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Shaftesbury’s Liberal Critique of Locke

by

Mark Andrew Lloyd

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Department of Political Science in the University of Toronto

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Shaftesbury’s Liberal Critique of Locke

Mark Andrew Lloyd
Graduate Department of Political Science in the University of Toronto

Abstract

This thesis undertakes to examine the thought of modern liberalism’s earliest liberal critic, Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury. In his private correspondence, Shaftesbury, a former student of John Locke’s, reveals his rejection of Locke’s philosophy, and explains the terms of that rejection. Shaftesbury argues that Locke’s philosophy undermines the basis for moral and religious beliefs, and that it introduces a politics of individualism that proves incompatible with the true nature of human beings. He further argues that Locke’s philosophy and, indeed all modern philosophy, is fundamentally flawed because it obscures the question of the human good. When we take that question seriously, we are led to a more accurate discovery of the inevitably moral character of human nature. By comparing his private criticism of Locke with the arguments advanced in Shaftesbury’s now much-neglected treatise, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times, where Locke goes largely unnamed, we discover that the central components of Locke’s political philosophy are the subject of a sustained critique. That critique includes an argument for religious toleration that seeks to avoid the vulgarization of piety that Locke
effects in order to make toleration possible. It also includes an argument for the reality of virtue that is presented in opposition to the Lockean view. We discover Shaftesbury, who sympathizes with liberal politics, to anticipate many of our modern grievances and to identify their sources in Locke.
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Introduction

The widespread dissatisfaction today with modern liberalism, combined with the consensus in the West that our political hopes must not admit any illiberal implications, makes it particularly appropriate to re-examine the thought of modern liberalism's earliest liberal critic. In Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, and author of the now much neglected treatise, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times, we find that critic. Shaftesbury's criticism of modern liberalism is fascinating in part because it is a criticism offered "before the fact." Modern liberalism was still in its earliest infancy during the "Age of Anne" when Shaftesbury lived and published. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury, while consistently expressing political sympathies with the liberal movement, relentlessly attacks the philosophy of his teacher, the philosophic founder of modern liberalism, John Locke. Shaftesbury anticipates that a variety of undesirable consequences will follow from Locke's political project, and he identifies and responds to the theoretical roots of those consequences. Chief among these is the atomizing individualism that characterizes our times, and which leaves little room for shared conceptions of moral virtue. The following study probes Shaftesbury's thought as it appears in his private correspondence and in the Characteristics, in order to discover the precise terms of Shaftesbury's rejection of Locke's philosophy. We thereby
gain a fresh critical perspective on Locke, and hence, on the arguments supporting the modern liberal political world we occupy. In doing so this study serves the cause of opening up some possible new ways of understanding ourselves, ways that are theoretically unfamiliar but which continue to support a liberal political outlook. This is the first study of Shaftesbury ever to argue that the defining feature of Shaftesbury’s philosophy is its opposition to Locke’s philosophy.

The scholarly literature on Shaftesbury is astonishingly scarce. There does not exist a single extensive study of Shaftesbury’s philosophy that has been undertaken by a political theorist. Charles Taylor devotes half of a chapter on “Moral Sentiments” to Shaftesbury, and observes that Shaftesbury founds a moral outlook that is partly in opposition to Locke’s (Taylor 1989, 248). But Taylor neglects even to allude to the radical terms of Shaftesbury’s critique of his former teacher. As a result, Taylor is inclined to understand Locke and Shaftesbury each to advance variants of “deism.” Had he seriously considered Shaftesbury’s understanding of Locke, this would have forced him to rethink his notion that even Locke advances views properly understood to be “deist.” Several members of the small fraternity of Shaftesbury scholars that has emerged over the last century or so (intellectual and cultural historians; literary critics; philosophy professors) have commented on the critical views of Locke that Shaftesbury
expresses in his correspondence. Most are baffled by the comments, usually due either to an unwillingness to accept that Shaftesbury could be a political liberal and still reject Locke's political philosophy, or an inability to take seriously Shaftesbury's charge that Locke's philosophy was (covertly) Hobbesian "at bottom" (SC, 178).

If there is one consensus among Shaftesbury scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is that one would be hard-pressed to name a philosophic figure who was so much celebrated in his time and in the decades following his death, who is in our time so much ignored. Therefore, most of the books on Shaftesbury's thought include some anecdotes from the eighteenth century expressing the magnitude of Shaftesbury's influence. Since I am impressed at least as much as my fellow travelers by the decline of Shaftesbury's once celebrated profile, it is worthwhile here to repeat some of these anecdotes. Stanley Grean's statement is the best.

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

1. Indeed, even some of those scholars willing to recognize differences in their thought, rush to reassure us that "in politics, their ideals and principles were identical" (Voitle 1984, 60). Cf. also Aronson 1959, 1102, 1104 n.20; Grean 1967, 132. That Shaftesbury was in some sense a critic of Locke is supported by Aronson 1959, Fowler 1882, Grean 1967, Klein 1994, Pangle 1988, and Taylor 1989.
1711 and 1790. Shaftesbury's philosophy was in great vogue in England in the first half of the eighteenth century; Goldsmith wrote soon after the middle of the century that he had "more imitators in Britain than any other writer I know..." Herder generously styled Shaftesbury the "beloved Plato of Europe," and in 1794 the German thinker could justly write that "this virtuoso of humanity... has had a marked influence on the best minds of our century, on those who have striven with determination and sincerity for the true, the beautiful, and the good."

