup> Locke, *King's Life and Letters of Locke*, 286.

<sup>95</sup> John Locke, "The Reasonableness of Christianity," in *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes* (London,: Printed for C. and J. Rivington [etc.], 1824), 6:138-39.

<sup>96</sup> (Perhaps. I suspect Plato's account of Cephalus is closer to the truth here.)

so much virtue as was necessary to hold societies together, and to contribute to the quiet of governments, the civil laws of commonwealths taught, and forced upon men that lived under magistrates. But these laws being for the most part made by such, who had no other aims but their own power, reached no farther than those things that would serve to tie men together in subjection; or at most were directly to conduce to the prosperity and temporal happiness of any people.<sup>97</sup>

Little by little, this policy changed with the spread and growing influence of Christianity. According to Locke, Jesus Christ himself "reunited these two again, religion and morality, as inseparable parts of the worship of God."<sup>98</sup> This is not the good news one might have suspected. In the wake of this reunion,

the ministers of it, who also called themselves priests, have assumed to themselves the parts both of the heathen priests and philosophers, and claim a right not only to perform all the outward acts of the Christian religion in public, and to regulate the ceremonies to be used there, but also to teach men their duties of morality towards one another and towards themselves, and to prescribe to them in the conduct of their lives.<sup>99</sup>

Locke famously argues that the magistrate should not interfere in those religious matters "indifferent in the commonwealth under his jurisdiction," where he is not himself a professor.<sup>100</sup> He may, of course, "forbid such things as may tend to the disturbance of

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<sup>97</sup> Locke, *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes*, 6:139.

<sup>98</sup> *King's Life and Letters of Locke*, 287.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> This follows naturally from his understanding of opinion. As he writes in *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity, &c.*: "For each society having an equal right to a good opinion of themselves, a man by passing but a river, or a hill, loses that orthodoxy in one company, which puffed him up with such assurance and insolence in another; and is there, with equal justice, himself exposed to the like censures of error and heresy, which he was so forward to lay on others at home. When it shall appear, that infallibility is intailed upon one set of men of any denomination, or truth confined to any spot of ground, the name and use of orthodoxy, as now it is in fashion every-where, will in that one place be reasonable. Until then, this ridiculous cant will be a foundation too weak to sustain that usurpation that is

the peace of the commonwealth to be done by any of his people, whether they esteem them civil or religious. This is his proper business." It is not proper, however, to enforce a set of opinions without such disruptive consequences. Absent such a concern, it would be a matter of "the greatest tyranny, to prescribe him a way of worship." So unreasonable and tyrannical was this practice that "we find scarce any attempt toward it by the magistrates in the several societies of mankind till Christianity was well grown up in the world, and was become a national religion." After that, Locke writes, "it hath been the cause of more disorders, tumults, and bloodshed, than all other causes put together."<sup>101</sup>

This is a remarkably strong claim for the usually temperate Locke and one might mistake it as powerful evidence against Christianity itself. The blame for such disorder, however, cannot be laid at the foot of the Cross per se:

Antichrist has sown those tares in the field of the Church, the rise whereof hath been only hence, that the clergy, by degrees, as Christianity spread, affecting dominion, laid claim to a priesthood, derived by succession from Christ, and so independent of civil power, receiving (as they pretend) by the imposition of hands, and some other ceremonies agreed (but only variously) by the priesthods

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raised upon it. It is not that I do not think every one should be persuaded of the truth of those opinions he professes. It is that I contend for; and it is that which I fear the great sticklers for orthodoxy often fail in. For we see generally that numbers of them exactly jump in a whole large collection of doctrines, consisting of abundance of particulars; as if their notions were, by one common stamp, printed on their minds, even to the least lineament. This is very hard, if not impossible, to be conceived of those who take up their opinions only from conviction. But, how fully soever I am persuaded of the truth of what I hold, I am in common justice to allow the same sincerity to him that differs from me; and so we are upon equal terms. This persuasion of truth on each side, invests neither of us with a right to censure or condemn the other. I have no more reason to treat him ill for differing from me, than he has to treat me ill for the same cause. Pity him, I may; inform him fairly, I ought; but contemn, malign, revile, or any otherwise prejudice him for not thinking just as I do, that I ought not. My orthodoxy gives me no more authority over him, than his (for every one is orthodox to himself) gives him over me. When the word orthodoxy (which in effect signifies no more but the opinions of my party) is made use of as a pretence to domineer (as ordinarily it is,) it is, and always will be, ridiculous." *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes*, 6:376.

<sup>101</sup> *King's Life and Letters of Locke*, 288-89.

of several factions, an indelible character, particular sanctity, and a power immediately from Heaven to do several things which are not lawful to be done by other men.<sup>102</sup>

Locke goes on to identify three aspects of the *political* character and consequences of this priestcraft: "1<sup>st</sup>, To teach opinions concerning God, a future state, and ways of worship. 2<sup>nd</sup>, To do and perform themselves certain rites exclusive of others. 3<sup>rd</sup>, To punish dissenters from their doctrines and rules."<sup>103</sup> These privileges obviously provided the priesthood immense influence over the political affairs of men. While not generally claiming for themselves the right of theocracy, the priesthood nevertheless "pressed, as a duty on the magistrate, to punish and persecute those whom they disliked and declared against."<sup>104</sup> In short, the priest would excommunicate and the magistrate would be expected to execute the heretic. The practical fruit of such an arrangement was instability, persecution, and warfare. Locke writes, "that ordination, that begins in priesthood, if it be let alone, will certainly grow up to absolute empire."

Lest one think that the Protestant Reformation solved this difficulty, however, Locke ends with this observation: "The Popedom hath been a large and lasting instance of this. And what Presbytery could do, even in its infancy when it had a little humbled

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 290. Locke will retain the claim of a future state as an effective spur to decent behavior, much to the disappointment of Shaftesbury.

the magistrates, let Scotland show."<sup>105</sup> This is parallel, of course, to the influence of Presbyterian ministers in Hobbes's *Behemoth*.

According to Shaftesbury, both Hobbes and Locke undertake a radical project to rid common life of superstitious opinions by adopting a radical skepticism toward opinion as such. Shaftesbury regarded this attack on common opinion as an attack on philosophy itself, as I will try to show in Chapter 4. He will propose what neither Hobbes nor Locke do, a restoration of classical philosophy as an antidote to religious sectarianism.

Shaftesbury's preference for the ancient policy toward religion does not arise from a different understanding of Christianity. To see this we now turn to Shaftesbury's critique of Christianity in *Characteristicks*. A full understanding of his preference for antiquity must look beyond his critique of Christianity to his understanding of religion *per se*. As I have suggested, it is in his account of religion that Shaftesbury presents what might be regarded as the essence of human life, *eros*.

### **Religion in the *Characteristicks***

Beginning with the frontispiece of Volume I, religion recurs as a sort of *leitmotiv* throughout the *Characteristicks*. While each of the treatises could be cited extensively to demonstrate the importance of religious subjects to Shaftesbury's project, the following observations are important for our purposes. The first treatise of Volume I, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* opens with a discussion of revelation and takes prophetic

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<sup>105</sup> King 291

inspiration as its general theme. In this way it seems fair to say that the *Characteristicks* as a whole opens by reflecting on religious subjects. In his private correspondence Shaftesbury indicates that the second treatise, *Sensus Communis*, belongs with the first: indeed as Robert Voitle shows, *Sensus Communis* was initially undertaken as a defense of *A Letter*.<sup>106</sup> As we have seen, *Sensus Communis* offers a defense of raillery--that is, Socratic irony--in the service of the philosophical treatment of controversial subjects. The first part of *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit* also treats religion extensively. There he presents a systematic taxonomy of theological opinion. The treatise as a whole takes the relationship between religion and virtue as its primary concern. *The Moralists* contains extensive conversations about religion among Theocles (whose name itself suggests a religious concern) and the other characters. Finally, the aforementioned treatises find commentary in *Miscellaneous Reflections*, where the Critic defends, sharpens, and elaborates Shaftesbury's opinions on religious matters. Indeed, Volume III and therefore the *Characteristicks* as a whole comes to an abrupt end as the Critic offers the apology of an unnamed controversial author. This author seems to lack a "sufficient

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<sup>106</sup> Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, 330-31. Shaftesbury writes to his friend Lord Somers about *Sensus Communis*: "nothing but the height of respect could have kept your friend from addressing the enclosed to you. Had he dared to converse with you in idea, as he did in a former letter, he should have pleased himself and perhaps the public far better in this performance. But his care to remove your lordship from the suspicions of the clergy, who have of late been so horribly alarmed, has made him unwilling to give you publicly the air of a correspondence with a supposed enemy of the Church, for such the author of this essay will infallibly be esteemed, though he names neither Church nor Priest, nor says anything concerning any mystery of religions, but has kept such measures of decency as may secure him, he hopes, from giving the least offence to any except the merest bigots. All his aim is, in plain sense, to recommend plain honesty, which in the bustle made about religion is fairly dropped. The defenders of religion, as well as its opposers, are contented to make nothing or a mere name of virtue." Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 400.



caution and reserve in religious matters," despite his awareness that such a reserve is desirable.<sup>107</sup>

*Soliloquy* might at first seem to be an exception to this running treatment of religion. Yet while religious questions are less prominent in *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury himself points out that this is exceptional:

IT MAY here perhaps be thought, that notwithstanding the particular *Advice* we have given, in relation to the forming of a Taste in *natural* Characters and Manners; we are still defective in our Performance, whilst we are *silent* on *super-natural* Cases, and bring not into our consideration the Manners and Characters deliver'd us in *Holy Writ*. But this Objection will soon vanish, when we consider, that there can be no Rules given by *human Wit*, to that which was never humanly conceiv'd, but *divinely* dictated, and inspir'd.<sup>108</sup>

I have argued that *Soliloquy* offers readers a model of thinking appropriate to the philosopher as understood by Shaftesbury. According to Shaftesbury, the philosopher at thought treats questions both of morality and the cosmos as natural rather than supernatural phenomena. Insofar as Shaftesbury's philosopher thinks about religion, it is from a naturalistic perspective. Apparently soliloquy as a method has little to say about the matter. By calling attention to his silence on scriptural criticism, however, Shaftesbury subtly plants the question of how one does approach those writings which trace their origin to revelation. All men would approach writings believed to be "*divinely* dictated" with reverence, but as we shall see, Shaftesbury regards many such writings as deceitful "impostures."

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<sup>107</sup> *Moralists*, 2.192.

<sup>108</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.219.

Even in *Soliloquy*, however, Shaftesbury cannot resist offering a peek at what the art of criticism might imply for sacred writings. One page after calling his attention to the silence on "supernatural cases," Shaftesbury writes that "the *Christian* Theology; the *Birth, Procedure, Generation, and personal Distinction* of the DIVINITY, are Mysterys only to be determin'd by *the initiated, or ordain'd*; to whom the State has assign'd the Guardianship and Promulgation of the Divine Oracles. It becomes not those who are un-inspir'd from Heaven, and un-commission'd from Earth, to search with Curiosity into the Original of those holy Rites and Records, *by Law establish'd*." <sup>109</sup> This is likely to be an acceptable view to an orthodox Church of England Christian, and again we see his emphasis on following the legal custom on religion. Yet in the sequel Shaftesbury points to a problem that would arise for anyone practicing his art of criticism:

should we make such an Attempt, we should in probability find the less Satisfaction, the further we presum'd to carry our Speculations. Having dar'd once to quit the Authority and Direction of *the Law*, we shou'd easily be subject to *Heterodoxy* and *Error*, when we had no better Warrant left us for the Authority of our sacred Symbols, than the Integrity, Candour, and Disinterestedness of their *Compilers, and Registers*. How great that Candour and Disinterestedness may have been, we have no other Historys to inform us, than those of their own licensing or composing. <sup>110</sup>

Without a reliable authority to vouch for the authenticity of the "holy rites and records" of Christianity, an individual believer would have to make his own investigation into the transmission of rites and scripture. This would entail asking about the character and trustworthiness not only of the tradition but also of the authors of the scriptures

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1.221.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 1.221-22.

themselves. Such an inquiry would leave most believers vulnerable to unscrupulous men and unable to distinguish genuine revelation from pretenders. Shaftesbury writes that, "busy Persons, who officiously search into these Records, are ready even from hence to draw Proofs very disadvantageous to the Fame and Character of this *Succession* of Men. And Persons moderately read in these Historys, are apt to judg no otherwise of the Temper of antient *Councils*, than by that of later *Synods* and modern *Convocations*."<sup>111</sup>

If *Soliloquy* generally avoids discussing the "manners and characters" discussed by scripture, the same cannot be said about *Miscellaneous Reflections*. Shortly after introducing *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, the Critic turns to the topic of "controversial writing."<sup>112</sup> The Critic compares the popular contemporary practice of "*Controversy*, or the Method of *Answer* and *Refutation*" with the practice of ancient authors. According to the Critic, authors were evaluated in antiquity on the basis of their artistic and intellectual merits: "if Authors writ *ill*, they were despis'd: If *well*, they were by some Party or other espous'd."<sup>113</sup> Given the tendency of human beings to disagree, it seems likely that in antiquity, as well as in modernity, "*partys* there wou'd necessarily be, and *Sects* of every kind, in Learning and Philosophy." Yet the Critic observes the curious fact that ancient authors did not develop a written art of controversial disputation. Since Shaftesbury was a careful student of Socratic dialogue it is likely he knew that antiquity had sophists and

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 1.222. I infer an intrusive law because the Critic continues, "even where Men are left to themselves, and allow'd the Freedom of their Choice..."

<sup>112</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.8.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

that Socrates himself practiced an art of refutation.<sup>114</sup> The Critic nevertheless claims of ancient sectarianism, "every one sided with whom he lik'd; and having the liberty of hearing *each* side speak for it-self, stood in no need of express *Warning-Pieces* against pretended Sophistry, or dangerous Reasoning."<sup>115</sup>

Such tolerance finds sharp contrast with the Critic's portrait of modern sectarianism, which betrays a strong "zeal of *Party-causes*." He writes:

let a zealous *Divine* and flaming Champion of our Faith, when inclin'd to shew himself in Print, make choice of some tremendous *Mystery* of Religion, oppos'd heretofore by some damnable *Heresiarch*; whom having vehemently refuted, he turns himself towards the orthodox Opinion, and supports the true Belief, with the highest Eloquence and profoundest Erudition; he shall, notwithstanding this, remain perhaps in deep Obscurity, to the great affliction of his Bookseller, and the regret of all who bear a just Veneration for *Church-history*, and the antient Purity of the *Christian* Faith. But let it so happen that in this Prosecution of his deceas'd Adversary, our *Doctor* raises up some *living Antagonist*; who, on the same foot of Orthodoxy with himself, pretends to arraign his Expositions, and refute the Refuter upon every Article he has advanc'd; from this moment the Writing gathers Life, the Publick listens, the Bookseller takes heart; and when Issue is well join'd, the Repartees grown smart, and the Contention vigorous between the learned Partys, a *Ring* is made, and *Readers* gather in abundance.<sup>116</sup>

As the Critic's satire makes clear, this modern mode of polemical writing is, according to Shaftesbury, connected to Christianity.

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<sup>114</sup> The prevalence of this "*elenchus*" in the "early" Platonic dialogues has been documented extensively by Gregory Vlastos. See especially Chapter 2, "Socrates contra Socrates," in Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 45 ff.

<sup>115</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.8.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.8-9.

The Critic's account might seem self-serving, given the controversial reception of Shaftesbury's own *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm*.<sup>117</sup> Yet the refusal to engage the dispute directly is consistent with Shaftesbury's overall strategy. I would argue that for Shaftesbury, a public dispute would be an occasion for scandal in sense of "perplexity of conscience occasioned by the conduct of one who is looked up to as an example."<sup>118</sup> As the quotation from Voitle (on page 102) suggests, Shaftesbury's opinions on religion and politics are not egalitarian. His account of the ancient policy presupposes a natural heterogeneity of intellect among men. According to the ancients, this natural heterogeneity has consequences both for political life and for the activity of philosophy.

This concern is brought to the forefront of the *Characteristicks* by the frontispiece to Volume I. Since the content and placement of the illustrations are themselves part of Shaftesbury's plan for the revised edition of his work, it is instructive to consider them as they relate to Shaftesbury's thematic concerns.<sup>119</sup> Taken together, the frontispieces for Volumes I and III point to the importance of religion and politics for understanding the

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<sup>117</sup> Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, 327-28.

<sup>118</sup> Burchfield, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary : Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*.

<sup>119</sup> Shaftesbury himself commissioned and arranged the placement of the engravings for his revised edition of *Characteristicks*, and went so far to include page number references to the text in the images themselves. An excellent article by Felix Paknadel helps reconstruct much of Shaftesbury's communications about the engravings. Regarding the purpose of the engravings, Felix Paknadel writes that they "were not for him mere ornaments. They were to convey in another medium the main points of his written work, to 'instil some thoughts of virtue and honesty, and the love of liberty and mankind'. They were an 'underplot' working in perfect harmony with the main plot: 'virtuosoship, methinks, plays its part very aptly, and in good tune.'" Felix Paknadel, "Shaftesbury's Illustrations of Characteristicks," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 290.

*Characteristicks*; together they provide an interpretive context for the dominant themes of Volume II.

The frontispieces for the "framing" volumes present what Shaftesbury identifies in his correspondence as the ancient and modern models for religion and politics. Shaftesbury writes of these rivals approaches:

The FEL. TEM. of the first volume-plate (which is all happiness from the right balance, liberty, and ancient model of religion) is a noted medal-inscription for *felicitas temporum* or *felicia tempora*.

The EN QUO of the last volume-plate (which on the other side is all misery and the modern model) is a poetical ejaculation, as much as to say, "Behold ! whither we are brought ? to what state reduced ?"<sup>120</sup>

The frontispiece for volume first, then, portrays what Shaftesbury elsewhere calls the "ancient policy" of magistrates.<sup>121</sup> According to Shaftesbury, it was the wise policy of ancient magistrates to indulge superstition by permitting subjects the freedom to practice a wide variety of religions. At the feet of a magistrate reclines a woman with crown and scepter, holding a balance. On one side of the balance rests "the Egyptian systrum, the mitre, the lituus or augur's instrument." On the other rests a lyre, a caduceus, and the breastplate of Minerva. Here we are reminded that Shaftesbury associates liberty with the "rise and progress of the arts." It is Shaftesbury's recommendation to the magistrate to indulge superstition while also allowing philosophy the freedom to pursue its own activities in private. Two scenes reflect this happy

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<sup>120</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 530.

<sup>121</sup> *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, 1.11.

situation. To the left we see four figures representing "religionists, supplicants, votaries, prophets." One seems to be an enraptured Sibyl; one holds a "thyrsus"; one pleads to the sky; and the last, as Shaftesbury describes it, performs a rite over a "dark pit or chasm in the earth." In the background there are busts of gods surrounded by a stormy sky. On the right side of the engraving a very different scene unfolds. There are poets and philosophers, men contemplating both ideas and actions. Behind them stands Mount Olympus (suggested by the Pegasus). The boarder of the frontispiece shows the many fruits and blessings of a society where the arts and sciences flourish. In the words of Felix Paknadel, "freedom, maintained by a wise ruler, breeds social harmony and fosters the development of civilization."<sup>122</sup>

The plate for volume third portrays the consequences of allowing religion to rule the magistrate. The second motto is drawn from Virgil's *Eclogues*. "*En, quo discordia civis/ produxit miseros!*" See where strife has brought our citizens!<sup>123</sup> Shaftesbury's account of the origin and development of Christianity, including the political devastation arising from Christian sectarianism, is presented most forcefully by the Critic in his *Miscellaneous Reflections*, and the plate matches the Critic's manner. This frontispiece is appropriately wanting for clear order, but when read from left to right the viewer can discern three episodes in the history of religion. To the left we see that Egypt provides a

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<sup>122</sup> Paknadel, "Shaftesbury's Illustrations of Characteristics," 299.

<sup>123</sup> Eclogue I, lines 72-72. Virgil, *Eclogues ; Georgics ; Aeneid, I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton; Goold Fairclough, G. P., Rev ed., *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 30-31. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the *Eclogues* hold special importance for Shaftesbury.

model of priestly rule. Such an arrangement is presented as wasteful by spilled baskets and an upset cornucopia. In the second scene naked diminutive men skirmish before classical temples, now obscured by dark copse; one barbarian marches with trophies from despoiled classical Rome. The scene suggests that sectarianism following the fall of Rome leads to barbarism. In the background to the right stands a Gothic Church. A figure kneels in the foreground to the Bishop of Rome (suggested by Mitre and key) and offers up what appears to be a globe. A monarch watches, with hands raised as if to suggest powerlessness to intervene.<sup>124</sup> At the foot of the Successor of Peter lies the symbol of old Roman power, the *fasces*. . There are two references in the text to *fasces*, each in the context of exhorting the magistrate to a policy of tolerance.<sup>125</sup> Roman strength through unity, seen in the bundled birch rods, has given way to the uniformity of dogma and the suppression of heresy.

Taken together the frontispieces for Volumes I and III present the alternatives as Shaftesbury understands them: either political life will tolerate a variety of religions or one understanding of religion will determine political life. According to Shaftesbury, it was the policy of ancient governments to establish a "public leading in religion." This established religion seldom came into conflict with private opinions, whether philosophic or religious in character, for ancient piety was concerned with proper conduct (orthopraxy) rather than the holding of certain opinions (orthodoxy). Since heathen

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<sup>124</sup> The monarch bears quite a resemblance to the famous frontispiece for *Leviathan*.

<sup>125</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.11. *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.69.



religion was polytheistic, the magistrate did not take additional practices of piety to be a threat to the publicly established order. "Why shou'd there not be public walks, as well as private gardens?" Shaftesbury asks. Since superstitious fears were thought to be natural to men, magistrates following the "polite" views of the ancients would enter into the enthusiastic concern of the people with "a kind sympathy...and taking, as it were, their passion upon him...endeavour, by chearful ways, to divert and heal it." The ancient magistrate was inclined to tolerate "visionaries and enthusiast of all kinds," and allowed philosophy a free course "as a balance against superstition." This is not to say that the magistrate was indifferent to religious practice, for open atheism was not tolerated. Nevertheless, the polite heathen magistrate was tolerant and gentle in his treatment of religion.

This seems to have changed over time, however, due in part to the "unnatural union of religion and philosophy" which emerged during the Roman Empire. Among the "polite heathens of the ancient world," the refined thoughts of the philosopher were kept separate from the observance of religious customs. Philosophy was a private activity of the few, and difficult matters of "profound speculation and inquiry" were carefully concealed from public view.<sup>126</sup> Over time, those matters which were once understood by philosophers to be merely probable accounts of the nature of things became in the hands

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<sup>126</sup> The discussion of defensive raillery is especially relevant here. The Critic elsewhere claims that this moderation extended to the writings of philosophers as well: "but that they really were [eminent in critical practice], witness, among the ancients, their greatest philosophers, whose critical pieces lie intermixt with their profound philosophical works, and other politer tracts ornamentally writ, for public use." *Miscellany V*, 3.172. In the footnotes here we read "the distinction of treatises was into the ἀκροαματικοί and ἐχότερκοί." (esoteric and exoteric)."

of decayed ancient schools the source of contentious and dogmatic opinion.<sup>127</sup> According to Shaftesbury, early Christianity did not share the concern for orthodoxy that eventually developed. This only emerges as a result of the influence of philosophy. "There is nothing more evident," he writes in the *Miscellanies*, "than that our Holy Religion, in its original constitution, was set so far apart from philosophy or refin'd speculation, that it seem'd in a manner diametrically oppos'd to it. A man might have been not only a sceptick in all the controverted points of the academys, or schools of learning, but even a perfect stranger to all of this kind; and yet compleat in his religion, faith, and worship." After the mixture of religion and philosophy, however, "mysteries, which were heretofore treated with profound respect, and lay unexpos'd to vulgar eyes, became public and prostitute; being enforc'd with terrors, and urg'd with compulsion and violence, on the unfitted capacities and apprehension of mankind."<sup>128</sup> In this combination, questionable matters for inquiry became "the necessary subject of a strict and absolute assent."

Shaftesbury obviously intends this comingling of philosophy and religion to describe the Christianity of his day. In the course of time, the magistrate himself adopted a "new sort of policy." This modern policy, "which extends itself to another world, and considers the future lives and happiness of men rather than the present, has made us leap the bounds of natural humanity; and out of a supernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another most devoutly. It has rais'd an antipathy which no temporal

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<sup>127</sup> 3.41.

<sup>128</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.52.

interest cou'd ever do; and entail'd upon us a mutual hatred to all eternity."<sup>129</sup> The "saving of souls" is considered a most heroic passion by the modern world, and this passion has "become in a manner the chief care of the magistrate, and the very end of government itself."<sup>130</sup> Shaftesbury writes that "in the process of time it was thought decent to mend men's countenances, and render their intellectual complexions uniform and of a sort."<sup>131</sup> The magistrate became "a dresser, and in his turn was dress'd" by "tire-men," (that is, theologians or priests). While all priests agreed that "there was only one certain and true dress. . . to which all people shou'd conform," neither the magistrate nor the attire-men knew which of the thousands of possible modes of dress was "the exact true one." Men were pressed from every side to adjust their mien according to the "fashion and the humour of the times," with the result that human nature itself became obscured by Christian mores.<sup>132</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter 4, modern philosophy responds to this hiding of nature by recommending the distrust of all convention. For Shaftesbury, the customs of men while perhaps conventional are not simply *contrary* to nature; some customs may in fact be the precondition of the perfection of human nature. Shaftesbury offers a fable to illustrate how one might begin to think about the complicated relationship between nature and convention.

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<sup>129</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.12.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.

<sup>131</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.53.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.54.

Imagine an Ethiopian visitor who arrives in Paris or Venice at the time of Carnival, when almost everyone is wearing a mask. Taking the strange way of the Europeans to be their natural way, the visitor would for a while regard the festivities with a serious eye. It would not occur to him that "a whole people cou'd be so fantastical, as upon Agreement, at an appointed time, to transform themselves by a variety of habits, and make it a solemn practice to impose on one another, by this universal confusion of characters and person."<sup>133</sup> Eventually, however, he would discover "the cheat," and while the Europeans might laugh at his simplicity for being fooled, the Ethiopian would have still better reason to laugh--after all, the revelers are indeed ridiculous in their costumes. But were the Ethiopian, now on the lookout for masks, to conclude that the pale complexion of Europeans was also part of their costume, he would become ridiculous himself. "By a silly presumption he took nature for mere art, and mistook perhaps a man of sobriety and sense for one of those ridiculous mummers." This, according to Shaftesbury, is an example of immoderate skepticism, a case of "carrying the jest too far."

The Ethiopian is right to laugh when he discovers that the Europeans wear masks, but wrong to conclude that all countenances are therefore masks. Shaftesbury suggests that there is something ridiculous about the fact that men's opinions are usually the product of art or convention. It is because of this insight that opinions must be investigated. When taken to an extreme, however, this insight will mislead judgment.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 1.53.

Some opinions may actually be in harmony with nature. We should also notice that the Ethiopian comes by his original misunderstanding honestly. The Ethiopian did not have any reason to expect the deception of Carnival because he bore a naïve trust of the world as it appeared to him. It is indeed surprising that a whole people would adopt a transformation of their characters, and even more so that they would do so universally and solemnly. This insight--a moment of wonder--might lead men to ask whether one set of customs is superior to others. In anticipation of excessive passion here, Shaftesbury suggests that there is less disagreement among men than the modern skeptic might claim. Also, the discovery of the cheat presupposes that the Ethiopian had some prior understanding that men have faces, whatever their exact complexion may be. Shaftesbury will insist that the possibility of human knowledge presupposes an initial insight that there is something to be known about the nature of the thing in question. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that Shaftesbury introduces his Socratic method of soliloquy as a tool for distinguishing natural from unnatural opinions.

Shaftesbury, then, presents two possible policies regarding politics and religion. The ancient policy distinguishes the superstitious religion of the people from the sublime inquiries of the philosopher. The magistrate is able to pursue a policy of tolerance toward a great variety of religious rites because religion concerns itself not with right opinion (that is, orthodoxy) but practice. It is the philosopher who is most serious about seeking the truth. Ancient philosophers, he suggests, pursued their inquiries with discretion,

being careful not to confuse or corrupt the people. Philosophers assisted the magistrates as well by offering them an education in virtue.

If Shaftesbury's account is to be credible, he must explain why this ancient policy eventually failed. We have already seen that Shaftesbury, like Hobbes before him, regarded Christianity as an unfortunate mixture of philosophy and vulgar religion. What does it mean that philosophy "became public and prostitute; being enforc'd with terrors, and urg'd with compulsion and violence, on the unfitted capacities and apprehension of mankind?" To answer this question we must consider his account of priestcraft, which appears in the *Miscellaneous Reflections*. There the Critic pursues a long digression on the establishment and growth of religion in Egypt; in it one can see a thinly veiled portrait of the growth of Christendom.

#### **Shaftesbury and Priestcraft**

It is characteristic of Shaftesbury's ancient sympathies that he does not regard Christianity as a singular religious phenomenon. In treating priestcraft in general, he seems to prefer a "sociological" approach to the question of religion.<sup>134</sup>

The Egyptian religion, as opposed to religions in the classical age, was shrouded in mysteries and secret rites. Egypt is the "Mother-Land of Superstition," partly because of natural conditions of climate and partly as a result of foolish policies set by the magistracy. According to the Critic, the government of Egypt overregulated the trade of priestcraft and changed the proportion between the supply of priests and the natural

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<sup>134</sup> This may, in turn, have had its influence on the Scottish Enlightenment.

demand for superstition. What is worse, the government made the office of Priest heritable, so that the children of priests themselves became priests. The Egyptians had many Gods and Temples, and each temple was allowed more than one priest. The Egyptian priesthood was allowed to maintain itself without restriction through donatives, and these donatives became the entailed property of the religious. By Law the property of the religious was protected such that "they might retain what they cou'd get; and that it might be lawful for their Order to receive such Estates by voluntary Contribution, as cou'd never afterwards be converted to other Uses."<sup>135</sup> Over time, of course, the priests accumulated considerable wealth for they were able to exploit the superstitious part of mankind for considerable profit. In addition to making the priesthood heritable, the magistrate also allowed people to become priests voluntarily, which combined with the expanding wealth and power of the priesthood, acted as a powerful incentive for growth.

These policies flourished in a climate especially conducive to "Prodigy in Nature." The heat of the African Sun combined with the fertile Nile river valley brings forth endless creatures and phenomena to be explained. Since the Egyptians needed ways to measure the land, predict floods, and navigate the rivers, they gave birth to astronomy and other sciences. The priesthood, however, turned these sciences to their advantage and to the "immense Growth of Superstition" and further growth of the priesthood. The Critic sums the effect of policy and conditions in the following principle of "political Arithmetic: "in every nation whatsoever; "That the Quantity of Superstition (if I may so

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<sup>135</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.29.

speak) will, in proportion, nearly always answer the Number of Priests, Diviners, Soothsayers, Prophets, or such who gain their Livelihood, or receive Advantages by officiating in Religious Affairs." For if these Dealers are numerous, they will force a Trade."<sup>136</sup> Once the priesthood grows powerful, a magistrate will have to be cautious in his attempts to institute reform. The power of the priesthood does not depend on force of arms.<sup>137</sup> As we will see in chapter 4, its power is derived chiefly from its ability to shape the opinions and characters of men. There are professions which depend on the "infirmitys and defects of mankind, (as for instance. . .law and physick)" that with the least bit of help from the magistrate will proliferate by creating new problems demanding new solutions which in turn create problems.

Shaftesbury's formulation of the problem of priestcraft is striking, for it suggests that it is possible to describe the growth of social phenomena according to natural laws. Thanks to such political arithmetic, one may gather "what, in the process of time, must therefore naturally have happen'd in the case of Religion, among the Egyptians."<sup>138</sup> The Egyptians form a striking contrast to the "rise and progress of the arts" among the Greeks.<sup>139</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2, Shaftesbury drew on Aristotle's account of the "Lineage and SUCCESSION of Wit"<sup>140</sup> to dampen the modern emphasis on "Genius

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 3.30.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 3.34.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 3.31.

<sup>139</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.84 ff. *Soliloquy*, 1.146 ff.

<sup>140</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.85.



alone."<sup>141</sup> The Greeks enjoyed a "fortunate Constitution" which contributed to their originality in the Arts.

The plague of priests was visited on nations beyond Egypt. The Critic says that the Syrians, the Ethiopians, the Persians, the Babylonians, and Chaldeans each followed this model. While each nation developed peculiar rites and mysteries, each followed a natural pattern. Shaftesbury does not seem to recommend a simplistic social science in his natural history of religion, though. It is unclear, for example, whether the Egyptians imitated the Ethiopians or vice versa. Some of the kingdoms (Chaldea, say) are influenced by Egypt directly; others (the Persians) seem to develop independently. These "Asiatick Priesthoods" do have certain identifiable conditions for their flourishing, however. The priestly hierarchy seems to rely on a strong monarchy to take root. The Magi, for example, gain control of Persia at a moment when it is poised to establish "Universal Empire."<sup>142</sup> Their control grows when the magistrate allows the priesthood to secure its own property. As the Critic remarks, monarchy cannot long resist for "dominion must naturally follow property." Because of human weakness, there is an inexhaustible fund of credulity among the "ignorant and vulgar," just waiting to be exploited by the crafty and unscrupulous. Shown a little favor, the priesthood will multiply the number of rites, gods, objects of worship, and priests beyond counting. In

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<sup>141</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.144.

<sup>142</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.54. *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.31.

the case of Egypt, it was almost inevitable that it would seek to export its model of religion:

no wonder if by a Nation so abounding in religious Orders, spiritual Conquests were sought in foreign Countrys, Colonys led abroad, and Missionarys detach'd, on Expeditions, in this prosperous Service. 'Twas thus a Zealot-People, influenc'd of old by their very Region and Climate, and who thro' a long Tract of Time, under a peculiar Policy, had been rais'd both by Art and Nature to an immense Growth in religious Science and Mystery; came by degrees to spread their variety of Rites and Ceremonys, their distinguishing marks of separate Worships and secret Communitys, thro' the distant World; but chiefly thro' their neighbouring and dependent Countrys.<sup>143</sup>

While the priesthood lacks force of arms, it is not without material consequences. According to the Critic, strangers are especially vulnerable to priestcraft because they often depend on others for their "maintenance and bread." While the account of priestcraft was removed from Christendom by nation and time, the natural history becomes more proximate in the discussion of the "Hebrew Race," which is presented as something of a digression from the main argument about priestcraft.<sup>144</sup> According to the Critic, ancient historians indicate that many important Jewish rites have their origin in the long captivity in Egypt. Circumcision, for example, was a religious rite instituted by the Egyptians. While he is unwilling to go so far as to say that Abraham picks this custom up because he wants to emulate the Egyptians, his qualification is so thin that it is unlikely to be sincere:

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<sup>143</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.31.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.39. After a discussion of Joseph's prognostications and machinations, the critic says "but to resume the Subject of our Speculation."

'tis certain that if this holy Patriarch, who first instituted the sacred Rite of Circumcision within his own Family or Tribe, had no regard to any Policy or Religion of the Egyptians; yet he had formerly been a Guest and Inhabitant in Egypt (where Historians mention this to have been a natural Rite); long ere he had receiv'd any divine Notice or Revelation, concerning this Affair.<sup>145</sup>

Nor is circumcision the most interesting thing Abraham learned in Egypt. According to the Critic, Abraham also learned occult sciences such as a "judicial Astrology"<sup>146</sup> more proper to the Magi, just as his successors did. In the history presented by the Critic, the exodus of the Jews was hardly an act of liberation by God. Twice the Egyptians tried to expel the Jews; probably, he adds in a footnote, because they were leprous, at least "from what appears in Holy Writ."<sup>147</sup>

The Critic's authoritative guide to scripture seems to be the Emperor Julian II, or as he was known to Christendom, Julian the Apostate, a convert (revert?) to neo-Platonism. As Julian and the Critic interpret Scripture, "Moses stole the sacred objects of the Egyptians; and when the Egyptians tried to recapture these, they were driven home by storms." To be fair, however, the Critic notes that the expulsion from Egypt was in fact due to a divine command: the oracle of Hammon bid the Egyptian king to purge the lepers because they were offensive to the Gods.<sup>148</sup> Among the sacred things carried out of Egypt by the Jews were strong influences on the "manners, the Religion, Rites, Diet,

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 3.34-35.

<sup>146</sup> Judicial or mundane *astrologia judiciaria* claims to foretell the fate of man, as opposed to *astrologia naturalis* or natural astrology, which predicted the weather.

<sup>147</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.35 in footnotes.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 3.35-36 in footnotes.

Customs, Laws, and Constitution of their tyrannical Masters." Not surprisingly, after 400 years of living among the Egyptians, the "manners, Opinions, Rites and Customs" of the Egyptians "gain'd a powerful Ascendency over their Natures."<sup>149</sup> While Moses attempted to institute reforms, the habits ran so deep that "it was almost necessary to God (it is right to say humane) to indulge them. . .and adapt his laws to their habit and standard." Moses, as the Scripture indicates, received a strong and privileged education at the hands of the Egyptians. The Critic cites the *Acts of the Apostles* (translated loosely) to say that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, which "as is well known," was the bailiwick of the priesthood. In other words, Moses himself was exposed to philosophy.

From the Egyptians, the "religious Profession" spread widely through the East. As the number of priests waxed, so the number of laymen waned, and soon the magistrates lost all power to govern or check the spread of priestcraft. According to the Critic, the glut of priests led to a scarcity of worshipers; and priests responded by elevating the dignity their own worship by asserting its singularity, and thereby moving political life toward "religious antipathy and mutual discord."<sup>150</sup>

Shaftesbury's account of priestcraft betrays considerable agreement with Hobbes as to the pernicious consequences of religion governing magistrates. Yet Shaftesbury, unlike Hobbes, prefers to restore the classical solution to the challenge of religion. From

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 3.38.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 3.40.

a political point of view his project recommends a return to the "antient policy" on religion. As John Leland rightly observes, Shaftesbury advocates subordinating religion to political ends; but his reason is not Hobbes's. For Shaftesbury, the relationship between religion and political life flows from the fact that the concerns of the philosopher point beyond the moral life. This perspective finds its political consequences in the ancient policy.

Shaftesbury's account presents, then, three modes of religion. The people are inclined to the practice of superstitious rites which they regard as proper worship of the gods. The magistrate, on the other hand, establishes a "public leading in religion" for his polity-- that is, a civil religion--which works to mitigate the excessive passions of the people and thereby improve their morals. Finally, the philosopher pursues a religion of "profound speculation and inquiry" into nature. This natural religion can be said to balance superstition in part because philosophy rightly understood can introduce more a more reasonable understanding of the divine.<sup>151</sup> This distinction, which can be seen in the writings of Cicero<sup>152</sup> and is made explicit in the writings of Varro, would have been familiar to Shaftesbury at least through Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the*

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<sup>151</sup> *Moralists*, 2.105. I discuss the political influence of philosophy more expansively in Chapter 5.

<sup>152</sup> As evidence of this claim, consider the quotation from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* on page 40, below. Cicero's Cotta is a leading citizen from a prominent family, a pontiff, and an Epicurean. While he is a confessed atheist, he is unwilling to disavow the public religion of Rome.

*Universe*.<sup>153</sup> In that work, which Shaftesbury references a number of times in the *Characteristicks*, we read that

not only the Egyptians, but also the Syrians, Persians, Indians, and other barbarian Pagans, had, beside their vulgar theology, another more arcane and recondite one, amongst their priests and learned men; and that the same was true concerning the Greeks and Latins also, is unquestionably evident from that account, that hath been given by us of philosophic theology; where, by the vulgar theology of the Pagans, we understand not only their mythical or fabulous, but also their political or civil theology, it being truly affirmed by St. Austin [that is, Augustine]...that both the fabulous theology of the Pagans was in part their civil, and their civil was fabulous.--And by their more arcane and recondite theology, is doubtless meant that, which they conceived to be the natural and true theology. Which distinction of the natural and true theology, from the civil and political, as it was acknowledged by all the ancient Greek philosophers, but more expressly by Antistines, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics; so it was owned and much insisted upon, both by Scaevola, that famous Roman Pontifex, and by Varro, that most learned antiquary.<sup>154</sup>

According to the account offered by St. Augustine, Seneca and other prominent Romans also subscribed to this three-fold distinction.<sup>155</sup>

Shaftesbury's own account of the origin and dissemination of quasi-philosophic religion confronts us with an important question: how can philosophy, which for Shaftesbury is an elevated love of wisdom, become a pernicious force in political life? In order to answer this important question we first need to consider the way classical philosophy regarded the relationship between religion, politics, and philosophy.

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<sup>153</sup> Shaftesbury refers to Cudworth in *Moralists*, 2.148. and *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.42.

<sup>154</sup> While the works of Varro are largely lost to us, this argument is preserved, apparently literally, by St. Augustine in his *City of God*. See Ernest L. Fortin, "Augustine and Roman Civil Religion: Some Critical Reflections," in *Classical Christianity and the Political Order: Reflections on the Theologico-Political Problem*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 1996).

<sup>155</sup> *City of God*, book 6, chapter 11.

## The Ancient Policy Considered

### Religion, Politics, and Philosophy according to Socrates

According to Fustel de Coulanges, in the earliest times of the *polis*, no distinction was made between religion and politics. He writes that "the state was closely allied with religion; it came from religion, and was confounded with it. For this reason, in the primitive city all political institutions had been religious institutions, the festivals had been ceremonies of the worship, the laws had been sacred formulas, and the kings and magistrates had been priests."<sup>156</sup> The claim that religion and politics were inseparable in the earliest days of the *polis* has been confirmed by contemporary scholars as well.<sup>157</sup> We'll see that confirmation can also be found in the treatment that the topic of religion and politics receives in Plato.

It appears that the speculations of the earliest philosophers were coeval with a rejection of the myths of the *polis*. Indeed, some have argued that philosophy was born when men began to distinguish nature from the laws of men, which from their variety appeared to be convention and from the point of view of a science of nature, arbitrary or contingent on accident. Since rites concerning the gods varied considerably from place to place, philosophers tended to relegate religion especially to the realm of the conventional

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<sup>156</sup> Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City : A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, trans. Willard Small, 11th ed. (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1901), 471 ff.

<sup>157</sup> Bruno Snell, "Arcadia: The Discovery of a Spiritual Landscape," in *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953). E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational, Sather Classical Lectures*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

rather than the natural.<sup>158</sup> The political consequences of the distinction between law or convention on the one hand and nature on the other were profound, for with it philosophy became virtually indistinguishable from atheism, at least in the public mind. The moral authority of the city, however, rested on and drew strength from the belief in the gods. It would not, perhaps, take much sophistication to doubt that Zeus literally hurled thunderbolts at sinners, but the myths of the city seem to have been accepted on some level by even sophisticated citizens.<sup>159</sup> Gradually, the influence of philosophy changed this:

philosophy appeared, and overthrew all the rules of the ancient polity. It was impossible to touch the opinions of men without also touching the fundamental principles of their government. Pythagoras, having a vague conception of the Supreme Being, disdained the local worships; and this was sufficient to cause him to reject the old modes of government, and to attempt to found a new order of society. Anaxagoras comprehended the God-Intelligence which reigns over all men and all beings. In rejecting ancient religious notions, he also rejected ancient polity. As he did not believe in the gods of the prytaneum, he no longer fulfilled all the duties of a citizen; he avoided the assemblies, and would not be a magistrate. His doctrine was an attack upon the city; and the Athenians condemned him to death.<sup>160</sup>

The essential principle seems to have been the presenting of nature as being opposed to the laws and customs of men.<sup>161</sup> This consequence of such thought, especially as spread

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<sup>158</sup> See, for example, "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right," Chapter 3 in Strauss, *Natural Right and History*.

<sup>159</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus*, 305-06.

<sup>160</sup> Coulanges, *The Ancient City : A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*.

<sup>161</sup> For the opposition of nature (*phusei*) and law (*nomoi*) see EN 1133a 11; 1134b20; 1135a5.



through the influence of sophistry, "was to attack the ancient political system at its foundation."<sup>162</sup>

A famous fragment from Critias's play, *Sisyphus*, will help us see how political life came to be viewed by these early philosophers:

there was a time when the life of men was unordered, bestial and the slave of force, when there was no reward for the virtuous and no punishment for the wicked. Then, I think, men devised retributory laws, in order that Justice might be dictator and have arrogance as its slave, and if anyone sinned, he was punished. Then, when the laws forbade them to commit open crimes of violence, and they began to do them in secret, a wise and clever man invented fear of the gods for mortals, that there might be some means of frightening the wicked, even if they do anything or say or think it in secret.<sup>163</sup>

This view seems to have been a commonplace of "pre-Socratic" philosophy, namely that the gods were invented by men to reinforce human justice with a fear of divine retribution. Through the influence of philosophy there arose a tension between the city and its mythology on the one hand, and philosophy on the other.

The portrait of Socrates offered by Aristophanes in the *Clouds* seems to offer further evidence to this effect. Perhaps earlier in his life, taken by the power of natural philosophy, Socrates too found himself indifferent to political matters. (This portrait, in turn, receives confirmation in the intellectual autobiography offered by Socrates at the end of Plato's *Phaedo*.) Aristophanes' Socrates is not especially interested in political questions, although his inquiry into natural subjects has inescapable consequences for

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<sup>162</sup> Coulanges, *The Ancient City : A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*.

<sup>163</sup> Kathleen Freeman and Hermann Diels, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers : A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*, 1971 importation. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 57-158.

political life. In the *Clouds*, the natural philosopher Socrates (and his unsubsidized graduate assistants) disdain the deepest concerns of the average Athenian citizen. Socrates appears floating aloft in a basket, looking down on the average citizen, Strepsiades. From the vantage point of Socrates, the concerns of Strepsiades are ephemeral (he even greets him as "Ephemeral").<sup>164</sup> This indifference is shown at once in the exchange between the pupil of Socrates and Strepsiades. The pupils study geometry for its own sake, and when pressed for a reason on why it is useful, they mention measuring the land.<sup>165</sup> But as it turns out, they measure the land "in general" rather than for allotment, and their maps are not political--the pupil has reckon just were the cities are for Strepsiades.<sup>166</sup>

The indifference seems to flow from the concern with the abiding natural things as opposed to conventional things, which are assumed to be fleeting and relative to place. Among the most important conventional things (to Strepsiades, at least) are the Gods. Socrates offers a naturalistic account of thunder and rain, but Strepsiades is incapable of following it.<sup>167</sup> He cannot conceive of the possibility that the Olympic gods do not exist. When Strepsiades asks who forces the clouds to drift, "Doesn't Zeus?" Socrates replies,

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<sup>164</sup> hô phēmere Aristophanes, *Clouds ; Wasps ; Peace*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), line 224.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 202-05.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, line 214.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 362-88.