...The roster of those who were influenced by Shaftesbury's philosophy in word and in spirit reads like a list of the literary and philosophic greats of the Enlightenment. (Grean 1967, ix-x)

Perhaps most impressive is Montesquieu's inclusion of Shaftesbury in his list of "les quatres grands poètes," among the auspicious company of Plato, Montaigne, and Malebranche.² In short, everyone who was anyone in the eighteenth century read Shaftesbury attentively. Impressed by credentials like these, his nineteenth and twentieth century critics have sought to revive interest in Shaftesbury. But they all ultimately find his thought hopelessly perplexing, even incoherent. Indeed, in Shaftesbury's writing one encounters both moments of pristine clarity and moments of frustrating ambiguity. Upon close study, however, it is possible to

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discover that Shaftesbury's arguments are not incoherent; but rather, as Thomas Fowler put it, they are often "inconsecutive" (1882, 50). Fowler achieves greater success in making clear sense of Shaftesbury's thought than anyone since by bringing specific questions to the text, and searching for the arguments that provide clear answers to fundamental questions.³ In seven hundred pages of "inconsecutive" arguments, it is easy to become lost or confused. Even Fowler ultimately excludes Shaftesbury from "the first rank of philosophers" (1882, 240). But Fowler never realizes that Shaftesbury's "inconsecutive" presentation of his arguments is intentional. Like all of Shaftesbury's critics, Fowler never appreciates the literary character of the Characteristics.

Shaftesbury's Characteristics reads like a book written by a man who knew he would live to publish only one book. It is a "comprehensive book," as its title indicates. Few would deny that Shaftesbury's is among the most artfully constructed of all English prose. Yet many of his critics throw up their hands in frustration at the difficulty of making precise sense of the philosophic position that he communicates. These critics all overlook evidence in the Characteristics and in Shaftesbury's correspondence that provides vital insight regarding his distinctive manner of writing.

³Cf. Fowler 1882, 72-89.
To begin with, none of Shaftesbury’s critics comment on his statement of a possible rationale for being less than forthright regarding his deepest teachings.

'Tis real humanity and kindness to hide strong truths from tender eyes. And to do this by a pleasant amusement is easier and civiller than by a harsh denial or remarkable reserve. But to go about 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, is as unhandsome in a way of raillery as when done with the greatest seriousness, or in the most solemn way of deceit. It may be necessary, as well now as heretofore, for wise men to speak in parables, and with a double meaning, that the enemy may be amused, and they only who have ears to hear may hear.4

If the Characteristics were to contain “strong truths” that are likely to shock, injure or offend some readers, Shaftesbury confesses here that he would employ a rhetorical veil of “pleasant amusement” to shield such readers from

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4Characteristics, I. 45. Cf. Life, Letters... (Shaftesbury 1900, 243). Further volume and page references to the Characteristics will appear in parentheses in the text. I use the Robertson text as it appears in the Grean edition. I use this text only because it is the most widely available. It is inadequate in at least four ways. It divides the text into two volumes (ignoring Shaftesbury’s meaningful division into three). It foolishly replaces Shaftesbury critical index (which provides many interpretive clues) with one that is inadequate and incomplete. Shaftesbury’s margin notes are excluded, as are the engravings that Shaftesbury included in the 1714 (corrected) edition and to which he attached page references corresponding to passages in the text that the engravings illustrate.
offense while still getting his message across to "those who have ears to hear." Notice that any kind or humane motive on Shaftesbury's part would, in such a case, be accompanied by a concern to avoid discovery by the "enemy." That Shaftesbury had reason to fear enemies is certain. The Characteristics is, among other things, a book that attacks religious fanaticism in an age of religious fanatics. Despite the author's precautions, no less than Bishop Berkeley was provoked to publish an exceedingly hostile attack; and there were others (Berkeley 1950, 112-140; Brown 1764).

Furthermore, it is evident that statements intended to "pleasantly amuse" are abundant in the Characteristics, serving to disarm and distract potentially unfriendly readers. As we shall see, some of Shaftesbury's most serious arguments appear in this light-hearted guise. Robert Voitle helpfully suggests that Shaftesbury "was forced to pose to his readers as a bantering dilettante, lest his erudition scare them away" (Voitle 1984, 10). But Voitle fails to remark on Shaftesbury's insistence that "[t]is the persecuting spirit that has raised the bantering one" (I 150; emphasis added).5 There is every reason to suspect that

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5References to the works of Shaftesbury, John Locke, and Thomas Hobbes will be to the editions cited in the bibliography, with the titles abbreviated as follows (note: volume and page references to the Characteristics (1964) appear by default, without a title abbreviation, e.g., II 120-122): COL = Correspondence of John Locke (1976; cited by volume and page); ECHU = Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1975; cited by book, chapter and section number); LEV=
Shaftesbury himself made use of the strategies he recommends for avoiding persecution when writing about controversial subjects.

At the same time, and equally ignored by the critics who dismiss him as “amateur” (Filonowicz 1991, 4), Shaftesbury firmly expresses his impatience with the “mean, impotent, dull” sort who write in a manner “which amuses all alike, and leaves the most sensible man, and even a friend, equally at a loss to understand what one’s real mind is, upon any subject” (I 45). Caution, according to Shaftesbury, is no excuse for sacrificing intelligibility.

If Shaftesbury writes cautiously in the Characteristics, we are fortunately offered considerable assistance by his private correspondence. In one letter he confesses, “what one writes freely to a friend in private is very different from what one writes for public view” (LL, 420). Indeed, Shaftesbury’s letters prove indispensable for establishing the anti-Lockean character of his thought, and a considerable

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Levitathan (1994); LL = The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury (1900); LCT = A Letter Concerning Toleration (1983); LTAS = Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man at the University (1716); SC = Second Characters (1914); STOE = Some Thoughts on Education (1989; cited by section number); STR = Two Treatises of Government (1947; cited by section numbers, referring to Second Treatise).

6Filonowicz 1991, 4. It is remarkable that Filonowicz makes this characterization of Shaftesbury’s thought in an essay ostensibly aimed at reviving serious interest in Shaftesbury.

portion of this study is devoted to analyzing them. In the *Characteristics*, as we shall observe below, there appears just a single explicit reference to Locke by name. It becomes evident from the correspondence, however, that Locke is the unnamed foil of Shaftesbury’s arguments on every page of the *Characteristics*. My questions, inspired by the statements in Shaftesbury’s correspondence that overtly criticize Locke, are designed to discover Shaftesbury’s response to his former teacher. And I have found keeping Shaftesbury’s antagonism toward Locke in mind to be essential to uncovering the coherent intention of his thought. But the analysis of Shaftesbury’s correspondence is not such a simple task as we might be led to think on the basis of Shaftesbury’s assurance that he writes “freely” when writing privately. First of all, we usually have just Shaftesbury’s side of the correspondence to examine, though it is obvious that Shaftesbury takes a different tone with the young divinity student Michael Ainsworth than he does with the politically ambitious General Stanhope. Furthermore, when Locke is mentioned in the correspondence, it is clear that Shaftesbury chooses his words cautiously. In the single instance we shall consider where Shaftesbury writes directly to Locke, it is obvious that he does not write “freely” at all.

If we are to find in Shaftesbury a philosophy that clarifies and addresses certain deficiencies of Lockean liberalism, then we must be sure that we read the
Characteristics as the author intended it to be read. This requires, first of all, a cognizance of the extraordinary sophistication of Shaftesbury’s rhetoric. Therefore, this study begins with a Prologue discussing the most instructive example of that sophistication: the “Miscellaneous Reflections,” with which the Characteristics concludes. In the “Miscellany,” Shaftesbury reviews the previous five treatises in the third person, as if he were a scholar trying to interpret it. In the process, he not only provides us with many interpretive clues that aid our study, but also suggests several hermeneutic principles that we are encouraged to appropriate and practice ourselves when reading his book.

In Chapter 1, we turn to Shaftesbury’s correspondence, and examine his elaboration of “the greatest confidence in the world,” that his philosophy is intended as a response to Locke’s. We also have occasion to examine the single instance in the Characteristics where Shaftesbury cites Locke by name. Through an analysis of some of the harshest statements concerning Locke that appear in the correspondence, we are led to consider a paradox that emerges when we try to reconcile Shaftesbury’s anti-Lockeanism with his evident sympathies for liberal politics. We are also provided with an occasion to discuss how great a contrast Shaftesbury’s understanding of Locke strikes with the prevailing understanding of Locke today. Finally, we discuss the way in which the correspondence provides explicit clues
that aid us in discovering the largely implicit critique of Locke that unfolds in the *Characteristics*.

Chapter 2 discusses two letters written by the mature Shaftesbury that summarize his differences with Locke. In letters to General James Stanhope and the young divinity student Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury discusses the devastating blow Locke’s doctrine of individualism delivers against civic-spiritedness and, indeed, all “real care or concern” for others. And Shaftesbury provides a defense of the view that human beings are naturally social. He also criticizes Locke’s denial of innate ideas, with specific attention to the consequences this has for morality and religion. The question emerges whether, if Locke’s account of human nature is inaccurate, the political project he prescribes for such beings can avoid causing certain dissatisfactions in political life. The balance of this chapter is devoted to an attempt to draw out the implications for our understanding of Locke’s thought that follow from certain remarks Shaftesbury makes (without extensive explanation) concerning Locke’s “state of nature” doctrine, his account of human liberty (which Shaftesbury suggests that Stanhope compare with Hobbes’s), and the moral relativism that results from his thought. Shaftesbury’s charge that Locke did not understand classical philosophy, even as he rejected it, is also introduced.