"not at all; it's the whirl of the upper air." Strepsiades assumes that Whirl is a new god who has supplanted Zeus.<sup>168</sup>

Yet pre-Socratic philosophy did have a teaching on political things. This teaching takes as its starting point a naturalistic perspective on human beings. Here human beings are seen in a continuum with other animals, different in degree but not in kind. In the *Clouds* this view emerges in the willingness of Phidippides to beat his father.<sup>169</sup> It is natural for the stronger to rule the weaker, and the young are stronger than the old. As Phidippides points out, the treatment of children and parents is customary. Having been convinced that there are no Olympic gods but only natural phenomena, Phidippides argues to his father that he is no longer bound to respect his parents. "Wasn't it a man like you and me who originally proposed this law and persuaded the ancients to adopt it? If so, am I any less free to establish in my turn a new law for the sons of tomorrow?"<sup>170</sup>

One can see various formulations of this view throughout the dialogues of Plato as well. In book one of the *Republic*, for example, Thrasymachus claims that "the just is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger," or that "in every city the same thing is just, the advantage of the ruling body." Adeimantus soon points out that an adequate statement of this position (as revised by Glaucon in book two) must take into account the promise of divine rewards and punishments for the just--that is, those with at least a

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., lines 364.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., lines 1420-25.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 1423.

*reputation* for being just.<sup>171</sup> Presumably a reputation for justice is sufficient "if there are not gods, or if they have no care for human beings." A similar concern could be shown to arise in the *Gorgias* and other dialogues of Plato.

Philosophy seems to have become more self-conscious of its political influence in the person of Socrates, and in the works of Plato we encounter a very different account of the relationship between political life and philosophy, and consequently, between politics and religion. As Cicero remarks in his *Tusculan Disputations*, "Socrates was the first who brought down philosophy from the heavens, placed it in cities, introduced it into families, and obliged it to examine into life and morals, and good and evil."<sup>172</sup> The Socratic innovation seem not to lie in his willingness to ask about human beings, but rather to bring philosophy from its lofty preoccupation with eternal things and examine human life and morality as phenomena which might have a nature of their own. He had to "oblige" philosophy to do so perhaps because philosophy's natural inclination is not in this direction. This Socratic approach, especially as presented in the works of Plato and Xenophon, attempts to darn the rift that philosophy opened between political life and religion. Philosophy as it originally emerged could speak of political life, but only by recognizing the conventional character of the divine myths needed to support the laws of the city. Socrates seems to offer a way to think of politics which allows religion to

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<sup>171</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 365b-e.

<sup>172</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations; Also, Treatises on the Nature of the Gods, and on the Commonwealth*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge, *Harper's New Classical Library*. (New York,: Harper & brothers, 1890).

remain a force in political life while keeping open the possibility for philosophers that it is somehow less than true.

As Thomas Pangle has shown in an important article, "The Political Psychology of Religion in Plato's Laws," Plato saw theology as an essential aspect of healthy political life.<sup>173</sup> His theology, however, was not identical to the mythology as presented in Homer and the early Greek tragedians. (This can be seen in Aristophanes' *Clouds* but also in the famous criticism of Homer appearing in the early books of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>174</sup>) In presenting a defense of the gods from atheism while also presenting a philosophical critique of theology, Plato is able to show that a proper theology will support the law code of the *polis* through more salutary myths. Interestingly, the account of theology in book 10 arises in the context of a discussion of the penal code of the city being sketched by the Athenian Stranger (in books 9 and 11). It becomes clear that the Cretan legislator Klinias find it almost inconceivable that a serious person would deny that the gods exist, given the orderliness of "the earth, the sun, the stars, and all things," including seasons, months, and years.<sup>175</sup> At most, he suspects, it is a pose to allow a person to rationalize immoral behavior. Klinias is sophisticated enough to distinguish the

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<sup>173</sup> Thomas Pangle, "Political Psychology of Religion in Plato's Laws," *American Political Science Review* 70 (1976).

<sup>174</sup> In Books 2 & 3 of the *Republic*, Socrates presents both a criticism of the Homeric gods -- paying special attention to the moral teachings found therein -- and then offers his own rules for a civic-minded theology. Interestingly enough, the famous account of the forms in book 7, among other things, seem to satisfy these rules. The critique of Homer has theoretical as well as moral concerns, however. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Homer appears as the leader of those who teach that the "whole is in motion." *Theae.* 151e ff.

<sup>175</sup> 886a.

Olympic gods from the orderliness of the cosmos, but much like the more ridiculous Strepsiades he does not imagine that the world might be attributed to chance.<sup>176</sup>

In the course of his account, the Athenian Stranger first introduces the most powerful arguments of atheistic philosophers and then mounts a defense against them. While the defense is adequate to the moral demands of the *polis* by lending persuasive support to the claim that the cosmos is orderly and consequently reflective of mind, it serves an even more important function. Plato's theology simultaneously leads thoughtful souls to philosophic contemplation of the natural world by asking about the truth of the matter.<sup>177</sup> Since neither Klinias nor Megillus have ever encountered atheistic natural philosophy, it is presumably possible to protect a city from the influence of such pernicious thought. Yet the Athenian Stranger explains their arguments at great length.<sup>178</sup> Since the conversation of the Laws is itself meant to become the law code of the new city being founded by Klinias, the Athenian has himself imported "pre-Socratic" philosophy into the *polis*. Yet his account also introduces the Platonic account of the soul, and the idea that human nature has an affinity through reason with an orderly cosmos. In the words of Pangle, "the city and its gods can become home to the mind to the degree that they can become home to philosophy."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> 889a

<sup>177</sup> In addition to the critique found in the Laws, Book 7 of the *Republic* may also accomplish this.

<sup>178</sup> 888d-890a.

<sup>179</sup> Pangle, "Political Psychology of Religion in Plato's Laws," 1077.

The Platonic solution to the tension which arose between political life and philosophy was to show how philosophy could support the city--indeed, as it is presented, it is essential if the city is to be just--without compromising on its own concern to understand the nature of things. In short, Plato presents what might have appeared to pre-Socratics as a contradiction in terms: a way of constructing a philosophical "civil religion."

The model for theology offered in Plato moves men away from superstitions he found pernicious toward a more rational, natural theology. It is worse morally, perhaps, for a man when he "believes [the gods] are easily persuaded if they are brought sacrifices and prayers," than when he denies the existence of gods outright.<sup>180</sup> These men are "the worst," that is, those who believe "that if the gods receive small sacrifices and flatteries they'll aid in robbing great amounts of money and release them from many sorts of great penalties." In this view, the outright atheist lacks such an incentive to pursue injustice.<sup>181</sup> According to many philosophers, atheism may be morally benign in a way that divinely inspired religion often is not.

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<sup>180</sup> *Laws* 948c.

<sup>181</sup> Consider the following from Montesquieu; "'It is impious toward the gods,' Plato says, 'to deny their existence, or to grant it but hold they do not take a hand in things here below, or finally to think they are easily appeased by sacrifices: three equally pernicious opinions.' Plato says there all of the most sensible things that natural enlightenment has ever said on the subject of religion." "On the Luxury of Superstition," Charles de Secondat Montesquieu et al., *The Spirit of the Laws, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 446.

In his conversation with *Euthyphro*, Socrates goes so far as to confess his irritation with myths, at least in the way they are generally understood.<sup>182</sup> In that dialogue we see Socrates encounter an enthusiastic believer in the gods who is engaged in what might be called a morally questionable act: in an apparent inversion of the charges against philosophy presented in the *Clouds*, Euthyphro has bound his father for committing a crime condemned by the gods. Euthyphro is awaiting word, not from the political authorities but from the religious authorities to see what to do with his father.<sup>183</sup> It comes to light that Euthyphro himself is an expert in "divine matters," and knows what is pious and what impious. He claims to know these things better than most people do.<sup>184</sup> Socrates, who finds the myths hard to accept, might have to accept them simply on authority: "People will say I am wrong. Now if you, who know so much about such things, accept these tales, I suppose I too must give way. For what am I to say, who confess frankly that I know nothing about them." Presumably, given his knowledge of Homer and the tragedians, Socrates does not mean he is unfamiliar with the myths, but rather that he doesn't know that they are the true, and he says as much.

While Socrates seems to have made it his project to present philosophy as civic-minded, he does not accomplish this by accepting the myths of the city at face value. As he remarks in the *Phaedrus*, "If, like the wise, I distrusted [mythical speech], I would not

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<sup>182</sup> *Euthyphro*, 6a

<sup>183</sup> *Euthyphro*, 4e4

<sup>184</sup> *Euthyphro*, 6b



be out of place."<sup>185</sup> That said, he is unwilling to say goodbye to myth simply. In part he doesn't think it is worth his time to "straighten out" all the myths as the "too terribly clever, laborious, and not altogether fortunate man" might. He claims to be too busy trying to "know himself," and proves "persuaded by what is conventionally believed about them, as I was saying just now I examine not them but myself." It should also be added that he is himself quite a spinner of myth, although Plato embeds his myths in a context where, with work, one can indeed straighten things out. As we saw in the previous chapter, Shaftesbury himself wants to distinguish a willingness to pursue daring thoughts from a desire to flout common opinion. Such a temptation shows itself throughout the Platonic dialogues (for example in the *Gorgias* in the person of Callicles) and the works of Xenophon.

Socrates plays a dangerous game of questioning these myths and offering salutary corrections of them, while at the same time obeying the laws set down by the city regarding devotions to be offered to the gods. Concerning the religious attitudes of Socrates Xenophon writes, "his deeds and words were clearly in harmony with the answers given by the Priestess at Delphi to such questions as, 'What is my duty about sacrifice' or about 'cult of ancestors.' For the answer of the Priestess is, 'Follow the customs of the city: that is the way to act piously.' And so Socrates acted himself and counseled others to act. To take any other course he considered presumption and folly.

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<sup>185</sup> Phaedrus

<sup>186</sup> In this way we can see what Fusel de Coulanges meant by suggesting that while Socrates reproved the abuses of the sophists, he remained one of their school.

### **The Ancient Policy encounters Christianity**

The willingness of philosophy to accommodate itself to political life seems to have persisted through the influence of Stoicism and Ciceronian Academic Skepticism. This "Platonic humanism" is also apparent, I believe, in the way the Romans first encountered Christianity. That Christianity seems to have brought a new challenge to political life can be seen in the consequences of the turn from practice to faith. The classical distinction between philosophic pursuits for the few and religious practice for the many can be seen in the reaction by contemporary Romans to the early Christians. Roman contemporaries drew on the resources of a naturalistic humanism, as we shall see.

In the year 64 AD, according to the *Annals* of Tacitus, the Emperor Nero diverted attention away from the rumor that he had ordered Rome to be burned by blaming the fire on a group "abhorred for their crimes" [*per flagitia invisos*] and "known to the people as Christians," [*vulgus Chrestianos appeilabat*]. Tacitus goes on to explain that this name came from one "Christus" who had been put to death by the Procurator Pontius Pilate. Soon, however, this "detestable superstition" [*exitiabiis superstitio*] broke out again, not just in the backwaters of Judea, but even in the city of Rome herself, where all atrocious and shocking things flow and are celebrated, [*quo cuncta undique atrociam aut pudenda confluunt ceiebranturque*]. Tacitus tells us that when men subsequently acknowledged

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<sup>186</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, *Oeconomicus*, 45.

themselves to be Christians they were condemned not so much for arson as for their "hatred of the human race," [*odio humani generis*]. Worthy of punishment as Christians may have been, he observes, they were tortured in the cruelest ways. Consequently, the persecution did not serve the public good. Contrary to Nero's intentions, such cruelty merely aroused pity for the tormented Christians.

Suetonius mentions a "Chrestus" who constantly incited the Jews to tumult during the reign of Claudius (41-54).<sup>187</sup> When listing the accomplishments of Nero, Suetonius mentions that "punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition," [*superstitionis nova et maieficæ*].

By the year 111, Pliny the Younger, then governor of Bithynia, writes to the Emperor Trajan for advice on how to handle Christians. I quote it at length because it is a clear expression of Roman concerns:

It is with me, sir, an established custom to refer to you all matters on which I am in doubt. . . I have never been present at trials of Christians, and consequently do not know for what reasons, or how far, punishment is usually inflicted or inquiry made in their case. Nor have my hesitations been slight: as to whether any distinction of age should be made or persons however tender in years should be viewed as differing in no respect from the full-grown: whether pardon should be accorded to repentance, or he who has once been a Christian should gain nothing by having ceased to be one: whether the very profession itself if unattended by crime, or else the crimes necessarily attaching to the profession, should be made the subject of punishment. Meanwhile, in the case of those who have been brought before me in the character of Christians, my course has been as follows: I put it to themselves whether they were or were not Christians. To such as professed that they were, I put the inquiry a second and a third time, threatening them with the supreme penalty. Those who persisted, I ordered to execution. For, indeed, I could not doubt, whatever might be the nature of that which they

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<sup>187</sup> *Claudius*, 25.4

professed, that their pertinacity, at any rate, and inflexible obstinacy, ought to be punished. . . . An anonymous paper was put forth containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they either were or had been Christians, upon their calling on the gods after me, and upon their offering wine and incense before your statue, which for this purpose I had ordered to be introduced in company with the images of the gods, moreover upon their reviling Christ--none of which things it is said can such as are really and truly Christians be compelled to do--these I deemed it proper to dismiss. Others named by the informer admitted that they were Christians, and then shortly afterwards denied it, adding that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so, some three years, some many years, more than one of them as much as twenty years, before. All these, too, not only honoured your image and the effigies of the gods, but also reviled Christ.

We should notice the "crime" of Christianity is sufficiently well known to ask Trajan how to handle it; in fact, it is so widespread that it is of concern even in what is now northern Turkey. Pliny is not especially interested in the details of opinions held by Christians. If they recant, they are set free. They are punished, however, should they refuse to obey their governor because of *pervicacia et inflexibilis obstinatio*. Pliny will pardon them if they will participate in sacrifices to the gods, which he seems to associate with the Emperor (the Emperor's statue is "introduced in company with the images of the gods.") He has heard that Christians would never so honor the Emperor and Roman gods, nor would they consent to revile Christ.

Pliny has learned through his investigation that Christians have the custom of meeting on certain days at dawn and "offering in turns a form of invocation to Christ, as to a god; also of binding themselves by an oath, *not* for any guilty purpose, but not to commit thefts, or robberies, or adulteries, not to break their word, not to repudiate deposits when called upon." (He also mentions in an apparent reference to the Eucharist that they enjoy a harmless little meal after these prayers!) They apparently desisted from

public assembly at the edict of Pliny, but to be certain he administered torture to two slaves said to "officiate" at their rites. Unfortunately, all he learns is "that these people were actuated by an absurd and excessive superstition." Pliny decides to end proceedings against the Christians until he can consult the Emperor, "indeed, the matter seemed to me a proper one for consultation, chiefly on account of the number of persons imperilled. For many of all ages and all ranks, ay, and of both sexes, are being called, and will be called, into danger. Nor are cities only permeated by the contagion of this superstition, but villages and country parts as well." Pliny believes it is not too late to curb this superstition, and offers as a hopeful sign of progress that the pagan temples which had been practically deserted were beginning to be frequented again. Pliny's concern seems to be connected to his responsibility to keep civil order. He reports the moral decency of Christian oaths but will not permit the law to be disregarded. Presumably swearing morally decent oaths to a new god would be acceptable as long as it didn't interfere with the public rites associated with the Emperor. Whatever his own view, however, the problem seems to have been widespread and was responsible for keeping people out of the Roman temples. This, we should notice, is a matter of public concern to Pliny, for professed Christians would not participate in the religion established by the law.

The reply by Trajan is a model of classical humanism, and shows the Emperor to have no special animus against Christians. He confirms that Pliny acted properly and says, prudently, that no single rule will cover every circumstance. He asks that Pliny not undertake inquiry as an extension of his office, although certainly the crime must be

punished when proven. Trajan instructs Pliny that any party denying that he is a Christian should be released if he can prove it, that is, by "supplicating our Gods," [*supplicando diis nostris*]. Trajan adds that anonymous testimony should not be accepted since it is a poor precedent and not in keeping with his reign (that is, I think, with the just magistracy he practices as Emperor).

According to Tacitus, the Christians were abhorred for their crimes; in particular they were reproached for their "hatred of the human race." He calls Christianity a detestable superstition and remarks its spread. Suetonius connects "Chrestus" to sedition in Judea and praises Nero for taking action against a new and mischievous superstition.<sup>188</sup> Pliny thinks this superstition to be absurd and excessive, but is most concerned about an obstinate refusal to worship the gods of Trajan and Rome.

Such an attitude toward religion on the part of sophisticated Romans might come as a surprise given the famous piety of Rome. Yet leading Romans were traditionally indifferent to the superstitions (as they saw them) of the vulgar and were concerned with religion more for its political effects or utility than its truth. We see this attitude in a statement of Gaius Cotta in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. In replying to an Epicurean account of the gods, Cotta remarks:

In an inquiry as to the nature of the gods, the first question that we ask is, do the gods exist or do they not? 'It is difficult to deny their existence.' No doubt it would be if the question were to be asked in a public assembly, but in private conversation and in a company like the present it is perfectly easy. This being so, I, who am a high priest, and who hold it to be a duty most solemnly to maintain

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<sup>188</sup> De Vita Caesarum, 12.15

the rights and doctrines of the established religion, should be glad to be convinced of this fundamental tenant of the divine existence, not as an opinion merely [*opinionem solum*] but as plain truth [*veritatem plane*]. For many disturbing reflections occur to my mind, which sometimes make me think that there are no gods at all.<sup>189</sup>

This remark is especially striking from a *pontifex*, who was, after all, an official of the state. Cotta very clearly distinguishes his public duty to defend public doctrine and his private opinions, which find the existence of gods, let alone any providential care for human life, doubtful. Christianity, from this point of view, is the worst of both worlds--vulgar superstition without redeeming utility of a civil religion.

#### **Transpolitical concerns: St. Paul and Enthusiasm**

While the Roman pagan reaction shows a practical concern with the spread of superstition, the concern that Christianity encouraged excessive enthusiasm can be seen even in the testimony of Christians themselves. As attention shifted away from practice toward faith, a new sort of political challenge arose: that of distinguishing true from false revelations. The ancient policy avoided this concern by treating all revelation as equal--and equally false, from the sophisticated point of view. As the enlightenment will come to argue, this policy was not equal to the challenge.

Even a devout Christian might be concerned about erroneous accounts of revelation; indeed, one need only read the New Testament to see evidence for this. Excessive "enthusiasm" as it reveals itself in the early Church is reflected in the Pauline letters, although I would argue not so much by Paul himself as many late thinkers have

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<sup>189</sup> De Natura Deorum, 61.

argued. It is, however, seen clearly in the local Churches Paul hopes to instruct. Many examples of what enlightenment thinkers will call "enthusiasm" could be offered, but to illustrate this point I will discuss Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.<sup>190</sup> According to the account found in *Acts*,<sup>191</sup>

Paul visited Corinth on his second mission after a rather unsuccessful visit to Athens. It was at Corinth, during his Second Journey, that Paul conducted a mission (from perhaps the winter of the years 49 and 50 to the summer of the year 51), described by Luke in Acts 18:1-18. Later, during his Third Journey, he conducted a considerable correspondence with the Christian community at Corinth, writing from Ephesus between the years 54 and 57, during which time he also paid a brief visit to Corinth.<sup>192</sup> It should be remarked that the people of Corinth were Greeks, some formerly pagan and many still pagan; also many of the converts were Gentiles, that is, collectively speaking, non-Jews.<sup>193</sup>

In *First Corinthians*, Chapter 12, Paul undertakes a discussion of "spiritual gifts." Paul begins by claiming "that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy

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<sup>190</sup> *The Holy Bible (King James Version)*, (New York: American Bible Society).

<sup>191</sup> "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth," etc. *Ibid.*, 18:1-18.

<sup>192</sup> *Who's Who in the New Testament*, Routledge, 2002, s.v. "Corinthians,"

<sup>193</sup> "A word of Latin origin (from "gens"; "gentilis"), designating a people not Jewish, commonly applied to non-Jews." Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, *The Jewish Encyclopedia : A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1916), 216. "Of or pertaining to any or all of the nations other than the Jewish. Also absol. used as a collective n. = the Gentiles." Gentile in usage is derived from St. Jerome's Vulgate.



Ghost."<sup>194</sup> While Paul traces all professions of faith to the inspiration of God, he also seems concerned that such a claim will lead to people to identify all things that they do to inspiration by God and, what is more, to make proud claims about the supernatural gifts they have received. He continues, "now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord . And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."<sup>195</sup> The full diversity of gifts seems not to be present at once in every believer. *Some* are given wisdom; *others* knowledge; or faith, healing, miracles, prophesy, discernment, or the interpretation of tongues. "But," he writes, "all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." The full range of these gifts is enjoyed not by the individual believer but rather by whole community of believers. Paul observes that God has set some in the church, first with the apostles, secondarily with prophets, thirdly with teachers. "*Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers? *are* all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?"<sup>196</sup> Presumably the answer is "no," for he encourages his flock to desire in "a more excellent way."

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of

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<sup>194</sup> *The Holy Bible (King James Version)*, 12:3.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.<sup>197</sup>

Paul councils that the gift which seems least astonishing from the outside is the truest and most valuable to a soul. Hope for the gift of charity and other gifts may follow; or they may not. He seems to advise the Corinthians not to be disappointed by this, however. "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."<sup>198</sup>

I take these passages to suggest that as early as 50 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, some Christians were inclined to a certain "enthusiastic" disposition. It is a very different matter to suggest that the Church taught or encouraged such enthusiasm. I think not, but candor requires noticing that Paul writes of himself that "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all."<sup>199</sup> Be this as it may, the Enlightenment diagnosis of enthusiasm may not do justice to the perennial character of the desire to transcend human finitude. From the classical philosophical perspective, the fact that Christianity

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 13:1-8.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 14:19.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 14:18.

draws men away from political life is not altogether bad. As Shaftesbury himself will argue, enthusiasm in the soul of man leads him not only to sectarianism but also to the appreciation for "true revelation," including "natural revelations" of order and beauty to which the human heart seems to aspire. The separation of religion and politics might be a necessary consequence of the desire of philosophy to transcend political life.

**Transpolitical concerns: Justice human and divine**

The history of Christian replies to these concerns is itself very complicated, but brief mention of perhaps the most influential reply is necessary. Augustine's *City of God against the Pagans* undertakes a refutation of the charge that Christians are poor citizens. The seriousness of the Roman concern is reflected by the seriousness (not to mention the length) of the reply. In the first ten books, Augustine argues that the political woes of the collapsing Roman Empire around 410 AD can be blamed neither on Christianity nor on the turning away from the traditional gods of the city. Rome had always been perverse and the pagan gods were hardly good civic role models (books 1-4). Christianity, in fact, could better account for what the traditional notion of fate claimed to explain, and anyway, a belief in fate, strictly speaking, would recommend accepting the sack of Rome (book 5). He observes that Rome had always accepted new gods and there was a long tradition on the part of the educated class of not believing in the gods anyway (books 6 & 7). The best thinkers, that is, Plato and the philosophers, actually held better views than the vulgar pagan religion would suggest, and these philosophic views actually are more harmonious with Christianity than polytheism (8-10).

Following this, however, Augustine does not quite argue that there are no tensions between the duties of a citizen and the duties of a Christian; in fact, he follows Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others in arguing that the just man and the just citizen are only the same in the perfectly just regime.<sup>200</sup> It is in this claim that Augustine finds his famous account of two cities, the City of Man and the City of God (in book 19, especially). The perfectly just city, he claims, is not to be expected on earth. The City of Man is *always* defective; only the City of God is just. Augustine claims to recognize the legitimacy of both the political community and the Church. Nevertheless, in calling Christians to be loyal to the True City, he might seem to be leading men away from political life just as classical philosophy did. Reflection on the fate of Socrates suggests that there is a long precedent for worrying about this sort of "transpolitical" advice.<sup>201</sup>

As we shall see in his account of "enthusiasm," Shaftesbury attempts to restore just such a transpolitical aim to human life but without an element of "true" revelation. Yet given the ability of Christian philosophers to absorb transpolitical ends into their account of the highest goals for human beings, one might wonder if Shaftesbury offers a reply equal to the theological-political problem. Shaftesbury's account of the problematic character of Christianity is nearly identical to other enlightenment thinkers. He, like Hobbes, regarded Christianity as an unnatural mixture of vulgar religion and

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<sup>200</sup> This theme is explicit in Aristotle (e.g., *Politics*, 1293b) and at least implicit in Plato. (Consider Socrates' explanation to Glaucon that the philosopher must be compelled to participate in even the best regime. *Republic*, 540b).

<sup>201</sup> Socrates is always receiving admonitions even before his "trial and death." See, for example, *Meno* 80b and 94e.

philosophy. Yet unlike Hobbes, Shaftesbury does not propose bringing enlightenment to the opinions of people. To understand why we must consider Shaftesbury's own account of religious psychology, especially as it comes to light in his treatment of "enthusiasm."

### **Religion in the *Characteristicks*, continued**

#### **The Psychological Roots of Religion: Shaftesbury's Revival of Enthusiasm**

We have now seen that Shaftesbury shares many elements of the Enlightenment account of Christianity. He agrees especially with the pernicious character of priestcraft and he also seems to trace the political trouble with Christianity to a monstrous combination of universal philosophic sectarianism and religious practice. Yet we have also seen the beginning of dissent in his desire to distinguish what is natural in opinion from what is unnatural. Like Hobbes, Shaftesbury traces religious zeal to a sort of *melancholia*--what he also calls "ill humour." Yet it is here that the most profound difference in Shaftesbury is found. Hobbes and Locke see little good in enthusiasm, which they do not distinguish from religious zeal; Shaftesbury identifies a noble aspect of enthusiasm. In considering this distinction in types of enthusiasm, we will come to see why Shaftesbury prefers the ancient policy to the philosophic solutions of the modern projectors Hobbes and Locke. Shaftesbury is not afraid of being another Renaissance because his goals are primarily philosophical rather than political; or rather, they are political only because of his understanding of philosophy.

The engraved plate at the head of *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* is a triptych in which the central concern of the treatise is anticipated. We are directed by a page

number in the boarder to the opening of section 4, where we read that "the *melancholy way of treating Religion* is that which, according to my apprehension, renders it so tragical, and is the occasion of its acting in reality such dismal Tragedys in the World. And my Notion is, that provided we treat *Religion* with good Manners, we can never use too much *good Humour*, or examine it with too much *Freedom* and *Familiarity*."<sup>202</sup>

The center picture of the plate is of a darkened room where two children have been imprisoned. (On the walls are chains and shackles.) In the background a Greek goddess (perhaps Athena) is opening a door to allow light into the room. The child to the left covers his eyes, the other stops his ears. On each side of this picture are happier scenes. In the left-hand picture, three boys are well-illuminated and at leisure in a pastoral scene. One operates a telescope. Overhead the sun can be seen shining. To the right, three boys dance to the music of a pan flute. Overall one can see the different consequences of good and ill humor. Again, taking a cue from the page directions in the boarder we learn that "the melancholy way in which we *have been taught Religion*, makes us unapt to think of it in good Humour. 'Tis in Adversity chiefly, or in ill Health, under Affliction, or Disturbance of Mind, or Discomposure of Temper, that we *have* recourse to it. Tho in reality we are never so unfit to think of it as at such a heavy and dark hour."<sup>203</sup> Presumably the imprisoned boys are in just such a circumstance. According to Shaftesbury,

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<sup>202</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.20.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.20-21.

we can never be fit to contemplate any thing above us, when we are in no condition to look into ourselves, and calmly examine the Temper of our Mind and Passions. For then it is we see Wrath, and Fury, and Revenge, and Terrors *in the* Deity; when we are full of Disturbances and Fears *within*, and have, by Sufferance and Anxiety, lost so much of the natural Calm and Easiness of our Temper.<sup>204</sup>

As we saw in our consideration of the art of soliloquy, Shaftesbury looks to philosophy (and her patroness, Athena) to free men from such terrors and restore their natural temper. Only then can they properly begin to consider "any thing above us." As it turns out, the melancholy way of considering religion is not, according to Shaftesbury, the only way. Once again, the Critic offers several valuable observations regarding the alternative as Shaftesbury understands it.

At the beginning of "Miscellany II," the Critic undertakes a discussion of "our Author's" review and modification of enthusiasm. He begins by raising a question about the existence of the supernatural. "*WHETHER in fact there be any real Enchantment, any Influence of Stars, any Power of Daemons or of foreign Natures over our own Minds, is thought questionable by many. Some there are who assert the Negative, and endeavour to solve the Appearances of this kind by the natural Operation of our Passions, and the common Course of outward Things.*"<sup>205</sup>

The Critic playfully indicates the *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* has given him pause on this topic. He confirms in his own experience what Shaftesbury suggests in the *Letter*, namely, "that we all of us know something of this Principle." The principle in

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 1.211.

<sup>205</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.19.

question is enthusiasm. According to the Critic, enthusiasm is extremely contagious. Merely reading treatises devoted to the examination of melancholy is apt to give rise to the passion itself. For this reason alone, perhaps, the Critic is "led to write on such Subjects as these, with Caution, at different *Reprises*; and not singly, *in one breath*."<sup>206</sup> (One might also consider, however, the indiscrete author discussed in the last part of the *Miscellaneous Reflections*.)

The Critic is encouraged by another lesson he has learned from Shaftesbury, that is, "that there is a Power in *Numbers, Harmony, Proportion*, and Beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the Heart, and raises the Imagination to an Opinion or Conceit of something *majestick* and *divine*."<sup>207</sup> Shaftesbury opens the *Letter* by recalling the ancient tradition of invoking the Muses at the beginning of a great literary endeavor. He remarks that this custom has not lost favor in the modern age; still he wonders why such an "Air of *Enthusiasm*, which fits so gracefully with an Ancient, shou'd be so spiritless and aukard [*sic*] in a Modern."<sup>208</sup> Shaftesbury tells us that ancient poets could with greater plausibility "feign an Extasy" here where we cannot. Since the ancients "deriv'd both their Religion and Polity from the *Muses Art*," and actually knew the worship of Apollo, such petitions would be received as sincere by their readers, however poetic the conceit.

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 3.20.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 3.21.

<sup>208</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.4.



Shaftesbury's contemporaries must look for other resources. Christians, who lack generosity when they consider heathen religion, overlook the persistence of a similar ecstasy in their own time. We learn of a Christian prelate who offered "a full account of his Belief in *Fairy's*."<sup>209</sup> A poet's faith, he remarks, is raised with his imagination. The imagination can still raise genius, although contemporary opinions are an impediment to such activity. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury claims, an author must draw his inspiration from somewhere. Shaftesbury offers the friend to whom he writes as a fit model for developing the "better self."

This prelude sets the stage for Shaftesbury's discussion of enthusiasm. After a short plea for freedom of raillery and an allusion to the ancient policy toward superstition and philosophy, Shaftesbury turns to his own remedy for the "devout melancholy" of enthusiasm, good humor:

Good Humour is not only the best *Security against Enthusiasm*, but the best Foundation of *Piety* and *true Religion*: For if right Thoughts and worthy Apprehensions of the Supreme Being, are fundamental to all true Worship and Adoration; 'tis more than probable, that we shall never miscarry in this respect, except thro' ill Humour only. Nothing beside ill Humour, either natural or forc'd, can bring a Man to think seriously that the World is govern'd by any devilish or malicious Power.<sup>210</sup>

Good humor is the foundation for true religion. It is ill humor, he argues, that leads men to believe "that the World is govern'd by any devilish or malicious Power." What is more, "I very much question whether any thing, besides ill-humour, can be the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 1.5.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 1.15.

Cause of Atheism." It is good humor, he suggests, that makes a man open to the possibility that the world is orderly and beautiful. Good humor is for Shaftesbury the natural disposition of man in the world. As we saw in the previous chapter, the temperament of man is deeply rooted in opinions, whether they be true or fanciful. Shaftesbury recommends self-study to separate our natural temper from the acquired and often questionable character we form as a result of our contact with society. He writes,

it wou'd be well for us, if before we ascended into the higher Regions of Divinity, we wou'd vouchsafe to descend a little into our-selves, and bestow some poor Thoughts upon plain honest Morals. When we had once look'd into our-selves, and distinguish'd well the nature of our own Affections, we shou'd probably be fitter Judges of the Divineness of a Character, and discern better what Affections were sutable or unsutable to a perfect Being.<sup>211</sup>

Among other things, the strategy we now recognize as soliloquy would help protect men from the contagious character of enthusiasm--what Shaftesbury calls "Enthusiasm of second hand."<sup>212</sup> Resolution of character in the sense discussed in *Advice to an Author* would serve to inoculate a man against the dangers of melancholy "panick." In panic, "the evidence of the Senses lost, as in a Dream; and the imagination so inflam'd, as in a moment to have burnt up every particle of judgment and reason."<sup>213</sup> This is perfectly harmonious with the account of chapter 2, where we saw that "company is an extreme Provocative to Fancy; and, like a hot Bed in *Gardening*, is apt to make our Imaginations sprout too fast. But by this anticipating Remedy of Soliloquy, we may

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 1.26.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 1.28.

effectually provide against the Inconvenience."<sup>214</sup> Such ill-humored enthusiasm accounts for the horrific description of the Sybil preserved by Virgil as well as other prophets both ancient and modern.<sup>215</sup> Yet Shaftsbury extends the distemper of enthusiasm to include more surprising company.

According to Shaftesbury, Epicurus himself could not do without the imagination when attacking superstition. "It is hard to imagine, that one who had so little religious faith as Epicurus, shou'd have so vulgar a credulity, as to believe those accounts of armys and castles in the air, and such visionary phaenomena. Yet he allows them; and then thinks to solve 'em by his effluvia, and aerial looking-glasses, and I know not what other stuff."<sup>216</sup> In the case of Lucretius the treatment is more subtle. Lucretius was convinced that "there was a good stock of visionary spirit originally in human nature." While he denied that religion was natural, he allowed that men could not be convinced to reject supernatural objects outright. Here, remarks Shaftesbury, "a Divine, methinks, might raise a good Argument against him, for the truth as well the usefulness."<sup>217</sup> Poets--even atheistic poets--are as guilty of enthusiasm as the religious. "Even the *cold Lucretius* makes use of Inspiration, when he writes against it; and is forc'd to raise an Apparition of

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<sup>214</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.100.

<sup>215</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.29. *Miscellany V*, 142-43.

<sup>216</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.30-31.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.31.

*Nature*, in a Divine Form, to animate and conduct him in his very Work of degrading Nature, and despoiling her of all her seeming Wisdom and Divinity."<sup>218</sup>

This observation brings Shaftesbury to a central conclusion:

enthusiasm is wonderfully powerful and extensive; that it is a matter of nice Judgment, and the hardest thing in the world to know fully and distinctly; since even *Atheism* is not exempt from it. For, as some have well remark'd, there have been *Enthusiastical Atheists*. Nor can Divine Inspiration, by its outward Marks, be easily distinguish'd from it. For Inspiration is *a real* feeling of the Divine Presence, and Enthusiasm *a false one*. But the Passion they raise is much alike.<sup>219</sup>

According to Shaftesbury, it is characteristic of the human mind to receive the world in images through the action of the imagination. He writes that

when the Mind is taken up in Vision, and fixes its view either on any real Object, or mere Specter of Divinity; when it sees, or thinks it sees any thing prodigious, and more than human; its Horror, Delight, Confusion, Fear, Admiration, or whatever Passion belongs to it, or is uppermost on this occasion, will have something vast, *immane*, and (as Painters say) *beyond Life*. And this is what gave occasion to the name of *Fanaticism*, as it was us'd by the Antients in its original Sense, for an *Apparition* transporting the Mind.<sup>220</sup>

Here we find the grave problem Shaftesbury has identified with the "modern projectors." For Shaftesbury compels us to ask whether we rid ourselves of fanaticism without doing away with our experience of the fantastic? This is a serious question. When the human mind is too narrow to contain the "ideas or images" it receives, "extravagance and fury" is the natural result. Shaftesbury suggests that this overflowing imagination is recognized by men to be something extraordinary. He writes that

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 1.33.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 1.34.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

inspiration "may be justly call'd *Divine Enthusiasm*: For the Word it-self signifies *Divine Presence*, and was made use of by the Philosopher whom the earliest Christian Fathers call'd *Divine*, [that is, Plato] to express whatever was sublime in human Passions."<sup>221</sup>

Shaftesbury distinguishes between an enthusiasm born of ill-humor, and a "noble enthusiasm," proper to "*Heroes, Statesmen, Poets, Orators, Musicians, and even Philosophers* themselves."<sup>222</sup> It is here that Shaftesbury remarks that all men know something of this principle. Enthusiasm is known by all human beings, however imperfectly. He nevertheless goes on to caution us against embracing enthusiasm naively. There is only one sure way to distinguish noble and base enthusiasm, and to thereby avoid delusion. "*to judg the Spirits whether they are of God*, we must antecedently *judg our own Spirit*; whether it be of *Reason and sound Sense*; whether it be fit to *judg* at all, by being sedate, cool, *and* impartial; free of every biasing Passion, every giddy Vapor, or melancholy Fume."<sup>223</sup> *Self-knowledge* as understood by classical philosophy--as presented in *Soliloquy*--is the proper antidote to excessive enthusiasm. He writes that

this is the first Knowledg *and* previous Judgment: "To understand *our-selves, and* know *what Spirit we are of*." Afterwards we may judg the *Spirit* in others, consider what their personal Merit is, *and* prove the Validity of their Testimony by the Solidity of their Brain. By this means we may prepare our-selves with some *Antidote* against Enthusiasm. *And* this is what I have dar'd affirm is best

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 1.35.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

perform'd by keeping to Good Humour. For otherwise the Remedy it-self may turn to the Disease.<sup>224</sup>

Shaftesbury's preference for ancient policy is inseparable from his preference for Socratic philosophy. The Critic makes clear that in Shaftesbury's opinion, the stakes for human life are very high:

Whatever this Subject may be *in it-self*; we cannot help being transported with the thought of it. It inspires us with something more than ordinary, and[31] raises us above our-selves. Without this Imagination or Conceit, *the World* wou'd be but a dull Circumstance, and *Life* a sorry Pass-time. *Scarce cou'd* we be said *to live*. The animal Functions might in their course be carry'd on; but nothing further sought for, or regarded. The gallant Sentiments, the elegant Fancys, the *Belle-passions*, which have, all of them, this Beauty in view, wou'd be set aside, and leave us probably no other Employment than that of satisfying our coarsest Appetites at the cheapest rate; in order to the attainment of a supine State of Indolence and Inactivity.<sup>225</sup>

Shaftesbury himself indicates that Plato is the source of his distinction between a noble and a base form of enthusiasm, and he points our attention to several dialogues, including the *Apology*, *Meno*, and *Phaedrus*. We can confirm this for ourselves by looking briefly at the treatment enthusiasm receives in Plato.

### **Poetry, Philosophy, and the Enthusiasm of *Eros***

Enthusiasm receives treatment in many Platonic dialogues, but its poetic aspects are seen most extensively in the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus*. At first these two dialogues seem to offer similar perspectives on poetry, especially regarding the divine in the act of making a poem. Poetry is presented again and again as a sort of enthusiasm, literally

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<sup>224</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.35.

<sup>225</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.20.

speaking. (Enthusiasm coming from the Greek *enthousiázō*, meaning literally to be inspired or possessed by a god). In his conversation with Ion, Socrates at one point describes the interpretive power of Ion as a mere patient of the Muse. Unlike other artists, the rhapsode seems to not to understand the nature of his own activity. Ion agrees and asks Socrates to explain why this is. Socrates explains:

as I was saying just now, this is not an art (*téchne*) in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power (*theía de dýnamis*), which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call "Heraclea stone." For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others (*hoúto de kai he Moúsa enthéous mèn poiéi auté, dià de tôn enthéon toúton állon enthousiazónton hormathòs eksartátai*), and holds them in a connected chain. For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise; just as the Corybantian worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession--as the bacchants are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers--that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report.

The rhapsode does not have a teachable art. Rather he is moved from the outside, just as iron is moved by a magnet. In this way it is said that a divine power takes possession of the rhapsode. So too with the good epic and lyric poets--they are inspired and possessed. Under such possession, men leave their senses and become frantic, much like the Corybantian worshipers do, although under such possession they can produce beautiful things--draw honey and milk from rivers, as it were.

We see the same claim made in the *Apology of Socrates*, where Socrates remarks of the poets "that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature (*phusei*) and while inspired (*enthousiázontes*), like the diviners and those who deliver oracles."<sup>226</sup> Poets are able to speak many beautiful things, but they do not really know what they are doing. The reference to nature here is interesting, because Socrates seems to suggest that a poetic gift may be natural to the poet; it is unclear how such a gift relates to the intellect.

Near the close of the *Meno* a similar point is made by Socrates. There he remarks that:

we would correctly call "divine" all those whom we were speaking of just now, soothsayers and prophets and all those skilled at poetry. And we might assert that the political men are, above all these, both divine and inspired, being breathed upon and possessed by the god (*enthousiázein*) when they succeed by speaking about many great matters, though they know nothing of what they say.<sup>227</sup>

In short, one might come away from Plato with the opinion that poets have an ineffable gift, perhaps sent by the gods, but one that has little to do with the faculty of reason so beloved by a philosopher. (This view might seem even more tempting given the famous "quarrel between poetry and philosophy" at the end of the *Republic*.<sup>228</sup>) Poetic enthusiasm, from this perspective, might be taken as an inferior experience of the soul and without a rational aspect.

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<sup>226</sup> 22c.

<sup>227</sup> 99c-d.

<sup>228</sup> *Rep.* 595 ff.



At first the *Phaedrus* too seems to lend credence to this view of poetry. After denigrating the passions, or desire without reason, in a speech he composes on behalf of Phaedrus,<sup>229</sup> Socrates presents as compensation his famous account of love as a sort of "divine madness." The view that madness is divine, that "the greatest of good things come into being for us" through it, requires a defense, and Socrates witnesses a variety of prophets, including the Sibyl, as examples. So impressed are the ancients by prophesy, he says, that the name for prophesy and madness share in etymology. (Here it seems more important that Socrates is trying to persuade rather than demonstrate, because the etymology is a bit questionable.) Indeed, the ancients testify that "madness coming from a god is more beautiful than soundness of mind from a human being."

This prophecy, which can reveal to men wisdom otherwise unattainable, is one of four sorts of divine madness Socrates mentions. In addition to prophesy, the gods send purification rites, poetry, and love. The description of inspired poetry here is worth considering:

possession and madness from the Muses, seizing a tender and untried soul, arousing it and exiting it to a Bacchic frenzy toward both odes and other poetry, adorns ten thousand works of the ancients and so educates posterity; but he who comes to poetic doors without the Muses' madness, persuaded that he will then be an adequate poet from art, himself fails of his purpose, and the poetry by the man of sound mind is obliterated by that of madmen.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Quite literally, as it turns out, for Socrates comes to refer to it as "Phaedrus' speech" : "the former speech was by Phaedrus." 244a.

<sup>230</sup> *Phaedrus*, 245a.

This is not such an absurd claim, of course. Many would-be poets have found that merely loving and studying poesy cannot lift a poetaster to greatness. This seems to fit with the other accounts of poetic inspiration we've mentioned. And yet we are still at the beginning of Socrates' famous account, and this view will have to be modified in light of what follows.

Socrates warns of the account (namely that madness is divine and a blessing) that what he says will be "untrustworthy for the terribly clever, but trustworthy for the wise." Here one must grasp the truth about the soul, both divine and human, and such a grasp seems to rely on an element of trust (for it to be taken as trustworthy, that is). After a brief argument for the immortality of soul, Socrates introduces his famous image of the charioteer. Regarding the souls of human beings, Socrates describes a condition of thwarted ascent by a winged chariot to the realm of true being apart from a cycle of coming into being and passing away. Human beings have had to varying degrees a glimpse of true being, but unlike gods, none have spent eternity looking at true things. Not all souls fare equally poorly, but "despite their having much toil, all go away unfulfilled in respect to the sight of being, and having gone away, they make use of opinion for their nourishment." Human souls, lacking the ability or inclination to follow god, become weighed down and lose their wings and fall toward earth and conjoin with bestial nature. Not all souls are equal in their fate: "the one that has seen the most things shall implant in that which will engender a man who will become a philosopher or lover

of the beautiful or someone musical and erotic." Such a soul is most fully human. As Socrates explains,

a human being must understand that which is said in reference to form, that which, going from many perceptions, is gathered together into one by reasoning. And this is the recollection of those things that our soul saw once upon a time, when it proceeded along with god and looked down upon the things that we now assert to be, and lifted up its head into the being that really is.

For this reason, "only the philosopher's thought is furnished with wings." The philosopher is able to use the glimpses and reminders around him to perfect himself, but this activity makes little sense to most people: "standing back from matters of human seriousness and coming to be near the divine, he is rebuked by the many as moved out of his senses, but that he is inspired by god (*enthousiázon*) escaped the notice of many." It is here that we see that love--the fourth sort of madness or enthusiasm--is not only incompatible with the Socratic account of philosophy, but essential to it. Love furnishes wings whenever someone seeing a lower beauty recollects true beauty. Socrates links the philosopher (the lover of wisdom) with the lover of beauty and the musical or erotic person. Most souls recollect very little of true beauty and are less moved than the true lover of beauty (that is, the philosopher). It is interesting to note that the prophet and mystic are now demoted to the fifth rank of winged souls, below the king or commander, the statesman or businessman, and the lover of gymnastics and doctors. In the soul of the true lover of beauty, the "black horse" of the soul's chariot, not content to rest with the decent opinion of convention (that is, "what is praised by the multitude as virtue"), puts the whole soul in motion, moving it toward the beautiful, beloved being. At its highest,

this motion is brought into order through the cooperation of the charioteer and the white horse to lead the soul into a "well-arranged way of life and philosophy." According to Socrates, "there is no greater good than this that either human moderation or divine madness is capable of providing to a human being."

Here Socrates seems to join human moderation and divine madness. Earlier in the *Phaedo* Socrates playfully describes himself as "a lover of speeches," "one who is sick," and as a "Corybantic reveler." Like all lovers of the beautiful, Socrates is consumed by an illness for erotic things.<sup>231</sup> Socrates has an erotic longing for speeches, which might be described as a sort of sickness insofar as it betrays a longing for wisdom or knowledge rather than the confident possession of wisdom as a guide to life. Yet this erotic longing is also that which keeps him in motion toward the beautiful, beginning with the beauty displayed even in the realm of coming to be, but ascending toward the idea of true beauty itself. In the words of Diotima in the *Symposium*,

beginning from these beautiful things here, always to proceed on up for the sake of that beauty, using these beautiful things here as steps: from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; and from beautiful bodies to beautiful pursuits; and from pursuits to beautiful lessons; and from lessons to end at that lesson, which is the lesson of nothing else than the beautiful itself; and at last to know what is beauty itself.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> This is the formulation of Diotima in *Symposium* 207. I feel free in borrowing from her because her speech seems especially directed through Socrates to Phaedrus at 212b. Ultimately, it is inadequate to equate what Diotima says with what Socrates thinks -- Diotima seems to equivocate on the relationship between the good and the beautiful, for example, whereas Socrates seems to think that the good is highest. In this sense Aristophanes is better when he suggests that love is a longing pointing to something unobtainable.

<sup>232</sup> *Symposium* 211c. It would be interesting to explore the implications of the fact that the *Symposium* is itself narrated by the very enthusiastic Apollodorus.

In the account of Socrates, the enthusiasm of *eros* is a kind of illness potentially leading to tyrannical excess. Yet Socrates would never have us cured, even if it were a possibility. For Socrates it is the task of philosophy to show man what he really desires and to indicate the most likely path to obtaining it.