The reasons leading to Shaftesbury’s initial rejection of modern rationalism are the subject of Chapter 3, which
examines a letter that Shaftesbury wrote to Locke in 1694. The historian Lawrence Klein accurately refers to this letter as Shaftesbury's "declaration of philosophic independence" (Klein 1994, 27). In the first part of the letter Shaftesbury criticizes the modern approach and announces his dissent. There can be no doubt that when Shaftesbury attacks "Descartes, or Mr Hobbs (sic), or any of their improvers," he has Locke especially in mind. Shaftesbury objects that modern philosophy fails to provide self-knowledge. In the second part of the letter, he makes a case for the superiority in this regard of the Socratic tradition of philosophy and argues that philosophy, to live up to the name, must address the moral dilemmas intrinsic to the human experience. We discover in this letter the beginnings of a critique of modern rationalism that is as novel as it is radical.

Chapter 4 discusses the most striking of Shaftesbury's letters concerning Locke. In a letter addressed to an anonymous "disciple," Shaftesbury responds to Locke's dying words as communicated to Anthony Collins. Shaftesbury observes a bitterness in Locke's complaint that life "affords no solid satisfaction." He also observes a contradiction between this complaint and Locke's simultaneous complaint that life is "short" (Id.). Very provocative for our purposes is Shaftesbury's intimation that Locke's views betray a latent Christianity. Shaftesbury then re-writes Locke's words from his own point of view, revealing in the
process a striking contrast between the outlooks of the two thinkers.

By following a path provided by Shaftesbury's response to Locke's dying words, we are led in Chapter 5 to the heart of the Characteristics, where Locke's words are repeated without attribution and are accompanied by a more extensive version of Shaftesbury's response. Here we examine Shaftesbury's account of the proper objectives of political philosophy, presented over and against those of the moderns. Philosophy, Shaftesbury argues, must undertake to answer the question of the human good. By criticizing the philosophy of "the schools" and modern philosophy in one breath, Shaftesbury suggests a hidden connection between the two. Elaborated here is Shaftesbury's most extensive critique of modern philosophy, a critique that is organized around Shaftesbury's response to Locke.

Chapter 6 consists of an analysis of the most directly political component of Shaftesbury's critique of Locke. In his "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm," Shaftesbury makes an argument for religious toleration that he clearly intends as an alternative to the argument Locke makes in the "Letter Concerning Toleration." By elaborating the differences between the two arguments, we discover that Shaftesbury thinks Locke to succeed in establishing religious peace only by undermining the foundations for all religious belief. Shaftesbury, on the contrary, argues that toleration can be justified from the point of view of one who thinks his
beliefs to be the true beliefs. The moderns are described as "enthusiastical atheists," who introduce a hybrid fanaticism rather than genuine toleration. This chapter concludes with a discussion of Shaftesbury's account of the motives animating the modern philosophers. By risking their "martyrdom" in the course of proliferating the view that human beings are naturally selfish beings, the moderns unwittingly reveal themselves to be subject to a misguided form of civic-spiritedness. Despite themselves, the actions of the modern philosophers serve as evidence for the natural sociability of human beings and for their inevitable attraction to moral virtue.

Chapter 7 completes this study by investigating the role that Shaftesbury's "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" plays in his critique of Locke. After establishing that Shaftesbury's defense of moral virtue is designed to defend it against the specific challenges posed by modern "free-thinkers" and by Christianity, we discover that Shaftesbury thinks that the moderns and Christians undermine moral virtue in similar ways. Both portray moral action to be mercenary and both identify the source of morality in authoritative will. Shaftesbury makes the case that human beings by nature admire as moral only those actions undertaken for the sake of "the species or public." He argues, further, that moral claims have meaning for us only to the extent that we regard morality to be supported by independent standards that are apprehensible by reason. Shaftesbury provides a moral
argument against the moral views of Christians and modern philosophers, revealing in the process that they have more in common than either would be comfortable admitting.

As the scope and character of Shaftesbury's critique of Locke unfolds, the relevance of that critique for students of political theory becomes very evident. It may nevertheless be necessary to defend the place of Shaftesbury in the tradition of political philosophy. After all, it is not merely the apparent ambiguity of Shaftesbury's arguments that has deterred political theorists from considering him for all of these years. Shaftesbury does not directly discuss political phenomena to the extent that we might hope. He does, in his "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" and in other places, announce his firm allegiance to liberal politics. But his status as a political philosopher is established primarily by his attention to the fundamental questions from which all political theory originates.

But as low as philosophy is reduced, if morals be allowed belonging to her, politics must undeniably be hers. For to understand the manners and constitutions of men in common, 'tis necessary to study man in particular, and know the creature as he is in himself, before we consider him in company, as he is interested in the State, or joined to any city or community. Nothing is more familiar than to reason concerning man in his confederate state and national relation, as he

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8Cf. I 72: "There is no real love of virtue, without the knowledge of public good. And where absolute power is, there is no public." Cf. also I 70, 272.
stands engaged to this or that society, by birth or naturalisation; yet to consider him as a citizen or commoner of the world, to trace his pedigree a step higher, and view his end and constitution in Nature itself, must pass, it seems for some intricate or over-refined speculation. (II 5)
Prologue

The “Miscellaneous Reflections” as Guide for the Perplexed

No doubt, the initial experience of every reader of the Characteristics is one of disorientation. Shaftesbury’s eclectic style of writing (or “mixed manner” (II 333)); the puzzling organization of the book; the strange titles of its six treatises and the variations in form and tone between the treatises all give rise to the reader’s initial frustration and dismay. This experience is inevitable. It is inevitable in part because the Characteristics requires a commentary to make sense of it. And, as odd as it may seem, that commentary is provided by Shaftesbury. But he provides it only in the Sixth and final treatise, “Miscellaneous Reflections on the Preceding Treatises,” which is written in the third person and appears as an interpretation of the preceding five treatises. Any attempt to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of Shaftesbury’s philosophy as presented in the Characteristics must begin with an awareness of the importance of the commentary with which it concludes. It is here that we find (mixed among sections with such obscure headings as “Football,” “A dialogue between our author and his bookseller,” “Authors and horsemanship” and even “Ambassadors from the moon”) illuminating discussions of the “Intention of the writer,” “His order and design” and the “Connection and union of the subject-treatises.”
In fact, there is little at all miscellaneous about the "Miscellaneous Reflections." The entire "miscellaneous" posture is from the beginning an obvious satire of the modern rebellion against critical standards and traditional literary forms, a rebellion which Shaftesbury elsewhere unequivocally condemns (cf. I 150ff.; II 157). Shaftesbury's irony is perfectly apparent in the following passages from the first chapter of the "Miscellany."

'Twas necessary, it seems, that the bottom of wit should be enlarged. 'Twas advisable that more hands should be taken into the work, and nothing could better serve this popular purpose than the way of miscellany or common essay, in which the most confused head, if fraught with a little invention and provided with common-place book learning, might exert itself to as much advantage as the most orderly and well-settled judgment...

Justness and accuracy of thought are set aside as too constraining and of too painful an aspect to be endured in the agreeable and more easy commerce of gallantry and modern wit... But since my chief intention in the following sheets is to descant cursorily upon some late pieces of a British

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1Consider Shaftesbury's remarks on the miscellaneous manner as employed by the authors of antiquity: "Even the satiric or miscellaneous manner of the polite ancients, required as much order as the most regular pieces. But the art was to destroy every such token or appearance, give an extemporary air to what was writ, and make the effect of art be felt without discovering the artifice" (II 169). Shaftesbury openly admits to imitating the various styles of classical authors (II 333, 334, n. 1); there is no reason to suspect that he discontinued this habit in the "Miscellany."
author, I will presume that what I have said already on this head is sufficient, and that it will not be judged improper or absurd in me, as I proceed, to take advantage of this miscellaneous taste which now evidently prevails. According to this method, whilst I serve as critic 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.... (II 158-161, emphasis added.)

In his subsequent interpretation, Shaftesbury proceeds to clarify and supplement the arguments of his principal five treatises, and does so (for the most part) systematically.² What is more, he comments on the rhetorical strategies that he employs in those treatises, offering suggestions and conjectures as if he were a scholar or literary critic, even as he examines his own work. Of course, when a "critic or interpreter" reviews arguments of which he is the author, those criticisms or interpretations acquire a special significance and credibility.

Consider, for example, the following: "He has hitherto... given only some few and very slender hints of going further or attempting to erect any scheme or model which may discover his pretense to a real architect

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²The miscellanarian begins discussing the "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" at II 173; turns to "Wit and Humour" at II 216; to "Advice" at II 239; to the "Inquiry on Virtue" at II 273; to "Moralists" at II 333; and comments on the "Miscellany" itself at II 351, thereby completing an orderly and systematic commentary.
capacity... what he offers by way of project or hypothesis is very faint, hardly spoken aloud, but muttered to himself in a kind of dubious whisper or feigned soliloquy” (II 239-40). Accompanying these remarks (which pertain exclusively to the first three treatises of the *Characteristics*) is a footnote directing the reader to six passages where such “slender hints” are to be found (II 239 n. 1). The guidance of the “Miscellany” thus proves indispensable. Every statement must be considered in light of Shaftesbury’s supplementary commentary; every statement is designed to be so considered. In the above example, the miscellanarian’s footnote serves to highlight certain earlier passages where

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3Since each of the treatises, excepting only the “Miscellany,” appeared in print independently in some form or other prior to the first publication of the *Characteristics* in 1711, the conventional wisdom has been that the *Characteristics* is a compilation of independent works. Shaftesbury resists giving that impression. In Miscellany IV, Chapter I, he writes: “We have already, in the beginning of our preceding Miscellany, taken notice of our author’s plan and the connection and dependency of his joint tracts, comprehended in two preceding volumes. We are now, in our commentator capacity, arrived at length to his second volume, to which the three pieces of the first appear preparatory. That they were really so designed, the advertisement to the first edition of his Soliloquy is a sufficient proof. He took occasion there, in a line or two, under the name of his printer... to prepare us for a more elaborate and methodical piece which was to follow. We have this system now before us [viz., the ‘Inquiry Concerning Virtue’]” (II 273). Indeed, the early publication of particular components of a larger work (especially by an author who was perpetually uncertain whether he would survive to finish and publish the larger work) is perfectly understandable. The *Characteristics*, there should be no doubt, is, as its author testifies, a single and unified whole.
parts of Shaftesbury’s arguments are deliberately understated, “hardly spoken aloud.” The first three treatises then demand to be reconsidered, giving proper weight to the arguments of those passages.