The connection between *eros* and what is highest in human beings informs the entire project of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*. For Shaftesbury, the modern projectors are correct to suggest that Christianity tends to diminish liberty and stir sectarian violence. He disagrees with Hobbes and Locke about both the possibility and the desirability of eradicating the root of religion he locates in enthusiasm. Enthusiasm lies beneath all aspirations to the divine. Shaftesbury's classical understanding of human nature leads him to prefer the "antient policy" of mitigating the harm of religion while permitting philosophy the freedom to correct opinions and investigate nature.

When we turn to consider the *Moralists* we will see that Theocles reintroduces a hierarchy of beauty as a ladder to the divine. Just as Socrates is present to disagree with Diotima in the *Symposium*, Philocles is present to disagree with Theocles. We will see that the presence of two credible characters in dialogue acts to preserve two rival hypotheses about the cosmos--theism and atheism. Keeping both of these serious hypotheses alive as genuinely plausible accounts seems to be the condition for the practice of soliloquy recommended by Shaftesbury. For this reason above all,

Shaftesbury must challenge the threat of the modern projectors. In Chapter 4 we examine Shaftesbury's critique of this threat.

## CHAPTER 4

### “THE ŒCONOMY OF THE PASSIONS”:

#### MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND THE DIMINUTION OF THE HUMAN

##### **General Introduction: Between the Wolf and the Dog**

Shaftesbury placed the following quotation from Horace as an epigraph to *Sensus Communis*:

On the one side a wolf attacks, on the other a dog.<sup>1</sup>

Insofar as Shaftesbury saw his philosophical project as engaging enemies on two fronts, the epigraph could serve Shaftesbury’s work as a whole. The *Characteristicks* might be described as a defense of common sense against radical attacks from two fronts. In chapter 3 we considered Shaftesbury’s account of Christianity. According to Shaftesbury, Christianity is particularly prone to theological ire given the doctrinal character it developed from the "unnatural Union of *Religion* and *Philosophy*."<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury engages his first enemy--Christianity--on the front first fortified by classical philosophy. (We have yet to discover whether or not this front becomes a Maginot line!) By distinguishing between two sorts of enthusiasm, Shaftesbury is able to offer a reply to religious zealotry without condemning all higher longings in men. As a practical matter he recommends toleration and ridicule as the best weapons to fight zealotry. He is able to

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<sup>1</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.37. The quotation is from the second satire of book 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.51.

recommend these weapons because of his confidence that they are available to all thoughtful men.

Yet in Shaftesbury's opinion, it is not just the religious believers who are vulnerable to excessive enthusiasm. As the Critic of *Miscellaneous Reflections* reminds us, "our Author" asserts "that even ATHEISM it-self was not wholly exempt from *Enthusiasm*; That there have been in reality *Enthusiastical* Atheists; and That even the Spirit of *Martyrdom* cou'd, upon occasion, exert it-self as well in *this* Cause, as in any *other*".<sup>3</sup>

The Critic quotes Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* on the enthusiastic atheist, "that they are *Fanaticks* too; however that word seem to have a more peculiar respect to *something of a Deity*: All Atheists being that *blind Goddess-NATURE'S Fanaticks*."<sup>4</sup> As we shall see in chapter 5, Shaftesbury himself holds a divine notion of nature, although he is ever concerned to avoid fanaticism in his own devotion. According to Shaftesbury, the modern philosopher seems to be especially motivated by a kind of "*pneumatophobia*,"--that is, fear of soul--which makes him adverse to any non-material explanation of the world. As the Critic explains,

'tis indeed the Nature of *Fear*, as of all other Passions, when excessive, to defeat its own End, and prevent us in the execution of what we naturally propose to our-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.42.

<sup>4</sup> The influence of the Cambridge Platonists on Shaftesbury is discussed in Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James Pettegrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), Stephen L. Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal "Ought", 1640-1740* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), John Arthur Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth; an Interpretation* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1951), Chapter 8, Ernest Tuveson, "The Importance of Shaftesbury," *ELH* 20, no. 4 (1953).



selves as our Advantage. SUPERSTITION it-self is but a certain kind of *Fear*, which possessing us strongly with the apprehended Wrath or Displeasure of *Divine Powers*, hinders us from judging what those *Powers* are in themselves, or what Conduct of ours may, with best reason, be thought suitable to such highly rational and superior Natures. Now if from the Experience of many gross Delusions of a superstitious kind, the Course of this Fear begins to turn; 'tis natural for it to run, with equal violence, a contrary way. The extreme Passion for religious Objects passes into an Aversion. And a certain *Horror* and *Dread of Imposture* causes as great a Disturbance as even *Imposture it-self* had done before. In such a Situation as this, the Mind may easily be blinded; as well in one respect, as in the other.<sup>5</sup>

Shaftesbury is as critical of the anti-theological ire he finds in modern philosophy as he is of religious zealotry, and it is here he opens a second front. In running to a contrary but equally passionate extreme, modern philosophers depart from the good sense Shaftesbury thought essential to decent human life. What is more, such enthusiasm obscures the proper beginning place for contemplation of the world and makes impartiality in thought unlikely. Neither the religious nor the anti-religious position is reasonable in this sense:

'tis plain, *both* these Disorders carry something with them which discover us to be in some manner beside our Reason, and out of the right use of Judgment and Understanding. For how can we be said to *intrust* or *use* our Reason, if in any case we fear to be convinc'd? How are we Masters of our-selves, when we have acquir'd the Habit of bringing Horror, Aversion, Favour, Fondness, or any other Temper than that of mere *Indifference* and *Impartiality*, into the Judgment of Opinions, and Search of Truth?<sup>6</sup>

The chapter epigraph from Horace captures the predicament of modern men, caught as they are caught between the lupine teachings of modern philosophers and the

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<sup>5</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3:42 in footnotes.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

tamer writings of contemporary theologians; Shaftesbury writes the *Characteristicks* to present an alternative to the two enthusiasms.



It is clear that Shaftesbury had this predicament in mind from his first published writing, the "Preface" to his edition of *Select Sermons of Benjamin Whichcote*.<sup>7</sup> In that brief essay Shaftesbury anticipated the position he would later elaborate in the *Characteristicks*, namely an alternative to the "unwearied Zeal of present Divines" and their avowed enemy Thomas Hobbes. In the "Preface," Shaftesbury writes of Hobbes:

this is *He* who reckoning up the Passions or Affections by which Men are held together in Society, live in Peace, or have any Correspondence one with another, forgot to mention Kindness, Friendship, Sociableness, Love of Company and Converse, Natural Affection, or any thing of this kind; I say *Forgot*, because I can scarcely think so ill of any Man, as that he has not by Experience found any of these Affections in himself, and consequently, that he believes none of them to be in others. But in place of other Affections, or good Inclinations, of whatever kind, this Author has substituted only one Master-Passion, *Fear*, which has, in effect devour'd all the rest, and left Room only for that infinite Passion towards *Power after Power, Natural* (as he affirms) *to All Men, and never ceasing but in Death*. So much less *Good Nature* has he left with Mankind, than what he allows the worst of Beasts: Having allotted to us, in the way of our Nature, such mischievous Passions as are unknown to them; and not so much as allowed us any Degree of their good ones, such as they All are known to have, and are never wanting to exert towards their own Kind: By which Excellency of Nature (so little reckon'd upon, in the Case of Mankind) their common Interest is duly served, and their Species propagated and maintain'd.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, "Preface," in *Select Sermons of Benjamin Whichcote* (Delmar, New York: Scholar's Facsimilies & Reprints, Inc., 1977; reprint, Photoreprint of the 1742 ed. published in Edinburgh). While the Preface was published anonymously, there is no dispute among scholars that Shaftesbury is the author of it. For an account of its publication, see Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, 111-18.

<sup>8</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," xxv-xxvi.

Hobbes had indeed been vigorously denounced as an atheist by leading Divines of the Church of England,<sup>9</sup> yet, according to Shaftesbury, "had the same Industry been applied to the Correction of his Moral Principles, as has been bestow'd in refuting some other of his Errors, it might perhaps have been of more Service to Religion."<sup>10</sup> Shaftesbury seems to be less concerned with any strictly Scriptural error Hobbes may have advanced, but as we saw in chapter 5, he does recognize a connection between religion and morality. Both the religious and the atheistic zealot make war on virtue by teaching that man's nature is essentially bad. On the one hand, the Divines were suspicious of any claims that human nature is praiseworthy apart from grace. Shaftesbury writes in the "Preface,"

some Men, who have meant sincerely well to Religion and Vertue, have been afraid, lest by advancing the Principle of good Nature, and laying too great a Stress upon it, the apparent Need of *Sacred Revelation* (a Thing so highly important to mankind) should be, in some Measure, taken away. So that they were forced in a manner, to *wound VERTUE*, and give way to the Imputation of being *Mercenary*, and of *Acting in a slavish Spirit, in the ways of Religion*, rather than admit a sort of Rival (in their Sense to the Faith of Divine Revelation).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan : Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*. John Bowle, *Hobbes and His Critics : A Study in Seventeenth Century Constitutionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

<sup>10</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," xxv.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix. Consider for example Jean Calvin in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 2, Chapter 1, on what develops into a doctrine of post-lapsarian total depravity: "For our nature is not only **utterly devoid of goodness**, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle. Those who term it *concupiscence* use a word not very inappropriate, provided it were added (this, however, many will by no means concede), that **everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, is defiled and pervaded with this concupiscence**; or, to express it more briefly, that the whole man is in himself nothing else than concupiscence." Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Esq. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), 218.

On the other hand, opponents of religion had presented a low portrait of human nature as part of their strategy to diminish the influence of religion over political life. By presenting man's nature as passionately selfish, modern philosophy hoped to provide compelling reasons to obey civil authorities above religious authorities. In short,

*one Party of Men, fearing the Consequences which may be drawn from the Acknowledgment of Moral and Social Principles in Humankind, to the Proof of a Deity's Existence, and, another Party fearing as much from thence, to the Prejudice of Revelations; each have in their Turns made War (if I may say so) even on Vertue itself: Having exploded the Principle of Good Nature; all Enjoyment or Satisfaction in Acts of Kindness and Love; all Notion of Happiness in temperate Courses and moderate Desires; and, in short, all Vertue or Foundation of Vertue which is left remaining, when all Generosity, free Inclination, Publick spiritedness, and every thing else besides private Regard, is taken away.*<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the *Characteristicks*, Shaftesbury tries to reestablish the grounds for connecting man's nature to life as it is ordinarily lived, that is, within a political community. In this attempt to preserve the sociability of man as a credible philosophical idea, he undertakes a critique of modern philosophy, both in its political and its epistemological guises. It is the task of this chapter to explain Shaftesbury's critique and the alternative approach he recommends.



In discussing Shaftesbury's response to modern philosophy, it is fair, I believe, to gather Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke together under the same totem; in treating them as

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<sup>12</sup> Shaftesbury, "Preface," xxx.

one tribe I follow the lead of Shaftesbury. While recent scholarship challenges any monolithic notion of "the Enlightenment,"<sup>13</sup> Shaftesbury himself found no fundamental differences among the projects of Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. It is clear from his personal correspondence that by 1694 Shaftesbury had already identified himself with the ancients in *la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.<sup>14</sup> (The first, unauthorized version of *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* did not appear until 1699.) As he explained in a letter to his tutor Locke,

itt [*sic; et al.*] is not with mee as with an Empirick, one that is studying of Curiositys, raising of new Inventions that are to gain credit to the author, starting of new Notions that are to amuse the World and serve them for Diversion or for tryall of their Accuteness (which is all one as if it were some new Play, a Chess, or a Game of cards that were invented.) Itt is not in my case as with one of the men of new Systems, who are to build the credit of their own invented ones upon the ruine of Ancienter and the discredit of those Learned Men that went before. Descartes, or Mr. Hobbs, or any of their Improvers have the same reason to make a-doe, and bee Jealous about their notions, and Discovery's, as they call them; as a practicing Apothecary or mountebank has to bee Jealous about the Compositions that are to goe by his name, for if it bee not a Livelyhood is aim'd; 'tis a Reputation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to J. G. A. Pocock, for example, "we can no longer write satisfactorily of 'The Enlightenment' as a unified and universal intellectual movement." J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: V. I. The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>14</sup> According to Klein, "the relation of "ancient" and "modern" is more complicated and more interesting than one of antagonism, as that relation is usually characterized." Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 46-47. Still, as Klein also observes, "though he did not pronounce on the set-piece quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, it is fair to say that Shaftesbury did value ancient achievement in morals and literature more than he valued the modern achievement in natural philosophy and epistemology." *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 46. For an argument that the "set-piece" is correct and in fact interesting, see Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books : History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 151.

Shaftesbury, then, rejected the pretense of modern philosophy that it was engaged in a radically new project. Unlike most of his contemporaries, for example, Shaftesbury was not interested in the Baconian project to transform nature for the relief of man's estate; nor does he answer Descartes' call for men to become the masters and owners of nature.<sup>16</sup> "For my part," he continued, "I am so far from thinking that mankind need any new Discoverys, or that they lye in the dark and are unhappy for want of them; that I know not what wee could ask of God to know more then wee doe or easily may doe." Nor was he persuaded that man was in his nature asocial: "If there bee any one who...cannot see that hee himself is a Rationall and Sociable Creature by his nature, and has an End to which he should refer his slightest actions; Such a one is indeed wanting of knowledge."<sup>17</sup>

Clearly Hobbes was one who denied that man was a sociable creature by nature. While Hobbes is mentioned only once by name in the *Characteristicks*,<sup>18</sup> he certainly is to be counted also among those whom Shaftesbury accuses of making "silly comparisions" between wolves and men.<sup>19</sup> So too we must think of Hobbes in the several discussions we find of the state of nature doctrine (and which we examine below.)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon : An Essay on Its Development from 1603 to 1609*, Phoenix Books. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), Jerry Weinberger, *Science, Faith, and Politics : Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age : A Commentary on Bacon's Advancement of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 151. If he were not a Lord, one might think it impertinent of Shaftesbury to take such a tone with his tutor!

<sup>18</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.56.

<sup>19</sup> In the *Index* to the *Characteristicks* prepared by Shaftesbury himself, we find the following entry: "Wolf: *Silly Comparison of Men and Wolves*. i. 88, 93, 118." These references take us to the mention of

Given the intimate relationship between Shaftesbury and John Locke, it may seem strange that Locke is not mentioned by name in the *Characteristicks*, especially in this political context. One should not conclude from this silence that Shaftesbury was impressed with Locke's identification of the state of nature as a condition of peace rather than war, as Hobbes would have it.<sup>21</sup> Unlike some contemporary scholars<sup>22</sup> who argue that Locke substantially modifies or revises Hobbes' state of nature teaching, Shaftesbury is more impressed with the effectual conclusion of Locke's state of nature teaching. Shaftesbury identifies Locke with Hobbes in a letter to his young friend and protégé Michael Ainsworth:

it was Mr. Locke that struck the home blow: for Mr. Hobbes'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.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, Shaftesbury thought Locke *more* pernicious than Hobbes on account of the Locke's apparent respectability. As Jason Aronson suggests in his "Critical Note:

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Hobbes. Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, "Shaftesbury's Index," in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 3.291.

<sup>20</sup> For the references, which we will explore below, see "Nature, *State of Nature, imaginary, fantastical...See Society*," and "Society (*see Tribe, Government*)...*From the Greatest Opposers of this Principle*." Ibid., 3.277; 86.

<sup>21</sup> John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2003), 270.

<sup>22</sup> Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke : An Historical Account of the Argument of the 'Two Treatises of Government'*, Chapter 3, James Tully, *A Discourse on Property : John Locke and His Adversaries* (Cambridge, [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For an argument against this view, see Patrick Coby, "The Law of Nature in Locke's Second Treatise: Is Locke a Hobbesian?," *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>23</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 403.

Shaftesbury on Locke," the silence of the *Characteristicks* on Locke may be better explained by filial piety than acceptance of Locke's account of the state of nature.<sup>24</sup> In a private letter to his confidant General Stanhope, Shaftesbury writes:

I have ventured to make you the greatest confidence in the world, which is that of my philosophy, even against my old tutor and governor, whose name is so established in the world, but with whom I ever concealed my differences as much as possible.<sup>25</sup>

While he allowed that Locke's writings could be useful, especially "against the rubbish of the schools in which most of us have been bred up," Shaftesbury had deep reservations about Locke's philosophical project. Locke, writes Shaftesbury, was "an ill builder."<sup>26</sup> Shaftesbury professed to Ainsworth respect for Locke's treatment of more political subjects--"vis., on government, policy trade, coin, education, toleration, &c."--but he attacks Locke for his arguments rejecting innate ideas. "*Innate* is a word [that Locke] poorly plays upon," Shaftesbury wrote to Ainsworth.<sup>27</sup> Shaftesbury was more candid with General Stanhope: "As for *innate principles* which you mention, it is, in my opinion, one of the childishest disputes that ever was."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jason Aronson, "Critical Note: Shaftesbury on Locke," *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 4 (1959): 1102.

<sup>25</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 416.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 417. Hume makes a very similar point: "If innate be equivalent to natural, then all the perceptions and ideas of the mind must be allowed to be innate or natural, in whatever sense we take the latter word, whether in opposition to what is uncommon, artificial, or miraculous. If by innate be meant, contemporary to our birth, the dispute seems to be frivolous; nor is it worth while to enquire at what time thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth." An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, section 2, footnote.



As some scholars have remarked, Shaftesbury seems to have had Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* in mind when he composed parts of the *Characteristicks*, and he seems to be referring to Book I of the *Essay* here.<sup>29</sup> Thus Shaftesbury dismisses the famous controversy between what come to be called "rationalists"<sup>30</sup> and "empiricists"<sup>31</sup> over innate ideas.<sup>32</sup> (As we shall also see, Descartes is mentioned by name twice in the *Characteristicks* and is also a target of concern for Shaftesbury.) He is more impressed that over time human beings in their common life form strikingly similar notions about the world. Shaftesbury looks to classical authors to clarify his own opinions here. For classical authors, the real question was:

not whether the very philosophical propositions about right and wrong were innate; but whether the passion or affection towards society was such; that is to say, whether it was natural and came of itself, or was taught by art, and was the product of a lucky hit of some first man who inspired and delivered down the prejudice.<sup>33</sup>

Again Shaftesbury identifies a kind of fear at work among the detractors of human sociability. Classical authors--even those who, like Epicurus, may have denied that men have an innate sociability--were more courageous than modern authors in distinguishing

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<sup>29</sup> See John A. Dussinger, "The Lovely System of Lord Shaftesbury: An Answer to Lock in the Aftermath of 1688?," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Descartes' *Rules for the Direction of the mind*, Rules 2 & 3.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book 1, Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> This is an epistemological dispute, of course. As we shall see, Shaftesbury is not interested in epistemology, at least as it emerges as a branch of modern philosophy. Shaftesbury is in analytical philosophy terms more of an "intuitionist" than an advocate of innate ideas. His desire to let concerns arise from the world may make his appear to modern philosophy as an "empiricist," but it is probably more accurate to say that he is a "moral realist" not of the empirical variety.

<sup>33</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 415.

nature from convention. "For the opposers of the social hypothesis in those days were not so over frightened with the consequences as to deny every idea to be innate, lest this should be proved to be so." Shaftesbury expresses a similar doubt about the value of the innate ideas dispute to Ainsworth, and it is a recurring theme in the *Characteristicks* as well.<sup>34</sup> To Ainsworth he writes,

the right word, though less used, is *connatural*. For what has birth or progress of the foetus out of the womb to do in this case? The question is not about the time the *ideas* entered, or the moment that one body came out of the other, but whether the constitution of man be such that, being adult and grown up, at such or such a time, sooner or later (no matter when), the idea and sense of order, administration, and a God, will not infallibly, inevitably, necessarily spring up in him.<sup>35</sup>

Both Hobbes and Locke are led astray by their denial that men are sociable by nature. Shaftesbury, following Horace, urges Stanhope to consider species in nature in order to see the defect of the state of nature teaching: "but all of this I must leave to your author and you after you have considered him with Locke, whose *State of Nature* he supposes to be chimerical, and less serviceable to Mr. Locke's own system than to Mr. Hobbes, that is more of a piece, as I believe."<sup>36</sup> Locke's work is also of a piece with Hobbes on the question of liberty and necessity: "You will be satisfied more in particular when you happen to read again what this latter gentleman [that is, Hobbes] has written

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<sup>34</sup> For examples: *Inquiry*, 25, *Enthusiasm*, 31, *Soliloquy*, 218. Etc.

<sup>35</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 403.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

upon the subject of *liberty and necessity*, and have compared it with Mr. Locke, as well as Mr. Locke with himself; I mean his several editions."<sup>37</sup>

Shaftesbury may have treated the modern projectors as a group in part because of an underlying account of philosophy he seems to have held. In an letter to Pierre Coste he writes: "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 Cyrenic and Epicurean."<sup>38</sup> One philosophy, the Socratic, recommended engagement in political and religious affairs because it held that nature was orderly and that human beings have a proper place in the *cosmos*; the other treated society with contempt because it held nature "not so sensible as a doting old woman." The point seems to be more theoretical than historical, for the two philosophies are derived from two fundamental alternatives regarding nature. "The first, therefore, of these philosophies is to be called the civil, social, Theistic; the second, the contrary," presumably asocial and Atheistic, if not strictly speaking uncivil.<sup>39</sup> So too, then, we shall see that Shaftesbury approaches the modern projectors as a group in the *Characteristicks*, and as revivers of this ancient "contrary" philosophy.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. The "several editions" remark probably refers to the fact that the *Essay* passed through four editions in the last fourteen years of Locke's life. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, xi.

<sup>38</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 359.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Shaftesbury argues in *An Inquiry* that atheism is compatible with virtue: "As to *Atheism*, it does not seem that it can directly have any effect at all towards the setting up a false Species of Right or Wrong." *Inquiry*, 2.27.

Having seen that Shaftesbury holds the political teaching of Hobbes and Locke to be essentially the same, we now turn to Shaftesbury's critique of modern philosophy. Taking another cue from our miscellanist-critic, we can learn that Shaftesbury gives an extended, if playful, treatment of modern philosophers in his second treatise. We have already examined *Sensus Communis* for its teaching on raillery; but the ambition of the treatise extends beyond the defense of "the freedom of wit and humour." Shaftesbury, the Critic tells us, also "reasons at large in his second Treatise" against certain "over-frightened *anti-superstitious* Gentlemen."<sup>40</sup> Shaftesbury's footnote directs our attention to several places in *Sensus Communis* where the political teaching of Hobbes is discussed. It is the primary work of *Sensus Communis* to argue against this teaching and to recommend to philosophers a more moderate approach.

### **The Visible World**

While Shaftesbury's criticisms of modern philosophy run throughout the *Characteristicks*, they come to light most clearly in the second treatise.<sup>41</sup> As the subtitle suggests, the most conspicuous task of the treatise is the defense of raillery, rightly understood. In Chapter 2 I argued that raillery in its highest form is a mode of ironic dissembling. According to Shaftesbury there is a "defensive raillery" which is employed by some authors "when the spirit of curiosity wou'd force a discovery of more truth than

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<sup>40</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.42 in Shaftesbury's footnotes. Our attention is directed in particular to *Sensus Communis*, 1.54-57.

<sup>41</sup> "*Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour.*"

can conveniently be told."<sup>42</sup> This observation, while important, only scratches the surface. *Sensus Communis* also constitutes a sustained attack on the radical skepticism of modern philosophy; both in its style and content, it tries to give modern philosophy a taste of its own satirical medicine. Shaftesbury treats common sense together with raillery in order to show his reader that attempts to depart from common sense are themselves ridiculous.

### **The Plan and Style of *Sensus Communis***

At the theoretical level, Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis* has the following rough structure: Part I introduces the problem of skepticism through an epistolary dialogue with a young friend. It is in this part that Shaftesbury explains the way an author might deploy irony to protect his audience. Part II, as the Critic indicated to us above, presents an extended reflection on the character of modern epistemological and political thought. Part III praises the beauties of nature. This praise is intended to restore our naïve, pre-philosophical trust that the world is orderly. According to Shaftesbury such trust is naturally present in common opinion when it has not been disrupted by philosophical skepticism.

We learned in chapter 2 that for Shaftesbury it is only the "question and reply" of a "free conference" that develops the ability to reason. For Shaftesbury, as for Plato's Socrates, free and good-humored reasoning is a powerful caustic against the "usual stiff

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<sup>42</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.41.

adherence to a particular opinion."<sup>43</sup> As a philosopher, Shaftesbury holds that "the truth itself may bear all lights," yet as a friend and tutor he brings a softer light to the examination of beloved opinions.<sup>44</sup> The humane art of dialogue permits him to take up the most serious concerns while protecting his friend, and with him, the reader. As I have already remarked, *Sensus Communis* is addressed to a morally serious but indignant friend. The friend's indignation arose from the scandal of a confusing philosophic conversation, which threatened to tarnish human reason by its failure to reach a certain conclusion. Shaftesbury undertakes his defense of raillery in order to distinguish a frivolous sort of ridicule from satire with a serious intent.

Shaftesbury anticipates that his friend will be skeptical of this praise of raillery. He writes: "you may continue to tell me, I affect to be paradoxical, in commending a conversation as advantageous to reason, which ended in such a total uncertainty of what reason seemingly so well established."<sup>45</sup> Shaftesbury notices that his friend's moral qualms arise from his desire to know the truth. The friend is apparently worried that raillery thwarts all attempts to reach solid knowledge by thinking.

Shaftesbury reminds his friend that in the midst of the many opinions put forward and challenged by the gentlemen, each speaker would now and again "take the liberty to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1.45.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1.40.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.45.

appeal to common sense."<sup>46</sup> Everyone allowed this appeal and each felt confident the case in dispute would be decided in his favor. And while the friends found repeatedly that no clear judgment was to be rendered, they nevertheless renewed their appeal to common sense on each occasion. No one thought to challenge the authority of common sense until one of the gentlemen asked if someone "wou'd tell him *what common sense was*." The gentleman observed that,

if by the word *Sense* we were to understand Opinion and Judgment, and by the word *common* the Generality or any considerable part of Mankind; 'twou'd be hard, he said, to discover where the Subject of common Sense cou'd lie. For that which was according to the Sense of one part of Mankind, was against the Sense of another. And if the Majority were to determine common Sense, it wou'd change as often as Men chang'd. That which was according to common Sense to day, wou'd be the contrary to morrow, or soon after.<sup>47</sup>

Now of course disagreement can be found on all serious matters. In the case of religion, "what to one was absurdity, to another was demonstration."<sup>48</sup> In matters of policy, "if plain British or Dutch sense [i.e., republicanism] were right, Turkish and French sense [monarchy] must certainly be wrong." As for morals, there is a great difference of "opinions and customs" between barbarian and civilized nations. Perhaps it is no wonder that "some even of our most admir'd modern philosophers had fairly told us, that virtue and vice had, after all, no other law or measure, than mere fashion and vogue."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1.50.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1.51.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

We can now see that Shaftesbury's friend may have had good reason for concern. The realization that intelligent men disagree with one another about the most important matters in life can disturb the confidence we place in our own opinions; one may even be tempted to draw the conclusion that all moral opinions are arbitrary or equally false. Socratic *aporia* may be insufficient to address the young gentleman's deepest moral concerns. Even the most admired philosophers of his day (those modern projectors) hold that virtue and vice are as changeable as fashion. Here he seems to have Locke, at least, in mind. Drawing again from a letter to Michael Ainsworth, we can see what Shaftesbury thought: "virtue, according to Mr. Locke, has no other measure, law, or rule, than fashion and custom; morality, justice, equity, depend only on law and will."<sup>50</sup>

Shaftesbury himself does not lose his characteristic good humor in the face of this challenge. Instead he praises the friends for their consistent adherence to the liberating method of raillery. They are to be commended, he says, for their willingness to use raillery with playful as well as serious matters. In an attempt to help his friend maintain his own good humor, Shaftesbury turns *raillieur* against the wild application of raillery itself. He will attempt to show that skeptical ridicule of common sense is itself ridiculous and thereby restore confidence in the court of common sense. "The fault is, we carry the Laugh but half-way. The false Earnest is ridicul'd, but the false jest passes secure, and becomes as errant deceit as the other...There is nothing so foolish and deluding as a

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<sup>50</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 404.



*partial Scepticism*."<sup>51</sup> Fortunately the gentlemen proved "more fair in their way of questioning receiv'd opinions, and exposing the ridicule of things." Shaftesbury offers to follow their example, carrying just raillery throughout and to see "what certain Knowledge or Assurance of things may be recover'd, in that very way, by which all Certainty, you thought, was lost, and an endless *Scepticism* introduc'd." Shaftesbury thinks that the modern philosophers--Descartes, Hobbes, Locke--are ridiculous for having abandoned a "fair way of questioning receiv'd opinions" in favor of a new method, which is equally uncertain but far more damaging to the decent opinions of common life.

***Sensus Communis*, Part II: the Parable of the Magi and the Absurdity of Anti-Theological Ire**

In Part II of *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury asks his correspondent-friend to imagine he lived in Persia at the time that the Magi, through "an egregious imposture," took control of the Empire.<sup>52</sup> Carried away by indignation, it would have been easy for his friend "to propose the razing all Monuments and Memorials of these Magicians." But suppose that the Magi had collected or written books of philosophy, science, and morals. Would the friend have destroyed them, Shaftesbury asks, "and condemn'd every Opinion or Doctrine they had espous'd, for no other reason than merely *because they had espous'd it?*" Not even a barbarian would be so absurd. As it turns out, the Magi wove good and bad opinions together. What, then, is the sensible response to such a situation? "How shou'd we have carry'd our-selves towards this Order of Men, at the time of the

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<sup>51</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.52.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.54.

Discovery of their Cheat, and Ruin of their Empire? Shou'd we have fall'n to work instantly with their Systems, struck at their Opinions and Doctrines without distinction, and erected a contrary Philosophy in their teeth?"<sup>53</sup>

According to Shaftesbury, this is exactly what Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and other "modern projectors" have done. Driven by their *pneumatophobia*, modern philosophers strike indiscriminately in their attempts to destroy all vestiges of Christianity. Since Christendom had woven traditional philosophy into Christian doctrine, modern projectors were willing to assail philosophy itself, whereas their real quarrel was with Scholastic philosophy alone. Shaftesbury makes this very point to Stanhope:

well it is for our friend Mr. Locke, and other modern philosophers of his sire [*sic*], that they have so poor a spectre as the ghost of Aristotle to fight with. A ghost indeed! Since it is not in reality the Stagyrte himself nor the original Peripatetic hypothesis, but the poor secondary tralatitious system of modern and barbarous schoolmen which is the subject of their continual triumph. Tom Hobbes, whom I must confess a genius, and even an original among these latter leaders in philosophy, had already gathered laurels enough, and at an easy rate, from this field.<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen, while Shaftesbury thought modern philosophers did in fact clear away some of the errors of Scholasticism, they carried their attack too far by erecting a contrary philosophy. Shaftesbury identifies "Mr. Hobbes" as one so "overfrightened by

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1.56.

<sup>54</sup> *Philosophical Regimen*, 414. The distinction between Aristotle and his alleged mis-interpreters was also recognized by Hobbes. Hobbes writes in *Leviathan* of the "*Entities, and Essences, of Aristotle*" that he may have known to be "false Philosophy; but writ it as a thing consonant to, and corroborative of their religion; and fearing the fate of Socrates." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 692.

the Magi" that "both with respect to Politicks and Morals, he directly acted in this Spirit of *Massacre*."<sup>55</sup> Having been frightened by abuse of authority in the name of the people, Hobbes developed "an Abhorrence of all popular Government, and the very Notion of Liberty it-self." In his one mention of Hobbes by name in the *Characteristicks*, Shaftesbury draws our attention to passages where Hobbes attacks ancient writers for praising liberty.<sup>56</sup> On this point, we can see that Shaftesbury connects Locke's modified teaching on constitutions, including the balance of powers and rule of law, to Hobbesian anthropology. He writes that

supposing one another to be by Nature such very *Savages*, we shall take care to come less in one another's power: and apprehending *Power* to be *insatiably coveted by all*, we shall the better fence against the Evil; not by giving all into one Hand (as the Champion of this Cause wou'd have us) but, on the contrary, by a right Division and Balance of Power, and by the Restraint of good Laws and Limitations, which may secure the publick Liberty.<sup>57</sup>

In the case of religion, Hobbes "had nothing before his Eyes beside the Ravage of *Enthusiasm*, and the Artifice of those who rais'd and conducted that Spirit."<sup>58</sup> In moral matters, Hobbes portrays "the good sociable Man, as savage and unsociable as he wou'd make himself and all Mankind appear by his Philosophy." In short, Hobbes "did his utmost to shew us, 'That both in Religion and Morals we were impos'd on by our

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<sup>55</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.56.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.60.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.57.

Governors; that there was nothing which by Nature inclin'd us either way; nothing which naturally drew us to the Love of what was without, or beyond *our-selves*."<sup>59</sup>

Yet according to Shaftesbury, the practice of the modern skeptic contradicts the radical principles he espouses in speculation. He remarks that Hobbes had humanitarian motives for teaching that human beings are naturally selfish; indeed, Hobbes exposed himself to considerable personal risk to deliver men from the terrors he saw.<sup>60</sup> Of the "fierce prosecutors of superstition," he writes, "whatever savages they may appear in philosophy, they are in their common capacity as civil persons, as one can wish. Their free communicating of their principles may witness for them."<sup>61</sup> Were the modern philosopher actually a thoroughgoing knave, he would keep his teaching secret, all the better to prey on his fellow man.<sup>62</sup> But modern philosophers, "if they have hard thoughts of human nature; 'tis a proof still of their humanity, that they give such warning to the world."<sup>63</sup> As we saw in our consideration of the *Soliloquy* in chapter 2, Shaftesbury will not let us forget that the philosopher must justify the activity of philosophy, and that justification is impossible without resorting to common life.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> For an account of Hobbes' exile from England, see Aloysius Martinich, *Hobbes : A Biography* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 161 ff. Shaftesbury would likely appreciate this given that his grandfather the first Earl had been imprisoned in the Tower of London, and spent the last days of his life exiled with Locke in the Netherlands. See Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics & Locke's Two Treatises of Government*, 406 ff.

<sup>61</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.57.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 1.59. We should remember, however, that Shaftesbury himself thinks that there may be humane reasons for disguising a harsh teaching.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Shaftesbury is therefore able to suggest that not even the "modern reformer" is convinced of the radical skepticism he introduces. "The Reason, perhaps, why Men of Wit delight so much to espouse these paradoxical Systems, is not in truth that they are so fully satisfy'd with 'em; but in a view the better to oppose some other Systems, which by their fair appearance have help'd, they think, to bring Mankind under Subjection."<sup>64</sup> In Shaftesbury's judgment the modern philosopher himself probably does not believe that the world is as doubtful as his principles would suggest. General skepticism is only put forward as part of a strategy to combat the "dogmatical spirit" of zealots. The projectors hope to debate more subtly and in safety once men become accustomed to "contradiction in the main, and hear the nature of things disputed, at large."<sup>65</sup>

This strategy may seem sensible enough, and Shaftesbury, *qua* philosopher, would likely have been more sympathetic had such maxims been suggested and received without ire. In playing down the radical character of the modern philosophy Shaftesbury seems to be motivated by moral considerations of his own. He attempts to encourage his friend to keep an even temper so that he can judge rationally. "The only *Poison* to Reason, is *Passion*. For false Reasoning is soon redress'd, where Passion is remov'd. But if the very hearing certain Propositions of Philosophy be sufficient to move our Passion; 'tis plain, the *Poison* has already gain'd on us, and we are effectually prevented in the use

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 1.60.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

of our reasoning Faculty."<sup>66</sup> Yet we have already seen that Shaftesbury distinguishes conversations held publically from those held privately. In public, it seems inevitable that such propositions of philosophy would move men to passion. How is one to react to claims such as these:

that we were the most mistaken Men in the world, to imagine there was any such thing as natural Faith or Justice? for that it was only *Force* and *Power* which constituted *Right*. That there was no such thing in reality as *Virtue*; no Principle of Order in things above, or below; no secret *Charm* or Force of Nature, by which every-one was made to operate willingly or unwillingly towards publick Good, and punish'd and tormented if he did otherwise.<sup>67</sup>

A scandal is inevitable when modern philosophers openly declare war on virtue. Could such "modes of opinions" be vetted in good humor, Shaftesbury would be far less concerned. Given his belief in human nature, it is hard to see where the exact threat of such opinions lies. Indeed, absent imposition by authority and the addling of reason by excessive passion, he "can hardly imagine that in a pleasant way they shou'd ever be talk'd out of their Love for Society, or reason'd out of Humanity and *common Sense*. A mannerly Wit can hurt no Cause or Interest for which I am in the least concern'd: And philosophical Speculations, politely manag'd, can never surely render Mankind more un-social or un-civiliz'd."<sup>68</sup> In the case of morals

men have not been contented to shew the natural Advantages of Honesty and Virtue. They have rather lessen'd these, the better, as they thought, to advance another Foundation. They have made *Virtue* so mercenary a thing, and have talk'd

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1.58.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 1.61.

so much of its *Rewards*, that one can hardly tell what there is in it, after all, which can be worth rewarding. For to be brib'd only or terrify'd into an honest Practice, bespeaks little of real Honesty or Worth.<sup>69</sup>

The wolf and the dog show their common ancestry in this mercenary disposition.

Shaftesbury writes in *An Inquiry* that a man,

if in following the Precepts of his suppos'd GOD, or doing what he esteems necessary towards the satisfying of such his DEITY, he is compel'd only by *Fear*, and, contrary to his Inclination, performs an Act which he secretly detests as barbarous and unnatural; then has he an Apprehension or *Sense* still of Right and Wrong, and, according to what has been already observ'd, is sensible of Ill in the Character of his GOD; however cautious he may be of pronouncing any thing on this Subject, or so thinking of it, as to frame any formal or direct Opinion in the case. But if by insensible degrees, as he proceeds in his religious Faith and devout Exercise, he comes to be more and more reconcil'd to the Malignity, Arbitrariness, Pariality, or Revengefulness of his believ'd DEITY; his Reconciliation with these Qualitys themselves will soon grow in proportion; and the most cruel, unjust, and barbarous Acts, will, by the power of this Example, be often consider'd by him, not only as just and lawful, but as divine, and worthy of imitation.<sup>70</sup>

While Shaftesbury holds that human beings have a nature, it is in their nature to develop manners based on their opinions. Men would, he fears, quickly come to disregard virtue should they believe that the only motives to virtue were fear of punishment or hope for gain. Both the modern projector and the religious zealot hold a version of this mercenary morality. (Strangely enough, Shaftesbury seemed to think that Locke held *both* versions of this opinion!)

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.28.

***Sensus Communis, Part III: the State of Nature and Man's Natural State***

"Modern projectors" deny the natural affections which are our universal experience. They would prefer to do away with the natural materials human nature offers them so they might "build after a more uniform way."<sup>71</sup> Shaftesbury observes that "they wou'd new-frame the human heart; and have a mighty fancy to reduce all its motions, balances and weights, to that one principle and foundation of a cool, deliberate selfishness."<sup>72</sup> All those passions known to a person living in common life to be generous in character are presented by modern philosophy in a lower light: "an honest heart is only a more cunning heart: and honesty and good-nature, a more deliberate, or better regulated self-love."

As we saw earlier, Shaftesbury thinks that modern philosophy partly follows in the footsteps of Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus, Lucretius, and the other followers of this ancient philosophy of selfishness hoped to improve their happiness by retiring from public life altogether. They held that "the interest of private nature is directly opposite to that of the common one, the interest of particulars directly opposite to that of the public in general."<sup>73</sup> Yet they did not go so far as to deny the *naturalness* of public life--in fact, their exhortations suggest quite the opposite: Epicurus himself "saw well this Power of *Nature*, and understood it so far, that he earnestly exhorted his Followers neither to beget

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<sup>71</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.73.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.47.



Children, nor serve their Country. There was no dealing with Nature, it seems, while these alluring Objects stood in the way."<sup>74</sup> The modern "revivers of this philosophy," however, make no such concession to public affection, and they would deny the word natural to social affection. In this, they are inferior to their ancient forefathers, for "they seem to have understood less of this force of Nature, and thought to alter *the Thing*, by shifting a *Name*."<sup>75</sup>

As we shall consider at greater length below,<sup>76</sup> Shaftesbury rejects this psychology which tries to reduce all human passions to self-interest, or to fear, or to any other "lower" passion, as far too simple to do justice to human experience. "'Tis of too complex a kind, to fall under one simple view, or be explain'd thus briefly in a word or two. The studiers of this mechanism must have a very partial eye, to overlook all other motions besides those of the lowest and narrowest compass."<sup>77</sup> Modern philosophy, he worries, gives an account of the passions that allows "nothing shou'd be understood to be done in kindness, or generosity; nothing in pure of any kind."<sup>78</sup> This teaching would have disastrous effects on virtue.

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<sup>74</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.73-74.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.74.

<sup>76</sup> Below, "Moral Footing: Opinions and the Passions."

<sup>77</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.72.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.73.

It is this low estimation of man that allows Hobbes to say that "*the State of Nature was a State of War.*"<sup>79</sup> Shaftesbury rejects the contract theory of government because it rest on this "ridiculous" notion called "the state of nature."<sup>80</sup> Contrary to this teaching, Shaftesbury claims that man is inclined by nature toward society. He reports that "in the fashionable language of modern philosophy: Society being founded on a compact; the surrender made of every man's private unlimited right, into the hands of the majority, or such as the majority shou'd appoint, was of free choice and by a promise."<sup>81</sup> But this suggests that the *promise* to respect the civil union is an obligation found in the state of nature, that is, prior to the contract itself. "That which cou'd make *a Promise* obligatory in the State of Nature, must make *all* other Acts of Humanity as much our real Duty, and natural Part."<sup>82</sup> At the very least, it is hard to conceive how such a promise could be made by men prior to their living together, for such creatures would not have any of the characteristics which accompany social life. As Shaftesbury's Theocles observes in *The Moralists*, if it ever were man's condition to live separately, such creatures would have been be "unassociated, unacquainted, and consequently without any language or form of

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<sup>79</sup> *Moralists*, 2.175.

<sup>80</sup> In defending man's natural sociability Shaftesbury anticipates Hume's account of the origin of government. For example, Hume calls the state of nature "a philosophical fiction." See *Treatise of Human Nature*, book 3, part 2, section 2, on the importance of a promise, too.

<sup>81</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.69.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

art."<sup>83</sup> In fact, the "imaginary" creature of man in the state of nature would not be a man at all, "for tho his outward Shape were *human*, his Passions, Appetites, and Organs must be wholly different. His whole inward Make must be revers'd, to fit him for such a recluse Economy, and separate Subsistence."<sup>84</sup>

Shaftesbury observes that in speaking of what is natural to man, it seems to make more sense to begin by considering the species as a whole--what he calls "the Kind itself" rather than the individual creature.<sup>85</sup> If this is allowed, then insofar as something is natural it must also be somehow shared by the kind as a whole. "If *Eating* and *Drinking* be natural, *Herdning* is so too. If any *Appetite* or *Sense* be natural, the *Sense of Fellowship* is the same. If there be any thing of Nature in that Affection which is between the Sexes, the Affection is certainly as natural towards the consequent Offspring; and so again between the Offspring themselves, as Kindred and Companions, bred under the same Discipline and Economy."<sup>86</sup> While one can see that there is on occasion a tension between what is good for the individual and what is good for the kind,<sup>87</sup> Shaftesbury does not think that they can be separated in a proper account of the human being.

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<sup>83</sup> *Moralists*, 2.176. In this, Shaftesbury's account of the consequences of the state of nature teaching has many striking similarities with Rousseau's *Second Discourse*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.177.

<sup>85</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.69.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.69-70.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, the discussion in *Inquiry*, 2.42.

### A Return to Common Sense

Shaftesbury seems to believe that there is a delicate relationship between the natural inclinations toward sociability and their incarnation in the partly conventional rules of morality. This comes to light in his explicit discussion of the term common sense, which he presents as a gloss on the remark by Juvenal that "common sense is rare in men of high rank."<sup>88</sup> At first glance, Juvenal seems to threaten the very possibility of common sense by suggesting that common sense could be absent among the "nobility and court." According to Shaftesbury, however, "ingenious commentators" take this remark in a way that is different from this ordinary reading:

they make this *Common Sense* of the Poet, by a *Greek Derivation*, to signify *Sense of Publick Weal*, and of the *Common Interest*; Love of the *Community* or *Society*, natural Affection, Humanity, Obligingness, or that sort of *Civility* which rises from a just *Sense* of the *common Rights* of Mankind, and the *natural Equality* there is among those of the same Species.<sup>89</sup>

According to Shaftesbury, Juvenal actually suggests that there is little sense of the common good in the court of Nero because there is no real community between a tyrant and his courtiers. The education received by the young at court leads them to have "thorow Contempt and Disregard of Mankind, which Mankind in a manner deserves, where Arbitrary Power is permitted, and a Tyranny ador'd."<sup>90</sup> A public spirit has its origin in "a social Feeling or *Sense of Partnership* with human Kind" which arises only among those who live as partners in a community. It is for this reason that Shaftesbury claims

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<sup>88</sup> *Rarus enim ferme sensus communis in illia fortuna*, Satire 8, verse 73. *Sensus Communis*, 1.65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.65-66.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.67.

that "Morality and good Government go together."<sup>91</sup> For Shaftesbury, where there is no freedom, there is no authentic community. Although common sense arises from our political experience, and is therefore in a sense learned, its lessons are taught by nature to the reason of man. While such lessons will continually offer themselves to human beings, human beings can misunderstand them fairly easily. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Shaftesbury is so concerned about the power of philosophy to confuse men about virtue. This is seen in his vigorous response to modern skepticism, but also in his account of philosophy offered to Coste: "As for that mere sceptic, and new Academic" he writes, "it had no certain precepts, and so was an exercise of sophistry rather than a philosophy."<sup>92</sup>

Shaftesbury claims, then, that human beings are naturally sociable. So strong is the human affection for social relations that even under that worst form of government, tyranny, it is natural for men to pay "Allegiance and Duty" to the public order. Shaftesbury remarks the good fortune of the Britons, for they had received:

the Notion of a Publick, and a Constitution; how *a Legislative*, and how *an Executive* is model'd. We understand Weight and Measure in this kind, and can reason justly on the *Balance of Power* and *Property*. The Maxims we draw from hence, are as evident as those in *Mathematicks*. Our increasing Knowledg shews us every day, more and more, what Common Sense is in Politicks: And this must of necessity lead us to understand a like *Sense* in Morals; which is the Foundation.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 359.

<sup>93</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.68.

Shaftesbury anticipates the more organic notion of the development of the English Constitution that Montesquieu and Hume will explore in their work on government.<sup>94</sup> He seems to deny that an abstruse account of the origin of government will make statecraft into a clear science.

Shaftesbury consequently reverses Hobbes by claiming that warfare actually arises from man's natural sociability. "To cantonize" he writes, "is natural."<sup>95</sup> Men are naturally inclined to associate, but the good of all human kind in general is too remote a "philosophical object" for them to apprehend readily.<sup>96</sup> While they naturally have a taste for a good that is beyond their narrow self-interest, "unless corrected by right reason" human beings also tend to associate in bands of smaller scope than a body politic. "Thus the social aim is disturb'd, for want of certain scope."<sup>97</sup> Shaftesbury offers as evidence of the natural instinct for confederation the fact that "the knot of fellowship is closest drawn" in war. The "associating genius of man" is proven by the *very existence* of the spirit of faction, which Shaftesbury holds to be "the abuse or irregularity of that social

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<sup>94</sup> For example, we find the following in *Persian Letters* #94 ("Usbek to Rhedi, at Venice"): "I have never heard a discussion of public law which was not preceded by a careful inquiry into the origins of society. This appears absurd to me. If men did not form into society, if they avoided and fled from one another, then it would be necessary to find the reasons why they kept apart. The son comes into the world beside his father and stays there, and this is both the definition and the cause of society." Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Healy (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1999), 155. Hume's essay "Of the Origin of Government" makes a similar point. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, 37 ff.

<sup>95</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.71.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.71.

love, and common affection, which is natural to man."<sup>98</sup> One might say that Shaftesbury finds here that the apparent exception actually proves the rule of sociability.

While he was a great admirer of Marcus Aurelius and the Emperor Justin, Shaftesbury is skeptical of the ability of philosophy and political power to be joined wisely. He does not seem to think it is the job of philosophy to provide the full correction of scope to the body politic, and remains content to turn philosophy toward the consideration of morals in the individual soul. In a discussion of royal authors of the past, for example, Shaftesbury remarks, "whatever Crowns or Laurels their renown'd Predecessors may have gather'd in this Field of Honour; I shou'd think that for the future, the speculative Province might more properly be committed to private Heads."<sup>99</sup>

As we have mentioned, Shaftesbury is forced to defend the natural sociability of man and the virtues which arise within society because of the corrupting power of philosophy. He congratulates his correspondent-friend on the fact that his own education involved little of the "*Philosophy, or Philosophers* of our days."<sup>100</sup> There was a time when the best youth could safely be entrusted to philosophy with the confidence that they would learn "right Practice of the World, or a just Knowledg of Men and Things," but it is no longer so.<sup>101</sup> Had Shaftesbury's friend learned ethics and politics from modern philosophers, he writes, "I shou'd never have thought of writing a word to you upon

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.72.

<sup>99</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.133.

<sup>100</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.76.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1.77.

*Common Sense, or the Love of Mankind.*"<sup>102</sup> Apparently, those teachings present a serious impediment to approaching moral life naturally. Contrary to the instrumentalist or selfish system of morals, the gentleman loves virtue for its own sake rather than for some future reward or fear of reprisal. Shaftesbury, as we have seen, sees both Christianity and modern philosophy as threats to this natural perspective of the gentleman. A gentleman who asks "why I wou'd avoid being *nasty*, when nobody was present?" is no gentleman. Shaftesbury thinks that this cynical question is more likely to arise for the person educated by modern philosophy than for a person guided by common sense:

the truth is; as Notions stand now in the world, with respect to Morals, Honesty is like to gain little by Philosophy, or deep Speculations of any kind. In the main, 'tis best to stick to *Common Sense*, and go no further. Mens first Thoughts, in this matter, are generally better than their second: their natural Notions better than those refin'd by Study, or Consultation with *Casuists*. According to common Speech, as well as common Sense, *Honesty is the best Policy*: But according to refin'd Sense, the only *well-advis'd* Persons, as to this World, are *errant Knaves*.<sup>103</sup>

Shaftesbury recommends the sober use of raillery to counterbalance the confusion found in common life (both the confusion indigenous to common life and those forms bred by Christianity and uncivil philosophy). In recollection of his discussion of just raillery and in anticipation of *Soliloquy*, he writes:

'tis in reality a serious Study, to learn to temper and regulate that *Humour* which Nature has given us, as a more lenitive Remedy against Vice, and a kind of Specifick against Superstition and melancholy Delusion. There is a great

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 1.83.



difference between seeking how to raise a Laugh from every thing; and seeking, in every thing, what justly may be laugh'd at. For nothing is ridiculous except what is deform'd: Nor is any thing proof against *Raillery*, except what is handsom and just.<sup>104</sup>

The Critic tells us near the close of the *Characteristicks* that "IT HAS been the main Scope and principal End of these Volumes, 'To assert the Reality of a Beauty and Charm in *moral* as well as *natural* Subjects; and to demonstrate the Reasonableness of a *proportionate* Taste, and *determinate* Choice, in *Life* and *Manners*.'"<sup>105</sup> He seems to believe that it is necessary to assert such a reality if the true nature of moral subjects is to come to light. Indeed, should men come to lose their appreciation of the nobility of human life, men would come to resemble animals. Such a view, he fears, might "leave us probably no other Employment than that of satisfying our coarsest Appetites at the cheapest rate; in order to the attainment of a supine State of Indolence and Inactivity."<sup>106</sup>

So too is it necessary to assert, at least initially, the reality of a beauty and charm in natural subjects, for without such a presupposition of "a *Coherence*, a *Design*, a *Meaning*," there is no possibility of knowledge as it was understood by classical philosophy.<sup>107</sup> This is of course part of the very intention of modern philosophy. They too also understand that "where there is nothing like *Nature*, there is no room for the troublesom part of *Thought* or *Contemplation*," and, therefore, no room for the

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.80.

<sup>105</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.185.

<sup>106</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.185.

<sup>107</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.6.

persecution which can arise from disagreement over such matters.<sup>108</sup> Shaftesbury knows this but parts company with them over the character of virtue. Modern projectors are more concerned that "the Habit of Admiration and contemplative Delight, wou'd, by over-Indulgence, too easily mount into high *Fanaticism*, or degenerate into abject *Superstition*."<sup>109</sup> Ultimately it is the intention of Shaftesbury to show that the cultivation of such habits need not run to such extremes.

Shaftesbury accordingly ends *Sensus Communis* with an enthusiastic consideration of the relationship between beautiful manners and other forms of beauty. He directs his speech to those "gentlemen of fashion,"

to whom a natural good Genius, or the Force of good Education, has given a *Sense* of what is *naturally graceful* and *becoming*. Some by mere Nature, others by Art and Practice, are Masters of an Ear in Musick, an Eye in Painting, a Fancy in the ordinary things of Ornament and Grace, a Judgment in Proportions of all kinds, and a general good Taste in most of those Subjects which make the Amusement and Delight of the ingenious People of the World. Let such Gentlemen as these be as extravagant as they please, or as irregular in their Morals; they must at the same time discover their Inconsistency, live at variance with themselves, and in contradiction to that Principle, on which they ground their highest Pleasure and Entertainment.<sup>110</sup>

He introduces this appeal to the most notable and reputable men in the hope of keeping alive the possibility that the world itself is an ordered whole or *cosmos*.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.84.

<sup>111</sup> *Miscellany I*, 3.21 in footnotes.

Common sense, he believes, has a natural appreciation of "those natural Rules of Proportion and *Truth*" which are necessary for there to be natural knowledge at all.<sup>112</sup> He is confident that "rude Nature it-self, in its primitive Simplicity, is a better Guide to Judgment, than improv'd Sophistry, and pedantick Learning."<sup>113</sup> He therefore turns our attention from modern philosophy, with its "wrong...ground of Education" for "Redress, and Amendment, from that excellent School which we call *the World*."<sup>114</sup>

### **Miscellaneous Reflections on *Terra Incognita***

In Chapter 2 we examined the soliloquy as Shaftesbury's primary model of philosophy. Shaftesbury's method of soliloquy is a reassertion of the classical search for self-knowledge. As we saw, this approach takes its bearing from the opinions of common life, treating them initially as the fruit of naïve but genuinely concerned reflection on the world; and then proceeds to distinguish those opinions most in accord with nature from cheats and impostors (that is, opinions which by their authority pretend to be natural). Since Shaftesbury begins his inquiry from the perspective of ordinary life, human beings are taken to be inevitable *participants* in his philosophy. It is through the practice of soliloquy that Shaftesbury restores the classical distinction between reason and the passions, and, consequently the view that philosophy provides "*Mastership in*

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<sup>112</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.92.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.206.

LIFE and MANNERS."<sup>115</sup> We have now seen that Shaftesbury's response to modern skepticism in *Sensus Communis* is undertaken both *for the sake of* and *through* an appeal to common sense. Both of these claims stand in contrast to the modern approach, which might be said to examine human beings as *objects* in nature, generally by placing them in a system built up from ideas we can grasp clearly and distinctly, but which are remote from our daily experience. Throughout the *Characteristicks*, Shaftesbury detracts from the abstruse method inaugurated by Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, as well as by Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He writes in *Soliloquy* that

*the Philosopher*, who pretends to be wholly taken up in considering his higher Facultys, and examining the Powers and Principles of his Understanding; if in reality his Philosophy be foreign to the Matter profess'd; if it goes beside the mark, and reaches nothing we can truly call our Interest or Concern; it must be somewhat worse than mere Ignorance or Idiotism. The most ingenious way of becoming foolish, is *by a System*. And the surest Method to prevent good Sense, is to set up something in the room of it. The liker any thing is to Wisdom, if it be not plainly *the thing it-self*, the more directly it becomes *its opposite*.<sup>116</sup>

Philosophical systems are foolish insofar as they obscure access to the very thing they were erected to examine. When discussing the modern philosophers here, Shaftesbury finds little reason to distinguish them from the medieval scholastic philosophers they despise.

According to Shaftesbury, modern philosophers prefer the *terra incognita* of epistemology to what Shaftesbury himself holds to be the plain forms suggested by the

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<sup>115</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.98.

<sup>116</sup> *Soliloquy*, 180.

visible world. Since he denies the modern approach will actually reveal human nature-- which, ultimately, must also be understood from the perspective of human beings and common sense--Shaftesbury's reply to modern philosophy will be dialectical rather than demonstrative. He makes it clear, however, that he understands the claims made by the projectors. "What can one do?" he asks,

or how dispense with these *darker* Disquisitions and *Moon-light* Voyages, when we have to deal with a sort of *Moon-blind* Wits, who tho very acute and able in their kind, may be said to renounce *Day-light*, and *extinguish*, in a manner, the bright visible outward World, by allowing us to *know* nothing beside what we can *prove*, by strict and formal *Demonstration*?<sup>117</sup>

Motivated by *pneumatophobia*, modern projectors introduced a method to undermine all teachings on soul and form. Shaftesbury himself admits that certain sublime philosophers (Plato, for example) used the superstitious opinions of common life in their presentation.<sup>118</sup> Yet for Shaftesbury, the modern method of self-reflection is itself an impediment to genuine self-knowledge.

We get a glimpse of Shaftesbury's understanding of the modern epistemological project in the Critic's discussion of *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*.<sup>119</sup> In "Miscellany IV" we encounter the radical skepticism of Descartes directly (if not fully). Before entering into an examination of what he has called Shaftesbury's "principal performance," namely *The Moralist*, the Critic playfully laments that "we have here no

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<sup>117</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.129.

<sup>118</sup> *Soliloquy*, 3.158.

<sup>119</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.116 ff.

other part left us, than to enter into the dry Philosophy, and rigid Manner of our Author; without any *Excursions* into various Literature; without help from the *Comick* or *Tragick* Muse, or from the Flowers of *Poetry* or *Rhetorick*.”<sup>120</sup>

So foreboding does the task seem at the moment, however, that the Critic goes so far as to suggest that the "more humourous Reader fore-knowing, may immediately, if he pleases, turn over; skipping (as is usual in many grave Works) a Chapter or two, as he proceeds."<sup>121</sup> The Critic promises to help clear the palate later with more cheerful fare. *An Inquiry*, apparently, is intended for the more serious reader. The Critic remarks: "to the *patient* and *grave* Reader, therefore, who in order *to moralize*, can afford to retire into his Closet, as to some religious or devout Exercise, we presume thus to offer a few Reflections, in the support of our Author's profound Inquiry."<sup>122</sup>

The Critic begins by summarizing the concern that would have motivated "our Author" to undertake the *Inquiry* of the fourth treatise:

HOW LITTLE regard soever may be shewn to that *moral Speculation* or Inquiry, which we call the *Study of our-selves*; it must, in strictness, be yielded, That all Knowledg whatsoever depends upon this *previous-one*: "And that we can in reality be assur'd of nothing, till we are first assur'd of What *we are* Our-selves." For by this alone we can know what *Certainty* and *Assurance* is.

But what does it mean to study ourselves? We can see already that our study of the *Soliloquy; or Advice to an Author* is likely to have been necessary preparation for

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 3:117.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

understanding what Shaftesbury means by self-knowledge. (This is also reflected in the remark of the Critic that the "grave reader" will retire to his closet to engage in this sort of moral inquiry.) One reason for the Critic's warning does not become clear until the second chapter of "Miscellany IV," where he suggests that the reader passes back "from *Terra Incognita* to the visible World."<sup>123</sup> In the first chapter of the miscellany, however, the Critic must lead us into the dark internal landscape of the mind and the passions. We stand at the beginning point for *modern* philosophical inquiry. Such *terra incognita* must be distinguished from another way of encountering the passions, which Shaftesbury will demonstrate in *An Inquiry*. First, however, the Critic's summary considers the philosopher taken by many to be the father of "modern projectors," René Descartes.

### ***Ego-ity and Identity***

The Critic begins his exploration thus: "that there is *something* undoubtedly which *thinks*, our very Doubt it-self and scrupulous Thought evinces."<sup>124</sup> Shaftesbury presumably refers to Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore, I am," which first appeared in the *Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Searching for Truth in the Sciences*.<sup>125</sup> (In fact a footnote soon confirms this when it directs our attention to "a famous Modern," namely "Monsieur DES CARTES."<sup>126</sup>)

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 3.128.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 3:117-18.

<sup>125</sup> René Descartes, *Œuvres De Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, XIII vols. (Paris: L. Cerf, 1902), 6:31 ff. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, II vols. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), 1:100 ff. The *Discours* (1637) is in French and the statement reads "je pense, donc je suis." It is repeated in Latin in *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644),

Descartes introduced his famous and radical method of doubting in part four of the *Discourse on the Method* and reaffirmed it in his first *Meditation*.<sup>127</sup> He did so, we learn, in order to find an unshakable foundation for knowledge. In part one of the *Discourse*, Descartes writes of the philosophy he learned as a youth, that it had "been cultivated for many centuries by the best minds that have ever lived, and nevertheless no single thing is to be found in it which is not subject of dispute, and in consequence is not dubious."<sup>128</sup> Descartes compares the status of the sciences under the influence of school-philosophy to a building with poorly planned additions or a city erected over a long time without the benefit of a master plan:

Thus we see that buildings planned and carried out by one architect alone are usually more beautiful and better proportioned than those which many have tried to put in order and improve, making use of old walls which were built with other ends in view. In the same way also, those ancient cities, which originally mere villages, have become in the process of time great towns, are usually badly constructed in comparison with those which are regularly laid out on a plain by a surveyor who is free to follow his own ideas.<sup>129</sup>

As for the opinions he had learned from common life, they were filled with errors and accidental truths. "Since it has for long fallen to us to be governed by our appetites

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"*ego cogito, ergo sum*." As a philosophical doctrine, of course, it is known as the "*cogito*." Descartes, *Œuvres*, 8:7. *Philosophical Works*, 1:221.

<sup>126</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.118.

<sup>127</sup> Descartes, *Œuvres*, 7:17 ff. *Philosophical Works*, 1:144 ff. Amusingly enough, Descartes wonders in the *Discourse* whether he should tell of "des premieres meditations" he had because they are so metaphysical and extraordinary. Doubt is also discussed in *The Search after Truth*. *Œuvres*, 10:509 ff. *Philosophical Works*, 1:313 ff.

<sup>128</sup> Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, 86. Descartes shares the opinion feared by the correspondent in *Sensus Communis* that doubt arises from the disagreement among philosophers every matter.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.



and by our teachers...it is almost impossible that our judgments should be so excellent or solid as they should have been had we had complete use of our reason since our birth, and had we been guided by its means alone."<sup>130</sup> As a remedy to these problems, Descartes resolves "to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments, and accepting in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it."<sup>131</sup>

Descartes is clearly aware that such a principle would pose a danger to common life. He admits that "we do not find that all the houses in a town are razed to the ground for the sole reason that the town is to be rebuilt in another fashion, with streets made more beautiful."<sup>132</sup> This would be an extraordinarily ambitious and dangerous project. "In the case of great bodies," he writes, "it is too difficult a task to raise them again when they are once thrown down, or even to keep them in their places when once thoroughly shaken; and their fall cannot be otherwise than very violent."<sup>133</sup> Still, there is nothing stopping an individual from undertaking such a project in his own life, for we can also "see that many people cause their own houses to be knocked down in order to rebuild

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 88. According to Harry Frankfurt, Descartes himself initially adopts the perspective of a naïve man of common sense. Harry G. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen : The Defence of Reason in Descartes's Meditations, The Philosophy of Descartes*. (New York: Garland, 1987), 5.

<sup>131</sup> Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, 92.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

them, and that sometimes they are forced to do so where there is danger of the houses falling of themselves, and when the foundations are not secure."<sup>134</sup>

Descartes suggests at first that he is content to adhere to common opinion. For example, in section two of the *Discourse* he writes of the customary opinions of his youth that "their imperfections, if they have any (and the mere fact of their diversity suffices to assure one that many of them are imperfect), usage has doubtlessly mitigated them and has even imperceptibly averted or corrected a great number of them, for which deliberate foresight could not have provided so well."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, he writes, "for a long time I had remarked that it is sometimes requisite in common life to follow opinions which one knows to be most uncertain, exactly as though they were indisputable."<sup>136</sup> This is especially true in matters of faith and morals. He consequently formulates for himself a "provisional code of morals," which includes the maxim "to obey the laws and the customs of my country, firmly holding on to the religion in which, by God's grace, I was instructed from childhood, and governing myself in all other things according to the most moderate opinions and those furthest from excess that were commonly accepted in practice by the most sensible people with whom I would have to live."<sup>137</sup>

While this is a very sensible course for a person who wants to avoid giving offense, it is difficult to reconcile with the principle of radical doubt. Descartes calls his

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>137</sup> *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 13.

moral code "provisional," and indeed, he emphasizes the practical utility of his maxims rather than their scientific value. He writes of his moral maxims that they "were founded merely on the plan I had of continuing my self-instruction; for since God has given each of us a certain light by which to distinguish the true from the false, I should not believe I ought to be content for a single moment with the opinions of others, had I not proposed to use my own judgment to examine them when there was time."<sup>138</sup>

For Descartes himself, the moral code he proposes to accompany his method of radical doubt is provisional and utilitarian. His higher duty is to question everything. Still, he first presents his project as a private rather than a public matter. Descartes denies that he wants to encourage those "turbulent and unrestful spirits" who are not suited to the task of planning grand reforms.<sup>139</sup> "My design has never extended beyond trying to reform my own opinion and to build on a foundation which is entirely my own."<sup>140</sup> And yet why would Descartes publish his *Discourse* if his ambitions were so private, let alone offer it as "the method for rightly conducting one's reason and searching for truth in the sciences?" This is a fair question and one raised by Descartes himself. In part VI of the *Discourse*, he writes that: "as long as I had reaped no other fruits from the method which I used, aside from my own satisfaction, in regard to certain problems that pertain to the speculative sciences or my attempt at governing my moral conduct by means of the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>139</sup> *Philosophical Works*, 89-90.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 90.

reasons which the method taught me, I believed I was under no obligation to write anything."<sup>141</sup> As it turns out, however, Descartes believes his method is especially fruitful for the natural sciences, particularly in applied physics:

As soon as I had acquired some general notions in the area of physics, and, beginning to test them on various specific difficulties, I had noticed just how far they can lead and how much they differ from the principles that people have used up until the present, I believed I could not keep them hidden away without greatly sinning against the law that obliges us to procure as best we can the common good of all men. For these general notions show me that it is possible to arrive at knowledge that is very useful in life and that in place of the speculative philosophy taught in the Schools, one can find a practical one, by which, knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, just as we understand the various skills for our craftsmen, we could, in the same way, use these objects for the purposes for which they are appropriate, and thus make ourselves, as it were, the masters and possessors of nature.<sup>142</sup>

As I have mentioned, this Baconian (and Cartesian) project to master nature is rejected by Shaftesbury, who as a young man wrote that he was "so far from thinking that mankind need any new Discoverys, or that they lye in the dark and are unhappy for want of them; that I know not what wee could ask of God to know more then wee doe or easily may doe."<sup>143</sup> Shaftesbury seems to have Descartes' project in mind when the Critic plays on the image of an architect to describe Shaftesbury's own project:

On this account I look upon his Management to have been much after the rate of some *ambitious* Architect; who being call'd perhaps to prop a Roof, redress a leaning Wall, or add to some particular Apartment, is not contented with this small Specimen of his Mastership: but pretending to demonstrate the Un-

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<sup>141</sup> *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 34.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>143</sup> Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 151.

serviceableness and Inconvenience of the *old* Fabrick, forms the Design of a *new* Building, and longs to shew his Skill in the principal Parts of Architecture and Mechanicks.<sup>144</sup>

It is through this method that Descartes hopes to raze the philosophy of the ancients to establish a "firm and permanent structure in the sciences." (Shaftesbury seems to be struck by this claim when he indicates a different way to find "certainty and assurance."<sup>145</sup>) Having established radical doubt as the beginning point of philosophical reflection, Descartes too must find a way to reconnect with the world he hopes to explain. As he also shows through the movement of thought in his first *Meditation*--from the unreliability of the senses, through the difficulty of distinguishing dreaming from wakefulness, to the "thought experiment" of a deceptive, evil genius--Descartes tries to bring his reader to a place where he will withhold assent from any view that seems dubious. By the second *Meditation*, Descartes gives voice to despair that perhaps there is nothing which is beyond doubt. "What then can be esteemed as true?" he writes, "perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain." It is from this crisis that Descartes' famous solution emerges:

I was persuaded that there was nothing at all in the world, that there was no heaven, no earth, that there were no minds, nor any bodies: was I not then likewise persuaded that I did not exist" Not at all; of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something or merely because I thought of something...I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.82.

<sup>145</sup> The full quotation can be found on page 234.

<sup>146</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 65.

Shaftesbury's Critic writes on behalf of the Author that this Cartesian claim is fine as far as it goes, but that it does not penetrate deeply enough for the person who desires genuine self-knowledge. The Critic writes:

but in *what Subject* that Thought resides, and how *that Subject* is continu'd *one and the same*, so as to answer constantly to the suppos'd Train of Thoughts or Reflections which seem to run so harmoniously thro' a long Course of Life, with the *same* relation still to one *single* and *self-same* Person; this is not a Matter so easily or hastily decided, by those who are nice Self-Examiners, or Searchers after *Truth* and *Certainty*.<sup>147</sup>

The Critic expresses contempt for the sophistical circularity of Descartes famous "first item of knowledge," the so-called *cogito*: I think; I am. "*What is, is.*"--Miraculously argu'd! 'If *I am; I am.*'--Nothing more certain!"<sup>148</sup> He then draws attention to the philosophic worries that inevitably arise from this method of reflection:

the Question is, "What constitutes the We or I?" And, "Whether the I of this instant, be the same with that of any instant preceding, or to come." For we have nothing but *Memory* to warrant us: and Memory may be false. We may believe we have thought and reflected thus or thus: but we may be mistaken. We may be conscious of that, as *Truth*; which perhaps was no more than *Dream*: and we may be conscious of that as a *past Dream*, which perhaps was never before so much as dreamt of. This is what *Metaphysicians* mean, when they say, "That *Identity* can be prov'd only by *Consciousness*; but that Consciousness, withal, may be as well false as real, in respect of what is past." So that the same successional *We* or *I* must remain still, on this account, undecided.<sup>149</sup>

It is here that Shaftesbury seems to turn his attention in part to Locke. Such concerns, now known collectively as the problem of "personal identity," arise from the

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<sup>147</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.118.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

view that the idea of a person is separable from the idea we have of a human being.<sup>150</sup> In the words of Locke, a person is:

a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving that he does perceive.<sup>151</sup>

By this definition, a parrot might conceivably be a person. On the other hand, a man is merely a sort of animal, "a living organized body; and consequently the same animal, as we have observed, is the same continued life communicated to different particles of matter, as they happen successively to be united to that organized living body."<sup>152</sup> While common sense might connect or equate the identity of a person with the persistence of his "living organized body," Locke insists that personal identity depends only on the subjective reflection of a thinking being: "the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself."<sup>153</sup> Known from the outside, man is known corporeally. In other words, only I can have direct knowledge of my personhood. Also, I can only know my own personhood; the personhood of others is merely inferred. Man, like all corporeal substances we identify, is a merely a name for the bundle of sensible (secondary) qualities

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<sup>150</sup> Harold W. Noonan, *Personal Identity* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1989), Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Reprinted with corrections, 1987. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), part 3.

<sup>151</sup> Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 1:448-49.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:445.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:451.

which customarily hang together because of a characterless, unperceivable substratum.

Locke writes in a chapter entitled *Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances*,

when we talk or think of any particular sort of corporeal substances, as horse, stone, &c. though the idea we have of either of them be but the complication or collection of those several simple ideas of sensible qualities, which we used to find united in the thing called horse or stone; yet because we cannot conceive how they should subsist alone, or one in another, we suppose them existing in and supported by some common subject; which support we denote by the name substance, though it be certain we have no clear or distinct idea of that thing we suppose a support.<sup>154</sup>

Our grasp of the substance of "spirit" is no different from this: "by supposing a substance, wherein thinking, knowing, doubting, and a power of moving, &c. do subsist, we have as clear a notion of the substance of spirit, as we have of body."<sup>155</sup>

Leaving aside, with Shaftesbury, the alleged controversy between "rationalists" and "empiricists" over innate ideas, we can see that both Descartes and Locke separate body and mind, at least conceptually: body is known first by the perception of extension, just as the operations of the mind are known by thinking. Both philosophers seem to separate the inferred form of a thing from whatever "existing" stuff makes it up.

Shaftesbury portrays the Critic as impatient with such questions. Both Descartes and Locke build up to an acknowledgement that human beings encounter something very much like *things*, and their own thoughts tell them (eventually) that they are themselves some sort of thing, albeit a mysterious one. Indeed, connecting the mind and body

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 1:395.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1.395.



inevitably falls back on the recognition of an intuition that mind and body, apart from speculation, generally travel together; that is, it leans on our common sense.

Shaftesbury suggests that unless one is willing to concede that one's consciousness has some contact with reality, there is no ascending (descending?) from the mind to the body or vice versa. "To the force of this Reasoning I confess I must so far submit, as to declare that for my own part, I take my Being *upon Trust*. Let others philosophize as they are able: I shall admire their strength, when, upon this Topick, they have refuted what able *Metaphysicians* object, and Pyrrhonists plead in their own behalf."<sup>156</sup>

Shaftesbury's lack of interest in modern introspection is clear. His ridicule for what he calls "metaphysical" speculation, however, should not be understood as a rejection of all philosophy. As we have seen in chapter two, Shaftesbury presupposes that genuine philosophical inquiry properly begins for men where they find themselves, that is, in the visible, human world. As the Critic says here, "for my own part, I take my Being *upon Trust*." According to Shaftesbury, accepting human beings as they first present themselves provides "sufficient Ground for a Moralist. Nor do I ask more, when I undertake to prove the reality of Virtue and Morals."<sup>157</sup> We will see when we turn to *The Moralists* in chapter 5 that Shaftesbury by no means suggests that he is abandoning

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<sup>156</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:119.

philosophy for less noble pursuits; he is, rather, beginning to philosophize at the only place available to human beings as such--the realm of common sense.

**Moral footing: Opinions and the passions**

Having glanced at modern epistemology, as he says, "to have a Knowledge in this part of Philosophy, sufficient to satisfy him that there is no Knowledge or Wisdom to be learnt from it," the Critic turns to modern reflections on the passions or affections.<sup>158</sup> Just as Shaftesbury objects to the reduction of knowledge to a foundation of subjective thinking, so he opposes the modern tendency to reduce human passions from the rich complexity we encounter in common life to simple drives that are ultimately physiological. The Critic returns his attention to Descartes, this time to the *Treatise of the Passions*.

In that work, Descartes identifies the primitive passions to which he claims all other passions may be reduced. According to Descartes, this method is very different from the approach of traditional philosophy. As he writes in the 68<sup>th</sup> article, his own *Treatise* follows:

the order which seems best to me for reckoning of the passions. Wherein, I know very well I digress from the opinion of all who have written before me. But I do it not without great cause. For they deduce their numeration thus: they distinguish in the sensitive parts of the soul two appetites, the one they call concupiscible, the other irascible. And because I understand not any distinction of parts in the soul (as I said before), me thinks it signifies nothing, unless that it has two faculties, one to desire, another to be angry. And because it has, in the same manner, faculties to admire, love, hope, fear, and also to admit into it every one of the other passions, or to do the actions whereunto these passions impel them, I see not what they meant by attributing them all to desire, or anger. Besides, their

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 3.128.

catalogue comprehends not all the principal passions, as, I believe, this does. I speak here only of the principal, because one might yet distinguish many more particular ones, and their number is indefinite.<sup>159</sup>

Contrary to Aristotle's distinction, there are in fact only six primitive passions, "to wit, admiration, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness." All other passions "are compounded of some of these six, or are sorts of them."

There is no question Shaftesbury was familiar with Descartes' *Treatise* as he cites it in *Soliloquy; or Advice to an Author*. He writes,

"the Passion of *Fear* (as a modern Philosopher informs me) determines the Spirits to the Muscles of the Knees, which are instantly ready to perform their Motion; by taking up the Legs with incomparable Celerity, in order to remove the Body out of harm's way."--Excellent Mechanism! But whether the knocking together of the Knees be any more the cowardly Symptom of Flight, than the chattering of the Teeth is the stout Symptom of Resistance, I shall not take upon me to determine. In this whole Subject of Inquiry I shall find nothing of the least *Self-concernment*. And I may depend upon it, that by the most refin'd Speculation of this kind, I shall neither learn to diminish my Fears, or raise my Courage. This, however, I may be assur'd of, that 'tis the Nature of Fear, as well as of other Passions, to have its Increase and Decrease, as it is fed by *Opinion*, and influenc'd by Custom and Practice.<sup>160</sup>

The modern philosopher, we are told, is "Monsieur DES CARTES, in his *Treatise of the Passions*." For Shaftesbury, human passions do not stand apart from opinion, custom, and practice--at least, not without the difficult self-scrutiny recommended in *Soliloquy*. What is more, it is irrelevant to the investigation of the passions as we encounter them in common life whether or not they are accompanied by physiological reactions.

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<sup>159</sup> René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1989).

<sup>160</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.182.

for instance, if SUPERSTITION be the sort of Fear which most oppresses; 'tis not very material to inquire, on this occasion, to what Parts or Districts the Blood or Spirits are immediately detach'd, or where they are made to rendezvous. For this no more imports me to understand, than it depends on me to regulate or change.

Far from distilling the essence of human passions, such an approach neglects the thing which makes them human in the first place, namely, opinions. "But when the Grounds of this superstitious Fear are consider'd to be from *Opinion*, and the Subjects of it come to be thorowly search'd and examin'd; the Passion it-self must necessarily diminish, as I discover more and more the Imposture which belongs to it." Since the passions rest on opinions, moral inquiry must ultimately ask about the aims articulated by the opinions themselves. Again, self-knowledge is to be found by taking up the perspective of the human world:

the Examination, therefore, of my *Humours*, and the Inquiry after my *Passions*, must necessarily draw along with it the Search and Scrutiny of my *Opinions*, and the sincere Consideration of my *Scope* and *End*. And thus the Study of *human Affection* cannot fail of leading me towards the Knowledg of *human Nature*, and of My-self.<sup>161</sup>

The Critic, too, moves quickly from what seems to be a parody of Descartes' *Treatise of the Passions* to the importance of opinion. The Critic writes, "The *Affections*, of which I am conscious, are either GRIEF, or JOY; DESIRE, or AVERSION. For whatever mere *Sensation* I may experience; if it amounts to neither of these, 'tis indifferent, and no way *affects* me." The Critic establishes a sort of formula to parse out happiness: that joy which when present causes grief when absent; and vice versa. Love, he says is a desire

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 1:183.

accompanied by hope for the good. Descartes indicates something similar in his 86<sup>th</sup> article, where he finds that:

the passion of desire is an agitation of the soul caused by the spirits which disposes it to will hereafter the things that she represents unto herself convenient. So a man not only desires the presence of an absent good, but the conservation of a present, and moreover, the absence of an evil, as well of that he now endures as that which he believes may befall him hereafter.<sup>162</sup>

Yet mention of the good immediately leads the Critic to opinion. He argues that the good, if absent, cannot but cause the mind regret; something absent which leaves us indifferent cannot be called good. But we have affections toward things we *hold* to be good, whether or not they are so. He writes, "affection towards it, *as suppos'd* Good, is an *ill* Affection, and creative only of *Disturbance* and *Disease*." From this observation it is a quick movement to the conclusion: "So that the AFFECTIONS of *Love* and *Hatred*, *Liking* and *Dislike*, on which the Happiness or Prosperity of the Person so much depends, being influenc'd and govern'd by Opinion; the highest *Good* or *Happiness* must depend on *right Opinion*, and the highest Misery be deriv'd from *wrong*."<sup>163</sup>

Shaftesbury seems to draw on traditional philosophy to call attention to the underlying claims of modern philosophy. In book IV of *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, Cicero and his interlocutors discuss what the Stoics called perturbations or disorders of the mind. The perturbations were considered by Stoics to be appetites or passions which removed men from the constancy of reason. Cicero explains,

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<sup>162</sup> Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 66.

<sup>163</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3:120.

[Stoics] would have the divisions of perturbations [πράθει] to arise from two imagined goods, and from two opinions of evils; and thus they became four: from the good proceed desire and joy--joy having reference to some present good, and desire to some future good. They suppose fear and grief to proceed from evils: fear from something future, grief from something present; for whatever things are dreaded as approaching always occasion grief when present.<sup>164</sup>

Cicero then explains that such passions actually arise from *opinions*. He says,

Joy and desire depend upon the opinion of good; as desire, being inflamed and provoked, is carried on eagerly towards what has the appearance of good; and joy is transported and exults on obtaining what was desired: for we naturally pursue those things that have the appearance of good, and avoid the contrary.<sup>165</sup>

From this it would naturally follow that one would seek to know which of our opinions are right and which are wrong. As we have seen, for Shaftesbury this sort of self-knowledge cannot be obtained through a method of reduction.

Here the Critic returns the "grave *Inquirer*" to the world with a characteristic "fable," the humor of which (he says) makes a moral at the end unnecessary. He tells of two travelling dogs who arrive at the sea shore. They see offshore the flotsam of a shipwreck and convince themselves "by...rhetorical Arguments, after long Reasoning," that the wrecked ship contains an unspeakably valuable prize. Since neither dog is practiced at swimming, they decide it would be unwise to go out of their depth to satisfy their desire. Instead they decide to drink the sea that lies between the shore and the shipwreck. The Critic remarks,

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<sup>164</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Academic Questions, Treatise De Finibus, and Tusculan Disputations.*, trans. Charles Duke Yonge, *Bohn's Libraries* (London: G. Bell, 1902), 403.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

'tis pretty evident that they who live in the highest Sphere of human Affairs, have a very uncertain View of the thing call'd *Happiness* or *Good*. It lies out at Sea, far distant, in the *Offin*; where those Gentlemen ken it but very imperfectly: And the means they employ in order to come up with it, are very wide of the matter, and far short of their propos'd End.<sup>166</sup>

According to Shaftesbury, it is foolish to try to satisfy desire before thinking carefully about the good.

## **The Economy of the Passions**

### **The Plan and Style of An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit**

The Critic indicates in the second chapter of "Miscellany IV" that the reader is about to make a "passage from *Terra Incognita* to the visible World."<sup>167</sup> Even though the Critic has "paid sufficient deference" to the "*Metaphysical* part" of philosophy, he warns that hard work still lies ahead. He writes

when we are even past these empty Regions and Shadows of Philosophy; 'twill still perhaps appear an uncomfortable kind of travelling thro' those other *invisible Ideal Worlds*: such as the Study of *Morals*, we see, engages us to visit. Men must acquire a very peculiar and strong Habit of turning their Eye inwards, in order to explore the *interior Regions* and *Recesses* of the MIND, the *hollow Caverns* of deep *Thought*, the private Seats of *Fancy*, and the *Wastes* and *Wildernesses*, as well as the more fruitful and cultivated *Tracts* of this *obscure Climate*.<sup>168</sup>

The Critic suggests that in turning from epistemology to moral questions, Shaftesbury is not yet free of the modern projectors. Having rejected "strict and formal demonstration"--that is, the epistemological and moral reduction of the moderns--the

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<sup>166</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3:127.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:128.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

Critic draws back to consider morality from a broader perspective. Heretofore, he says, he has tried to proceed on the basis of "our very *Perceptions, Fancys, Appearances, Affections, and Opinions* themselves, without regard to any thing of *an exterior World*, and even on the supposition that there is *no such World in being*." <sup>169</sup> He compares this Cartesian approach in philosophy to the Egyptian punishment of the Hebrews:

Such has been our late dry Task. No wonder if it carries, indeed, a meagre and raw Appearance. It may be look'd on, *in Philosophy*, as worse than a mere Egyptian *Imposition*. For to make *Brick* without *Straw* or *Stubble*, is perhaps an easier labour, than to prove *Morals* without *a World*, and establish *a Conduct of Life* without the Supposition of *any thing living or extant* besides our immediate *Fancy*, and *World of Imagination*.<sup>170</sup>

Henceforth, the Critic suggests we should "trust our eyes, and take for real *the whole Creation, and the fair Forms* which lie before us."<sup>171</sup> This accords with the strategy of *Sensus Communis*, which ends with a praise of moral and visual beauty. The Critic now shifts our attention from the subjective experience of the individual to our common experience of human beings in the world.

In his *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury offers his own method for tracing opinions back to nature. Yet an adequate reply to the modern projectors would also involve some account of how we can recognize what opinions and passions truly are in accord with nature. This concern receives its most extended treatment in *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and*

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 3:129.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.



*Merit*, where Shaftesbury explains the context for claiming that the passions should be seen as an "oeconomy" or harmonious disposition of parts and the whole.<sup>172</sup>

Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*, then, has the following structure.<sup>173</sup> The treatise is divided into two books. Book I, which is itself divided into three parts, compares religion and virtue. After establishing the concerns of the treatise as a whole, part 1 offers a taxonomy of possible religious opinions. Part 2 explains Shaftesbury's account of the nature of virtue. Naturally enough, part 3 goes on to compare religion and virtue.

Book II is divided into two parts, and considers what obligation there is for man to be virtuous as he has defined it. To this end, part 1 distinguishes types of affections; part 2 examines these types of affections and asks whether they are conducive to happiness. Since the work of this chapter is devoted to Shaftesbury's reaction to the modern projectors, I will only offer an account of Book I here.

In general one might say that the *Inquiry* treats the passions (or as Shaftesbury usually prefers to call them, the "affections") within the context of the "visible world." For reasons we shall see below, he prefers the term affection to passion because it retains the presence of mind as a factor in human motivation.<sup>174</sup> His account of the visible world

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<sup>172</sup> Shaftesbury asks with Marcus Aurelius in his notebooks: "Can a certain order subsist in thee, and disorder in the All?" Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 13.

<sup>173</sup> Since it is my intention to read *An Inquiry* as part of the *Characteristicks* as a whole, I look to the version published in 1714. For an account of the publication history, see Alfred Owen Aldridge, "Two Versions of Shaftesbury's 'Inquiry concerning Virtue'," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1950).

<sup>174</sup> He seems to use it in the second sense of the word as offered by the OED, that is, as a noun describing senses relating to the mind. More particularly, an affection is "the action or result of affecting the mind in some way; a mental state brought about by any influence; an emotion, feeling." Burchfield, *The Compact*

by necessity arises *within* that world. Rather than approaching the world with a posture of doubt, however, Shaftesbury offers an account based in common sense, that is, on an initial trust in the world as it appears to men in ordinary circumstances.

### **The Visible World: Systems and Ends**

After a general introduction in Book I, part 1, section 1, of the concerns pursued in *An Inquiry*, Shaftesbury offers a systematic look at religion. Section 2 has an abstract, logical quality. It sets forth a series of possible opinions about divine matters, divided into categories. The possibilities fall under four main heads, namely: theism, atheism, polytheism, and daemonism. He begins his inquiry with the broadest horizon imaginable to natural reason, the *cosmos* (κόσμος). The first distinction to be drawn regarding opinions of the divine is whether "in the Whole of things (or in the Universe) 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."<sup>175</sup> If the *cosmos* accords with order, it seems to follow that "there is no such thing as real ILL in the Universe, nothing ILL with respect to the Whole." Should the world (writ large in terms of the "general interest") be orderly, then with respect to the parts of the world things are what they seem to be: orderly. This opinion would not, of course, preclude the possibility that ill would exist with respect to parts of the whole, at least

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*Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary : Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically*, 39, original page 153.

<sup>175</sup> *Inquiry*, 1:5.

when viewed from the perspective of those parts. (When seen from the perspective of partial interests, we should probably speak of *apparent ill*.)

Should there be "real ill" in the world, it would have to come about by either design (that is, intelligence) or by chance. If there is ill by design, one would have to conclude that there is "no one good designing Principle." Either the one designing principle is not good, or there is some contrary principle responsible for the existence of ill. Alternatively, if there is real ill as a result of chance, then "a designing Principle or Mind, whether Good or Bad, cannot be the Cause of *all* things."<sup>176</sup> Presumably chance can coexist with mind only if there is room for it to work outside of the control of mind. It then follows that either the designing principle is either good but not omnipotent; or if omnipotent it is not actually good, for it allowed ill to exist in the *cosmos*.

We now have what is necessary for our main categories. Shaftesbury writes, and I quote at length, that:

Whatsoever is superior in any degree over the World, or rules in Nature with Discernment and a Mind, is what, by universal Agreement, Men call GOD. If there are several such superior Minds, they are so many *Gods*: But if that single, or those several Superiors are not in their nature necessarily good, they rather take the name of DAEMON.

To believe therefore that every thing is govern'd, order'd, or regulated *for the best*, by a designing Principle, or Mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect THEIST.

To believe nothing of a designing Principle or Mind, nor any Cause, Measure, or Rule of Things, but *Chance*; so that in Nature neither the Interest of *the Whole*,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 1:6.

nor of any *Particulars*, can be said to be in the least design'd, pursu'd, or aim'd at; is to be a perfect ATHEIST.

To believe no *one* supreme designing Principle or Mind, but rather *two*, three, or more, (tho in their nature *good*) is to be a POLYTHEIST.

To believe the governing Mind, or Minds, not absolutely and necessarily good, nor confin'd to what is best, but capable of acting according to mere Will or Fancy; is to be a DAEMONIST.<sup>177</sup>

This last category is of special interest in light of what we learned in chapter 2 about the importance of will and fancy (or opinion). In his *Advice to an Author* we heard the lesson from the tale of the noble prince: "let WILL be ever so free, Humour and Fancy, we see, govern it." There, we recall, Shaftesbury offered us a solution to the tyranny of fancy in his method of soliloquy:

By what I can observe of the World, *Fancy* and *Opinion* stand pretty much upon the same bottom. So that if there be no certain *Inspector* or *Auditor* establish'd within us, to take account of these Opinions and Fancys in due form, and minutely to animadvert upon their several Growths and Habits, we are as little like to continue a Day in the same *Will*, as a Tree, during a Summer, in the same *Shape*, without the Gard'ner's Assistance, and the vigorous Application of the Sheers and Pruning-Knife.<sup>178</sup>

As we saw above, Shaftesbury follows the ancients by connecting fancy to opinion. By setting forth the possible opinions on the divine, *An Inquiry* is establishing the grounds for allowing both religion and moral virtue their proper provenance. This will be accomplished by indicating which opinions are more in accord with human nature, and consequently, with moral virtue as Shaftesbury understands it. The definition of

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1:115-16.

"daemonism," we note, bears a striking resemblance to the Calvinist religious doctrines Shaftesbury especially deplored. (He attributes something like this view to Locke, whose sincere if eccentric Christianity he thought made it impossible for him to live or die as a philosopher.<sup>179</sup>)

Since men seldom adhere to their opinions with any constancy, Shaftesbury offers a sensible definition for what places men into a category of opinion: "That alone, therefore, is to be call'd a Man's Opinion, which is of any other the most habitual to him, and occurs upon most occasions."<sup>180</sup> As it turns out, men are seldom pure in their opinions, and in fact the opinions concerning the divine may be compounded: "All these both of sorts *Daemonism*, *Polytheism*, *Atheism*, and *Theism*, may be mix'd. Religion excludes only *perfect Atheism*."<sup>181</sup> Constancy may not be a virtue when the opinions held are unsound. Shaftesbury emphasizes that there are indeed perfect *Daemonists*, who offer prayers and offering to a malicious god on account of fear. His exception here indicates how closely connected are *melancholia* and false enthusiasm for Shaftesbury. As we saw in chapter 3, this view is coextensive with religious zealotry.

Having made it through the "thorny part" of Book I, Shaftesbury turns to the subject of *An Inquiry* proper. He will ask which of the foregoing opinions is compatible

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<sup>179</sup> Shaftesbury seems to support the claim of Ashcraft that Locke's Christianity is sincere. Richard Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives; a Collection of New Essays*, ed. John W. Yolton (London,: Cambridge U.P., 1969).

<sup>180</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:7.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

"with an *honest* or *moral* Character." In order to do this, Shaftesbury must first explain what virtue is. This requires Shaftesbury to consider the passions at the level of the human species.



Part 2 of Book I opens by identifying the place of human beings within the *cosmos*.<sup>182</sup> Shaftesbury's account relies on the identification of kinds or species by indicating the end to which nature directs them. According to Shaftesbury, it may not be necessary to have a complete knowledge of "the Whole" for a subordinate part to be contemplated. The Whole seems to be articulated into heterogeneous parts which are themselves wholes of a sort. He writes:

WHEN we reflect on any ordinary Frame or Constitution either of Art or Nature; and consider how hard it is to give the least account of a particular *Part*, without a competent Knowledge of *the Whole*: we need not wonder to find our-selves at a loss in many things relating to the Constitution and Frame of *Nature* her-self. For to what End in Nature many things, even whole Species of Creatures, refer; or to what purpose they serve; will be hard for any-one justly to determine: But to what End the many Proportions and various Shapes of Parts in many Creatures actually serve; we are able, by the help of Study and Observation, to demonstrate, with great exactness.<sup>183</sup>

Each complete part (or "Creature") is known by the fact that it has a "private Good and Interest of his own; which Nature has compel'd him to seek, by all the advantages afforded him, within the compass of his Make." Given that each kind has a private good, Shaftesbury concludes that "there must be also a certain END, to which every thing in his

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., Part II, §1.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 2:8-9.

Constitution must *naturally* refer."<sup>184</sup> Based on this claim, Shaftesbury reasons that a creature's "Appetites, Passions, or Affections" will either accord with its proper end or work against it. It is therefore possible for a creature to be good or ill to others of his species and even to be ill himself.

Now in the constitution of *rational* creatures,

the same Irregularity of Appetite which make him ill *to Others*, make him ill also *to Him-self*; and if the same Regularity of Affections, which causes him to be good in *one* sense, causes him to be good also in *the other*; Goodness, then is that Goodness by which he is thus useful to others, a real Good and Advantage to himself. And thus *Virtue* and *Interest* may be found at last to agree.<sup>185</sup>

Why would these irregularities make the rational creature ill to himself as well as to others? Shaftesbury must realize that this claim is controversial, to say the least, for it is precisely this that sets the moral teaching of "modern projectors" apart from classical political philosophy. It is the burden of the remainder of *An Inquiry* to make good on the claim that virtue and self-interest can be reconciled.