But the seemingly eccentric method of interpreting his own treatises in the third person serves a purpose beyond that of supplying important clues to Shaftesbury’s meaning. It also teaches us how to read the Characteristics, and confirms that Shaftesbury sees himself as one who writes “in parables, with a double meaning” (I 45). As he comments on his earlier treatises, the miscellanarian employs hermeneutic principles which he tacitly invites the reader to appropriate. He does not only interpret his own treatises, but also defends his interpretation with evidence from the text. A vivid example of this practice occurs as he explains the relationship between the “Inquiry on Virtue” and the dialogue “The Moralists” (II 333). To justify his claim that the dialogue is “an undertaking of greater weight,” he appeals to “his own rules.” The author of the “Miscellany” then provides a footnote directing us to places in the earlier treatises where the relevant rules are furnished, and indicates that the presence of these rules necessitates his interpretation (Id., n. 3). He thereby communicates to us a more important rule: Shaftesbury makes it his practice in the Characteristics consistently to follow his own rules.4 The

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4This appeal to “his own rules” is also employed by Shaftesbury at II
proper interpretation of many of Shaftesbury’s arguments therefore requires an accurate discernment and application of such rules.

The clarifying role of the "Miscellany" is best appreciated when it is consulted in the course of examining the treatises that it discusses. But it is helpful to mention here two more general directions that the author provides. First, as the very existence of the "Miscellany" as a supplement illustrates, key arguments in the *Characteristics* are divided into separate parts, and rarely appear in complete form in any one place. On this point, Shaftesbury relieves us of any need for inference.

It appears, indeed, that as high as our author in his critical capacity would pretend to carry the refined manner and accurate simplicity of the ancients, 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 continued chain or thread.

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295. It is used there to defend the "sincerity" of a particular argument in the "Inquiry." Notice that the rule is not that Shaftesbury is habitually truthful and sincere, but that "an affected gravity and feigned seriousness carried on through any subject, in such a manner as to leave no insight into the fiction or intended raillery, is in truth no raillery or wit at all; but a gross, immoral, and illiberal way of abuse, foreign to the character of a good writer, a gentleman, or man of worth" (emphasis added). Insincerity and equivocation may be justified so long as they are accompanied by some "insight into the fiction or intended raillery." Observe also how the miscellanarian supplements, as he paraphrases, the actual rule as it appears at I 45 (see n. 1 above).
Here our author's timorousness is visible. (II 334)

This means that it is incumbent upon the student of the Characteristics to put together the pieces. Hence, we must resist the temptation to dismiss Shaftesbury in frustration when he appears to digress from important arguments or to leave them incomplete. Second (and finally), Shaftesbury is not always sincere or forthright in his outward presentation of himself and his arguments. In other words, not only is he apt to withhold important information from us, but at times Shaftesbury even affects dispositions and assumes points of view that camouflage (because they are at odds with) his true position. The miscellanarian remarks of the "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm": "Notwithstanding the high airs of scepticism which our author assumes in his first piece...he has something of his own still in reserve, and holds a certain plan or system peculiar to himself" (II 238). In "Advice to an Author," Shaftesbury "has affected soliloquy, as pretending only to censure himself, but he has taken occasion to bring others into his company and make bold with personages and characters of no inferior rank...you have a confessing criminal" (II 272). In "The Moralists," he

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5Cf. II 174: "And now that I find I have in reality so much of it imparted to me, I may with better reason be pardoned if, after our author's example, I am led to write on such subjects as these with caution, at different reprises; and not singly, in one breath." Cf. also II 295.

6Italics my translation from the Latin original: "Habes confitentem
"conceals what is scholastical under the appearance of a polite work" (II 333). Of course, extraordinary caution is necessary when attempting to distinguish Shaftesbury's genuine position from one that he presents only for the sake of making a specific impression. Such distinctions rightfully deserve the strictest of scrutiny; the confessions that appear in the "Miscellany" (such as those immediately above) provide the most solid basis for making them. But to be unaware of Shaftesbury's strategic deception necessarily leads to a distorted, incomplete understanding of the book.

Shaftesbury wrote with great care and demonstrates extraordinary control over his text. It will become evident that his many unusual rhetorical techniques are employed for good reasons. His techniques certainly allow him to communicate views that -- if expressed openly -- would have attracted hostility. But what is more, they allow him to speak to multiple audiences, and to make multiple arguments to those audiences. Shaftesbury saw that the struggle for liberalism was far from won, and he joined decisively in the effort to make its case. Yet he perceived, at the same time, grave deficiencies in the modern argument for liberalism that needed to be addressed. This by itself requires a careful and sophisticated rhetoric. Complicating matters for him further is the fact that often what needs to be said, what best speaks to most people's concerns, is far from identical.
with the arguments and formulations that persuade political theorists and philosophers. Shaftesbury certainly intended the *Characteristics* to have a wide audience and make a great impression.\(^7\) His achievement in this regard is best recorded by Macaulay.