Shaftesbury's first step in this direction is to clarify what he means by goodness or virtue. He begins by imagining a traveler who upon returning from a foreign land describes "a certain Creature of a more solitary Disposition than ever was yet heard of; one who had neither Mate nor Fellow of any kind; nothing of his own Likeness, towards which he stood well-affected or inclin'd; nor any thing without, or beyond himself, for which he had the least Passion or Concern." Common sense would first suspect that

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 2:9.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

happiness would not belong to this creature. But if the traveler were to insist that the creature is, with respect to himself, properly constituted and actually not a monster, we would have to concede that insofar as he were a complete but solitary system, he must be called good. But, "shou'd there be any where in Nature *a System*, of which this living Creature was to be consider'd as *a Part*; then cou'd he no-wise be allow'd *good*; whilst he plainly appear'd to be such *a Part*, as made rather to the harm than good of that System or *Whole* in which he was included." Shaftesbury indicates here that while travelers chronicle the immense variety of kinds to be found in the world, he has yet to see evidence requiring a reassessment of the principles of nature he observes at home. The *Characteristicks* makes several references to the travel writings of explorers and missionaries so popular among his contemporaries. In *Soliloquy*, for example, he ridicules the "*Incredulity*, which fashions the Taste and Judgment of many Gentlemen, whom we hear censur'd as *Atheists*, for attempting to philosophize after a newer manner than any known of late."<sup>186</sup> Shaftesbury finds such gentlemen, who follow the modern mode of philosophizing, more credulous than the vulgar. They have, he writes, "far more Pleasure in hearing the monstrous Accounts of monstrous Men, and Manners; than the politest and best Narrations of the Affairs, the Governments, and Lives of the wisest and most *polish'd* People."<sup>187</sup> He may well have had Locke in mind here. As he wrote to Michael Ainsworth,

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<sup>186</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1:212.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*



then comes the credulous Mr. Locke, with his Indian, barbarian stories of wild nations, that have no such idea [of God] (as travellers, learned authors! and men of truth! and great philosophers! have informed him), not considering that is but a negative upon hearsay, and so circumstantiated that the faith of the Indian danger may as well be questioned as the veracity or judgment of the relater; who cannot be supposed to know sufficiently the mysteries and secrets of those barbarians.<sup>188</sup>

Given the posture of trust, Shaftesbury finds it odd to prefer the exception to the rule when reasoning. Stipulating, then, that nature could produce such a solitary creature, Shaftesbury says that the creature would be itself a "private system," and have its own proper end in solitude and be good. Seen as part of a broader system, however, such a creature might well be called harmful and ill.

This insight leads to the interesting conclusion that a whole species of animals can contribute to the good of another species. Such a species would then be "*a Part* only of some other System."<sup>189</sup> From this broader perspective one can say that predator and prey (spider and fly, say) are part of one system: "The Web and Wing are suted to each other."<sup>190</sup> All life is properly "included in one and the same *Order* of Beings." Shaftesbury describes a system or "*Æconomy*" of all animals in the way that we now casually speak of the "food chain." He does not say that the fly likes to be eaten by the spider; only that their interaction indicates a wider order.

From here Shaftesbury steps back even further to describe the Earth as a part of the solar system or galaxy, until he is able to state that:

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<sup>188</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 403-04.

<sup>189</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:10.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:11.

Therefore if any Being be *wholly* and *really* Ill, it must be ill with respect to the Universal System; and then the System of the Universe is ill, or imperfect. But if the Ill of one private System be the Good of others; if it makes still to the Good of the general System, (as when one Creature lives by the Destruction of another; one thing is generated from the Corruption of another; or one planetary System or *Vortex* may swallow up another) then is the Ill of that private System no real Ill in it-self; any more than the pain of breeding Teeth is ill, in a System or Body which is so constituted, that without this occasion of Pain, it wou'd suffer worse, by being defective.<sup>191</sup>

Having concluded that the private ill of a system is not sufficient evidence that the *cosmos* as a whole is flawed, Shaftesbury describes the way species of sensible creatures are reflective of their "systems" in their internal constitution.<sup>192</sup> With respect to its passions taken as a whole, he calls the posture of a creature to the world its "temper." Should there be "an Affection towards Self-Good, as it actually, in its natural degree, conducing to his private Interest" while being "at the same time inconsistent with the publick Good," this would deserve the name ill. One would still be saying, however, with Hobbes and Locke, that the private good of the creature is incompatible with the public good. This sort of creature he found improbable. Shaftesbury clearly understands that private interests, and therefore the passions, can come into conflict with "*the common Nature, or System of the Kind.*"<sup>193</sup> But having followed Shaftesbury through Volume I, though, we are now prepared to approach this apparent problem moderately.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 2:11-12.

<sup>192</sup> *An Inquiry*, Book I, Part 2, §2.

<sup>193</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:46.

Shaftesbury indicates that some self-regarding passions are only a problem when they are excessive or immoderate. Even when a passion is commonly regarded as selfish, it may not in fact be incompatible with the public interest; it may actually contribute to the public interest. It would in fact be injurious to the species if individuals wholly lacked self-regard. He writes:

if the want of such an Affection as that towards Self-preservation, be injurious to the Species; a Creature is ill and unnatural as well thro' this Defect, as thro' the want of any other natural Affection. And this no-one wou'd doubt to pronounce, if he saw a Man who minded not any Precipices which lay in his way, nor made any distinction of Food, Diet, Clothing, or whatever else related to his Health and Being. The same wou'd be aver'd of one who had a Disposition which render'd him averse to any Commerce with Womankind, and of consequence unfitted him thro' *Illness of Temper* (and not merely thro' *a Defect of Constitution*) for the propagation of his Species or Kind.<sup>194</sup>

For a sensible creature to be good, it must have a natural temperament such that its passions are directed to the general welfare of its species. "Indeed," he writes, "whatever exterior Helps or Succours an ill-dispos'd Creature may find, to push him on towards the performance of any one good Action; there can no Goodness arise in him, till his *Temper* be so far chang'd, that in the issue he comes in earnest to be led by some immediate Affection, *directly*, and not *accidentally*, to Good, and against Ill."<sup>195</sup> If the temper of a creature is selfish, Shaftesbury calls the creature ill, regardless of whether the temper leads to a public or private benefit. We see once again that, unlike Hobbes and other moderns

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 2:13-14.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 2:14-15.

on the one hand, and certain sectarian Christians on the other, Shaftesbury will not praise good behavior when it is coerced or bribed. He explains:

for instance; if one of those Creatures suppos'd to be by Nature tame, gentle, and favourable to Mankind, be, contrary to his natural Constitution, fierce and savage; we instantly remark the Breach of Temper, and own the Creature to be unnatural and corrupt. If at any time afterwards, the same Creature, by good Fortune or right Management, comes to lose his Fierceness, and is made tame, gentle, and treatable, like other Creatures of his Kind; 'tis acknowledg'd that the Creature thus restor'd becomes good and natural. Suppose, now, that the Creature has indeed a tame and gentle Carriage; but that it proceeds only from the fear of his Keeper; which if set aside, his predominant Passion instantly breaks out: then is his Gentleness not his real Temper; but, his true and genuine Nature or natural Temper remaining just as it was, the Creature is still as ill as ever.

Seen in the context of his cosmology, Shaftesbury emphasizes the "real temper" as opposed to the "breach of temper" in creatures. A real temper, it seems, can be expected to be naturally suited to the place a species finds in the whole. Not to grant this claim would be monstrous.

Shaftesbury is now ready to consider human beings *per se*.<sup>196</sup> It is here that we see the introduction of what comes to be called a "moral sense." Shaftesbury seems to mean something relatively modest by this claim.

### **Reason and the Moral Sense**

Section 3 of Book I, part 2, treats "that which is call'd VIRTUE or MERIT, and is allow'd to *Man* only."<sup>197</sup> For Shaftesbury, man's unique sort of goodness is connected to his ability to reason. Shaftesbury writes that "in a Creature capable of forming general

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<sup>196</sup> *An Inquiry*, Book I, Part 2, §3.

<sup>197</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:16.

Notions of Things, not only the outward Beings which offer themselves to the Sense, are the Objects of the Affection; but the very *Actions* themselves, and the *Affections* of Pity, Kindness, Gratitude, and their Contrarys, being brought into the Mind by Reflection, become Objects."<sup>198</sup> For Shaftesbury, mental and moral subjects as well as bodies can become objects of reflection. Just as objects in the world betray color, shape, and proportion to the mind, so in "*Behaviour* and *Actions*, when presented to our Understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent Difference, according to the Regularity or Irregularity of the Subjects."<sup>199</sup> Through this "reflected sense" there arises in men "another kind of Affection towards those very Affections themselves, which have been already felt, and are now become the Subject of a new Liking or Dislike."<sup>200</sup> This second-order affection is, like other human passions, not wholly separable from opinion.<sup>201</sup> In explaining what he means by this, Shaftesbury refers to "the Mind," which in this context he calls "Spectator or Auditor of *other Minds*." He writes:

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2:16-17.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 2:16.

<sup>201</sup> I am calling the reflection on affections a second-order passion for convenience. It is not my intention to raise the Thomistic distinction between *secundum esse natural* and *secundum esse repraesentativum*, let alone the Analytic quarrel over the possibility of "intentionality." Nevertheless, it seems important to remark that for Shaftesbury, the moral sense does not have a physical seat, nor is it a faculty *per se*. It is perhaps better described as a receptivity to forms communicated not by a deliberate rational act. Forms are present for human beings and they can become the objects of reflection and reasoning. Shaftesbury's account is suggestive but far from clear as to the ontological status of moral objects. The point is, rather, an epistemological one.

the Mind, which is Spectator or Auditor of *other Minds*, cannot be without its *Eye* and *Ear*; so as to discern Proportion, distinguish Sound, and scan each Sentiment or Thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its Censure. It feels the Soft and Harsh, the Agreeable and Disagreeable, in the Affections; and finds a *Foul* and *Fair*, a *Harmonious* and a *Dissonant*, as really and truly here, as in any musical Numbers, or in the outward Forms or Representations of sensible Things. Nor can it with-hold its *Admiration* and *Extasy*, its *Aversion* and *Scorn*, any more in what relates to one than to the other of these Subjects. So that to deny the common and natural Sense of a Sublime and Beautiful in Things, will appear an Affectation merely, to any-one who considers duly of this Affair.<sup>202</sup>

Shaftesbury combines the claim that species have tempers suited to their natural "systemic" place in the whole with the claim that fancies and opinions are for men generally conjoined to arrive at the claim that man "is capable of having a *Sense of Right or Wrong*; a Sentiment or Judgment of what is done, thro' just, equal, and good Affection, or the contrary."<sup>203</sup>

As we mentioned above, the phrase "spectator or auditor" in this context recalls terms he used to frame his discussion of firmness-of-will regarding fancies and opinions in *Soliloquy*.<sup>204</sup> In *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury recommends that we establish "within us" an "*Inspector* or *Auditor*" to judge our fancies. By dividing the self into two persons, Shaftesbury was able to reestablish the classical distinction between reason and the passions. The mention of a spectator is also reminiscent of the language Shaftesbury uses to describe the proper work of "Criticism" in *Soliloquy*. There, he writes:

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<sup>202</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:17.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:18.

<sup>204</sup> See full quotation on page 233.

what is there mortifies the good *Painter* more, than when amidst his admiring Spectators there is not one present, who has been us'd to compare the Hands of different Masters, or has *an Eye* to distinguish the Advantages or Defects of every Style? Thro' all the inferior Orders of *Mechanicks*, the Rule is found to hold the same. In every Science, every Art, the real *Masters*, or *Proficients*, rejoice in nothing more, than in the thorow Search and Examination of their Performances, by all the Rules of Art and nicest *Criticism*.<sup>205</sup>

Shaftesbury holds that human beings have a natural tendency to form moral judgments based on their "connatural" affections for other creatures, especially those of the same species. Also in *Soliloquy* Shaftesbury refers to "Criticks by Fashion," who form a judgment on mores without having developed his deeper way of considering what is natural in opinions. He offers the following example of this:

the noble Wits of a Court-Education, who can go no farther back into Antiquity than their Pedegree will carry 'em, are able however to call to mind the different State of Manners in some few Reigns past, when *Chivalry* was in such repute. The Ladys were then Spectators not only of feign'd Combats and martial Exercises, but of real Duels and bloody Feats of Arms. They sat as Umpires and Judges of the doughty Frays.<sup>206</sup>

For Shaftesbury, our sense of right and wrong is built upon our natural animal affections for others of our kind, but susceptible to opinions because of the character of reason. Fashionable opinions are taken up by men from their societies. "Such is the

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<sup>205</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1:145. As Hume will later show in his essay "On the Standard of Taste," it is possible to refer moral questions to a category analogous to taste without abandoning the notion of a natural standard for judging between virtue and vice. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, 226 ff. Hume writes that, "amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind." *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, 233. It belongs to the experienced and careful critic rather than the casual observer to say when genuine beauty, nobility, or virtue are present in a work of art or a moral act. A similar notion will be developed by Adam Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and it is difficult not to see the kernel notion of the "impartial spectator" here as well. See part 1, section 1, chapter 5, "Of the Amiable and Respectable Virtues."

<sup>206</sup> *Soliloquy*.

different *Genius* of Nations; and of the same Nation in different Times and Seasons," he remarks of the fashionable critic in general.

So too does Shaftesbury draw out the consequences of an "uncertain View of the thing call'd *Happiness* or *Good*." Given the relationship of affection to opinions, a person's judgment of right and wrong is vulnerable to "misconception or misapprehension."<sup>207</sup> In thinking about this problem, Shaftesbury draws a distinction between mistakes of fact and right, thus: "a Mistake therefore *in Fact* being no Cause or Sign of ill Affection, can be no Cause of Vice. But a Mistake *of Right* being the Cause of unequal Affection, must of necessity be the Cause of vitious Action, in every intelligent or rational Being."<sup>208</sup> Opinions of right are usually informed by the fashionable manners and opinions of the times. An accurate assessment of right and wrong therefore requires "a use of Reason, sufficient to secure a right application of the Affections."<sup>209</sup> As we saw in our discussion of *Sensus Communis*,<sup>210</sup> Shaftesbury thinks that "Morality and good Government go together."<sup>211</sup>

In section 4 of part 2, then, Shaftesbury draws out the implications of his claim that men's opinions are those they hold habitually and for the most part. It is significant

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<sup>207</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:19.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:20.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> See the discussion of Juvenal and Nero, on page 31.

<sup>211</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1:67.



that according to Shaftesbury, the existence of superstition and pernicious customs or opinions, does not *per se* refute the claim that men have a natural sociability. He writes:

thus is *Virtue* shar'd in different degrees by rational Creatures; such at least as are call'd *rational*; but who come short of that sound and well-establish'd Reason, which alone can constitute a *just Affection*, a uniform and steady *Will* and *Resolution*. For it seems evident from our *Inquiry*, that how ill soever the Temper or Passions may stand with respect either to the sensible or the moral Objects; however passionate, furious, lustful, or cruel any Creature may become; however vitious the Mind be, or whatever ill Rules or Principles it goes by; yet if there be any Flexibleness or favourable Inclination towards the least moral Object, the least appearance of moral Good (as if there be any such thing as *Kindness*, *Gratitude*, *Bounty*, or *Compassion*), there is still something of *Virtue* left; and the Creature is not wholly vitious and unnatural.<sup>212</sup>

It would therefore be unnecessary to conclude with the modern projectors a radical attempt to "new-frame the human heart" is necessary for the restoration of political civility.

Thus Shaftesbury gives a limited endorsement of compassion, which, from a classical point of view is considered a vice. There are indications of Shaftesbury's awareness of this in his personal notebooks. In light of the classical subordination of passion to reason, the etymology is inescapably pejorative to a classical eye. Yet in this context Shaftesbury appeals to the difference between the philosopher and most other men that we saw emerge in *Sensus Communis*. In the essay Rand entitles "Passions" we find the following passage:

COMPASSION.--To compassionate, i.e., to join with in passion, be passionate with.-  
-To commiserate, i.e., to join with in misery, be miserable with. This in one order of life is right and good; nothing more harmonious; and to be without this, or not

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<sup>212</sup> *Inquiry*, 2:22.

to feel this, is unnatural, horrid, immane [*sic*]. How else would the machine perform. For this is meant still of the machine, or what is all one, of the mind, nature, or temper, as it is when acting like a machine in the common way of life, in animals and men-animals, where there is no better rule than the speciousness of the object, nor no other force to act by than that of the πῶθε [perturbations] raised thence, where the only energy is from pain and pleasure, sorrow and transport. Where men are thus light and heavy, airy and clouded, always under the power of passion, always passionate, always miserable in their own cases and about their own affairs, it would be unequal, unjust, unsocial, and hard not to be so in the affairs of others and be wretched too for company.

This as to one order of life, where this fellow-wretchedness agrees admirably and makes so great a part in the order of things, and shows us so fair a side of Nature. Hence the union of several species, their mutual relation, sympathy, life.<sup>213</sup>

This order of life stands in distinction to another, higher order. To that group, "to act by temper simply (though ever so good a temper), is in such a one, a loss even of simplicity, a quitting of that uniform, self-same, divine, and simple principle, for a various, manifold, compound, and changeable one, a composition, mere composition; for what else does the word temper signify?"<sup>214</sup> Most men, it would seem, lack the resolution of will and firmness of character so prized by Shaftesbury. He is content to let men be as they are--namely, fairly governed by chance in their passions. As a practitioner of his own art of soliloquy, however, he exhorts himself: "for thy part remember that 'for where rejoicing is reasonable, there also is congratulation reasonable'" and "in no way sympathise, or feel as they feel, when they take either this or the other event (even what is unpremeditated) for good or ill."<sup>215</sup> (Interestingly enough, the allusion seems to be to

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<sup>213</sup> Shaftesbury, *Philosophical Regimen*, 158-59.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

Epictetus' *Discourses* Book II, Chapter 5, entitled *How magnanimity can be consistent with prudence.*)

### **Impediments to Virtue: Religion and Virtue Compared**

Shaftesbury now<sup>216</sup> turns his attention more directly to the overall task of *An Inquiry*, that is, "what *Honesty* or *Virtue* is, consider'd by it-self; and in what manner it is influenc'd by *Religion*: How far *Religion* necessarily implies *Virtue*; and 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.*"<sup>217</sup>

Having seen that virtue is "*a certain just Disposition, or proportionable Affection of a rational Creature towards the moral Objects of Right and Wrong,*" Shaftesbury now asks more generally about ways in which religious opinions can interfere with virtue.<sup>218</sup> He proposes three possibilities. First, an opinion could destroy the natural sense of right and wrong. Second, an opinion could pervert this sense. Third, it can give rise to affections contrary to the moral sense.

In the first case, Shaftesbury finds that the "Sense of Right and Wrong therefore being as natural to us as *natural Affection* itself, and being a first Principle in our Constitution and Make; there is no speculative Opinion, Persuasion or Belief, which is capable *immediately* or *directly* to exclude or destroy it."<sup>219</sup> It is a principle of the human

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<sup>216</sup> In *An Inquiry*, Book I, Part 3, §1.

<sup>217</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.4.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.23.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

constitution that human beings make moral distinctions. Since this is so, only a powerful habit or second nature could counteract the moral sense. Nature is not so plastic that it will be easily opposed by customs. He writes:

'Tis evident in what relates to the Frame and Order of our *Bodys*; that no particular odd Mein [*sic*] or Gesture, which is either natural to us, and consequent to our Make, or accidental and by Habit acquir'd, can possibly be overcome by our immediate Disapprobation, or the contrary Bent of our Will, ever so strongly set against it. Such a Change cannot be effected without extraordinary Means, and the intervention of Art and Method, a strict Attention, and repeated Check. And even thus, Nature, we find, is hardly master'd; but lies sullen, and ready to revolt, on the first occasion. Much more is this *the Mind's Case* in respect of that natural Affection and anticipating Fancy, which makes the sense of Right and Wrong. 'Tis impossible that this can instantly, or without much Force and Violence, be effac'd, or struck out of the natural Temper, even by means of the most extravagant Belief or Opinion in the World.<sup>220</sup>

Nature, it seems, "can shift for her-self."<sup>221</sup> As the Critic remarks in "Miscellany IV," Shaftesbury in this holds with Horace that "you may turn out nature with a pitchfork, yet back she will keep coming."<sup>222</sup> Religious opinion, then, cannot destroy the nature of man.

In the second case, however, religion is more efficacious. We've seen that customs can oppose nature, and a "Custom or politick Institution" can lead men to misapprehend the moral worth of an object.<sup>223</sup> Shaftesbury says that it is unlikely that atheism would erect a "false Species of Right or Wrong," although if it leads men to

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 2.26.

<sup>221</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.131.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 3.132.

<sup>223</sup> *Inquiry*, 3.26.

licentiousness it could lead men to be less attentive to their natural inclinations. "Corrupt Religion, or Superstition," on the other hand, can indeed lead men to praise naturally ugly things.<sup>224</sup> This seems to follow naturally from the strong esteem men have toward their notions of God. He writes in an especially bold passage,

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 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 sutable Disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful Temper. For even *Irregularitys* and *Enormitys* of a heinous kind must in many cases appear illustrious to one, who considers them in a Being admir'd and contemplated with the highest Honour and Veneration.<sup>225</sup>

This is especially problematic in the case of a voluntaristic notion of the deity, such as he attributes to many contemporary Divines as well as his former tutor Locke. "If the mere *Will, Decree, or Law* of God be said absolutely to constitute *Right* and *Wrong*, then are these latter words of no significancy at all. For thus if each part of a Contradiction were affirm'd for Truth by the supreme Power, they wou'd consequently become *true*."<sup>226</sup>

On the other hand, Shaftesbury claims that "nothing can more highly contribute to the fixing of right Apprehensions, and a sound Judgment or Sense of Right and Wrong, than to believe a God who is ever, and on all accounts, represented such as to be actually a

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 3.27.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 3.28.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 2.29.

true Model and Example of the most exact Justice, and highest Goodness and Worth." We have seen in Chapter 2 that Shaftesbury favored the "antient Policy" that there be "a *Publick Leading* in Religion. For to deny the Magistrate a Worship, or take away a National Church, is as mere Enthusiasm as the Notion which sets up Persecution. For why shou'd there not be publick Walks, as well as private Gardens? Why not publick Libraries, as well as private Education and Home-Tutors?"<sup>227</sup> This policy recommendation is informed by his expectation that people will seldom be "pure atheists." Given the influence of custom and the culture on habitual opinion and the difficulty of true devotion to the practice of soliloquy, such a recommendation makes sense. One must remember, however, that Shaftesbury also holds that such a public religion ought to teach without coercion.

Finally Shaftesbury raises the possibility that contrary affections could thwart the operation of the natural affections. Here too Shaftesbury identifies a problem. While some might hold (with Locke at least) that hope of reward and fear of punishment by God are the most powerful influences over human passions, Shaftesbury is reluctant to agree. Both hope and fear, he argues, teach an excessive self-regard.<sup>228</sup>

Shaftesbury does think that it is proper for "*a civil STATE or PUBLIC*" to distribute rewards and punishments.<sup>229</sup> Not only can the magistrate force people to be useful to

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<sup>227</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.11.

<sup>228</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.32-34.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.36.

society, but much more importantly, he can make virtue seem to be in the interest of all, "so as to remove all Prejudices against it, create a fair reception for it, and lead Men into that path which afterwards they cannot easily quit."<sup>230</sup> The power of this lies not in coercion (although that is certainly present) so much as in the "*example* which chiefly influences Mankind, and forms the Character and Disposition of a people."<sup>231</sup> As we mentioned earlier, Shaftesbury holds good morals to be linked to good government. He continues,

for a virtuous Administration is in a manner necessarily accompany'd with Virtue in the Magistrate. Otherwise it cou'd be of little effect, and of no long duration. But where it is sincere and well establish'd, there Virtue and the Laws must necessarily be respected and belov'd. So that as to Punishments and Rewards, their Efficacy is not so much from the Fear or Expectation which they raise, as from a natural Esteem of *Virtue*, and Detestation of *Villany*, which is awaken'd and excited by these publick Expressions of the Approbation and Hatred of Mankind in each Case. For in the publick Executions of the greatest Villains, we see generally that the Infamy and Odiousness of their Crime, and the Shame of it before Mankind, contribute more to their Misery than all besides; and that it is not the immediate Pain, or Death it-self, which raises so much Horror either in the Sufferers or Spectators, as that ignominious kind of Death which is inflicted for publick Crimes, and Violations of Justice and Humanity.<sup>232</sup>

The power of opinion in these matters makes contrary opinions especially dangerous. The mercenary view of morality suggests that in fact one's private happiness is in fundamental tension with the public good. "There is a necessity for the preservation

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, *Enthusiasm*, 2.36.

<sup>231</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.37.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 2.38.

of *Virtue*, that it shou'd be thought to have no quarrel with *true Interest*, and *Self-enjoyment*."<sup>233</sup>

The otherworldliness of religion also presents a challenge in the other direction in that it leads men to underestimate the value of self-regard. When confronted with the hope of eternal bliss,

an Expectation and Dependency, so miraculous and great as this, must naturally take off from other inferior Dependencys and Encouragements. Where infinite Rewards are thus inforc'd, and the Imagination strongly turn'd towards them, the other common and natural Motives to Goodness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by Dis-use. Other Interests are hardly so much as computed, whilst the Mind is thus transported in the pursuit of a high Advantage and Self-Interest, so narrowly confin'd within our-selves. On this account, all other Affections towards Friends, Relations, or Mankind, are often slightly regarded, as being *worldly*, and of little moment, in respect of the Interest of *our Soul*.<sup>234</sup>

It is difficult to expect virtue to lead to happiness without having an admiration for it on its own terms. This, in turn, is difficult to sustain without some belief that "the WHOLE it-self" is orderly and beautiful. While atheism does not produce "false imaginations of right and wrong,"<sup>235</sup> it does seem to foster affections contrary to virtue in that it fails to present anything "good or lovely" to "Contemplation."<sup>236</sup> Taken in this sense, atheists are far less likely to be happy:

According to the Hypothesis of those who exclude a general Mind, it must be confess'd, there can nothing happen in the Course of things to deserve either our Admiration, and Love, or our Anger, and Abhorrence. However, as there can be

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 2.39.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 2.26.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 2.40.



no Satisfaction at the best in thinking upon what *Atoms and Chance* produce; so upon disastrous Occasions, and under the Circumstances of a calamitous and hard Fortune, 'tis scarce possible to prevent a natural kind of Abhorrence and Spleen, which will be entertain'd and kept alive by the Imagination of so perverse an Order of Things.<sup>237</sup>

Given his own admiration for the teachings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, this may not be Shaftesbury's final word on the matter. We have already seen, for example, that for the philosopher, at least, the passions are firmly governed by reason.

### **General Conclusion: On the Economy of the Passions**

In this chapter we have considered Shaftesbury's response to modern philosophy. In the first section we considered his response to radical skepticism through a return to common sense in *Sensus Communis*. We then examined the Critic's rejection of modern epistemology (or as he would have it, "metaphysics") and the reductionism of the passions it supports in favor of the classical view that passions must be considered with opinions. Finally, we looked at the way Shaftesbury attempts to articulate an alternative approach to the nature of human passions in *An Inquiry* by restoring man to a place in the *cosmos*. This allowed Shaftesbury to present the affections as a comprising natural "Economy of the Passions."

Still, an essential aspect of Shaftesbury's classical philosophy remains to be considered. What arguments does he present that nature is in fact an ordered whole or *cosmos*? His argument relies in large part on his account of the beauty of the world, and

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 2.42.

for this we must consider the second treatise in Volume II of the *Characteristicks*. It is to this task we now turn to in chapter 5, "Shaftesbury's "Principal Performance"--A reading of *The Moralists*.

## CHAPTER 5

### SHAFTESBURY'S "PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE":

#### A READING OF *THE MORALISTS*.

#### **General Introduction**

##### *The Moralists Criticized*

We have seen in earlier chapters that the Critic of *Miscellaneous Reflections* regards the *Characteristicks* as having a unity to its structure. Regarding the arrangement of the individual treatises, he writes, "it will appear therefore in this *Joint*-Edition of our Author's *Five Treatises*, that the *Three* former are preparatory to the *Fourth*...and the *Fifth* (with which he concludes) a kind of *Apology* for [the] Treatise concerning *Virtue* and *Religion*."<sup>1</sup> In this chapter we will turn our attention to the fifth treatise, which is entitled "THE MORALISTS, *A Philosophical Rhapsody*. BEING A RECITAL of certain Conversations on *Natural* and *Moral* Subjects."<sup>2</sup>

Before turning to *The Moralists* itself, however, we should continue our practice of consulting Shaftesbury's own advice for reading the treatise he regarded as his "principal performance."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

<sup>2</sup> *Moralists*, 2.101 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.176.

### The Dialogue-Form Revisited

In his fifth "Miscellany",<sup>4</sup> the Critic invites us to think carefully about the literary character of the work we are about to encounter. He offers Shaftesbury an ironical reproach for the literary forms he has chosen for Volume II of his book:

had the Author of our *Subject-Treatises* consider'd thorowly of...literate Affairs, and found how the Interest of Wit stood at present in our Nation, he wou'd have had so much regard surely to his own Interest, as never to have writ unless either in the single Capacity of mere CRITICK, or that of AUTHOR *in form*. If he had resolv'd never to produce a regular or legitimate Piece, he might pretty safely have writ on still after the rate of his first Volume, and *mixt* manner. He might have been as *critical*, as *satirical*, or as full of *Raillery* as he had pleas'd. But to come afterwards as a grave *Actor* upon the Stage, and expose himself to Criticism in his turn, by giving us a Work or two in form, after the regular manner of Composition, as we see in his second Volume; this, I think, was no extraordinary Proof of his Judgment or Ability, in what related to his own Credit and Advantage.<sup>5</sup>

We saw in chapter 4 that our Critic apologized for the unpleasant "methodick" manner of *An Inquiry*; he lamented the "dry Philosophy, and *rigid Manner* of our Author; without any *Excursions* into various Literature; without help from the *Comick* or *Tragick* Muse, or from the Flowers of *Poetry* or *Rhetorick*."<sup>6</sup> We have a different challenge facing us in reading *The Moralists*, perhaps precisely because we now have an overabundance of help from the Muses. According to the Critic, the

next Piece (the MORALISTS, which we have now before us) must, according to his own Rules, be reckon'd as an Undertaking of greater weight. 'Tis not only at the bottom, as *systematical*, *didactick* and *preceptive*, as that other Piece of formal Structure; but it assumes withal another Garb, and more fashionable Turn of Wit.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.139 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.175-76.

<sup>6</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

It conceals what is *scholastical*, under the appearance of a polite Work. It aspires to *Dialogue*, and carries with it not only those poetick Features of the Pieces antiently call'd MIMES; but it attempts to unite the several Personages and Characters in One *Action*, or *Story*, within a determinate Compass of *Time*, regularly divided, and drawn into different and proportion'd *Scenes*: And this, too, with variety of *STYLE*; the *simple*, *comick*, *rhetorical*, and even the *poetick* or *sublime*; such as is the aptest to run into Enthusiasm and Extravagance. So much is our Author, by virtue of this Piece, a Poet *in due form*, and by a more apparent claim, than if he had writ a Play, or *dramatick Piece*, in as regular a manner, at least, as any known at present on our Stage.<sup>7</sup>

The Critic leads us to expect a serious teaching to emerge from *The Moralists*, but our task here will be more difficult than the working through of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*. We should expect to find "systematical, didactick and perceptive" structure in *The Moralists* as much as in *An Inquiry*. This might be surprising, since formal structure is always more difficult to discern in a dialogue than in a philosophic treatise. What is more, we must now draw heavily on the preparation in literary modes that Shaftesbury offered us in *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. We are told by the Critic that the author will follow his "own Rules." *The Moralists* is a dialogue; it consequently follows the modes of those works "antiently call'd MIMES." It does this in part by respecting the classical concern to integrate a variety of characters into a unified story. We recall that in *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury described these ancient mimes thus: "they were Pieces which, besides their force of Style, and hidden Numbers, carry'd a sort of *Action* and *Imitation*, the same as the *Epick* and *Dramatick* kinds. They were either real *Dialogues*, or Recitals of such *personated Discourses*; where the Persons themselves had their Characters preserv'd

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<sup>7</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.175-76.

thro'out; their Manners, Humours, and distinct Turns of Temper and Understanding maintain'd, according to the most exact *poetical Truth*."<sup>8</sup> Mimes, then, while having a certain style and disguised order ("hidden Numbers"), are more than a set of arguments set off by *tunica distincta* alone. In a genuine dialogue, the speeches are delivered in the context of a plot (the "*Action and Imitation*" found in drama) and by characters who are presented with artistic integrity (that is, they are "preserv'd thro'out"). As we discussed in Chapter 2, the dialogic form invites reflection not only on the things said but also on the character of the speakers and audience present at a conversation. Since the author of a dialogue recedes from view--Shaftesbury says the author is "annihilated" by the form--the reader is left with an apparently immediate encounter with characters. Shaftesbury writes:

the Scene presents it-self, as by chance, and undesign'd. You are not only left to judg coolly, and with indifference, of the Sense deliver'd; but of the Character, Genius, Elocution, and Manner of the Persons who deliver it. These two are mere Strangers, in whose favour you are no way engag'd. Nor is it enough that the Persons introduc'd speak pertinent and good Sense, at every turn. It must be seen *from what Bottom* they speak; from what *Principle*, what *Stock* or *Fund* of Knowledg they draw; and what Kind or Species of Understanding they possess. For the Understanding here must have its Mark, its characteristick Note, by which it may be distinguish'd. It must be *such and such an Understanding*; as when we say, for instance, *such or such a Face*: since Nature has characteriz'd Tempers and Minds as peculiarly as Faces. And for an Artist who draws naturally, 'tis not enough to shew us merely Faces which may be call'd *Men's*: Every Face must be a certain *Man's*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.125.

We will therefore watch the characters of *The Moralists* carefully, noticing who is speaking, what they are saying and to whom; that is, we must attend to character and plot. The Critic also calls our attention to the importance of "a determinate Compass of *Time*" and to the "different and proportion'd *Scenes*" we encounter. When and where certain speeches occur will deserve our special attention; that is, we must also attend to time and place. Finally, we must not overlook the "variety of STYLE; the *simple, comick, rhetorical*, and even the *poetick* or *sublime*." This last style is especially deceptive because it is the "aptest to run into Enthusiasm and Extravagance."

The Critic calls Shaftesbury *qua* author of *The Moralists*, "a Poet in due form." Shaftesbury deploys literary styles as he sees fit, following the lessons he learned from several disciples of Socrates, including

his Disciple of noble Birth and lofty Genius, who aspir'd to Poetry and Rhetorick [that is, Plato], took the *Sublime* part, and shone above his other Condisciples. He of mean Birth, and poorest Circumstances [Speusippus], whose Constitution as well as Condition inclin'd him most to the way we call *Satirick*,<sup>10</sup> took the reproving part, which in his better-humour'd and more agreeable Successor [Xenocrates], turn'd into the *Comick* kind, and went upon the Model of that antient Comedy which was then prevalent. But another noble Disciple [Xenophon, that is], whose Genius was towards Action, and who prov'd afterwards the greatest Hero of his time took the *genteeler* Part, and *softer* Manner. He join'd what was deepest and most solid in Philosophy, with what was easiest and most refin'd in Breeding, and in the Character and Manner of a Gentleman. Nothing cou'd be remoter than his Genius was, from the scholastick, the rhetorical, or mere poetick kind. He was as distant, on one hand, from the

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<sup>10</sup> Plutarch in his *Moralia* (Περὶ φιλαδελφίας 21) remarks that Plato redeemed his sickly nephew Speusippus from a life of debauchery with philosophy. His *Life of Dion* (967; 22.1-4) repeats the probably unflattering remark of the poet Timon that Speusippus was good at raillery and suggests that Plato recommended his company to Dion to correct his severe temperament.

sonorous, high, and pompous Strain; as, on the other hand, from the ludicrous, mimical, or satirick.<sup>11</sup>

We remark in passing that the most conspicuous aspect of Shaftesbury's dialogue, namely the long rhapsodic prose-poems, imitate the "sublime" style. According to Shaftesbury, Plato's "dialogues were real POEMS."<sup>12</sup> It is for the rhapsodic element above all that the Critic calls Shaftesbury "*a Poet in due form.*"

To return, the Critic elaborates in an extended footnote the importance of Shaftesbury's being a true poet in this dialogue. We should consider his remarks carefully:

That [Shaftesbury] is conscious of this, we may gather from that Line or two of Advertisement, which stands at the beginning of his first Edition. "As for the Characters, and Incidents, they are neither wholly feign'd (*says he*) nor wholly true: but according to the Liberty allow'd in the way of DIALOGUE, the principal Matters are founded upon Truth; and the rest as near resembling as may be. 'Tis a *Sceptick* recites: and the Hero of the Piece passes for an *Enthusiast*. If a perfect Character be wanting; 'tis the same Case here, as with the Poets in some of their best Pieces. And this surely is a sufficient Warrant for the Author of a PHILOSOPHICAL ROMANCE."--Thus our Author himself; who to conceal, however, his strict Imitation of the antient *poetick* DIALOGUE, has prefix'd an auxiliary Title to his Work, and given it the Sirname of RHAPSODY: As if it were merely of that *Essay* or *mix'd* kind of Works, which come abroad with an affected Air of Negligence and Irregularity. But whatever our Author may have affected in his *Title-Page*, 'twas so little his Intention to write after that Model of incoherent Workmanship, that it appears to be sorely against his Will, if this *Dialogue-Piece* of his has not the just Character, and correct Form of those antient *Poems* describ'd. He wou'd gladly have constituted ONE single *Action* and *Time*, sutable to the just Simplicity of those Dramatick Works. And this, one wou'd think, was easy enough for him to have done. He needed only to have brought his

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<sup>11</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.158-59. For an account of the succession at Plato's Academy, see Eduard Zeller, Sarah Frances Alleyne, and Alfred Goodwin, *Plato and the Older Academy*, New ed. (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and co., 1888), 553 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.158 in footnotes.



first Speakers immediately into Action, and sav'd the *narrative* or *recitative* Part of PHILOCLES to PALEMON, by producing them as speaking Personages upon his Stage. The Scene all along might have been *the Park*. From the early Evening to the late Hour of Night, that the two Galants withdrew to their Town-Apartments, there was sufficient time for the Narrator Philocles, to have *recited* the whole Transaction of the second and third Part; which wou'd have stood thro'out as it now does: only at the Conclusion, when the *narrative* or *recitative Part* had ceas'd, the *simple* and *direct* DIALOGUE wou'd have again return'd, to grace the *Exit*. By this means the *temporal* as well as *local* Unity of the Piece had been preserv'd. Nor had our Author been necessitated to commit that *Anachronism*, of making his first Part, *in order*, to be last *in time*.<sup>13</sup>

We learn many important things from this passage. First, our author has constructed his dialogue with care--he is "conscious" of his work as a poet. In fact, while the piece may at times seem to be the product of "incoherent Workmanship," we should not believe it. The characters and incidents are neither wholly feigned nor wholly true. The work itself is disguised as a "philosophical romance" but is actually an imitation of the classical dialogue. Since a dialogue is more than a collection of reported speeches, we will have to ask ourselves in what way the characters and incidents are feigned or true as we proceed. We may be sure, however, that the "principal Matters are founded upon Truth."

The narrator of the dialogue is "*a Sceptick*," while "the Hero of the Piece passes for an *Enthusiast*." What could it mean to "pass" for an Enthusiast? As we shall see, the treatment of enthusiasm is carefully constructed, and Shaftesbury offers us careful clues as to how we should understand the enthusiasm of our characters.

As for the local and temporal setting of the piece, the Critic calls our attention to the fact that they are *not* straightforward. This complexity, we learn, could have been

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<sup>13</sup> See footnotes, *Miscellany V*, 3.175-76. Emphasis added.

easily avoided. "He needed only to have brought his first Speakers immediately into Action, and sav'd the *narrative* or *recitative* Part of PHILOCLES to PALEMON, by producing them as speaking Personages upon his Stage." Yet he has not done so, and we must ask ourselves why not. Given the care of the workmanship, it can hardly have been "sorely against his Will" to have departed from the ancient manner of dialogue-writing. The Critic offers us one reason Shaftesbury appears to have so departed. Shaftesbury wanted to conceal his "strict Imitation of the antient *poetick* DIALOGUE," and he has for this reason identified the style and structure of the work a "RHAPSODY."

The fact that *The Moralists* is a narrated dialogue hardly removes Shaftesbury from the classical tradition. Many of Plato's dialogues are narrated, including the *Symposium* and the *Theaetetus*. The latter dialogue, in fact, has an odd preliminary dialogue between two characters, one of whom shares a manuscript he prepared over time and in consultation with the philosophical hero Socrates who is himself portrayed in the manuscript. Socrates himself draws attention to the narrative literary style in the *Republic*.<sup>14</sup> Both Xenophon and Cicero present their dialogues as narratives.<sup>15</sup>

Yet the Critic calls our attention to the irregularities of the time and place of the conversations in *The Moralists* by indicating how they might have been presented differently. He notes that the speakers might have been presented without the narrative frame. Why then do we have the first letter of Philocles to Palemon at all? Does it really

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<sup>14</sup> *Republic* 392d-e.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates* or Cicero's dialogue *On Friendship*.

belong in the same work as the account of Philocles' visit with Theocles or must we conclude that the conversation with Palemon is window dressing? We might carry this further by asking why the character Palemon is present in *The Moralists* at all. If we accept the narrative frame, we still wonder about the location of the conversations. Why not stay in the park? Why does the account of Theocles occur only after Palemon and Philocles retire to their own apartments? This structure apparently forces an abrupt ending to the work: At the close of a long discourse on philosophy Philocles writes, "BY this time we found our-selves insensibly got home. Our *Philosophy* ended, and we return'd to the common Affairs of life."<sup>16</sup> If Palemon and Philocles remained together for the duration of the narrative, we might have returned to them after Philocles' narrative in parts II and III. Would this exit not have been more graceful? Even if we confine our attention to the second two parts we encounter a variety of locations--inside and outside--and a variety of times and occasions.

Finally, we are invited to wonder whether the temporal unity of *The Moralists* has been violated. The narrative is emphatically out of temporal order. Shaftesbury commits an "*anachronism*" in the narrative by placing the conversation with Theocles, which happened earlier, *after* the later conversation between Palemon and Philocles. The Critic might also have noted that even the exchange of part I is not presented directly. Instead, it, too, is narrated indirectly through letter-writing, albeit still from Philocles to Palemon.

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<sup>16</sup> *Moralists*, 2.247.

(The work is, as the title says, a "recital" of certain conversations.) Yet Palemon himself was present at the conversation of part I and it occurred as recently as yesterday!

According to the Critic, Shaftesbury had reasons for failing to imitate the alleged simplicity of the ancients. The Critic writes, "he dares not, in his own Model and principal Performance, attempt to unite his Philosophy in one solid and uniform Body, nor carry on his Argument in one continu'd Chain or Thred."<sup>17</sup> The Critic suggests that it was difficult to imagine contemporary characters who would engage in an extended conversation on nothing but philosophy and morals. As we saw in chapter 2, and as the Critic now reminds us in a footnoted reference to Volume I, Shaftesbury fears that the "coquetry of a modern Author" somehow suits the manners and mores of the modern "fashionable world" better than the more salutary practice of dialogue.<sup>18</sup> Shaftesbury is "forc'd therefore to raise particular *Machines*, and constrain his principal Characters, in order to carry a better Face, and bear himself out, against the appearance of *Pedantry*."<sup>19</sup> While these "machines" may help the contemporary reader avoid boredom, they also make it more difficult to trace the continuous thread of the argument mentioned above. It will be our job to see whether we can discern a unified argument--one "*systematical, didactick and perceptive*," perhaps--in *The Moralists*. As we shall see, Shaftesbury's

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<sup>17</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.176.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* The reference is to *Soliloquy*, 1.126.

<sup>19</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.176.

dialogue does try to raise the ancient form of dialogue from the dead, since such a style appeals to those mimes of early times, "before *Philosophy* was in vogue."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Characters**

The Critic offers us important clues for thinking about the characters we meet in *The Moralists* by indicating the sorts of "machines" we should notice. We have seen the Critic say that the "hero...passes for an *Enthusiast*." The hero is named Theocles, and his name suggests the glory of God.<sup>21</sup> We now learn that Shaftesbury's "Gentleman-Philosopher THEOCLES, before he enters into his real Character, becomes a feign'd *Preacher*. And even when his real Character comes on, he hardly dares stand it out; but to deal the better with his *Sceptick-Friend*, he falls again to personating, and takes up the Humour of the *Poet* and *Enthusiast*."<sup>22</sup> For now it is enough to notice that when considering the "Bottom" from which Theocles speaks, it may not be the preachy enthusiasm frequently identified with him. The Critic forces us to wonder about the real character of Theocles.

The recipient of the letters is named Palemon. The Critic remarks, "PALEMON the Man of Quality, and who is first introduc'd as Speaker in the Piece, must, for fashion-sake, appear *in Love*, and under a kind of Melancholy, produc'd by some Mis-adventures

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<sup>20</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

<sup>21</sup> From the Greek *theos* (θεός) for god and *kleos* (κλέος) for fame or glory. Theocles is an actual classical name mentioned by Lemprière. John Lemprière and F. A. Adams, *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary of Proper Names Mentioned in Ancient Authors Writ Large : With a Chronological Table*, 3rd ed. (London ; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.176-77.

in the World. How else shou'd he be suppos'd so serious?"<sup>23</sup> How else indeed. While this is true, we shall see that Palemon comes by his melancholy honestly. The name Palemon seems to allude to several things, which I will discuss in detail presently.

The skeptical friend is named Philocles, whose name suggests the friend of glory.<sup>24</sup> The Critic writes that "PHILOCLE'S his Friend (an airy Gentleman of the World, and a thorow Raillier) must have a home Charge upon him, and feel the Anger of his grave Friend, before he can be suppos'd grave enough to enter into a philosophical Discourse."<sup>25</sup> If this is an accurate description of what is required to stir Philocles, it is nevertheless true that he enters the "discourse" artfully and extensively.

It seems likely that Shaftesbury has chosen the names of his characters with care. We can infer this not only from the general remarks on dialogue above, but also from the scorn the Critic shows other contemporary attempts at dialogue. Party authors and theologians have tried to imitate this ancient form, but without success. The Critic remarks:

at present, it must be own'd, the *Characters*, or *Personages*, employ'd by our new orthodox Dialogists, carry with 'em little Proportion or Coherence; and in this respect may be said to sute perfectly with that figurative metaphorical Style and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 3.177.

<sup>24</sup> According to Lemprière, Philocles's work won against *Oedipus Tyrannus* in competition. (This was taken by Aristophanes to be an example of the typically poor judgment of the Athenians.) In his *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes mocks Philocles for producing poetry as ugly as his face. He also mentions in the *Knights* Morsimus, son of Philocles (calling anyone disseminating the son's poetry the worst of criminals). Philocles was famous for an imitation of Sophocles' lost play *Tereus*. Aristotle famously cites the *Tereus* of Sophocles for an example of dramatic contrivance (*Poetics* 1454b30-37 speaks of "the voice of the shuttle.")

<sup>25</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.177.

rhetorical Manner, in which their Logick and Arguments are generally couch'd. Nothing can be more complex or multiform than their moral *Draughts* or *Sketches* of Humanity. These, indeed, are so far from representing any *particular* Man, or *Order of Men*, that they scarce resemble any thing of *the Kind*. 'Tis by their Names only that these *Characters* are figur'd. Tho they bear different Titles, and are set up to maintain contrary Points; they are found, at the bottom, to be all of the same side; and, notwithstanding their seeming Variance, to co-operate in the most officious manner with the Author, towards the display of his own proper Wit, and the establishment of his private Opinion and Maxims. They are indeed his very legitimate and obsequious *Puppets*; as like *real Men* in Voice, Action, and Manners, as those wooden or wire Engines of the lower Stage. PHILOTHEUS and PHILATHEUS, PHILAUTUS and PHILALETHES are of one and the same Order: Just Tallys to one another: Questioning and Answering in concert, and with such a sort of Alternative as is known in a vulgar Play, where *one* Person lies down blindfold, and presents himself, as fair as may be, to *another*, who by favour of the Company, or the assistance of his Good-fortune, deals his Companion many a sound Blow, without being once challeng'd, or brought into his Turn of *lying down*.<sup>26</sup>

We can expect, then, that Shaftesbury intends to portray real characters rather than "obsequious *Puppets*." Also, his names are unlikely to have been chosen haphazardly. The Critic's list of variations on favorite names for characters--Philotheus, Philatheus, Philautus, Philalethes--is interesting in itself, since it suggests names that were *not* chosen by Shaftesbury. "Philotheus" would have combined the first roots of Philocles and Theocles, respectively. Insofar as there is friendship for god in *The Moralists*, however, it is expressed by characters other than the principal three. "Philo" and "Theo" are also suggestive given the prevalence of philosophy and theology in the *Characteristicks*. Indeed, Shaftesbury's skeptic and enthusiast do provide a continuation of the dispute between philosophy and theology. Finally, names aside, we can expect that the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 179.

characters will not be straw-men and that disputed opinions will have the full advantage of reasonable argument.

### **The Moralists, Part I**

The general structure of *The Moralists* is as follows. The dialogue is divided into three parts, and each part into sections. The whole is cast in the form of a letter (or three letters) from Philocles to his friend Palemon. Part I recounts a conversation held "yesterday" between Philocles and Palemon. Parts II and III recount a series of conversations between Philocles and his friend Theocles, with occasional participation from additional characters. The conversations between Philocles and Theocles happen over the course of two days.

Part I is divided into three sections. As we shall see, section 1 sets out the contemporary environment within which philosophers think. Section 2 examines the *melancholia* of Palemon and connects it to broader philosophical concerns. Section 3 acts as a prelude to the rest of the dialogue, setting up the context and indicating the tone we can expect.

#### **Part I, § 1: The State of Philosophy**

Shaftesbury opens *The Moralists* by providing a character sketch of Palemon through the eyes of our narrator, Philocles. We learn that Palemon is a man of "Rank and Credit in the *fashionable* World" and a man of "Genius fitted for the greatest Affairs," but also one who has made a "violent...Turn toward Philosophy and the Schools."<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>27</sup> *Moralists*, 2.103.



makes Palemon an unusual gentleman. Philocles writes to his friend that "you are the only well-bred Man who wou'd have taken the Fancy to talk Philosophy in such a Circle of good Company as we had round us yesterday, when we were in your Coach together, in *the Park*."<sup>28</sup> While Philocles is himself quite conversant with philosophy, his praise of Palemon's "passion for Philosophy" is mixed with irony. Palemon's passion leads him to initiate an "unseasonable Conversation, so opposite to the reigning Genius of *Gallantry* and *Pleasure*." Philocles seems not to share Lawrence Klein's sense that the park is an appropriate place to have philosophical conversations; indeed, one might call Palemon *impolite*.<sup>29</sup>

Philocles remarks that it has "become fashionable in our Nation to talk Politicks in every Company, and mix the Discourses of State-affairs with those of Pleasure and Entertainment."<sup>30</sup> It is not surprising to find gentlemen (and perhaps also ladies and more ordinary men) discussing politics given the political currents of the age.<sup>31</sup> But not so philosophy.

According to Philocles, "we Moderns" have "degraded" philosophy, and "stripp'd her of her chief Rights." Philosophy is in disrepute and political matters are no longer

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.103-04.

<sup>29</sup> Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, 34-41.

<sup>30</sup> *Moralists*, 2.104.

<sup>31</sup> Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman ; Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*.

considered the concern of philosophers. While "Philosophy" once influenced affairs of the world,

we have immur'd her (poor Lady!) in Colleges and Cells; and have set her servilely to such Works as those in the Mines. Empiricks, and pedantick Sophists are her chief Pupils. The *School-syllogism*, and the *Elixir*, are the choicest of her Products. So far is she from producing Statesmen, as of old, that hardly any Man of Note in the publick cares to own the least Obligation to her. If some few maintain their Acquaintance, and come now and then to her Recesses, 'tis as the Disciple of Quality *came* to his Lord and Master; "*secretly, and by night.*"<sup>32</sup>

This degradation is contrary to nature, however, for "if *Morals* be allow'd belonging to her, *Politicks* must undeniably be hers."<sup>33</sup> Politics and morality are inseparable; one cannot think about "Manners and Constitutions of Men *in common*" without first considering who and what men are by nature. Philocles remarks, "nothing is more familiar than to reason concerning Man in his *confederate* State and *national* Relation; as he stands engag'd to this or that Society, by Birth or Naturalization: Yet to consider him as a *Citizen* or *Commoner of the World*, to trace his Pedegree a step higher, and view his End and Constitution in *Nature* it-self, must pass, it seems, for some intricate or over-refin'd Speculation."<sup>34</sup>

Philocles blames part of the shameful reputation of philosophy on her academic practitioners, whom he describes as "*Scholasticks.*" It is they who are responsible for the stuffy air surrounding philosophy. The scholastic model consists of over-rehearsed "*set-*

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<sup>32</sup> *Moralists*, 2.105.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

places" rather than living ideas. Such language is foreign to the tastes of good company. "The least mention of such matters gives us a disgust, and puts us out of humour. If Learning comes a-cross us, we count it *Pedantry*; if Morality, 'tis *Preaching*."<sup>35</sup> This consequence is especially lamentable, given the tendency of gallant conversation to become shallow and effete. Philocles writes that modern conversations have lost "those masculine Helps of Learning and sound Reason" to the extent that even women find them contemptible.<sup>36</sup> Witty conversation may still enjoy "an Air of Play and Dalliance," but without a foundation in knowledge, serious people dismiss it as mere "*colouring and drapery*."

Philocles connects the decline in serious conversation to the decline in the popularity of the dialogue as a literary form, which "heretofore was found the politest and best way of managing even the graver Subjects."<sup>37</sup> Nor poet nor painter nor philosopher can cast their works "against the Appearance of Nature and Truth," and the truth is that a philosophic conversation would be unrecognizable to the fashionable world. A philosopher who writes dialogues can expect to be ineffectual. "If he represents his Philosophy as making any figure in Conversation; if he triumphs in the Debate, and gives his own Wisdom the advantage over that of the World; he may be liable to sound

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2.106.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Raillery, and possibly be made *a Fable* of." As we saw in chapter two, the decline of conversation and the abandonment of the art of dialogue are mutually influential.

Philocles offers his own fable to make his point clear. He observes that statues often depict the triumph of heroic men over lions; and indeed, a master sculptor might move even a lion with his art. Yet lions and men both know the truth: lions are stronger than men, beautiful fables to the contrary notwithstanding. In the case of philosophical characters, Philocles asks, "where are *the Originals*?"<sup>38</sup> Even should one have the good fortune to find a genuine philosopher, can one even imagine a truthful dialogue which depicts his philosophical conversation?

Genuine philosophy, which Philocles, following Cicero, calls "*Academick*," requires open "Questioning and Doubting." This manner is contrary to the genius of the age. Philocles writes that contemporary "men love to take party instantly. They can't bear being kept in suspense. The Examination torments 'em. They want to be rid of it, upon the easiest terms."<sup>39</sup> In this they betray a distrust of the very faculty of reason which alone might save them from doubt.

The philosophy of the age suits such impatience by directing its attention to applied rather than purely theoretical matters. Philocles shares with Shaftesbury a disdain for philosophic "improvers." Philocles calls these contemporary philosophers "*alchymists*."

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2.107.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

We have a strange Fancy to be Creators, a violent Desire at least to know the Knack or Secret by which Nature does all. The rest of our Philosophers only aim at that in Speculation, which our Alchemists aspire to in Practice. For with some of these it has been actually under deliberation how to make *Man*, by other Mediums than Nature has hitherto provided. Every Sect has a *Recipe*. When you know it, you are Master of Nature: you solve all her *Phaenomena*: you see all her Designs, and can account for all her Operations. If need were, you might, perchance too, be of her Laboratory, and work for her. At least one wou'd imagine the Partizans of each modern Sect had this Conceit. They are all ARCHIMEDES'S in their way, and can *make* a World upon easier terms than he offer'd to *move* one.<sup>40</sup>

Philocles concludes section 1 of part 1 by connecting the vices of the age to scholastic and alchemical modern philosophy. Men no longer "dare to *doubt*" and "thus we will needs *know* every thing, and be at the pains of examining nothing." It is no surprise then, that "*Academick*" philosophy, which doesn't offer firm truths, is unpopular. Academic philosophy, he writes, "goes upon no establish'd Hypothesis, nor presents us with any flattering Scheme, talks only of Probabilitys, Suspence of Judgment, Inquiry, Search, and Caution not to be impos'd on, or deceiv'd."<sup>41</sup> Young men were once trained in this academic philosophy, receiving from it an exercise of the mind analogous to the education of the body receives from wrestling; both disciplines presumably lead to humane strength and flexibility. Gentlemen carried this humane education with them throughout their lives and into public and domestic affairs.

So too the art of dialogue, which imitated and taught academic philosophy, is ill suited to the modern age. Sustaining the willingness to treat open questions as genuinely

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2.108.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2.109.

open is a philosophical challenge to which the dialogue is especially well-suited. We have seen that dialogues present more than one character in conversation and thereby disguise the opinions of the author. Philocles professes reluctance to present such a conversation, "especially in the Light you have unluckily chosen to set it."<sup>42</sup> We learn that Philocles proceeds only at the request of Palemon--"the Project is your own," he writes--and that success will require the assistance of the Muses.

**Part I, § 2: Melancholy Palemon and Skeptical Philocles**

In section 2 we learn that Palemon has not been improved by his turn to philosophy; indeed it seems to have sowed nothing but misanthropy in his soul. The section opens with a lamentation by Palemon:

O WRETCHED State of Mankind!--Hapless Nature, thus to have err'd in thy chief Workmanship!--Whence sprang this fatal Weakness? What Chance or Destiny shall we accuse? Or shall we mind the Poets, when they sing thy Tragedy (Prometheus!) who with thy stoln celestial Fire, mix'd with vile Clay, didst mock Heaven's Countenance, and in abusive Likeness of the Immortals mad'st the compound Man; that wretched Mortal, *ill* to himself, and Cause of *Ill* to all. --<sup>43</sup>

Philocles calls the lamentation a "rant" and expresses surprise that such an ugly mood was possible on such a lovely day in the park. Palemon quickly concedes that he does in fact admire the beauty of nature which surrounds them; he excludes man alone from praise. Insofar as mankind can be said to have beauty at all, Palemon credits art rather than nature.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2.109-10.

This limited concession to art was unavoidable, because, as Philocles observes, Palemon's "Genius" was inclined to "Poetry." Yet Palemon does not admire all poetry. Philocles writes, "you acknowledg'd it to be true indeed, what had been observ'd by some late Wits, 'That Gallantry *was of a modern Growth.*' And well it might be so, you thought, without dishonour to the Antients; who understood *Truth* and *Nature* too well, to admit so ridiculous an Invention."<sup>44</sup> Palemon, it seems, deplores "gallantry" for its artificiality and consequently sees gallantry as contrary to his own understanding of nature and truth. He cannot imagine that while opinions are shaped by art, some may be judged as more in accord with nature than others. Clearly, his turn to philosophy had not led him to the judicious practice of "soliloquy" we discussed in Chapter 2.

As Philocles and Palemon spoke, the hour grew late. Their company at the park began to withdraw, perhaps because of the hour and perhaps in part because Palemon's vehement opinions offended them. "The *Beau-monde*," says Philocles, "whom you had been thus severely censuring, drew off apace." It is now evening and the heavenly bodies can be seen.<sup>45</sup> The night brings solitude to the two friends, and Philocles jokes that the rising moon and planets might be "the only proper Company for a Man in [Palemon's] Humour." There in the moonlight, Palemon finds "much Satisfaction of natural Things, and of all Orders of Beautys," with the conspicuous exception of man.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.110.

<sup>45</sup> The time of day seems to be connected to the manner of discourse. In general, soliloquies happen at dawn and rhapsodies at night.

Philocles seems to connect both the contempt Palemon feels for the fashionable world and the admiration he has for nature to the modern philosophy he has imbibed. Philocles writes, "you, who wou'd allow nothing to those fair earthly Luminarys in the Circles which just now we mov'd in; you, Palemon, who seem'd to overlook the Pride of that Theater, began now to look out with Ravishment on this other, and triumph in the new philosophical Scene of Worlds unknown."<sup>46</sup>

Philocles worries that Palemon, who is so sensible when discussing the heavens, has allowed his aversion to human beings to grow into hatred. While Palemon objects that his affection for friends and country remain strong, he cannot ignore the "treachery" and "disorders" hidden in the hearts of men. Palemon is torn between his own experience in common life and the cynical opinions he has learned from modern philosophy. Men may seem to the careless observer to be sociable, he remarks,

but let him stay a-while. Allow him leisure; till he has gain'd a nearer View, and following our dissolv'd Assemblys to their particular *Recesses*, he has the power of seeing 'em in this new Aspect.--Here he may behold those great Men of the Ministry, who not an hour ago in publick appear'd such Friends, now plotting craftily each other's Ruin, with the Ruin of the State it-self, a Sacrifice to their Ambition. Here he may see too those of a softer kind, who knowing not Ambition, follow only *Love*. Yet (Philocles) who wou'd think it?"--

This speech provokes laughter in Philocles, who thinks he has glimpsed the true cause of Palemon's ill mood. Only a man who has been unlucky in love would hold these opinions! Philocles' joke suggests one possible allusion suggested by Palemon's name. Fashionable society is rooted in gallantry and gothic tales. In the "Knight's Tale" of

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<sup>46</sup> *Moralists*, 2.112.



Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* we meet a lovelorn "knyght highte Palamon."<sup>47</sup> Chaucer's Knight himself is also disaffected with gallantry, having himself seen the consequences of knight-errantry while serving as a mercenary in the Crusades. (There is also a Palamon in Dryden's retelling of the tale in his poem "Palamon and Arcite.") We will see another plausible allusion below. Palemon, like the knight Palamon, may be melancholy over an unobtainable love; and like the pilgrim Knight he might be melancholy from a loss of faith in gallantry.

Philocles has broken the mood of Palemon with his good humor and the friends are now able to engage in a more sober discussion--what Shaftesbury commonly calls "cool Reasoning." They inquire into the "nature and Cause of ILL in general: 'Thro' what *Contingency*, what *Chance*; by what fatal *Necessity*, what *Will*, or what *Permission* it came upon the World; or being come once, shou'd still subsist."<sup>48</sup> While most gentlemen would find "this *Inquiry*" too difficult, Philocles finds Palemon to be a man of "close Judgment and Penetration."<sup>49</sup> A footnote to the word "*Inquiry*" refers us to the beginning of the fourth treatise, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*. That beginning, as we explained in chapter 4, sets forth the several logical opinions on the divine. That section of *An Inquiry* was described by Shaftesbury as the "thorny part of

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<sup>47</sup> *The Canterbury Tales*, "The Knight's Tale," line 1014. In the case of the Knight's Tale, the despair of the Knight over gallantry seems to be an allegory for despair over Christianity. (Defending this claim would require another dissertation!)

<sup>48</sup> *Moralists*, 2.113-14.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.114.

our Philosophy," after which the work became "more plain and easy."<sup>50</sup> This difficult inquiry gives Philocles the opportunity to challenge Palemon's opinion holding that nature has erred in making man.

Philocles suggests that good and ill are inseparably mixed in the world, but that given the right perspective one can find it "agreeable enough, in the main." Palemon is willing to say that even storms lend beauty to nature; but as for men, they are a failed mixture of dirt and divine fire much in the way the Prometheus myth suggests.<sup>51</sup> Philocles observes that this is not much of a solution to the problem of evil which worried Palemon. It "explains" evil by moving its cause back one step from the initial question, but the same question can still be asked.

Yet such an account *is* an answer of sorts. Philocles points out that most people can rest satisfied with such an answer, even if the philosopher would recognize it as a "Tale."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, only a philosopher would be such a nuisance as to press the question of "the cause of ill" past the point of easy solutions--at least in mixed company! Philocles recognizes the utility of mythological explanations. He says,

in reality... 'tis not to be imagin'd how serviceable *a Tale* is, to amuse others besides mere Children; and how much easier the Generality of Men are paid in this Paper-coin, than in Sterling Reason. We ought not to laugh so readily at the *Indian* Philosophers, who to satisfy their People how this huge Frame of the World is supported, tell 'em 'tis by an Elephant.--And the Elephant how?--A shreud Question! but which by no means shou'd be answer'd. 'Tis here only that

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<sup>50</sup> *Inquiry*, 2.5.

<sup>51</sup> *Moralists*, 2.114; 2.19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.115.

our *Indian* Philosophers are to blame. They shou'd be contented with *the Elephant*, and go no further. But they have *a Tortoise* in reverse; whose Back, they think, is broad enough. So the Tortoise must bear the new Load: And thus the matter stands worse than before.<sup>53</sup>

Matters are made worse by prying too deeply, it seems, because the most fundamental questions seem capable of an infinite regress. "Heathen Mythologists" were wise enough not to inquire too deeply into such matters, at least not indiscriminately. This is sufficient, says Philocles, for most people—for the "Heathen *Vulgar*," that is--but it is not good enough for philosophers. Shaftesbury shows us that Philocles is aware of the ancient policy toward religion and philosophy as articulated by the Critic. Philosophers had their own "*allegorical, mythological Account of Sacred Things*," but they were careful that the "mysteries" of philosophy were "treated with profound respect, and lay unexpos'd to vulgar eyes."<sup>54</sup>

Philocles suggests that such myths, for philosophers at least, might be understood allegorically. Prometheus, for example, could be a name for "*Chance, Destiny, a plastick Nature*, or an *evil Daemon*; whatever was design'd by it."<sup>55</sup> But until the question is traced back to first principles--principles adequate, that is, to answer for the "OMNIPOTENCE" of what ultimately happens--the work of philosophy is incomplete. In light of this insight, Palemon is willing to confess that, given imperfect knowledge, he is unable to say whether the world would have been better off without certain particular

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.52.

<sup>55</sup> *Moralists*, 2.115-16.

events. He says that "'twas impossible...that Heaven shou'd have acted otherwise than *for the best*. So that even from this Misery and Ill of *Man*, there was undoubtedly some Good arising; something which over-balanc'd all, and made full amends."<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Palemon is not content with this position, in part because Philocles, having suggested it, turns to criticize it. Why should one suspect that things are for the best? He asks Palemon

whether it must not be a very strong philosophical Faith which shou'd persuade one that those dismal Parts you set to view were only the necessary Shades of a fine Piece, to be reckon'd among the Beautys of the Creation: Or whether possibly you might look upon that Maxim as very fit for Heaven, which I was sure you did not approve at all in Mankind; "*To do ILL that GOOD might follow*."<sup>57</sup>

Such a view sounds perverse, of course, to the Christian ears of Palemon, who seems to be attached to the idea of "*Creation*"<sup>58</sup> and is concerned to avoid "Profaneness."<sup>59</sup> Before Philocles can develop this view of ill with examples drawn from Homer,<sup>60</sup> he is stopped short by the disapproving visage of Palemon. Palemon has come to see clearly that Philocles is inclined toward "SCEPTICISM," and consequently he fears that Philocles "adher'[s] to nothing."<sup>61</sup> Palemon is troubled that in debate Philocles seems to be "as

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.116.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 2.114.

<sup>60</sup> "I was going to bring HOMER to witness for the many Troubles of JOVE, the Death of SARPEDON, and the frequent Crosses Heaven met with, from the fatal Sisters." Ibid., 2.117.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

well pleas'd with the Reason on one side, as on the other," and therefore indifferent to the "Success of the Argument."<sup>62</sup>

Philocles confesses this criticism is fair. He has what seem to be Epicurean reasons for his philosophical stance, claiming that

above all things I lov'd Ease; and of all Philosophers those who reason'd most at their ease, and were never angry or disturb'd; as those call'd SCEPTICKS, you own'd, never were. I look'd upon this kind of *Philosophy* as the prettiest, agreeablest, roving Exercise of the Mind, possible to be imagin'd. The other kind, I thought, was painful and laborious; "To keep always in the Limits of *one* Path; to drive always *at a Point*; and hold precisely to what Men, at a venture, call'd THE TRUTH: A *Point*, in all appearance, very unfix'd, and hard to ascertain."<sup>63</sup>

While one might wonder whether the truth is unfixed, few serious men would deny that the truth is hard to ascertain. Palemon suggests that his skepticism harms no one, and makes him agreeable to all more "dogmatical" men, especially on questions of faith. Philocles' skepticism makes him suspicious of his "own Understanding" and adverse to rationalism in general.<sup>64</sup> In short, his skepticism makes him agreeable in political life. He says, "you who are *Rationalists*, and walk by Reason in every thing, pretend to know all things, whilst you believe little or nothing: We for our parts *know* nothing, and *believe* all."<sup>65</sup> This remark is clearly ironical. Philocles suggests that his rationalist skepticism makes remaining silent in the face of questionable opinions easier than it is for the morally grounded--and opinionated--gentleman.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 2.118.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Palemon is offended by this glib posture of Philocles. He worries that these skeptical arguments result in a moral nihilism. Betraying his irritation with a cold voice, he asks Philocles, "whether with that fine Scepticism... [he] made no more distinction between Sincerity and Insincerity *in Actions*, than...between Truth and Falsehood, Right and Wrong, *in Arguments*?"<sup>66</sup> Philocles sees the concern immediately: does his skepticism overthrow all principles, both "*Moral and Divine*?"

Philocles apologizes, confessing that he is guilty of "*Sceptical Misbehaviour*." He offers to make amends by exercising the "*Sceptick Privilege*" of taking up any side of an argument to defend the cause he had previously attacked. He claims no ambition to discuss or defend Christianity--he professes himself "unworthy of such a task." This amusingly ambiguous remark suggests that Philocles follows the practice of the Critic's Author, who "on all occasions submits most willingly, and with full Confidence and Trust, to the Opinions *by Law establish'd*."<sup>67</sup> His concerns are confined to "mere *Philosophy*," and, he says, "my Fancy is only to try what I can muster up thence, to make head against the chief Arguments of *Atheism*, and reestablish what I have offer'd to loosen in the System of *Theism*."<sup>68</sup>

This offer is sufficient to reconcile Palemon to Philocles. A serious concern remains for us as readers, however. We can see that the "Questioning and Doubting"

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.46.

<sup>68</sup> *Moralists*, 2.118.

recommended by "*Academick Philosophy*" lead men to distrust the intentions of philosophers.<sup>69</sup> It is indeed contrary to the genius of the age to postpone answers to moral and theological questions. Yet even in antiquity, philosophical "busy-bodys" were seldom welcome in decent company.<sup>70</sup>

Be this as it may, Palemon is prepared to hear a defense of "THEISM," despite his principled objection to "DEISM" when it is opposed to Christianity.<sup>71</sup> (It is not clear to me whether Shaftesbury takes this to be a genuine distinction but it does serve to distance Philocles from what are perhaps more vulgar contemporary skeptics.) Palemon would like to hear Philocles' defense of theism, but only on the condition that he intends to advance those opinions fundamental to all religion and not merely to amuse himself with the subject.<sup>72</sup> While Palemon wants to hear theism defended, he also wants something else that may or may not be compatible with this desire. "Whatever your Thoughts are, PHILOCLES, I am resolv'd to force 'em from you. You can no longer plead the Unsutableness of the Time or Place to such grave Subjects. The gaudy Scene is over with the Day. Our Company have long since quitted the Field. And the solemn Majesty of such a Night as this, may justly sute with the profoundest Meditation, or most serious Discourse."<sup>73</sup> It is now night and the two friends are alone in the park. Because of the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 2.107.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2.115.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2.119.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

resolution made by Palemon, Philocles finds himself "drawn into the following Vein of *Philosophical Enthusiasm*."<sup>74</sup>

### **Part I, § 3: The Balm of Philosophical Enthusiasm**

Philocles claims that he now understands the melancholy of Palemon better. Palemon is not love-sick in the manner of a gallant pining for an unobtainable girl; he is, instead, melancholy because of "a nobler Love than such as common Beautys inspire."<sup>75</sup> Philocles, raising his voice and adopting a solemn air, describes an ascent by "*knowing*" up the ladder of order and perfection of form. This, Philocles suggests, is Palemon's true love and yearning.

Starting from the claim that Palemon is "well-knowing" of all orders and degrees of beauty, Philocles explains to Palemon that he is attempting to move beyond the particular forms of beauty he knows to grasp beauty in more general forms; "and with a larger Heart, and Mind more comprehensive, you generously seek that which is highest in the kind."<sup>76</sup> A soul such as Palemon's, longing as it does for larger and deeper beauties, cannot rest satisfied with any particular thing. It seeks broader and more complex beauties, first in social relations, in "Communitys, Friendships, Relations, Dutys; and considers by what Harmony of particular Minds the general Harmony is compos'd, and *Commonweal* establish'd." Even this is too parochial for his soul's longing, and soon the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 2.120.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



soul is contemplating the what might be seen as the best sort of human associations as such and the highest human activities. The soul

frames it-self a nobler Object, and with enlarg'd Affection seeks *the Good of Mankind*. It dwells with Pleasure amidst that Reason, and those Orders on which this fair Correspondence and goodly Interest is establish'd. Laws, Constitutions, civil and religious Rites; whatever civilizes or *polishes* rude Mankind; the Sciences and Arts, Philosophy, Morals, Virtue; the flourishing State of human Affairs, and the Perfection of human Nature; these are its delightful Prospects, and this the Charm of Beauty which attracts it.<sup>77</sup>

Still the soul is dissatisfied, however, for in contemplating the things particular to human beings it has again realized a partial beauty. The soul remains "true to its native World and higher Country" and so it must continue its quest for "Order and Perfection; wishing the best, and hoping still to find a just and wise Administration."<sup>78</sup> As the marginal heading here suggests, the native world and higher country for this soul is "the *Whole*," understood as the entire universe. Yet since no real order can be attributed to the Whole without the existence of Mind, "'tis here the generous Mind labours to discover that *healing Cause* by which the Interest of *the Whole* is securely establish'd, the Beauty of Things, and the universal Order happily sustain'd."<sup>79</sup>

This deepest of longings, says Philocles,

is the Labour of your Soul: and This its *Melancholy*, when unsuccessfully pursuing the supreme Beauty, it meets with darkning Clouds which intercept its Sight. Monsters arise, not those from *Lybian* Desarts, but from the Heart of Man more fertile; and with their horrid Aspect cast an unseemly Reflection upon

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 2.120-21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2.121.

NATURE. She, helpless (as she is thought) and working thus absurdly, is contemn'd, the Government of the World arraign'd, and DEITY made void.<sup>80</sup>

Much like the correspondent-friend in *Sensus Communis*,<sup>81</sup> Palemon seems to be one of those "gentlemen of fashion...to whom a natural good genius, or force of good education, has given a sense of what is naturally graceful or becoming."<sup>82</sup> Palemon is himself a man of rank and credit in the fashionable world, "*well-knowing* and experienc'd in all the Degrees and Orders of Beauty, in all the mysterious Charms of the particular Forms."<sup>83</sup> Yet he has lost confidence that the world in the truest sense is orderly or that the Whole is a *kósmos*.

Palemon seems to have come by his *melancholia* honestly. His turn to the philosophy of the modern schools was described as a violent one. To this extent he seems less fortunate than Shaftesbury's friend in *Sensus Communis*. There, Shaftesbury was able to write, "'TIS well for you (my Friend!) that in your Education you have had little to do with the *Philosophy*, or *Philosophers* of our days. A good Poet, and an honest Historian, may afford Learning enough for a *Gentleman*. And such a one, whilst he reads these Authors as his Diversion, will have a truer relish of their Sense, and understand 'em better than a *Pedant*, with all his Labours, and the assistance of his Volumes of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> The character of this correspondent is discussed above in Chapter 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.84.

<sup>83</sup> *Moralists*, 2.121.

Commentators."<sup>84</sup> In light of this concern, it seems unlikely that the opening conversation between Philocles and Palemon, while perhaps out of season in the *beau monde*, took its direction by accident. While Palemon first raised the topic of philosophy, it is Philocles who goes on the offensive against the contemporary state of philosophy in the world; it is he who decries the separation of academic philosophy from a gentleman's education; and he who identifies schoolmen and alchemists as the root of the problem.

Upon hearing this criticism made of modern philosophy, Palemon brought forth his lamentation against nature. When pressed, Palemon admitted that his concern is primarily moral. Despite himself, Palemon is troubled by the moral disorder apparently natural to mankind. Indeed, it is likely that his affection for his friends, family, country, and humanity, make his fears stand in dark relief. It is conceivable (although speculative) that Philocles turns to the "theological" question because he sees that it is at the heart of Palemon's ill humor. Having distinguished between myth and philosophy, Philocles then shows Palemon that even the academic philosopher is sometimes less than edifying, at least insofar as he makes it difficult to settle upon the truth. This, as we have seen, has grave moral implications.

The philosophical enthusiasm of Philocles first presents a diagnosis of the illness troubling Palemon. In summarizing his diagnosis, Philocles admits that "much is alledg'd in answer, to shew why *Nature* errs, and how she came thus impotent and erring

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<sup>84</sup> *Sensus Communis*, 1.170.

from an unerring Hand." <sup>85</sup> But swept along by his enthusiasm, Philocles boldly offers hope.

I deny she errs; and when she seems most ignorant or perverse in her Productions, I assert her even then as wise and provident, as in her goodliest Works. For 'tis not then that Men complain of the World's Order, or abhor the Face of things, when they see various Interests mix'd and interfering; Natures subordinate, of different kinds, oppos'd one to another, and in their different Operations submitted, the higher to the lower. 'Tis on the contrary, from this Order of inferior and superior Things, that we admire the World's Beauty, founded thus *on Contrarietys*: whilst from such various and disagreeing Principles, *a universal Concord* is establish'd.<sup>86</sup>

One might fear that the apparent diversity we encounter in the world is incompatible with the notion of sustained universal order. Shaftesbury directs us in a footnote to consider two passages on "*the World*" at this point.<sup>87</sup> The reader is instructed to consult a footnote to the Critic's "Miscellany V," which offers the reader a philosophic pedigree for Shaftesbury's opinion about concord and contraries. We will glance at these passages briefly, before continuing the speech of Philocles to Palemon.

The footnote in "Miscellany V" cites two passages from Aristotle's *On the Heavens* (or *perí kósmon*, appropriately enough). The passages are combined as follows:

perhaps Nature wants opposites too, and wants to make harmony out of them, not out of similars; as, for instance, she brings the male to the female and not each of these to one of his or her own sex; and she made the first concord by means of opposites, not similars. Art too seems to do this in imitation of nature. For painting, by combining the natures of black and white, yellow and red, makes its representations correspond with their types. Music, uniting sharp and grave notes,

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<sup>85</sup> *Moralists*, 2.121.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.141 in footnotes. *Miscellany V*, 3.162-63 in footnotes.

and long and short syllables, makes one harmony among different sounds. Grammar too, bringing together vowels and consonants, builds her whole art upon them. This is the very point which was given forth by Heraclitus the Obscure, who said, "combine wholes and parts, that which is dispersed and that which is united, that which makes discord and that which is in unison, and out of all comes one and out of one comes all." . . . There is one harmony arising from all the bodies which sound together and circle in the sky, and it springs from one thing and ends in one. We might with correct etymology call the universe an order, but not a disorder. And, just as in a chorus, when the leader has led off, all the band of men (and sometimes women) joins in, making by combination of different voices, higher and lower, one harmony in unison, so it is also in the case of the Deity who controls the universe.<sup>88</sup>

This passage makes several points useful for our purposes. Here we see Shaftesbury begin to establish an analogy between art and nature. Earlier Palemon feared that, in the case of human beings, art alone contributed whatever was of beauty in human beings. The passages of Aristotle suggest, to the contrary, that art, found in music, painting, and graceful speaking, imitates nature when it combines contraries into a harmonious whole. Aristotle suggests for this reason we can call the universe an order but not a disorder.<sup>89</sup> The end of the quotation shifts the analogy, attributing to "the Deity" activity analogous to the choral leader.

According to Philocles' speech, Nature achieves order by subordinating its parts to the greater Whole; as Aristotle says, "nature wants opposites too, and wants to make harmony out of them, not out of similars"--at least "perhaps" it does. Thus can Philocles account for "those Seeming Blemishes cast upon Nature."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.163.

<sup>89</sup> As quoted by Shaftesbury, "kósmos d'etýmos tò sýmpan, all'oukh akosmían onomásais án."

<sup>90</sup> *Moralists*, 2.122-23.

This philosophical enthusiasm draws the admiration of Palemon, who wonders how Philocles came to change his character and speak so eloquently; surely such thoughts "have some Foundation" in Philocles. Philocles replies that

had [it] been my fortune to have met you the other day, just at my Return out of the Country from *a Friend*, whose Conversation had in one day or *two* made such an Impression on me, that I shou'd have suted you to a Miracle. You wou'd have thought indeed that I had been cur'd of my *Scepticism* and Levity, so as never to have rally'd more, at that wild rate, on any Subject, much less on these which are so serious.<sup>91</sup>

Palemon expresses regret not to have met Philocles before he lost those impressions. Philocles denies he has lost them; he remarks "I had not so lost 'em neither, as not easily, you saw, to revive 'em on occasion; were I not afraid."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, he has just shown both Palemon and the reader that he has philosophical enthusiasm at his ready disposal (and for reasons we shall see, he *cannot* lose it). This, of course, makes his claim to be afraid for both Palemon and himself surprising. Philocles explains: "for tho I was like to be perfectly cur'd of my *Scepticism*; 'twas by what I thought worse, downright *Enthusiasm*. You never knew a more agreeable Enthusiast!"

Philocles seems to be of the opinion that enthusiasm is an antidote which is itself easily abused. The Critic expresses similar concerns when he discusses enthusiasm in the second "Miscellany." He writes:

as all Affections have their Excess, and require Judgment and Discretion to moderate and govern them; so this high and noble Affection, which raises Man to Action, and is his Guide in Business as well as Pleasure, requires a steady Rein

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 2.123.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

and strict Hand over it. All *Moralists*, worthy of any Name, have recogniz'd the Passion; tho' among these the wisest have prescrib'd Restraint, press'd *Moderation*, and to all Tyro's in Philosophy forbid the forward Use of Admiration, Rapture, or Extasy, even in the Subjects they esteem'd the highest, and most *divine*. They knew very well that the first Motion, Appetite, and Ardour of the Youth in general towards Philosophy and Knowledge, depended chiefly on this Turn of Temper: Yet were they well appriz'd, withal, That in the Progress of this Study, as well as in the affairs of Life, the florid Ideas and exalted Fancy of this kind became the Fuel of many incendiary Passions; and that, in religious Concerns particularly, the Habit of Admiration and contemplative Delight, wou'd, by over-Indulgence, too easily mount into high *Fanaticism*, or degenerate into abject *Superstition*.<sup>93</sup>

The danger of even philosophical enthusiasm is a recurring theme in "Miscellaneous Reflections." For example, during the discussion of self-sufficiency and its dependence on the proper œconomy of the passions in "Miscellany IV," the Critic offers an extended footnote elaborating his concern over excessive passions of any sort, including the more laudatory, more sublime passions.<sup>94</sup> The footnotes offer quotations from Epictetus which reproach the passions. The Critic also cites Horace's remark that "the wise man must be called mad, the fair man unfair, if he seek even virtue too keenly." Most interestingly for our purposes here, we read the following:

Nor was this Prohibition of the *wondering* or *admiring* Habit, in early Students, peculiar to *one* kind of Philosophy alone. It was common to many; however the Reason and Account of it might differ, in one Sect from the other. The Pythagoreans sufficiently check'd their Tyro's, by silencing them so long on their first Courtship to *Philosophy*. And tho' *Admiration*, in the Peripatetick Sense, as above-mention'd, may be justly call'd the inclining Principle or first Motive to PHILOSOPHY; yet this Mistress, when once espous'd, teaches us *to admire*, after a different manner from what we did before.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.24.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.123-24.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.124.

In this passage we see confirmation of our suspicion (discussed in Chapter 2) that philosophic discretion protects the philosopher from reproach but also serves an important pedagogical purpose. Once again we Shaftesbury directs our attention away from the sublime toward the consideration of natural moral life. This is the necessary prelude to any philosophical progress. As he writes in *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*,

methinks, my Lord, it wou'd be well for us, if before we ascended into the higher Regions of *Divinity*, we wou'd vouchsafe to descend a little into *our-selves*, and bestow some poor Thoughts upon plain honest *Morals*. When we had once look'd into our-selves, and distinguish'd well the nature of our own Affections, we shou'd probably be fitter Judges of *the Divineness* of a Character, and discern better what Affections were sutable or unsutable to *a perfect Being*. We might then understand how to *love* and *praise*, when we had acquir'd some consistent Notion of what was *laudable* or *lovely*. Otherwise we might chance to do God little Honour, when we intended him the most. For 'tis hard to imagine what Honour can arise to *the DEITY* from the Praises of Creatures, who are unable to discern what is *praise-worthy* or *excellent* in their own kind.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, Palemon reproaches Philocles for speaking of his friend so carelessly. "Nor," he adds, "shou'd I, perhaps, judg that to be *Enthusiasm* which you so freely term so. I have a strong suspicion that you injure him. Nor can I be satisfy'd till I hear further of that serious Conversation for which you tax him as *Enthusiastick*."<sup>97</sup>

Palemon is now very eager to hear about this friend and he worries that Philocles is unfair to call the friend's cure for skepticism "enthusiasm." Philocles admits that his friend's enthusiasm is not vulgar. To the contrary,

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<sup>96</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.26.

<sup>97</sup> *Moralists*, 2.124.



all was serene, soft, and harmonious. The manner of it was more after the pleasing Transports of those antient *Poets* you are often charm'd with, than after the fierce unsociable way of modern *Zealots*; those starch'd gruff Gentlemen, who guard Religion as Bullys do a Mistress, and give us the while a very indifferent Opinion of their Lady's Merit, and their own Wit, by adoring what they neither allow to be inspected by others, nor care themselves to examine in a fair light. But here I'll answer for it; there was nothing of Disguise or Paint. All was fair, open, and genuine, as Nature herself. 'Twas *Nature* he was in love with: 'Twas *Nature* he sung. And if any-one might be said to have a *natural* Mistress, my Friend certainly might, whose Heart was thus engag'd. But Love, I found, was every-where the same. And tho the Object here was very fine, and the Passion it created very noble; yet *Liberty*, I thought, was finer than all: And I who never car'd to engage in other Loves of the least continuance, was the more afraid, I told you, of this which had such a power with my poor *Friend*, as to make him appear the perfectest Enthusiast in the World, *Ill-humour* only excepted. For this was singular in him, "That tho he had all of the *Enthusiast*, he had nothing of the *Bigot*. He heard every thing with Mildness and Delight; and bore with me when I treated all his Thoughts as visionary; and when, Sceptick-like, I unravel'd all his Systems."<sup>98</sup>

Several important things come to light in this speech. Just as Shaftesbury himself appealed to the Muses of the ancient poets at the opening of *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, so Philocles now describes the "transports of those antient *Poets*" loved by Palemon. This laudable form of enthusiasm is again contrasted with the zealotry of modern churchmen. Philocles then vouches for the love of his friend, saying "here I'll answer for it; there was nothing of Disguise or Paint. All was fair, open, and genuine, as Nature herself."

Yet it must be remarked that Philocles remains a skeptic despite his marvelous friend's powerful charms. Indeed, Philocles says that "love, I found, was every-where the same. And tho the Object here was very fine, and the Passion it created very noble; yet

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

*Liberty*, I thought, was finer than all." Philocles prefers the love of liberty to this transporting love of nature. Only the noble object described by his friend could have tempted Philocles to reconsider his skepticism, for the friend's strong enthusiasm was not bigoted: he "heard every thing with Mildness and Delight; and bore with me when I treated all his Thoughts as visionary; and when, Sceptick-like, I unravel'd all his Systems." Philocles seems to suggest that the counter-arguments he himself presented were sufficient to challenge the visionary systems of his friend if not refute them.

We will have to see whether or not we agree with Philocles, but Palemon is enthralled. He insists that Philocles relate the full two-day conversation. (Philocles equivocates on the length of his visit, saying at one point he spent "one day or *two*" in the country and then asserting "*two* days," and again, "*two* philosophical Days."<sup>99</sup>) Philocles reminded Palemon "again and again" that he knew not "the danger of this *philosophical Passion*." Philocles writes that he moved forward reluctantly, and that Palemon listened at his own hazard.<sup>100</sup> Needless to say, such warnings were ineffective and perhaps they incited Palemon's eagerness all the more. Finally Philocles asks for a respite, offering "to turn *Writer*, and draw up the Memoirs of those *two* philosophical Days; beginning with what had pass'd this *last* Day between our-selves."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.123 and 24.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.124.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.125.

### **Preliminary Reflections**

However persuasive Philocles' friend Theocles will seem, he was insufficiently persuasive to have convinced Philocles. This seems to be one reason that Shaftesbury committed his literary anachronism. As readers, we enter the conversation between the "academic skeptic" and the "theist" knowing that the skeptic remains skeptical. We can see, however, that Palemon, whose *melancholia* seems to have been understood by Philocles, is open to the possibility of being persuaded by Theocles. To that extent, at least, Philocles seems to have lived up to his name by proving his generous friendship toward Palemon.

Palemon himself, who may be named in part for the melancholy lover of Arcite, has found sufficient hope in the enthusiastic speech presented by Philocles in §1 to ask for the whole account of Philocles' recent trip to the country. As we shall soon see, Palemon's name may have an additional clue both to his identity and the way to approach the remainder of *The Moralists*.

### **The Moralists, Part II**

The plot of Part II is as follows. Section 1 finds Philocles alone in his apartment, recollecting his recent visit with Theocles and we are soon transported to that scene. After meeting Theocles in the fields, Philocles and his friend converse until they are interrupted by the announcement that company has arrived. In section 2, the friends and company share dinner. Conversation centers on the relationship between civil and moral liberty. Philocles upsets one of the guests, and Theocles is drawn into the conversation to

defend his friend. Section 3 takes up the relationship between religion and virtue, which acts as an "Apology" on behalf of Philocles. At the insistence of two gentleman-guests, Theocles offers in Section 4 what he calls a "*Philosophical Sermon*." Philocles, according to an agreement, then advances objections to the sermon; Theocles and Philocles are led to discuss human nature as it presents itself in ordinary life. This leads to a discussion of the state of nature, which draws the older gentleman into the conversation. Theocles then advances the argument that man is by nature social. The two guests dominate the conversation in section 5, which brings Part II to a close; Theocles remains silent while Philocles and the two guests discuss matters pertaining to revelation and miracles.

#### **Part II, § 1: Philocles' Soliloquy**

At the end of Part I, Philocles asks Palemon to delay his gratification while Philocles turns writer. Given the extensive attention given by the *Characteristicks* to authorship, writing, self-knowledge, and literary form, it is difficult not to be struck by this request. As we have seen at the opening of this chapter, the Critic of *Miscellaneous Reflections* calls the judgment of Shaftesbury into question when he turns to Volume II of the *Characteristicks*. Shaftesbury, "by giving us a Work or two in form, after the regular manner of Composition," has legitimately opened himself up to the art of Criticism explored at length in *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*. The Critic told us to look for "systematical, didactick and perceptive" structure in *The Moralists*, and we have tried to

follow his advice so far. It is useful at this point to revisit a passage quoted more fully above. In "Miscellany V" the Critic makes the following remarks about *The Moralists*:

as for the Characters, and Incidents, they are neither wholly feign'd (*says he*) nor wholly true: but according to the Liberty allow'd in the way of DIALOGUE, the principal Matters are founded upon Truth; and the rest as near resembling as may be. 'Tis *a Sceptick* recites: and the Hero of the Piece passes for *an Enthusiast*. If a perfect Character be wanting; 'tis the same Case here, as with the Poets in some of their best Pieces. And this surely is a sufficient Warrant for the Author of a PHILOSOPHICAL ROMANCE.--Thus our Author himself; who to conceal, however, his strict Imitation of the antient *poetick* DIALOGUE, has prefix'd an auxiliary Title to his Work, and given it the Surname of RHAPSODY.<sup>102</sup>

We wondered earlier what it would mean for a dialogue to be "neither wholly feign'd...nor wholly true: but according to the Liberty allow'd in the way of DIALOGUE, the principal Matters are founded upon Truth." There is of course an obvious way in which the entire *Moralists* is feigned: Palemon, Philocles, and Theocles are characters. We know, however, that stories can tell the truth, albeit through fiction.<sup>103</sup> In the case of this work, however, it may be more complicated still. The Critic tells us "'tis *a Sceptick* recites: and the Hero of the Piece passes for *an Enthusiast*." This seems fairly straightforward, for clearly Philocles recites, and he is a skeptic. This apparently leaves enthusiastic Theocles as the hero; certainly this is the common view.<sup>104</sup> But are

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<sup>102</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.175 in footnote.

<sup>103</sup> "We have no regard to the Character or Genius of our *Author*: nor are so far curious, as to observe how able he is in the Judgment of *Facts*, or how ingenious in the Texture of his *Lyes*. For *Facts* unably related, tho with the greatest Sincerity, and good Faith, may prove the worst sort of Deceit: And mere *Lyes*, judiciously compos'd, can teach us the Truth of Things, beyond any other manner." *Soliloquy*, 1.212-13.

<sup>104</sup> For example, according to Pat Rogers, Theocles "represents Shaftesbury." Pat Rogers, "Shaftesbury and the Aesthetics of Rhapsody," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 12, no. 3 (1972). John Hayman writes that "a kinship between Theocles and Shaftesbury is indicated by the relationship between several of Theocles's speeches and passages in the *Philosophical Regimen*." John G. Hayman, "Shaftesbury and the Search for a

we to think that Theocles only *passes* for an enthusiast? We have seen Shaftesbury tell us that in good dialogue, we find "characters preserv'd thro'out." Yet, strangely enough, the Critic also remarks of *The Moralists* that "if a perfect Character be wanting; 'tis the same Case here, as with the Poets in some of their best Pieces."<sup>105</sup>

How is it that a perfect character could be wanting? In *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury explains the "philosophical *Hero*" of Plato's Socratic "*Mimes*" or "*Dialogues*" like this:

the Philosophical *Hero* of these Poems, whose Name they carry'd both in their Body and Front, and whose Genius and Manner they were made to represent, was in himself *a perfect Character*; yet, in some respects, so veil'd, and in a Cloud, that to the unattentive Surveyor he seem'd often to be very different from what he really was: and this chiefly by reason of a certain exquisite and refin'd Raillery which belong'd to his Manner, and by virtue of which he cou'd treat the highest Subjects, and those of the commonest Capacity both together, and render 'em explanatory of each other. So that in this Genius of writing, there appear'd both *the heroick* and *the simple, the tragick, and the comick Vein*.<sup>106</sup>

Here the work of concern does not bear the name of a particular character; it is called *The Moralists* and not *Theocles* or *Palemon*. Shaftesbury does not leave us in doubt as to whether he considered Plato a genuine poet as well as a philosopher; he remarks in a footnote to a discussion of Plato that "his *Dialogues* were real POEMS."