He had not merely disciples, but worshippers. His life was short: but he lived long enough to become the founder of a new sect of English freethinkers, diametrically opposed in opinions and feelings to that sect of freethinkers of which Hobbes was the oracle. During many years the *Characteristics* continued to be the Gospel of romantic and sentimental unbelievers, while the Gospel of coldblooded and hardheaded unbelievers was the *Leviathan*. (Macaulay 1914, 2582)\(^8\)

But for the “patient and grave reader... who in order to moralise can afford to retire into his closet,” Shaftesbury provides the unsentimental, systematic arguments for which there are no substitutes (II 274). The “high road of

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\(^7\)See LL 507-8, where Shaftesbury confides, “Let me tell you (and I care not who hears me say it), I sit not idle; though far off. I have secrets, a long history, a pen and something of a name in the world. I can be heard, and in a certain capacity can command the public ear; of which some late successes have particularly put me in possession. I can speak even when I am dead; and shall have that to leave behind me which may do myself and friends, as well as my country, some kind of right... these are my arms -- remember.”

\(^8\)Macaulay fails to mention what we shall see beyond a doubt: that, in Shaftesbury’s view, the member of that "sect of free thinkers of which Hobbes was the oracle" whose influence was most poisonous to political virtue and virtue itself was Locke.
demonstration” is distinguished from the “diverting paths of poetry or humour” (II 283). Such a reader is required, though, to undertake considerable labors. Not the least of these is to follow carefully the guidance provided by the "Miscellany."

Few of his critics have paid any considerable attention to the “Miscellaneous Reflections.” None have recognized its fundamental place as a guide for the conscientious reader. It is no wonder that so many complain about the “unsystematic Shaftesbury,” insist that he is “far from being a great philosopher,” and assert that “[n]o one supposes that Shaftesbury’s thought is very profound or very coherent.”

In this study, the guidance of the “Miscellany” will be considered at every possible turn.

9Fowler 1882, 57, Voitle 1984, 338, are the qualified exceptions. Voitle recognizes that the “Miscellaneous Reflections provide a commentary on the first two volumes, intended to draw the various tracts together.” But as Shaftesbury’s biographer, his treatment of the substance of the Characteristics is brief and superficial; and he makes nothing more of his observation. Fowler’s study of Shaftesbury is arguably the most clarifying and penetrating to date. He notes that the “Miscellany” was designed “partly to defend, partly to supplement the treatises that preceded it.” One finds oneself wishing, however, when Fowler later discusses the “Inquiry Concerning Virtue,” that he had paid closer attention to Shaftesbury’s comments (in the “Miscellany”) on the rhetorical intention of that treatise.

10Smith 1950, 163; Bosanquet 1884, 3; Willey 1964, 227. All are cited by Filonowicz 1991, 4 as examples of Shaftesbury’s abuse at the hands of his critics. As noted above (n. 2), Filonowicz goes on to add his name to this list.
Chapter 1

"The Greatest Confidence in the World": Shaftesbury’s Anti-Lockeanism

In the Characteristics there appears just a single explicit reference to John Locke, and that in a footnote. At a critical moment in his dialogue “The Moralists,” Shaftesbury cites a passage from the Essay Concerning Human Understanding as evidence supporting the interlocutor Theocles’ critique of individualism, of the view that human beings are best understood as naturally independent agents, and that politics is best understood as an artificial (if useful) instrument in the service of entirely private needs (II 63, n. 1). Of course, Locke is a consummate individualist, and we may accurately describe Lockean liberalism as “liberal individualism.” But when seeking in his Essay to establish the unknowability of qualities of substances on the basis of our sensory experiences of them, Locke makes this remarkable claim:

This is certain, Things, however absolute and entire they seem in themselves, are but Retainers to other parts of Nature, for that which they are most taken notice of by us. Their observable Qualities, Actions, and Powers, are owing to something without them; and there is not so complete and perfect a part, that we know, of Nature, which does not owe the Being it has, and
the Excellencies of it, to its Neighbors; and we must not confine our thoughts within the surface of any body, but look a great deal farther, to comprehend perfectly those Qualities that are in it. (ECHU, IV.vi.11)

Like Locke, Shaftesbury’s Theocles argues for the “mutual correspondancy and relation” of the natural beings (II 65). This explains Shaftesbury’s reference to the passage from Locke’s Essay.¹ But unlike Locke, Theocles finds this observation to lend great advantage to the classic thesis that human beings are by nature social and political: “Here then is our main subject insisted on, that neither man nor any other animal, though ever so complete a system of parts as to all within, can be allowed in the same manner complete as to all without, but must be considered as having a further relation abroad to the system of his kind” (II 64).