Socrates is a perfect character despite the fact that he is easily misunderstood.

The "unattentive Surveyor" of Plato may not understand the significance of Socratic

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Persona," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 10, no. 3 (1970): 498. For G. Gabrielle Starr, Theocles is "Shaftesbury's *altera vox*." G. Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations : Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 84.

<sup>105</sup> *Miscellany V*, 2.175. (Quoted above on page 316.)

<sup>106</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.121.

irony and may be confused by the "veil'd" presentation. So too Theocles is easily misunderstood to those readers who are not alert to the deeper meaning of raillery for Shaftesbury. We must continue to read for the full art of dialogue to show itself in *The Moralists*.

**Part II, § 1: Philocles' Soliloquy and the Fields of Arcadia**

Philocles opens the next part of *The Moralists* with an odd prelude. He writes to Palemon that he awoke the next morning to find himself "under positive Engagements of proceeding in the same philosophical way, without intermission, and upon harder terms than ever."<sup>107</sup> His work was harder for want of a companion to converse with. Palemon writes: "I was now *alone*; confin'd to my Closet; oblig'd to meditate by my-self; and reduc'd to the hard Circumstances of *an Author*, and *Historian*, in the most difficult Subject."<sup>108</sup>

Fortunately for Philocles, he receives some sort of divine inspiration to begin the project. "But here, methought, propitious Heaven, in some manner, assisted me. For if *Dreams* were, as Homer teaches, sent from the Throne of Jove; I might conclude I had a favourable one, of the *true* sort, towards the *Morning-light*; which, as I recollected myself, gave me a clear and perfect Idea of what I desir'd so earnestly to bring back to my Memory."<sup>109</sup> (Presumably this all happens before he begins to write at all.)

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<sup>107</sup> *Moralists*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.125.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

Philocles proceeds to describe the true dream he had. "I found my-self transported to a distant Country, which presented a pompous *rural Scene*. It was a Mountain not far from the Sea, its Brow adorn'd with antient Wood, and at its foot a River and well-inhabited Plain: beyond which the Sea appearing, clos'd the Prospect." He recognizes this pastoral scene as the place he talked with his friend Theocles on his second day in the country. So vivid is his recollection that he calls out to his friend, thus breaking his reverie. Nevertheless, writes Philocles,

so powerful was the Impression of my Dream, and so perfect the Idea rais'd in me, of the Person, Words, and Manner of my Friend, that I cou'd now fancy myself philosophically inspir'd, as that Roman *Sage* by his *AEgeria*, and invited, on this occasion, to try my *Historical Muse*. For justly might I hope for such Assistance in behalf of Theocles, who so lov'd *the Muses*, and was, I thought, no less belov'd by them.<sup>110</sup>

Presumably the Roman sage alluded to in this passage is Numa Pompilius, who Livy tells us set out to instill a fear of the gods in the Roman people.<sup>111</sup> "Because he could not win them over without some miraculous fiction," we learn, "he pretended that he met by night with the goddess Aegeria: it was at her prompting, he claimed, that he was instituting religious rites that would please the gods most."<sup>112</sup> In comparing himself with Numa, Philocles seems to suggest that there is an aspect of deception in his own presentation. Numa, we learn from Livy, continued to visit his goddess alone, in a

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 2.126.

<sup>111</sup> Livy History book 1, chapter 19

<sup>112</sup> Livy, *The Rise of Rome : Books One to Five*, trans. T. James Luce (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24-25.



shaded and private sacred grove fed by an endless fountain.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, I want to claim that Philocles is about to present us with his own miraculous fiction, having conjured for himself a visit from the Muses for the sake of Palemon. Shaftesbury may be following the custom of the ancient poet, who, wanting to appear as a favorite of the Muses, "might with probability feign an Extasy, tho he really felt none: and supposing it to have been mere Affectation, it wou'd look however like something natural, and cou'd not fail of pleasing."<sup>114</sup> Certainly the charm would be unsuccessful if Palemon were to take the ecstasy to be a contrivance. We have already seen that Philocles believes that paper-coin tales are more serviceable for the "generality of men" than "sterling reason."<sup>115</sup> He has also shown himself capable of telling fables<sup>116</sup> and of portraying philosophical enthusiasm despite his continuing skepticism.<sup>117</sup>

A similar point can be drawn from Ovid's mention of Numa in *Fasti*, Book III, lines 263-4 and 273-6: "here is a lake in the valley of Aricia, inclosed by a dark wood, sanctified by religious awe...With indistinct murmur glides a pebbly stream: oftentimes, but in scanty draughts, have I drunk thence. It is Egeria who supplies the water; a Goddess

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<sup>113</sup> Juvenal's third satire makes reference to this sacred grove of Numa. Apparently Aegeria had since been "improved" past recognition; the Arcadian fields and shepherds are gone!

<sup>114</sup> *Enthusiasm*, 1.4.

<sup>115</sup> *Moralists*, 2.115.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.107.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.123.

pleasing to the Muses; she was the wife and the counsellor of Numa."<sup>118</sup> (Similar suggestions are found in Plutarch's *Life of Numa*.) Here we see the poet Ovid drinking from the same fountain that inspired Numa and was kept flowing by Numa's nymph wife. In the words of Molly Masco-Pranger, both "Plutarch and Ovid...prepare readers to see Numa in poetic terms, and particularly encourage them to read Numa's relationship with Egeria as akin to divine inspiration evoked by the Hesiodic model."<sup>119</sup> As Numa is inspired by Aegeria, so is Ovid. So too is Philocles.

Philocles, then, offers us a few hints to guide our interpretation of his conversation. He takes us back to the "*original rural Scene*" and the first morning of his visit with Theocles, "that *Heroick* Genius, the Companion and Guide of my first Thoughts in these profounder Subjects."<sup>120</sup>

Having been prepared by *Soliloquy* to read *The Moralists*, it is difficult not to recollect the advice we received on the proper way to philosophize. We recall from

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<sup>118</sup> Ovid, *The Fasti, Tristia, Pontic Epistles, Ibis, and Halieuticon of Ovid*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: G. Bell, 1903), 99-101.

*vallis Aricinae silva praecinctus opaca  
est lacus, antiqua religione sacer;*

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*defluit incerto lapidosus murmure rivus:  
saepe, sed exiguis haustibus, inde bibi.  
Egeria est quae praebet aquas, dea grata Camenis:  
illa Numae coniunx consiliumque fuit.*

<sup>119</sup> Molly Pasco-Pranger, "A Varronian Vatic Numa?: Ovid's *Fasti* and Plutarch's *Life of Numa*," in *Clio and the Poets: Augustan Poetry and the Traditions of Ancient Historiography*, ed. D. S.; Nelis Levene, Damien (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 296.

<sup>120</sup> *Moralists*, 2.126.

Chapter 2 that in *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury invoked the image of a "*Daemon, Genius, Angel, or Guardian-Spirit*" whom we could invite into "secret Conferences, by which alone he cou'd be enabled to become our *Advisor and Guide*."<sup>121</sup> It is by this art of soliloquy that a man can come to know himself. By dividing himself into two persons, a man can "exert this generous Faculty, and raise himself *a Companion*; who being fairly admitted into Partnership, wou'd quickly mend his Partner, and set his affairs on a right foot."<sup>122</sup> Shaftesbury has recommended this practice "especially in the case of *Authors*." He writes:

I wou'd therefore advise our *Probationer*, upon his first Exercise, to retire into some thick Wood, or rather take the Point of some high Hill; where, besides the Advantage of looking about him for Security, he wou'd find the Air perhaps more rarefy'd, and sutable to the Perspiration requir'd, especially in the case of a *Poetical Genius*.<sup>123</sup>

Palemon's philosophical discourse was out of season in part because he had not practiced sufficiently in solitude. Philocles, however, finds himself transported to a "pompous *rural Scene*," complete with an "antient Wood." All "great Wits" practice soliloquy and are known "for their great Loquacity by themselves, and their profound Taciturnity in Company."<sup>124</sup> In what well may be a clue for thinking about Shaftesbury's dialogue, *Soliloquy* tells us that in the case of "the *Moralists or Philosophers*," soliloquy is used in

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<sup>121</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.106.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.107.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.101.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.101-02.

solitude to make their thoughts "speak out distinctly."<sup>125</sup> Shaftesbury agrees with Socrates that thinking is a conversation the soul has with itself.<sup>126</sup> We can expect that the philosophers of *The Moralists* will follow this rule, especially those philosophers who are also authors.

Contrary to the claim of Philocles to Palemon that he wanted an agreeable companion to converse with, Philocles "alone" and "oblig'd to meditate" is likely to follow the regimen of soliloquy. *The Moralists* presents itself emphatically as a written work rather than a recorded conversation. (This seems true even stipulating that we know it to be "fictional.") It is difficult to imagine that Philocles, having turned author, would fail to heed the common practice of great wits. Philocles, too, has a "companion and guide" even in his solitude named Theocles.

In *The Moralists*, the philosophical hero of the work follows the method of soliloquy and divides himself in two. We recall that Shaftesbury writes in *Soliloquy* that:

this was, among the Antients, that celebrated *Delphick* Inscription, Recognize Your-self: which was as much as to say, *Divide your-self*, or *Be Two*. For if the Division were rightly made, all *within* wou'd of course, they thought, be rightly understood, and prudently manag'd. Such Confidence they had in this Home-*Dialect* of Soliloquy. For it was accounted the peculiar of Philosophers and wise Men, to be able *to hold themselves in Talk*. And it was their Boast on this account, "That they were never less *alone*, than when *by themselves*." A Knave, they thought, cou'd never be *by himself*. Not that his Conscience was always sure of giving him disturbance; but he had not, they suppos'd, so much Interest with himself, as to exert this generous Faculty, and raise himself *a Companion*; who

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 2.107.

<sup>126</sup> Theaetetus 189e.

being fairly admitted into Partnership, wou'd quickly mend his Partner, and set his Affairs on a right foot.<sup>127</sup>

When he retires to his apartment to write, Philocles too holds himself in talk. He allows Palemon and other readers to eavesdrop on his thought, that is, the internal conversation between 'Philo' and 'Theo' through his literary device or "machine." (He might be said to make one into two in the same way he reckons the days.) Here, then, we can see why the Critic offered his strange remark that "if a perfect Character be wanting; 'tis the same Case here, as with the Poets in some of their best Pieces." A perfect character in one sense is wanting because we are presented with two philosophers rather than one; in another sense, the matter is exactly the same as in a Platonic dialogue, where the hero was "in himself *a perfect Character*; yet, in some respects "so veil'd, and in a Cloud, that to the unattentive Surveyor he seem'd often to be very different from what he really was."<sup>128</sup> In the case of Philocles' soliloquy, we have one soul having a conversation with itself--that is, thinking.

**"The Muses love alternating verses."<sup>129</sup>**

Philocles finds Theocles "with his belov'd *Mantuan* Muse, roving in the Fields."<sup>130</sup> Seeing Philocles approach, Theocles' book "vanish'd." Philocles is naturally curious to know what Theocles was reading, asking whether it is "of a secret kind" he

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<sup>127</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.107.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.121.

<sup>129</sup> "amant alterna Carmenae." *Eclogue* 3, ln 59

<sup>130</sup> *Moralists*, 2.126.

was not allowed to see. Theocles shows him the book, "his Poet," asking whether Philocles expected something more mysterious.

Oddly enough, Philocles does not tell us exactly what Theocles was reading. We do know it is something by Virgil, the beloved "Mantuan MUSE." Theocles suggests that "diviner poets" are best appreciated by contemplative men, who have retired from the world to think. What is true of books is also true of thought. Theocles adds, "that not only the best Authors, but the best Company, require this seasoning. Society it-self cannot be rightly enjoy'd without some Abstinence and separate Thought."<sup>131</sup> We are left with the impression that Theocles was engaged in his own private devotional, communing with Virgil or perhaps a "genius" of his own.

I believe that this brief exchange, combined with another allusion later in the dialogue, offers us important clues about *The Moralists*. The second allusion occurs on the second morning of Philocles' visit to the country. Theocles again follows his custom of taking a solitary morning walk, which Philocles describes as "his *Hours* and *Exercises*."<sup>132</sup> Philocles jokes that he might need a nymph to join forces against Theocles, "in the manner your belov'd Poet makes the *Nymph* AEGle join with his two Youths, in forcing the God Silenus to sing to 'em."<sup>133</sup> The allusion is to Virgil's sixth

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 2.127.

<sup>132</sup> This is, presumably, a reference to the Divine Hours of the Anglican Church (and Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the *horæ diurnæ* or Ὠρολόγιον); and the meditations or exercises of Aurelius.

<sup>133</sup> *Moralists*, 2.192.

*Eclogue*.<sup>134</sup> In the sixth *Eclogue*, Silenus sings a cosmological song, tracing the world from its origin in void and matter. Theocles, confirming the reference, remarks, "do you expect I shou'd imitate the Poet's God you mention'd, and sing 'The Rise of Things from Atoms; the Birth of Order from Confusion; and the Origin of *Union, Harmony, and Concord*, from the sole Powers of Chaos, and blind *Chance*?'"<sup>135</sup> Shaftesbury seems to recognize, that Virgil, at least, presents a view where order does indeed arise from chaos.

Given the pastoral setting of the conversations between Theocles and Philocles, the allusions to Virgil in general and to the *Eclogues* in particular, the reader is invited to think more carefully about the relationship between Virgil and *The Moralists*. We have seen already that Philocles takes us to a pastoral scene that seems more fabulous than real.<sup>136</sup> Many points could be made about this, but for our purposes I note the following. In Virgil's third *Eclogue* we are presented with a singing contest between two shepherds (Menalcas and Damoetas).<sup>137</sup> While one might be tempted to see the contest as little more than comic bickering, at least to the shepherds it concerns "not small things" (*res est non parva*).<sup>138</sup> After dickering about the appropriate prize for the best singer, the shepherds appoint a judge to decide the contest, another shepherd named Palaemon.

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<sup>134</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues ; Georgics ; Aeneid, I-VI*, 61 ff.

<sup>135</sup> *Moralists*, 2.192. The poet's god, Silenus, is also a classical symbol for Socrates, following the comparison by Alcibiades in the Symposium.

<sup>136</sup> I intend as a future project to examine the role Virgil's "Arcadia" as described by Bruno Snell informs Shaftesbury's return to nature. Snell, "Arcadia: The Discovery of a Spiritual Landscape."

<sup>137</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues ; Georgics ; Aeneid, I-VI*, 37 ff.

<sup>138</sup> *Eclogues*,

While Shaftesbury's Palemon is spelled differently than Virgil's Palaemon, it is difficult to overlook the allusion. (I am untroubled by the spelling partly because translation from classical languages into English involves choices. For example, in the earliest English translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Arthur Golding renders the Latin name Palaemon into English as Palemon.<sup>139</sup>) The shepherds begin their amoebic song with a responsorial pair of couplets, each appealing to a very different god:

**DAMOETAS:** With Jove my song [or the Muse--*Musae*] begins; of Jove all things are full; He makes the earth fruitful; he cares for my verses.

**MENALCAS:** And me Phoebus loves; Phoebus always finds with me the presents he loves, laurels and sweet-blushing hyacinths.

This exchange is interesting because it seems to anticipate the inclinations of the interlocutors in *The Moralists*. Damoetas appeals to Jupiter, generally regarded as the god of justice and orderly nature. In identifying Apollo with the name Phoebus, Menalcas reminds the reader of the god of light and reason.<sup>140</sup> So too, Theocles will argue for an orderly cosmos, while the skeptical Philocles will present a challenge.

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<sup>139</sup> Thus "Adnuit oranti Neptunus et abstulit illis,/ quod mortale fuit, maiestatemque verendam inposit nomenque simul faciemque novavit/ Leucothoeque deum cum matre **Palaemona** dixit," becomes "Leucothoe was the mothers name, **Palemon** was the sonne./ The Thebane Ladies following hir as fast as they could runne,/ Did of hir feete perceive the print upon the utter stone." *Met.* 4.542. Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses : The Arthur Golding Translation, 1567*, ed. John Frederick; Bate Nims, Jonathan, trans. Arthur Golding, 1st Paul Dry Books ed. (Philadelphia: P. Dry Books, 2000).

<sup>140</sup> According to John Henderson, the contest begins with "invocations to the greatest gods of the cosmos and of poetry." John Henderson, "Virgil's Third Eclogue: How Do You Keep an Idiot in Suspense?," *The Classical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1989): 213. While he is more interested in the historical referents in the third Eclogue, John Savage indicates that these couplets take as their "definite" and "opening" theme Jupiter and Apollo respectively. John J. H. Savage, "The Art of the Third Eclogue of Vergil (55-111)," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 89 (1958): 143.



These competing perspectives are called ‘hypotheses’ in *The Moralists*, and seem to refer to fundamental and mutually exclusive opinions about the nature of the Whole. In the third *Eclogue*, the shepherds’ contest ends with Palaemon awarding prizes to *both* shepherds. Palaemon says to the shepherds, "it is not for me to settle so close a contest between you. You deserve the heifer, and so does he."<sup>141</sup> As we have already suggested, *The Moralists* ends rather abruptly. While the reader is left with the initial impression that Theocles has persuaded Philocles to accept his enthusiastic appeals for an harmonious Whole, the structure of the dialogue leaves considerable doubt. We do not learn how Shaftesbury’s Palaemon responds to the dialogue between Theocles and Philocles. The reader is left to decide the dispute for himself, or at least to continue to wrestle with the questions that emerge. Shaftesbury presents his case in such a way that the arguments of Theocles appear very attractive and perhaps more likely than the alternatives. Yet Shaftesbury is himself too honest a philosopher to choose either side.

The remainder of section 1 of Part II concerns the relationship of happiness or the good to pleasure. The conversation arises from a remark by Theocles that "all grows insipid, dull, and tiresome, without the help of some Intervals of Retirement."<sup>142</sup> Theocles asks whether or not Philocles agrees that even the best lovers seek distance from their beloved for periods of solitude. This is true for lovers, and all the more so for the man who must live in "that common World of mix'd and undistinguish'd Company."

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<sup>141</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues ; Georgics ; Aeneid, I-VI*, 49.

<sup>142</sup> *Moralists*, 2.127.

Theocles seems to suggest that solitude is necessary for restoration when he suffers from refractory boredom. Philocles responds to this argument of Theocles without offering his own opinion. He says:

by your Rule, said I, Theocles, there shou'd be no such thing as *Happiness* or *Good* in Life, since every Enjoyment wears out so soon; and growing painful, is diverted by some *other* thing; and that again by some *other*; and so on. I am sure, if Solitude serves as a Remedy or Diversion to any thing in the World, there is nothing which may not serve as Diversion to Solitude; which wants it more than any thing besides. And thus there can be no *Good* which is regular or constant. Happiness is a thing out of the way, and only to be found in wandring.<sup>143</sup>

Theocles infers from this little speech that Philocles holds that "*nothing can be good but what is constant*," and in Theocles' own opinion this is a just maxim.<sup>144</sup> Philocles responds that, sadly, while the objects of good may remain constant throughout a man's life, a man's humor changes with age, temper, passions, thoughts, and conversations. If this notion of the good is true, then Philocles will have to conclude that all things in life are changing and vulnerable to "the same common Fate of Satiety and Disgust."

Theocles points out that Philocles is not satisfied with "the current Notion...That our real *Good* is PLEASURE."<sup>145</sup> Philocles assents to this, adding that he would be more satisfied if the current defenders of this hedonism could say more about what pleasures are. As it stands, contemporary hedonists fail to distinguish pleasure from the will. On their account, men are little more than animals responding to the immediate stimuli of

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 2.128.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

pleasure. Such creature-comfort, while arguably a genuine kind of pleasure, hardly deserves the name good or happiness.<sup>146</sup> A footnote to his reply directs our attention to a similar concern as it arises in *Soliloquy*. There we encounter the claim of some that men are governed by "*Interest*." This claim, however, amounts to equating will with fancy; it is a confession that human life is essentially aimless.<sup>147</sup> "Can I then be suppos'd *to hit*," Shaftesbury asks, "when I know not, in reality, so much as how *to aim*?"<sup>148</sup>

By following this thread we see that Philocles does not necessarily object to what is naturally pleasant. He believes, rather, that by claiming the good to be *whatever* pleases a man, modern philosophers undermine our ability to connect "the *Opinion of the Good* to the Possessions of the MIND."<sup>149</sup> In arguing this modern philosophers divide men from their nature and teach them to be restless and unhappy. If he is correct about this, then what is most called for is reflection on how we are to distinguish our true pleasure from the great variety of false opinions about the good. Philocles seems to agree with the Critic that "the less *fanciful* I am, in what relates to my Contentment and Happiness, the more powerful and absolute I must be, in Self-enjoyment, and the Possession of my Good."<sup>150</sup> As the Critic explains,

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 2.129.

<sup>147</sup> *Soliloquy*, 1.190.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.122.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 3.123.

if it be in *the Affections* themselves that I place my highest Joy, and in those Objects, whatever they are, of *inward* Worth and Beauty, (such as *Honesty, Faith, Integrity, Friendship, Honour*) 'tis evident I can never possibly, in this respect, rejoice amiss, or indulge my-self too far in the Enjoyment. The greater my Indulgence is, the less I have reason to fear either Reverse or Disappointment.<sup>151</sup>

The Critic here displays his own moderate skepticism by tentatively mentioning possible objects of our affections. While honesty, faith, integrity, etc. are likely contenders for "*inward* Worth and Beauty," we cannot know what is natural before we undertake the sort of investigation recommended by *Soliloquy*.

Philocles, then, rejects the hypothesis of his contemporary "dogmatizers on *Pleasure*."<sup>152</sup> It is more sensible, he says, to consider "how to gain that *Point of Sight*, whence probably we may best discern; and How to place our-selves in that unbiass'd State, in which we are fittest to pronounce."<sup>153</sup>

Theocles is able to praise Philocles for not falling into the dogmatic skepticism of modern philosophy. He remarks,

O Philocles...if this be unfeignedly your Sentiment; if it be possible you shou'd have the Fortitude to with-hold your Assent in this Affair, and go in search of what the meanest of Mankind think they already *know* so certainly: 'tis from a nobler turn of thought than what you have observ'd in any of the *modern Scepticks* you have convers'd with. For if I mistake not, there are hardly anywhere at this day a sort of People more peremptory, or who deliberate less on the choice of *Good*. They who pretend to such a Scrutiny of other Evidences, are the readiest to take the Evidence of the greatest *Deceivers* in the World, *their own Passions*. Having gain'd, as they think, a Liberty from some seeming Constraints of Religion, they suppose they employ this Liberty to perfection, by following the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 3.122.

<sup>152</sup> *Moralists*, 2.129.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 2.130.

first Motion of their Will, and assenting to the first Dictate or Report of any prepossessing *Fancy*, any foremost *Opinion* or *Conceit* of Good.<sup>154</sup>

The Critic presents a modest version of skepticism which seems to accord with this moderate skepticism of Philocles. The Critic writes:

to say truth, I have often wonder'd to find such a Disturbance rais'd about the simple name of Sceptick. 'Tis certain that, in its original and plain signification, the word imports no more than barely, "That State or Frame of Mind in which every one remains, on every Subject of which he is *not certain*." He who is *certain*, or presumes to say *he knows*, is in that particular, whether he be mistaken or in the right, a Dogmatist. Between these *two* States or Situations of Mind, there can be no medium. For he who says, "*That he believes for certain, or is assur'd of what he believes*"; either speaks ridiculously, or says in effect, "*That he believes strongly, but is not sure*." So that whoever is not *conscious* of Revelation, nor has *certain Knowledg* of any Miracle or Sign, can be no more than Sceptick in the Case.<sup>155</sup>

As we have seen, insofar as Philocles adopts a position at all, it is only temporary:

Philocles himself remains a skeptic when he later meets Palemon in the park. His position is may be like Shaftesbury's own, at least insofar as it is "certain that, in its original and plain signification, the word [Skeptic] imports no more than barely, 'That State or Frame of Mind in which every one remains, on every Subject of which he is *not certain*.'" "

## **Part II, § 2: Dinner Company**

At dinner, Philocles revisits the claim made by Theocles earlier in the day that a man might live a life of constancy by enlarging friendship to include all mankind. Whatever Theocles means by his claim, we should not mistake it for the Christian virtue

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany II*, 3.46.

of charity. According to Theocles, "‘to deserve well of *the Publick,*’ and ‘to be justly styl’d *the Friend of Mankind,*’ requires no more than to be *good* and *virtuous*; Terms which for one’s own sake one wou’d naturally covet."<sup>156</sup> Philocles objects to this claim, observing that few pursue virtue for its own sake; they are motivated best by "the Rod and Sweetmeat," that is, punishments and rewards.<sup>157</sup>

Theocles then advances the argument that practicing the virtues is conducive to one’s own health and good. Following the Epicureans, he is able to show that temperance is conducive to health and, consequently, to a longer-term notion of pleasure. Philocles has no difficulty in agreeing with this when considering health, but Theocles pursues the argument to raise the question of the whole human life. We learn that Philocles is an admirer of free political institutions. Theocles suggests that civil liberty is quite compatible with the moral liberty that emerges from the practice of virtue. He says to Philocles, "you...who are such an Admirer of *Civil Liberty*, and can represent it to your-self with a thousand several Graces and Advantages; can you imagine no Grace or Beauty in that original *native Liberty, Moral.* which sets us free from so many in-born Tyrannys, gives us the Privilege of our-selves, and makes us *our own*, and independent? A sort of Property, which, methinks, is as material to us to the full, as that which secures us our Lands, or Revenues."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Moralists*, 2.139.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.140.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.142.

Theocles now advances an image of the relationship between moral and political liberty. This is perhaps the clearest statement of the political consequences of Shaftesbury's philosophical teaching. So important is this passage that Shaftesbury arranged for the frontispiece of the Volume II of the *Characteristicks* to bear its image. I will now quote it in full:

I shou'd think, said he (carrying on his Humour) that one might draw the Picture of this *moral* Dame to as much advantage as that of her *political* Sister; whom you admire, as describ'd to us "in her *Amazon-Dress*, with a free manly Air becoming her; her Guards the *Laws*, with their written Tables, like Bucklers, surrounding her; Riches, Traffick, and Plenty, with the *Cornucopia*, serving as her Attendants; and in her Train the *Arts* and *Sciences*, like Children, playing."--The rest of the Piece is easy to imagine: "Her Triumph over Tyranny, and lawless Rule of Lust and Passion."--But what a Triumph wou'd her Sister's be! What Monsters of savage Passions wou'd there appear subdu'd! "There fierce *Ambition*, *Lust*, *Uproar*, *Misrule*, with all the *Fiends* which rage in human Breasts, wou'd be securely chain'd. And when *Fortune* her-self, the Queen of Flatterys, with that Prince of Terrors, *Death*, were at the Chariot-wheels, as Captives; how natural wou'd it be to see *Fortitude*, *Magnanimity*, *Justice*, *Honour*, and all that generous Band attend as the Companions of our inmate Lady Liberty! She, like some new-born Goddess, wou'd grace her Mother's Chariot, and own her Birth from humble *Temperance*, that nursing Mother of the Virtues; who like the Parent of the Gods, old Reverend CYBELE, wou'd properly appear drawn by rein'd Lions, patient of the Bit, and on her Head a Turret-like Attire: the Image of defensive Power, and Strength of Mind."<sup>159</sup>

One of the few favorable references to a recent contemporary thinker occurs in Shaftesbury's discussion of the ancient policy of religion. In *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, Shaftesbury recognizes James Harrington, whom he calls "a notable Author of our Nation," for his observation that "'tis necessary a People shou'd have a *Publick*

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 2.142-43.

*Leading in Religion.*"<sup>160</sup> While we have seen that Shaftesbury is committed to religious toleration, his toleration is of the ancient variety. He is unwilling to leave moral education to chance, and he consequently advocates moderate religion for most people, and moral philosophy for those who are capable. In this sense one might wonder if the *Characteristicks* cannot be described as the moral education necessary to make Harrington's *Oceana* a complete account of human life. While often identified as a "country Whig," one might wonder if Shaftesbury isn't better identified as a "classical republican" of the sort described by Skinner and Pocock.

This speculation must be tempered by the reminder that it is Theocles who delivers the image; Philocles immediately invites the dinner party to consider the triumph of Liberty in reverse, with: "Virtue her-self *a Captive* in her turn; and by a proud Conqueror triumph'd over, degraded, spoil'd of all her Honours, and defac'd; so as to retain hardly one single Feature of real Beauty."<sup>161</sup> The audacity of Philocles leads the conversation to the first of two major disputes between Philocles and one particular dinner guest. This guest is described as "a formal sort of Gentleman, somewhat advanc'd in Years," and as we shall see, he is a religious zealot.<sup>162</sup>

The old gentleman (who never receives a name) objects to Philocles in an "angry tone," saying:

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1.11.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 2.143.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 2.144.



that he had hitherto, indeed, conceiv'd some hopes of me; notwithstanding he observ'd my *Freedom of Thought*, and heard me quoted for such a passionate Lover of *Liberty*: But he was sorry to find that my Principle of Liberty extended in fine to a Liberty from all Principles...and none, he thought, beside a Libertine in Principle wou'd approve of such a Picture of Virtue, as only *an Atheist* cou'd have the impudence to make.<sup>163</sup>

After a pause, Theocles comes to the defense of Philocles. He observes that it is not "*the Atheist* alone can lay this load on *Virtue*, and picture her thus disgracefully."<sup>164</sup> To the surprise of the old gentleman, Theocles suggests that the "*revers'd Triumph*" described by Philocles is a portrait resulting not from atheism but rather from "RELIGION itself!"<sup>165</sup> Theocles advances the argument we saw in Chapter 4 that there are those who "magnify to the utmost the Corruption of Man's Heart; and in exposing, as they pretend, the Falshood of *human Virtue*, think to extol *Religion*."<sup>166</sup> The old gentleman is forced to concede that such a consequence would be no "sign of Tenderness for *Religion*."

Philocles addresses Palemon at this point, recalling for us the narrative frame of the dialogue. He tells Palemon (and the reader) that Theocles will proceed to "disclose himself fully upon these Subjects."<sup>167</sup> Philocles remarks that his remarks served as a "Prelude" to the metaphysical argument the two friends would have the next morning. Philocles says in anticipation of Theocles' speeches: "If his Speculations prov'd *of a*

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 2.144-45.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 2.145.

*rational kind*, this previous Discourse, I knew, wou'd help me to comprehend 'em; if only *pleasing Fancys*, this wou'd help me however, to please my-self the better with 'em."<sup>168</sup> As readers we must note this interruption of the internal dialogue and wonder what Philocles hopes for us to see. We will have to return to this question later.

### **Part II, § 3: Theocles' Apology for Philocles**

We observed at the beginning of the chapter that the Critic calls *The Moralists* "a kind of *Apology* for [the] Treatise concerning *Virtue* and *Religion*."<sup>169</sup> The Critic calls especial attention to the part of the dialogue we must now consider.<sup>170</sup> The Critic remarks that "as for his [the Author's] Apology (particularly in what relates to *reveal'd Religion*, and a *World to come*) I commit the Reader to the disputant Divines, and Gentlemen, whom our Author has introduc'd in that concluding Piece of *Dialogue-Writing*, or *rhapsodical Philosophy*."<sup>171</sup> By the end of the section, Theocles will say,

THUS...I have made my Friend's Apology; which may have shewn him to you perhaps a good *Moralist*; and, I hope, no Enemy to Religion. But if you find still that *the Divine* has not appear'd so much in his Character as I promis'd, I can never think of satisfying you in any ordinary way of Conversation. Shou'd I offer to go further, I might be engag'd deeply in spiritual Affairs, and be forc'd to make some new Model of a *Sermon* upon his System of Divinity. However, I am in hopes, now that in good earnest Matters are come well nigh to *Preaching*, you will acquit me for what I have already perform'd.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 2.146.

<sup>169</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

<sup>170</sup> Namely, *The Moralists*, Part II, §3.

<sup>171</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany IV*, 3.117.

<sup>172</sup> *Moralists*, 3.158.

Section 3 of Part II, then, will employ an "ordinary way of conversation," and appeal primarily to reason, while section 4 will present what will be called a "*Philosophical Sermon*."<sup>173</sup>

Before Theocles begins, Philocles remarks to Palemon that we are about to hear a "Prelude" to the private conversation he and Theocles will have tomorrow morning. He is eager for this prelude whether or not it proves demonstrative. "If his Speculations prov'd *of a rational kind*, this previous Discourse, I knew, wou'd help me to comprehend 'em; if only *pleasing Fancys*, this wou'd help me however, to please my-self the better with 'em."<sup>174</sup> This distinction between demonstration and persuasion will prove to be essential for the remainder of *The Moralists*.

Theocles, we are told, enters section 3 of Part II with the air of "some grave Divinity-Professor, or Teacher of *Ethicks*, reading an Afternoon Lecture to his Pupils."<sup>175</sup> He begins with the claim that we must distinguish between force and reason, which, according to Theocles, are mutually exclusive. He says, "where Force is necessary, Reason has nothing to do. But on the other hand, if Reason be needful, Force in the mean while must be laid aside: For there is no Enforcement of Reason, but by Reason."<sup>176</sup>

This distinction, as we shall see in a moment, has practical consequences. Theocles next tells us that the name 'atheist' is used indiscriminately, and that two very

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 2.166.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 2.146.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 2.147.

different characters are carelessly grouped together as atheists. There is a distinction, we learn, between a person who doubts and a person who absolutely denies religion:

Now he who *doubts*, may possibly lament his own Unhappiness, and wish to be convinc'd. He who *denies*, is daringly presumptuous, and sets up an Opinion against the Interest of Mankind, and Being of Society. 'Tis easily seen that *one* of these Persons may bear a due respect to the Magistrate and Laws, tho not *the other*; who being obnoxious to them, is therefore punishable. But how the former is punishable *by Man*, will be hard to say; unless the Magistrate had dominion over Minds, as well as over Actions and Behaviour; and had power to exercise an Inquisition within the inmost Bosoms and secret Thoughts of Men.<sup>177</sup>

The distinction between force and reason finds its implication in the difference between one who doubts and one who denies. The two sorts of distinction are not simply coextensive, however. No amount of force will provoke assent in the mind of a man, whether he is an outright denier of religion or a mere doubter. Theocles seems to suggest that by being "daringly presumptuous" and indiscrete in his doubts, the denier risks causing scandal that could damage the public good, and that, at the very least, one can expect that the magistrate will punish such behavior.

Theocles goes on to maintain that philosophical freedom "was never esteem'd injurious to Religion, or prejudicial to the vulgar."<sup>178</sup> Philocles is quick to observe the claim we examined in chapter 2, namely that in "*Christian Times*," circumstances no longer permit such "*Fair* INQUIRY."<sup>179</sup> While Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the*

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 2.148.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

*Universe* is mentioned directly here, it is difficult for Shaftesbury's own *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit* not to come to mind as well.

It is this that provokes Theocles' "apology" proper. He remarks, "now indeed you have found a way which may, perhaps, force me to discourse at large with you on this head; by entering the Lists in defense of a Friend unjustly censur'd for this philosophical Liberty."<sup>180</sup>

What I have called the apology proper begins on page 149 and continues for the remainder of section 3. Theocles begins his account by observing that most defenders of religion occupy themselves in defending "the Truth of the Christian Faith" or in confuting heretics. Far fewer occupy themselves with the more fundamental task of examining "the very Grounds and Principles of all Religion."<sup>181</sup> This task is more important, however, if one is to persuade the unbeliever. According to Theocles, there are those for whom "what was never *question'd*, was never *prov'd*: and That whatever Subject had not, at some time or other, been examin'd with perfect Indifference, was never *rightly examin'd*, nor cou'd *rightly be believ'd*."<sup>182</sup> As we have already considered at length, a treatise may not be the best method for reaching this audience; an "*Essay* or *Inquiry*" generally presents one side only, and seldom with a rational indifference. It is for this reason,

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 2.149.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 2.150.

according to Theocles, that some writers have found it to advance the arguments of unbelievers with vigor and equanimity. Such a writer

offers to conclude nothing positive himself, but leaves it to others to draw Conclusions from his Principles: having this one chief Aim and Intention; "How, in the first place, to reconcile these Persons to *the Principles of Virtue*; That by this means, a Way might be laid open to *Religion*; by removing those greatest, if not only Obstacles to it, which arise from the Vices and Passions of Men."<sup>183</sup>

According to Theocles, the commitment to advance the principles of religion independently from religion is necessary to persuade men who do not accept the claims of revelation. Since they do not believe in God, they are hardly likely to worry about rewards and punishments found in a "*Future State*."<sup>184</sup> Defenders of reason, therefore, generally begin from the wrong point. They try to "prove MERIT *by Favour*, and ORDER *by a Deity*."<sup>185</sup> Since the controversial writers so offensive to the older gentleman are moral "realists," they try to exploit the natural fact of virtue to show that there is order in the world.

Theocles extends this argument to the possibility of "DEITY." He asserts, "That whoever sincerely defends Virtue, and is a *Realist* in MORALITY, must of necessity, in a manner, by the same Scheme of Reasoning, prove as very a *Realist* in DIVINITY."<sup>186</sup> This, of course, hardly settles the matter. We will see in a later section that the old gentleman is worried that such a deism does little to affirm the claims of orthodox

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 2.151.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

Christianity. Theocles himself seems to confess as much by immediately mentioning Epicurus, who allowed for nominal deities while offering a wholly rationalistic account of the world.<sup>187</sup>

Theocles takes his point further when he suggests to Philocles that his skeptical philosophy, by asking whether a theology can exist on the basis of reason alone, does little more than affirm the reigning authoritative religion.<sup>188</sup> Yet revelation itself "founded on the Acknowledgment of a divine Existence." Since only philosophy can demonstrate what religion presupposes, reason and revelation are mutually dependent.<sup>189</sup>

Theocles leaves the question open as to whether the controversial writers he describes actually believe their own arguments. He proposes judging the religious merit of an hypothesis on the basis of the practical moral consequences it entails for man.

Now whether our Friend be unfeignedly and sincerely of this latter sort of *real Theologists*, you will learn best from the Consequences of his *Hypothesis*. You will observe, whether instead of ending in *mere Speculation*, it leads to *Practice*: And you will then surely be satisfy'd, when you see such a Structure rais'd, as with the Generality of the World must pass at least for *high Religion*, and with some, in all likelihood, for no less than ENTHUSIASM.<sup>190</sup>

Our judgment about the sincerity of the opinions, then, requires an examination of their underlying "hypothesis." The moral and civic consequences are apparently inseparable from this concern.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 2.151-52.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 2.152.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Theocles asks Philocles rhetorically whether there is anything more enthusiastic than a "notion of *Divine LOVE*."<sup>191</sup> It is not sufficient proof that the writer is "far enough from Irreligion" for espousing a doctrine of divine love; such claims are familiar even to the enemies of religion.<sup>192</sup> Theocles takes this as an opportunity to advance on his friend's behalf the "Hypothesis" we know well from Chapter 4, namely that "tho the *disinterested Love of God* were the most excellent Principle; yet he knew very well, that by the indiscreet Zeal of some devout well-meaning People it had been stretch'd too far, perhaps even to Extravagance and Enthusiasm; as formerly among the *Mysticks* of the antient Church, whom these of latter days have follow'd."<sup>193</sup> So, too, have the enemies of enthusiasm fallen to their own zeal. Theocles' writer-friend is of the opinion that "we ought all of us to aspire, so as to endeavour 'That *the Excellence of the Object*, not the *Reward or Punishment*, shou'd be our Motive: But that where thro' the Corruption of our Nature, the *former* of these Motives is found insufficient to excite to Virtue, there the *latter* shou'd be brought in aid, *Supplemental Motives*. and on no account be undervalu'd or neglected.'"<sup>194</sup> Theocles does not expect every soul to be moved by "*the Excellence of the Object*" alone. Theocles sees love of the good is an insufficient to motivate to virtue for some men; he therefore retains a role for rewards and punishments to reinforce the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 2.153.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 2.154.



lessons of virtue. For his part, the friend of Theocles finds it sufficient to inquire into the existence "in Nature [of] a *supreme Mind* or Deity."<sup>195</sup>

Since the friend has precluded an appeal to revelation his arguments must rely on evidence readily available in the observable world. Theocles says,

now that there is such a principal Object as this in the World, the World alone (if I may say so) by its wise and perfect Order must evince. This Order, if indeed perfect, excludes all *real* ILL. And that it really does so, is what our Author so earnestly maintains, by solving the best he can those untoward *Phaenomena* and ill Signs, taken from the Course of Providence in the seemingly unequal Lot of *Virtue* in this World.<sup>196</sup>

For the purposes of defending his friend Theocles asserts that the world is orderly, although in fairness we see that he qualifies his statement with an "if." The author does his best to show how "untoward *Phaenomena* and ill Signs" can be reconciled with Providence and the existence of virtue. Theocles admits that the appearance that vice and chaos rule the world poses a genuine problem for the author's argument. It is natural for men to infer backward from an apparent effect a presumptive cause. In the words of Theocles, "from so uncomely a Face of things *below*, they will presume to think unfavourably of all *above*."<sup>197</sup> Should men become convinced that the world is orderly, however, they are much more likely to expect reward and punishment in a future state; at least they are more likely to experience the natural reward for virtue and punishment for vice suggested in the discussion of temperance above.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 2.155.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

Theocles maintains that the evidence in favor of the intrinsic rewards to be found in the practice of virtue are more impressive than many recent writers have acknowledged. Even the incomplete victory of virtue among human affairs is some evidence, perhaps, "to shew Providence already engag'd on [Virtue's] side."<sup>198</sup> By presupposing the efficacy of virtue Theocles is able to recommend to his interlocutors a trust in the supernatural goodness of Providence. For this reason too, modern defenders of religion are foolish to exaggerate the disorder (or fallen condition) of the world. Paradoxically, claims Theocles, the hypothesis of chaos embraced by some Divines inclines men to accept "the belov'd Atoms, Chance, and Confusion of the Atheists."<sup>199</sup>

Lest he leave the defense of virtue to its own devices, Theocles next considers the opinions of the ancients on the matter.

Thus it was, that among the Antients the great Motive which inclin'd so many of the wisest to the Belief of this Doctrine unreveal'd to 'em, was purely *the Love of Virtue* in the Persons of those great Men, the *Founders* and *Preservers* of Societys, the *Legislators*, *Patriots*, *Deliverers*, *Heroes*, whose Virtues they were desirous shou'd live and be immortaliz'd.<sup>200</sup>

The appeal of virtue--an appeal not dependent on revelation--is still available to the contemporaries of Theocles in the common human experience of friendship. "Nor is there at this day any thing capable of making this Belief more engaging among the Good

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 2.156.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 2.157.

and Virtuous than *the Love of Friendship*."<sup>201</sup> For the noble soul, friendship creates a longing to be joined with virtuous men even after death.

In short, according to Theocles his writer-friend hopes to draw men "of looser Principles" to divine love through the orderliness in human things to an appreciation of beauty in the world.<sup>202</sup>

Theocles concludes by saying that further argument would move beyond "any ordinary way of Conversation" and into "some new Model of *a Sermon* upon his system of Divinity."<sup>203</sup> The prospect of setting aside "the way of *Dialogue*" for "*the Law* of SERMON" is very appealing to the two divine gentlemen.<sup>204</sup> Theocles agrees to continue in that style, but only on the condition that Philocles will mount a challenge to the sermon afterwards. Philocles agrees.

#### **Part II, § 4: The Philosophical Sermon and the State of Nature**

Just as the "philosophical enthusiasm" of Philocles came on in the evening of Part I, section 3, the "philosophical sermon" offered by Theocles, takes place in the evening. Having embarked on a walk in the fields, the companions observe the pleasant virtues of country life. This leads Theocles into his sermon on "the Order and Frame of

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 2.157-58.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 2.158.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 2.159.

NATURE."<sup>205</sup> Theocles reaffirms the claim that it would be very strange to find order within our own souls and miss it in the larger world. Nothing, he says,

is more strongly imprinted on our Minds, or more closely interwoven with our Souls, than the Idea or Sense of *Order* and *Proportion*. Hence all the Force of *Numbers*, and those powerful *Arts* founded on their Management and Use. What a difference there is between *Harmony* and *Discord!* *Cadency* and *Convulsion!* What a difference between compos'd and orderly Motion, and that which is ungovern'd and accidental! between the regular and uniform Pile of some noble Architect, and a Heap of Sand or Stones! between an organiz'd Body, and a Mist or Cloud driven by the Wind!<sup>206</sup>

According to Theocles, such difference is "immediately perceiv'd by plain internal Sensation."<sup>207</sup> Reason concludes from this that every orderly thing has a "Unity of Design" which can be taken as a whole in itself or as a part in a larger whole. If all the parts are not united in a broader "UNIVERSE," there can be no claim of design. From this Theocles draws his "main Subject, insisted on," namely

that neither *Man*, nor any other Animal, tho ever so compleat a *System* of Parts, as to all *within*, can be allow'd in the same manner compleat, as to all *without*; but must be consider'd as having a further relation abroad to *the System of his Kind*. So even this System of his Kind to *the Animal-System*; this to the World (our *Earth*;) and this again to *the bigger World*, and to *the Universe*.<sup>208</sup>

All things, claims Theocles, are interdependent, one thing on another. Such an account of the coherence of the world leads him to this conclusion: "know, my ingenious Friend, that by this Survey you will be oblig'd to own the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM, and coherent

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 2.160.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 2.161.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 2.162.

Scheme of Things, to be establish'd on abundant Proof, capable of convincing any fair and just Contemplator of the Works of Nature."<sup>209</sup>

Things are not as simple as they seem at first, however. We soon learn that "the End and Use of Things does not every-where appear."<sup>210</sup> This should not be surprising, however, given the finitude of the human perspective on the world. For in an Infinity of Things thus relative, a Mind which sees not *infinitely*, can see nothing *fully*: And since each Particular has relation to all in general, it can know no perfect or true Relation of any Thing, in a World not perfectly and fully known."<sup>211</sup> This inability of man to know the whole is insufficient proof either for the presence of mind in the world or its absence. Theocles exhorts his listeners to overlook this problem with by offering an image of order. "Think of the many Parts of the vast Machine, in which we have so little Insight, and of which it is impossible we shou'd know the Ends and Uses; when instead of seeing to the highest *Pendants*, we see only some *lower Deck*, and are in this dark Case of Flesh, confin'd even to *the Hold*, and meanest Station of the Vessel."<sup>212</sup>

Presupposing a *cosmos*, however, Theocles claims that "we must of consequence acknowledg a *Universal MIND*; which no ingenious Man can be tempted to disown, except thro' the Imagination of Disorder in the Universe, its Seat."<sup>213</sup> While few men are

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 2.163.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 2.16e.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 2.164.

tempted to argue that the rest of the world is disordered, they have a hard time not wondering about mankind. Nature seems to have left man among the other animals especially vulnerable in the world. Yet although he lacks claws and fur and horns, man has the possibility of gaining "*Wisdom and Virtue*."<sup>214</sup> Unlike the beasts, man is able to improve himself. Theocles therefore exhorts us to look to "a liberal Education" to improve on our good nature to form in us "a generous Temper and Disposition, well-regulated Appetites, and worthy Inclinations."<sup>215</sup>

For those who are willing to inquire "what is *according to NATURE*" for men, happiness is possible. Few are inclined to do this, however. Theocles remarks, "were we more so, as this *Inquiry* wou'd make us, we shou'd then see Beauty and Decorum here, as well as elsewhere in Nature; and the Order of the Moral World wou'd equal that of the Natural. By this the *Beauty of Virtue* wou'd appear; and hence, as has been shewn, *the Supreme and Sovereign Beauty*, the Original of all which is Good or Amiable."<sup>216</sup> So ends the "*Philosophical Sermon*" of Theocles. Where the "Apology" of Theocles offered the practical reasons for deniers to become prudent and for the religious to tolerate arguments based on reason alone, the "sermon" serves as an exhortation to seek beauty and not to grow discouraged. The sermon draws the praise of the two gentlemen;

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 2.165.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 2.166.

Philocles himself is about to commend Theocles when he is reminded of his promise to criticize the sermon.

Philocles begins his criticism by drawing attention to the narrow argument chosen by Theocles to defend the existence of God. Philocles says, "I expected to have heard from you, in customary form, of a *first Cause*, a *first Being*, and a *Beginning of Motion*: How clear the *Idea* was of an *immaterial Substance*: And how plainly it appear'd, that at some time or other *Matter must have been created*. But as to all this, you are silent."<sup>217</sup> The argument that unthinking substance could never produce a thinking, immaterial substance is acceptable to Philocles on the philosophical principle of "*Nothing being ever made from Nothing*."<sup>218</sup> This principle cuts both ways, however, and serves both dogmatic materialists as well as dogmatic immaterialists.

According to Philocles, the argument as stated by Theocles implies that one can judge the past by looking at the present. He holds that if "Deity be *now* really extant; if by any good Token it appears that there is *at this present* a universal Mind; 'twill easily be yielded there *ever* was one."<sup>219</sup> While Philocles does neither admits nor denies that there is a universal mind, he denies that the conclusion follows the presupposition. Philocles argues that Theocles failed to demonstrate his reasons: "What Demonstration have you given? What have you so much as offer'd at, beyond *bare Probability*?" Quite

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 2.167.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 2.167-68.

to the contrary, in fact. "So far are you from *demonstrating* any thing," Philocles continues, "that if this uniting Scheme be the chief Argument for Deity, (as you tacitly allow) you seem rather to have demonstrated, 'that the Case it-self is incapable of Demonstration.'"<sup>220</sup>

Theocles has argued that it is *impossible* for finite man to know the whole. Even if the world as we know it seems orderly, we cannot infer that all things (writ large) are orderly. It is possible that we observe only "a separate *By-World*," we will say, "of which perhaps there are, in the wide Waste, Millions besides, as horrid and deform'd, as this of ours is regular and proportion'd."<sup>221</sup> Who is to say, given enough time, that this odd orderly world isn't an anomaly in the great swirl of all matter? "Old *Father* Chaos (as the Poets call him) in these wild Spaces, reigns absolute, and upholds his Realms of Darkness. He presses hard upon our Frontier; and one day, belike, shall by a furious Inroad recover his lost Right, conquer his Rebel-State, and reunite us to primitive *Discord* and *Confusion*."<sup>222</sup> Philocles concludes with an odd compliment for the Divines. At least the Divines were more honest in facing the chaotic appearance of the world. Their opinion are not refuted should it be demonstrated that the world is indeed without

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 2.168.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.



mind. Theocles, on the other hand, has introduced Nature into the conversation, and it is with great reluctance that Philocles questions Her.<sup>223</sup>

Theocles tells Philocles not to worry about this. It is only "*my Hypothesis* can suffer," he says. Theocles drolly says that the divine gentlemen seem not to be vulnerable to such arguments, equipped as they are with "*metaphysical Weapons*."<sup>224</sup> (Indeed, even after the Apology offered by Theocles on the behalf of Philocles, the older gentleman is able to remark, "the *Part* you have propos'd for [Philocles] is so natural and sutable, that, I doubt not, he will be able to act it without the least Pain. I cou'd wish rather, that you had spar'd your-self the trouble of putting him thus in mind of his proper *Character*. He wou'd have been apt enough of his own accord to interrupt your Discourse by his perpetual Cavils."<sup>225</sup>)

Philocles decides to concentrate on human nature alone. He raises the question of why man among the beasts is alone so vulnerable and without natural defenses; Theocles advances counterarguments in defense of man's excellence. Since the discussion follows closely the matters we explored in Chapter 3, we will move ahead. Soon, the old gentleman reenters the conversation. The old gentleman is pleased with the conversation because, it seems to him, Philocles is being refuted. In an attempt to flush an atheist out of the bushes, the old gentleman remarks to Philocles "that it was better for me [that is,

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 2.169.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 2.159.

Philocles] to declare my Sentiments openly; for he was sure I had strongly imbib'd that Principle, that *the State of Nature was a State of War*."<sup>226</sup>

Philocles instantly sees that the old gentleman is vulnerable on this point. By placing this objection in the mouth of the zealot, Shaftesbury is able to link the milder state of nature teaching of Locke to Hobbes. Philocles asks whether he believes in the state of nature and learns that he does. He does not want to say, however, that the state of nature is one of warfare, perhaps because he knows that Hobbes is an atheist and consequently to be opposed. He opts instead for a tolerable condition state of nature prior to men forming a compact. When asked if this means that man is naturally sociable, he replies "that Man indeed, from his own *natural Inclination*, might not, perhaps, have been mov'd to associate; but rather from some particular *Circumstances*."<sup>227</sup> Philocles is easily able to show that this distinction collapses quickly, and "that the *State of Nature* must in all likelihood have been little different from a *State of War*."<sup>228</sup>

It is at this point that Theocles reenters the conversation in order to reconcile the men. Theocles argues (and as we have discussed at length in Chapter 4) that man as we know him is indeed naturally social.

#### **Part II, § 5: Monsters and Miracles**

The two gentlemen direct the conversation in section 5 and Theocles is largely silent for the remainder of the evening. This may not be a coincidence. Theocles seems

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 2.175.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 2.176.

to have nothing to say about revelation or miracles. Since we discussed miracles and their origin in Chapter 2, we will give this section shorter shrift.

For our purposes, the following points are worth noting. Just as the older gentleman seemed to follow Locke in distinguishing the state of nature from a state of war, both of the gentlemen share Locke's love of travel tales and the monstrous. Philocles writes,

nothing was so charming with them, as that which was disagreeing and odd: nothing so soothing, as that which mov'd Horror. In short, whatever was rational, plain, and easy, bore no relish; and nothing came amiss which was cross to Nature, out of Sort and Order, and in no Proportion or Harmony with the rest of Things. *Monstrous Births, Prodigys, Inchantments, Elementary Wars, and Convulsions*, were our chief Entertainment. One wou'd have thought that in a kind of Rivalship between Providence and Nature, the *latter Lady* was made to appear as homely as possible; that her Deformitys might recommend and set off the Beautys of *the former*.<sup>229</sup>

Philocles believes that sincere religious motives lie beneath their fascination. He himself has little worry that such tales will turn him "*enthusiastick, or superstitious*." It is unlikely that Philocles can say of the gentlemen, however, what he said to Palemon regarding Theocles, "that tho he had all of the *Enthusiast*, he had nothing of the *Bigot*."

Philocles, addressing Palemon, confesses that his skepticism made it difficult to avoid offending the gentlemen.<sup>230</sup> The conversation moves from monsters to miracles, and thereby the question of the importance of revelation to religion. Philocles declines to judge ancient miracles attested by authority, but he is skeptical about reports of

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<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.181.

<sup>230</sup> *Moralists*, 2.182.

contemporary miracles. The old gentleman makes a very sensible reply to this distinction.

This is Fancy indeed, (reply'd the grave Gentleman) and a very dangerous one to that Scripture you pretend is of it-self so well attested. The Attestation of Men dead and gone, in behalf of Miracles past and at an end, can never surely be of equal force with Miracles present: And of these, I maintain, there are never wanting a Number sufficient in the World to warrant a *Divine Existence*. If there were no Miracles now-a-days, the World wou'd be apt to think there never were any. The present must answer for the Credibility of the past. This is "*GOD witnessing for himself*"; not "*Men for GOD*." For who shall witness for *Men*, if in the Case of Religion they have no Testimony from Heaven in their behalf?<sup>231</sup>

Philocles might well agree that "if there were no Miracles now-a-days, the World wou'd be apt to think there never were any," and the older gentleman is not unaware of this. Yet here the zealous old gentleman and his younger companion split.<sup>232</sup> The younger man shows a willingness to be more careful in accepting reports of contemporary miracles, and he seems to have adopted Theocles' preference for a good rather than a severe idea of God. Shaftesbury seems to be suggesting that the young are more likely to be persuaded that a rational foundation for religion is necessary. This of course angers the older gentleman, and Philocles borrows the arguments of Theocles to defend the younger man. "Thus," he writes, "I took upon me the part of a sound Theist, whilst I endeavour'd to refute my Antagonist, and shew that his Principles favour'd *Atheism*."<sup>233</sup> Theocles seems to have been successful in persuading the younger gentleman to become more rational in

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 2.186-87.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 2.185 ff.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 2.190.

his theology, and to have taught Philocles a more effective defense against religious zealotry.

### ***The Moralists, Part III: Philosophical Rhapsody and Cool Reason***

The final part of *The Moralists* is divided into three sections. The conversation oscillates between the philosophical rhapsodies of Theocles and cool, reasoned arguments with Philocles. In their first morning conversation, Theocles and Philocles discussed human happiness and the existence of a lasting and universal good. At that time, Theocles had tried to convince Philocles that he had experience of lasting good of lasting love, for he knew it from his own experience of friendship. The skeptical Philocles had said that he doubted the joy of friendship could be expanded to fill an entire life, let alone point to a more universal good:

Indeed, reply'd I, were it possible for me to stamp upon my Mind such a Figure as you speak of, whether it stood for *Mankind* or *Nature*, it might probably have its effect; and I might become perhaps *a Lover* after your way: But more especially, if you cou'd so order it, as to make things reciprocal between us, and bring me to fancy of this Genius, that it cou'd be "sensible of my Love, and capable of *a Return*." For without this, I shou'd make but an ill Lover, tho of the perfectest Beauty in the World.<sup>234</sup>

We have already seen that on this second morning, Philocles rushes to catch Theocles and overtakes him in a field. Theocles recalls his vow to Philocles that "if you promise *to*

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid., 2.138.

*love*, I will endeavour to shew you *that* BEAUTY which I count *the perfectest*, and *most deserving of LOVE*; and which will not fail of *a Return*."<sup>235</sup>

It is in the pastoral setting of the fields that Theocles promises Philocles "we shall find our *sovereign Genius*; if we can charm the *Genius* of the Place...to inspire us with a truer Song of Nature, teach us some celestial Hymn, and make us feel *Divinity* present in these solemn Places of Retreat."<sup>236</sup>

Philocles urges his friend to begin, saying "for now I know you are full of those Divine Thoughts which meet you ever in this *Solitude*. Give 'em but Voice and Accents: You may be still as much *alone* as you are us'd, and take no more notice of me than if I were absent."<sup>237</sup>

Theocles turns away to begin his rhapsodic meditation. As readers we are allowed to listen. The first hymn thanks Nature for providing a solitary retreat, "a happy Leisure and Retreat for Man; who, made for Contemplation, and to search his own and other Natures, may here best meditate the Cause of Things; and plac'd amidst the various Scenes of Nature, may nearer view her Works."<sup>238</sup> Here we are able to listen to a surprising line, in light of the earlier rhetorical elements of the dialogue. Theocles sings "O mighty *Nature!* Wise Substitute of *Providence!* impower'd *Creatress!* Or Thou

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 2.193.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

impowering Deity, supreme Creator! Thee I invoke, and Thee alone adore."<sup>239</sup> If there were any doubt remaining, Theocles offers his reverie without any expectation that Nature considers his personal fate.

Theocles stops his hymn to address Philocles, asking him whether his transport seemed the divine madness of the poet or the ravings of a lunatic. Philocles wishes Theocles had not interrupted himself, for "already I begin to find a thousand Difficultys in fansying such a *Universal Genius* as you describe."<sup>240</sup> Theocles then pursues the concerns raised by his rhapsody through the art of dialogue. He appeals to the fact that trees and other beings seem to have a unified structure of their own--a form. When Philocles objects that he is multiplying nymphs and hamadryads and other "immaterial and immortal Substances," Theocles replies that he is unconcerned that such forms be proven eternal.<sup>241</sup>

We injure 'em then, reply'd THEOCLES, to say "*they belong to these Trees*"; and not rather "*these Trees to them*." But as for their *Immortality*, let them look to it themselves. I only know, that both *theirs* and all other *Natures* must for their Duration depend alone on *that Nature* on which the World depends: And that every *Genius* else must be subordinate to that *One good GENIUS*, whom I wou'd willingly persuade you to think *belonging to this World*, according to our present way of speaking.<sup>242</sup>

Insofar as trees are trees, they are and remain trees. Should they stop being trees, it is suggested, they would be something else and belong to a different form.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 2.194.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 2.195.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 2.196.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

Theocles extends his argument for the unity of being to the question of the self and personal identity. This is a surprising move, given the difficulties we discussed in Chapter 3. Philocles is quick to observe that the self is always shifting: "I dare affirm, that few are so long themselves as *half* seven Years. 'Tis good fortune if a Man be *one and the same* only for a day or two: A Year makes more Revolutions than can be number'd."<sup>243</sup> Theocles appeals to Philocles' common sense. It is hard to deny that, that objection aside, "there is a strange Simplicity in this YOU and ME, that in reality they shou'd be still *one and the same*, when neither *one* Atom of Body, *one* Passion, nor *one* Thought remains the same."

As for the claim that matter is always in motion, Theocles observes that the more fundamental thing to notice is that matter is always compounded; he seems to imply with Aristotle that we never find some "prime matter" in the world devoid of form. What we have is a range of things which seem to adhere to "Numbers," and these numbers themselves seem to be immaterial.<sup>244</sup> How, wonders Theocles, can Philocles avoid recognizing "*the universal and sovereign* GENIUS" behind this phenomenon?

Philocles objects that should this hypothesis concerning form be true, Nature nevertheless requires no homage or worship. While the magistrate determines the lawful religion, philosophy recognizes no such titles.<sup>245</sup> Philocles consequently presses to learn

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 2.197.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 2.197-98.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 2.198.



what unified substances are and whether they are material or immaterial. As Theocles reminds Philocles, Philocles has already conceded that he knows of at least one genuine substance, namely himself. This is true whether or not Philocles wholly understands what this self is. It is difficult indeed to know whether there is only one mind or many particular minds; here, says Theocles, "*every one for himself*" bears the responsibility of understanding their own nature. While nature writ large is not self-aware *per se*, human beings are capable of understanding "in her behalf." At the very least, then, nature contains mind and understanding in this limited sense.<sup>246</sup>

According to Theocles, this observation is sufficient to show that Nature is a self. Parts are joined to other parts into a greater system, and no particular mind can believe that it exhausts the order found in the whole. He mentions two rival hypotheses to his Theism:

No (says one of a modern Hypothesis) for the World was from Eternity, as you see it; and is no more than barely what you see: "*Matter modify'd; a Lump in motion, with here and there a Thought, or scatter'd Portion of dissoluble Intelligence.*"--No (says one of an antienter Hypothesis) for the World was once without any Intelligence or Thought at all; "*Mere Matter, Chaos, and a Play of Atoms; till Thought, by chance, came into play, and made up a Harmony which was never design'd, or thought of.*"--Admirable Conceit!--Believe it who can. For my own share (thank Providence) I have a MIND in my possession, which serves, such as it is, to keep my Body and its Affections, my Passions, Appetites, Imaginations, Fancys, and the rest, in tolerable *Harmony* and *Order*. But *the Order of the UNIVERSE*, I am persuaded still, is much the better of the *two*. Let EPICURUS, if he please, think his *the better*; and believing no *Genius* or *Wisdom* above his own, inform us by what Chance 'twas dealt him, and how *Atoms* came to be so wise.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 2.199-200.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 2.200-01.

Theocles suggests here that the atheist also holds an hypothesis which is not in turn defended by reason. This is true of both modern and ancient atheists. All hypotheses are presuppositions, the grounds "lying under" an argument. According to Theocles, insofar as Epicurus and his kin cannot account for our direct awareness of our own minds, the atheistic hypothesis itself has not been demonstrated. This is as much to say that atheism too rests on faith and is a matter of belief. Theism thereby withstands skepticism, at least to the extent that the atheist has no better account of his hypothesis than does the theist of his. The fundamental question becomes for us as readers one of probability, and it is unclear where the burden of proof lies. What is clear, however, is that Shaftesbury's defense of the sociable nature of man works to remove the rhetorical trump suit of the modern projector.

Here Philocles professes that he is tempted toward superstition by the account offered by Theocles, and he asks Theocles to continue before his own enthusiasm cools. Theocles is unwilling to comply, however, for he does not want to manipulate assent in Philocles:

I wou'd have you know, reply'd he, I scorn to take the advantage of a warm Fit, and be beholden to Temper or Imagination for gaining me your Assent. Therefore ere I go yet a step farther, I am resolv'd to enter again into cool Reason with you; and ask, If you admit for Proof what I advanc'd yesterday upon that head, "Of a *Universal UNION, Coherence, or Sympathizing of Things?*"<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 2.203.

Motivated by his desire that "all shou'd go happily and well," Philocles asked Theocles to become the enthusiast again.<sup>249</sup> Theocles consoles him by observing that each natural thing persists unless it is overcome by some contrary principle. Nature, considered as a whole, cannot have a contrary principle, however. All that is, is good when viewed from the broadest perspective. Philocles is quick to tell Theocles, "your Solutions...of the *ill Appearances* are not perfect enough to pass for Demonstration. And whatever seems vitious or imperfect in the Creation, puts a stop to further Conclusions, till the thing be solv'd."<sup>250</sup> Theocles presses Philocles to admit that if human reason is finite, it is possible that ill effects in the world are only apparent rather than real. Philocles reaffirms, however, that the acceptance of Theocles' "divine hypothesis" presupposes that the ill effects "remain *Appearances* only."<sup>251</sup> Philocles himself prefers the certainty of demonstration to the psychological comfort offered by an hypothesis, however plausible it may be.

Theocles agrees to offer an argument. He argues that it is impossible that the world would contain contrary principles of equal power. Eventually one will make the other or others subordinate. The marginal header names the view of nature that allows

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 2.201.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 2.203.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

competing principles "Manichaeism."<sup>252</sup> According to Theocles, such a view is philosophically unsupportable. He says,

were there in Nature *Two* or more Principles, either they must agree, or not. If they agree not, all must be Confusion, till one be predominant. If they agree, there must be some natural Reason for their Agreement; and this natural Reason cannot be from *Chance*, but from some particular *Design, Contrivance, or Thought*: which brings us up again to One Principle, and makes the other *two* to be subordinate. And thus when we have compar'd each of the *Three* Opinions, viz. "That *there is no designing active Principle; Conclusion. That there is more than one*"; or, "That finally *there is but One*"; we shall perceive, that the only consistent Opinion is *the last*. And since *one* or *other* of these Opinions must of necessity be true; what can we determine, other than that the *last* is, and must be so, demonstrably? if it be Demonstration "That in *Three* Opinions, *One* of which must necessarily be true, *Two* being plainly absurd, the *Third* must be the Truth."<sup>253</sup>

While this is not incontrovertible, it is a philosophical demonstration. The argument is formal insofar as it does little to clarify just what this one fundamental principle of the whole is, but it does allow Philocles to accept Theocles' claims about apparent ill.

Philocles renews his request for Theocles to speak in Rhapsody, confident, he says, that "I shall now no longer be in danger of imagining either *Magick* or *Superstition* in the case; since you invoke no other Power than that single ONE, which seems so natural."<sup>254</sup> The next rhapsody sings of especially abstruse matters; Philocles expresses his gratitude that it is particularly short.<sup>255</sup> The rhapsody itself seems to discourage

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 2.204.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. This argument is rather one of *ab actu ad potentiam valet consequentia* -- given the premises, the argument is perfectly plausible.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 2.205.

<sup>255</sup> "HERE I must own, 'twas no small Comfort to me, to find that, as our Meditation turn'd, we were likely to get clear of an entangling abstruse *Philosophy*." Ibid., 2.207.

abstruse meditation, claiming that nature hides her "secret Springs of Action." While human artifice tries to penetrate "that consummate Art exhibited thro' all the Works of Nature," Nature herself reveals an infinite regress of "Worlds within Worlds."<sup>256</sup> Theocles suggests that human reason can know little of certainty about matter, motion, time; and turning inward, even of sense and thought. Still, thought holds the honor of "its *Eldership* of Being. Thus are we in a manner conscious of that *original* and *eternally existent* Thought, whence we derive *our own*"<sup>257</sup> From the order of his own reason, man comes to appreciate "Thou who art *Original* Soul, diffusive, vital in all, inspiring *the Whole*."

Theocles moves his rhapsody "closer to *Nature*," and sings of matters "upon the Borders of our World."<sup>258</sup> In this rhapsody, Theocles mentions the motion Philocles had accused him of omitting earlier in the conversation. He says in praise,

O thou who art the *Author* and *Modifier* of these various Motions! O *sovereign* and *sole Mover*, by whose high Art the rolling Spheres are govern'd, and these stupendous Bodys of our World hold their unrelenting Courses! O wise OEconomist, and powerful Chief, whom all the Elements and Powers of Nature serve! How hast thou animated these moving Worlds? What Spirit or Soul infus'd? What Biass fix'd? Or how encompass'd them in liquid *AEther*, driving them as with the Breath of living Winds, thy active and unweary'd Ministers in this intricate and mighty Work?<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 2.205-06.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 2.207.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 2.208.

The sense of wonder expressed here does not lead Theocles and Philocles to investigate the nature of motion as, say Aristotle does in his *Physics* or Galileo in *De Motu*. *The Moralists* itself, while trying to inspire an interest in such questions, does not engage directly in such philosophical exploration. Once again, however, Theocles interrupts his own rhapsody. He reproaches Philocles for his failure to monitor the enthusiasm of the rhapsody. Theocles says, "have you at once given over your scrupulous Philosophy, to let me range thus at pleasure thro' these aerial Spaces and imaginary Regions, where my capricious Fancy or easy Faith has led me? I wou'd have you to consider better, and know, my Philocles, that I had never trusted my-self with you in this *Vein of Enthusiasm*, had I not rely'd on you to govern it a little better."<sup>260</sup> Here we see the importance of our initial reflections on the soliloquy of Philocles in his apartment. Theocles and Philocles are both necessary for the philosopher to remain in philosophic balance. Without Theocles the philosopher lacks the erotic drive to encompass the whole; without Philocles, though, the philosopher is hard to distinguish from an intoxicated poet. It is interesting to note, however, that Theocles seems to regulate himself. It is he who has to remind Philocles not to let him get away with extravagant poetry. This flexibility of role is artistically defensible only if Theocles and Philocles are two parts of the same soul conversing.

Theocles proceeds to sing of the elements (earth, air, water, and fire) but he is stopped short by the intervention of Philocles. Apparently Theocles is carried away to

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 2.209.

the point where he has divided the world too discreetly, having forgotten to place "*the Divine Mind*" at the forefront.<sup>261</sup> His song has taken him far from the nature Philocles can recognize, and Theocles must return to the "various Map of *Nature*, and this *fair visible World*."<sup>262</sup>

Theocles returns to Earth and circles the globe in his rhapsody, taking in the seasons and the great variety of forms in the world we more commonly call nature, from gems to insects, and from "triumphant *Palm* down to the humble *Moss*."<sup>263</sup> We learn that even on Earth there are more forms than man has recognized: "--Fair Image of that fruitful and exuberant Nature, who with a Flood of Bounty blesses all things, and, Parent-like, out of her many Breasts sends the nutritious Draught in various Streams to her rejoicing Offspring!--Innumerable are the dubious Forms and unknown Species which drink the slimy Current."<sup>264</sup> We learn as we fly past that the fertility of Nature has often tempted man to superstition. It is a delicate line Shaftesbury walks between celebrating the sublimity of nature and reintroducing a belief that the world is miraculous and unintelligible. Mankind is always tempted to seek out hidden nature rather than rejoice in the beauty of the visible world. "Even we our-selves," says Theocles, "who in plain Characters may read Divinity from so many bright Parts of Earth, chuse rather these

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 2.213.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 2.215.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., .216.

obscurer Places, to spell out that mysterious Being, which to our weak Eyes appears at best under a Veil of Cloud."<sup>265</sup>

This observation leads Theocles "to take his leave of *the Sublime*." Philocles tells us that dawn had passed and the day was well into "forenoon."<sup>266</sup> Shaftesbury has brought us to the end of Part III, section one.

### **Philocles' Rhapsody**

Theocles decides it is time to leave the "unsociable Places, whither our Fancy has transported us," for the familiar climate of "our more conversable Woods." It soon becomes clear that Philocles himself has become attentive to the "*mysterious BEAUTY*" Theocles has described. Philocles confesses,

I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for Things of a *natural* kind; where neither *Art*, nor the *Conceit* or *Caprice* of Man has spoil'd their *genuine Order*, by breaking in upon that *primitive State*. Even the rude *Rocks*, the mossy *Caverns*, the irregular unwrought *Grotto's*, and broken *Falls* of Waters, with all the horrid *Graces* of the *Wilderness* it-self, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a Magnificence beyond the formal Mockery of princely Gardens.<sup>267</sup>

In this comment we see that for Philocles, nature means primarily what romantic poets will come to praise--natural scenes unspoiled by the hand of man. Philocles wonders that so few men appreciate the wondrous beauties Theocles has revealed to him.

Theocles now begins to correct the account of nature offered by Philocles. "Say not this, reply'd he, of Lovers only. For is it not the same with Poets, and all those other

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 2.218.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 2.220.



*Students* in Nature, and the *Arts* which copy after her? In short, is not this the real Case of all who are *Lovers* either of the Muses or the Graces?" Nature is present not just to refined philosophers, but to all human beings who participate in love. Philocles observes that these inferior lovers are popularly "thought to be plainly out of their wits, or over-run with *Melancholy* and *Enthusiasm*."<sup>268</sup> According to Theocles, such lovers deserve the name of lover, but fail to reason deeply enough. The beauty they pursue is only the "Shadow of that *First Beauty*" for it is seen by the senses rather than the mind. Even this beauty points beyond itself, however, and invites men to the "*Contemplation of Beauty...as it really is in it-self*."<sup>269</sup> Philocles himself, having learned not to scorn the longing for inferior, sensual beauty, is now ready to move closer to the "*Original*." Philocles soon realizes that praising lower beauties is dangerous, for such praising might encourage in men "covetous Fancy," ambition, or sordid luxury.<sup>270</sup> He fears that most men are not moved to contemplation in the face of beauty, and the ironical consequence of Theocles' teaching is "that you, Theocles, for ought I see, are become the *Accuser* of Nature, by condemning a *natural Enjoyment*."<sup>271</sup>

Here Theocles reveals himself as a less-than-moralistic moralist. He is unwilling to condemn any "*Joy* which is from *Nature*."<sup>272</sup> When the friends enjoy the woods,

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 2.220-21.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 2.222.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

however, they are directed by nature toward rational, human pleasures as well as such pleasures as "tasteful *Food*." As he explains, "we who were rational, and had Minds, methought, shou'd place it rather in those Minds; which were indeed abus'd, and cheated of their real *Good*, when drawn to seek absurdly the Enjoyment of it in the Objects of *Sense*, and not in those Objects they might properly call *their own*: in which kind, as I remember, we comprehended all which was truly *Fair, Generous, or Good*."<sup>273</sup> Theocles advances an argument based on pleasure, albeit one which distinguishes higher pleasures from lower pleasures. This distinction apparently saves pleasure from reproach, for Philocles replies: "BEAUTY, said I, and GOOD, with you, Theocles, I perceive are still *one and the same*."<sup>274</sup>

Shaftesbury alerts us in a footnote to consult an earlier remark of Theocles. In their conversation of the first morning, Theocles told Philocles:

HEAR then!...For tho I pretend not to tell you at once the Nature of this which I call Good; **yet I am content to shew you something of it, in *your-self*, which you will acknowledg to be naturally more fix'd and constant, than any thing you have hitherto thought on.** Tell me, my Friend! if ever you were weary of doing good to those you lov'd? Say when you ever found it displeasing to serve a *Friend*? Or whether when you *first* prov'd this generous Pleasure, you did not feel it less than at *this present*; after so long Experience? Believe me, Philocles, this Pleasure is more debauching than any other. Never did any Soul do good, but it came readier to do the same again, with more Enjoyment. Never was Love, or Gratitude, or Bounty practis'd but with increasing Joy, which made the Practiser still more in love with the fair Act.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 2.223.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 2.135. Bold emphasis added.

We are reminded by this passage that Theocles includes human action under the category of the beautiful. He believes in the noble and relies on its persistence to draw men out of more narrow, selfish concerns. From this perspective, the growth of Philocles is incomplete. For Philocles, nature's beauty is pristine and untouched by human art. Theocles must therefore return us to more sociable places.<sup>276</sup>

It is useful here to seek assistance from the Critic, who explores the relationship between the beautiful and the good at some length. In "Miscellany III," the Critic turns to consider the question of taste, and the way in which an improper education can corrupt the taste of the young. He writes

'tis easier, I confess, to give account of this *Corruption of Taste* in some *noble Youth* of a more sumptuous gay Fancy; supposing him born truly *Great*, and of *honourable Descent*; with a *generous free Mind*, as well as *ample Fortune*. Even these *Circumstances* themselves may be the very Causes perhaps of his being thus ensnar'd. The Elegance of his Fancy in outward things, may have made him overlook the Worth of *inward Character* and *Proportion*: And the Love of Grandure and Magnificence, wrong turn'd, may have possess'd his Imagination over-strongly with such things as *Frontispieces, Parterres, Equipages, trim Valets in party-colour'd Clothes*; and others in *Gentlemens Apparel*.--Magnanimous Exhibitions of *Honour* and *Generosity!*--"In Town, a Palace and sutable Furniture! In the Country the same; with the addition of such Edifices and Gardens as were unknown to our Ancestors, and are unnatural to such a Climate as GREAT BRITAIN!"<sup>277</sup>

The *beau monde* that educated Palemon may have been corrupt in this way, provoking the decent young man to turn to philosophy for assistance. According to the Critic,

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<sup>276</sup> Theocles declares, "METHINKS...PHILOCLES! (changing to a familiar Voice) we had better leave these unsociable places, whither our Fancy has transported us, and return to our-selves here again, in our more conversable Woods, and temperate Climes." *Ibid.*, 2.219.

<sup>277</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.105-06.

contemporary educators lead a youth into corruption, "till he is brought to laugh at *publick Virtue*, and the very Notion of *common Good*; till he has openly renounc'd all Principles of Honour and Honesty, he must in good Policy avoid those to whom he lies so much expos'd, and shun that Commerce and Familiarity which was once his chief Delight."<sup>278</sup> As Shaftesbury indicated in *Sensus Communis*, modern philosophy is largely to blame for this situation, having restored Epicureanism through their sophistical way. Yet according to the Critic, nature still provides a standard by which true good taste can be measured. He writes

THAT there is really a STANDARD of this latter kind, will immediately, and on the first view, be acknowledg'd. The Contest is only, "Which is *right*:--Which the *unaffected* Carriage, and *just* Demeanour: And Which the *affected* and *false*." Scarce is there any-one, who pretends not to know and to decide What is *well-bred* and *handsom*. There are few so affectedly clownish, as absolutely to disown *Good-breeding*, and renounce the Notion of a BEAUTY in *outward Manners* and *Deportment*. With such as these, wherever they shou'd be found, I must confess, I cou'd scarce be tempted to bestow the least Pains or Labour, towards convincing 'em of a *Beauty* in *inward Sentiments* and *Principles*.<sup>279</sup>

Whatever the defects of gallantry, polite society sustains a belief that there is a difference between comely and ugly behavior. Ultimately it is impossible to sever beauty from truth because of the persistence of nature. It has a stubborn way of reappearing even in human customs. The Critic cites Horace favorably in support of this observation. He writes, "'Tis here, above all other places, that we say with strict Justice, *You may turn out nature*

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 3.106.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 3.109.

*with a pitchfork, yet back she will keep coming.*<sup>280</sup> While the natural is not recognized univocally, all artists betray their deep belief that proportion lies in the world rather than their own hands. The Critic writes,

*Beauty and Truth are plainly join'd with the Notion of Utility and Convenience, even in the Apprehension of every ingenious Artist, the Architect, the Statuary, or the Painter. 'Tis the same in the Physician's way. Natural Health is the just Proportion, Truth, and regular Course of things, in a Constitution. 'Tis the inward Beauty of the Body. And when the Harmony and just Measures of the rising Pulses, the circulating Humours, and the moving Airs or Spirits are disturb'd or lost, Deformity enters, and with it, Calamity and Ruin.*<sup>281</sup>

While a man might claim to be a physician, his credibility would suffer were patients die from his care. According to Shaftesbury, it is the same with beauty: abandon harmony and you abandon beauty. This holds for the fine arts the Critic mentions, but also for the art of living well as described by classical philosophy. Is it not so, wonders the Critic, "that what is beautiful is *harmonious* and *proportionable*; what is harmonious and proportionable, is TRUE; and what is at once both *beautiful* and *true*, is, of consequence, *agreeable* and good?"<sup>282</sup> While the claim is indeed controversial, the Critic supports this view in a long footnote. He writes, "This is the HONESTUM, the PULCHRUM, τὸ καλόν [the Beautiful], on which our Author lays the stress of VIRTUE, and the Merits of this Cause; as well in his other Treatises, as in this of *Soliloquy* here commented. This *Beauty* the Roman *Orator*, in his rhetorical way, and in the Majesty of Style, cou'd

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<sup>280</sup> Cf., *Natural Right and History*, 201-202.

<sup>281</sup> *Miscellaneous Reflections: Miscellany III*, 3.110-11.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.111.

express no otherwise than as *A Mystery*."<sup>283</sup> The Critic quotes Cicero to show that even the most eloquent of men finds it difficult to offer a pure definition of beautiful deeds. It takes a noble soul to recognize nobility and it requires an education for a soul to become noble; and still, Shaftesbury maintains with the classical philosophers that there is a natural standard for human conduct.

The Critic elaborates a scale of beauty on behalf of his Author, moving from "the IN-ANIMATE," to the animate, to the mixed. This scale is itself vulnerable to criticism, however, for the Critic imagines the Author engaging here in his customary "*SOLILOQUY* or *Self-Discourse*."<sup>284</sup> The Critic advances an objection from yet another critic to show this. "'And what of this?' (says an airy Spark, no Friend to Meditation or deep Thought) 'What means this *Catalogue*, or *Scale*, as you are pleas'd to call it?'"<sup>285</sup>

The reply is sensible:

"Only, Sir, to satisfy my-self, That I am not alone, or single in a certain Fancy I have of a thing call'd BEAUTY; That I have almost the whole World for my Companions; and That each of us *Admirers* and earnest *Pursuers of BEAUTY* (such as in a manner we *All* are) if peradventure we take not a certain Sagacity along with us, we must err widely, range extravagantly, and run ever upon a false Scent. We may, in the Sportsman's Phrase, *have many Hares afoot*, but shall stick to no real *Game*, nor be fortunate in *any Capture* which may content us.

When confronted with skepticism about the existence of beauty, the Critic, Theocles, and Shaftesbury himself turn to common sense for defense. They challenge the reader to ask

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 3.112.

where the burden of proof for the existence of true beauty lies when a belief in beauty enjoys nearly universal consent among mankind. The Critic shows us that the philosopher will accept ordinary opinions of beauty to begin his contemplation but that he also pushes himself to question these opinions.

Thus our MONOLOGIST, or *self-discoursing* Author, in his usual Strain; when incited to the Search of BEAUTY and the DECORUM, by vulgar Admiration, and the universal Acknowledgment of the SPECIES in *outward* Things, and in the *meaner* and *subordinate* Subjects. By this inferior *Species*, it seems, our strict Inspector disdains to be allur'd: And refusing to be captivated by any thing less than the *superior, original, and genuine* Kind; he walks at leisure, without Emotion, in deep philosophical Reserve, thro' all these pompous Scenes; passes unconcernedly by those Court-Pageants, the illustrious and much-envy'd Potentates of the Place; overlooks *the Rich, the Great, and even the Fair*: feeling no other Astonishment than what is accidentally rais'd in him, by the View of these Impostures, and of this specious *Snare*.<sup>286</sup>

Returning to Theocles and Philocles we can see that Philocles initially had not expanded his reflection to encompass the noble. By connecting the beautiful to the good, however, Theocles brings Philocles to an enthusiastic embrace of the noble. Philocles sings:

"The Transports of *Poets*, the Sublime of *Orators*, the Rapture of *Musicians*, the high Strains of the *Virtuosi*; all mere ENTHUSIASM! Even *Learning* it-self, the Love of *Arts* and *Curiositys*, the Spirit of *Travellers* and *Adventurers*; *Gallantry, War, Heroism*; All, all ENTHUSIASM!"--'Tis enough: I am content to be this *new Enthusiast*, in a way unknown to me before.<sup>287</sup>

This "new enthusiasm" invites Philocles to consider the human things anew. He is now ready to undertake the first steps in a science of beauty. By connecting art and nature, account offered by Theocles is less straight-forward than the naïve enthusiast

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 3.113.

<sup>287</sup> *Moralists*, 2.223-24.

might hope. We soon learn that it is art which contributes beauty to an object; matter is not beautiful in itself. It follows from this that "the Beautifying, not the Beautify'd, is the really *Beautiful*."<sup>288</sup> More directly, it is mind that is responsible for the beautiful. We can see immediately the importance of Theocles' defense of the Deity. If the mind alone recognizes the beautiful, makes the beautiful, and ultimately styles "the forming Forms," can it be said that nature is responsible for the existence of beauty?<sup>289</sup>

It is essential that Shaftesbury has laid the foundation for a reply to this question. As we have seen, a proper answer resorts to the analogy between moral virtue and natural harmony. If he had left the matter at the analogy between the mind and the world, it would be unclear which was the agent and which the patient. The *Characteristicks* has argued, however, that human beings are sociable and that their instincts and thoughts are naturally inclined toward the sociable order. For this reason, Theocles raises once again the issue of moral beauty, and connects it to the generation of offspring. He argues: "this I am certain of; that *Life*, and the *Sensations* which accompany Life, come when they will, are from *mere Nature*, and nothing else. Therefore if you dislike the word *Innate*, let us change it, if you will, for *Instinct*; and call *Instinct*, that which *Nature* teaches, exclusive of *Art*, *Culture*, or *Discipline*."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 2.226.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 2.229-30.



It is clear from this why, taken together as Volume II, *An Inquiry* and *The Moralists* are properly called the heart of *Characteristicks*. Only together do they answer the question surrounding moral life, "whether the Principles spoken of are *from Art*, or *Nature?*"<sup>291</sup> The complexity of Shaftesbury's reply to this question presupposes the proper preparation in reading, a proper understanding of the relationship between reason and the passion, and a proper grasp of the good as well as the pernicious effects of enthusiasm. It is only when he has wrestled with these matters, and then pursued the encounter with modern philosophy from the point of view of "common life," that a person is receptive to the dialectical account offered in *The Moralists*.

According to Theocles, even actions have a natural "Fitness and Decency."<sup>292</sup> Men may disagree about which action is more beautiful, but they display in their daily lives their confidence that there is a natural standard. Theocles maintains that,

without controversy, 'tis allow'd "There is a BEAUTY of *each* kind." This no-one goes about to *teach*: nor is it *learnt* by any; but *confess'd* by All. *All* own the *Standard, Rule, and Measure*: But in applying it to Things, Disorder arises, Ignorance prevails, Interest and Passion breed Disturbance. Nor can it otherwise happen in the Affairs of Life, whilst that which interests and engages Men as *Good*, is thought different from that which they admire and praise as *Honest*.<sup>293</sup>

For Shaftesbury, it is inadequate to distinguish art and nature entirely when speaking about human nature. It is the nature of human beings to respond to the world, albeit within the boundaries set by nature herself. The affairs of life suggest to men where

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 2.229.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 2.232.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

happiness lies, but the most beautiful way is often obscured by corrupt philosophical principles, religious rules, *mores*, and laws. It is the proper work of philosophy to help recover the sense of natural happiness for man. This is not a project to be accomplished for all of society, but is the fruit of careful self-examination. It happens through education, soul by soul.

The beauty of nature reveals itself only to mind. As Theocles puts it, "never can the *Form* be of real force where it is un contemplated, unjudg'd of, unexamined, and stands only as the accidental Note or Token of what appeases provoked Sense, and satisfies the brutish Part."<sup>294</sup> While human beings have sociable passions, the moral life is emphatically a human thing according to Theocles. Even so, there are ranks of understanding beauty, and the untutored mind is less attentive than the properly educated mind. Through philosophy the mind learns to see. On its own, the "*Mind's EYE*" sees dimly; it only reaches its "natural Vigour" in contemplation.<sup>295</sup> It is here that we see that the art of soliloquy is not only a means but an end in itself for Theocles. Through soliloquy (or philosophy) a man becomes a "self-improving Artist" capable of genuine moral freedom. When one learns to recognize the proper models, a man "becomes in truth the *Architect of his own Life and Fortune*; by laying within himself the lasting and sure Foundations of *Order, Peace, and Concord*."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 2.237.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 2.238.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

In section 3, Theocles makes his understanding of philosophy clearer by distinguishing it from the modern frauds who borrow its name. Far from being a highfalutin' profession, philosophy is commonplace because it is the thing most appropriate to human beings:

yet, in effect [said Theocles], what else is it we all do in general, than *philosophize*? If PHILOSOPHY be, as we take it, *the Study of Happiness*; must not everyone, in some manner or other, either skilfully or unskilfully *philosophize*? Is not every Deliberation concerning our main Interest, every Correction of our Taste, every Choice and Preference in Life to be reckon'd *of this kind*?<sup>297</sup>

Philosophy is the study of happiness, for everyone at some point asks of his life, "Where, then, is *the Difference*? Which Manner is *the best*?" Here lies the Question. This is what I wou'd have you weigh and examine."<sup>298</sup> Theocles acknowledges that most of us would like to ignore such probing questions. "But the Examination," say you, "is troublesom; and I had better be without it." It is only the properly educated and disciplined reason that can formulate a reply to this lazy but sensible objection. No doubt, suggests Theocles, that the person ignorant of mathematics finds mathematics difficult; but is he really a fit judge of the activity? Theocles replies that "in Morality and Life, I ask still...May he not, perhaps, be allow'd the best Judg *of Living*, who *studys* Life, and endeavours to form it by some *Rule*? Or is he indeed to be esteem'd most knowing in the matter, who *slightly* examines it, and who *accidentally* and *unknowingly*

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 2.244.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 2.246.

*philosophizes?*"<sup>299</sup> The Critic himself offers a summary statement of Shaftesbury's project in the *Characteristicks*. In "Miscellany V", he writes:

IT HAS been the main Scope and principal End of these Volumes, "To assert the Reality of a Beauty and Charm in *moral* as well as *natural* Subjects; and to demonstrate the Reasonableness of a *proportionate* Taste, and *determinate* CHOICE, in *Life* and *Manners*." The Standard of this kind, and the noted Character of *Moral* Truth appear so firmly establish'd in Nature it-self, and so widely display'd thro' the intelligent World, that there is no Genius, Mind, or *thinking Principle*, which (if I may say so) is not really *conscious* in the case. Even the most refractory and obstinate Understandings are by certain *Reprises* or *Returns* of Thought, on every occasion, convinc'd of this Existence, and necessitated, in common with others, to acknowledg the actual Right and Wrong.<sup>300</sup>

*The Moralists* ends with a more questioning tone than one might have expected from Theocles. Theocles concludes the conversation in the following way: "thus is Philosophy establish'd. For Every-one, of necessity, must reason concerning his own Happiness; 'What his *Good* is, and what his *Ill*.' The Question is only, 'Who reasons best?' For even he who rejects this *reasoning* or *deliberating Part*, does it from a *certain Reason*, and from a Persuasion "That this is *best*." As for Philocles, he concludes his narrative abruptly, as we have already remarked. He writes to Palemon, "BY this time we found our-selves insensibly got home. Our *Philosophy* ended, and we return'd to the common Affairs of Life." By returning us to common life at this point we are left with Theocles' important question: what is the best life, and who reasons best about it.

As we have seen, the reader, like Palemon, is left to judge for himself.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> *Miscellany V*, 3.185.

## CONCLUSION

### "CHARTAE SOCRATICAE"

This dissertation has tried to read Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* in light of the literary theory presented by the *Characteristicks* itself. Shaftesbury offers his reader advice through the character of the Critic, who seems to be a practitioner of the subtle art of criticism. When this advice is combined with the self-referential apparatus of footnotes and indices, a map of Shaftesbury's philosophical opinions unfolds before the patient reader. Shaftesbury hopes that a reader who follows this map will become acquainted with the dialogical way of philosophizing as classical philosophy traditionally understood it.

This "antient" yet perennial philosophy aims at self-knowledge. In one sense, self-knowledge would involve inquiry into the reputable opinions found in common life with the intention of separating human nature from the inheritance of convention. Shaftesbury offers his reader a way of coming to know the characteristics of men, manners, opinions, and times. Because philosophy is an activity practiced by human beings, and because human life is characterized by the common confusion of convention and nature, such self-knowledge can be said to be the necessary prelude to any serious reflection on the character of the *cosmos*. Viewed from this perspective, Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* is Socratic in the deepest sense of the term.

It is also Socratic in a more political way. Shaftesbury understands political liberty to rest on the moral liberty of the individual. He clearly regards the dominance of Christianity to be an impediment to such moral liberty, in part because of its marriage of otherworldly hopes and fears, and in part because of its obfuscation of Socratic philosophy as he understands it. Shaftesbury regards modern philosophy as a project undertaken to weaken the influence of Christianity on political life; his own account of Christianity suggests considerable sympathy for the goals of this project. Yet Shaftesbury repudiates modern philosophy because of its reckless diminishment of the noble. A proper concern for the noble is necessary if man is to become virtuous in the most serious sense. Love of the noble, which Shaftesbury suggests is inseparable from the highest aspirations of man, is naturally present in the human soul. Despite this fact, there is no guarantee that men will notice and appreciate the beauty, order, and numbers of the world, especially in the absence of the literary arts. These arts have political liberty as a condition for their development and perfection. The *Characteristicks*, then, mounts a defense of the noble from both Christianity and modern philosophy by cultivating the art of criticism in its reader. Criticism as practiced by the reader in his attempt to understand the *Characteristicks* is ultimately a model for Socratic inquiry.

The patient reader of Shaftesbury's seldom-understood book can come to see that he is being shown *CHARTAE SOCRATICAE*--philosophical sea-cards for the impetuous soul. Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* itself might be described as a philosophic poem meant to stir *eros* in the reader for the noble as it is encountered both in art and nature. This

extravagant, dangerous passion finds a model for orderly love in Shaftesbury's art of criticism.

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