Now the classic thesis holds that human beings as such are political beings and not independent agents. Moreover, it holds that political life must be understood as existing fundamentally not for the sake of satisfying private needs but rather for the sake of “noble action” (cf., Aristotle Politics 1281a1-3; Strauss 1953, 134). Such noble or

¹It must be noted that even as Shaftesbury appropriates that part of Locke’s argument which observes an interdependency of natural beings, he seems to ignore Locke’s main point: that this interdependency is so pervasive and complicated that it is impossible to know the qualities of a thing or the specific character of its relationships to other things. See n. 15 below.
virtuous actions are distinguished, in Shaftesbury’s formulation, by being motivated by a concern for “the public good or interest of his species,” and not by selfish interests (I 279). A conception of nature as orderly and inter-related not only supports the notion that human beings are naturally social, but also invites us to envision that there is in public life some higher end or purpose that transcends selfish concerns, some purpose to which individuals owe service and allegiance (II 64). The position that Theocles undertakes to defend is therefore antithetical to the Lockean position.² It is no accident that this reference to Locke’s Essay occurs at a point in the dialogue immediately preceding a discussion by the interlocutors of various “state of nature” theories (II 78-84). In that

²In fact, Shaftesbury reveals almost immediately that Theocles’ position is considerably more complicated than it initially appears. The optimistic cosmology that he defends (and which Shaftesbury is widely assumed to have subscribed to) proves, by his own admission, an inadequate guide: “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” (II 65). Human sociability must be defended on other grounds (cf. I 74-77; II 78-84), as must moral virtue (cf. I 243-244). What is more, we have to evaluate Theocles’ self-described “sermon” (II 60) in light of the miscellanarian’s warning that we must distinguish Theocles’ “real character” from his appearance as a “feigned preacher” (II 335). The apparent order and interdependency of things may support a prejudice in favor of human sociability and the notion that there is a purpose that individuals serve beyond their private interests; but, in the absence of perfect wisdom, it cannot provide a sound basis for such views.
discussion, though Locke goes unnamed, his "state of nature" theory is shown to contain grave deficiencies.\(^3\) We are forced to conclude, therefore, that the only explicit reference to Locke in the *Characteristics* (or anywhere in the works that Shaftesbury published during his lifetime) enlists Locke ironically in support of an emphatically anti-Lockean view.

This is, to say the least, surprising. After all, Locke supervised the education of the young Third Earl from infancy, and was a longtime denizen of the Shaftesbury household. In his correspondence, Shaftesbury claims to have been the first recipient of the education that Locke prescribes in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, and he refers to Locke affectionately as "my friend and foster-father" (LL 332). Moreover, Shaftesbury describes with admiration the role that Locke played as personal physician and political confidant to the First Earl (Shaftesbury's grandfather), who founded the Whig party (Id., 328-334). It makes sense to suspect that the finest student of the greatest philosopher of modern liberalism, and grandson of one of its political founders, should be in fundamental agreement with his illustrious teacher. And, indeed, are not the various political arguments that we encounter in the *Characteristics* identifiably liberal? Does not Shaftesbury's thought reflect the same (liberal) desire to remedy the

\(^3\)This portion of Shaftesbury's dialogue is discussed in Chapter 2 of
distortions of public and private life that are caused by religious fanaticism?

Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence in Shaftesbury's private correspondence and his posthumously published *Second Characters* that he thought Locke "little able to treat the home points of philosophy" (Ibid., 416). In a letter to General Stanhope, Shaftesbury reveals a secret crucial to understanding his thought.

Thus have I 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. (Ibid., emphasis added)

It is this deliberate attempt to conceal his differences with Locke that accounts for the near absence of Locke's name in the *Characteristics*. Shaftesbury's attacks on Hobbes and the other moderns are, however, pervasive and pronounced. But the final lines of the unfinished *Second Characters* equate Locke with Hobbes, "Hobbes, Locke, etc., still the same man, same genus at bottom -- 'beauty is nothing' -- virtue is nothing" (SC, 178; cf., Aronson 1959). Even more telling, in *Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man* at

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4 Shaftesbury uses "even" here in the now archaic sense of "exactly" or "precisely."

5 Aronson is to be credited for collecting and presenting to political scientists many examples (especially from the correspondence) where
the University, Shaftesbury writes that "[i]t was Mr. Locke that struck the home blow: for Mr. Hobbes' character and base slavish principle in government took off the poison 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" (LTAS, 32).6

The above statement expresses Shaftesbury's chief reservation concerning modern liberalism (developed at length in the Characteristics): the moderns provide a politics of peace, liberty, and security to a world desperately in need of it, only through a radical undermining of the natural foundation for human conceptions of virtue and the orderliness of the world. Somehow, in the absence of this foundation we also lose the basis for an idea of God.7 In other words, the modern philosophers ease the politically destabilizing pressures that result from moral and religious controversies precisely by undermining the foundations for the moral and religious views of all competing claimants. Thus, not only are fanatics tamed by Locke's arguments, but every representative of moral or religious seriousness finds himself without grounds. Here Locke is the real culprit, he

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6 The important (if perplexing) parenthetical phrase, "which are the same as those of God" is omitted and ignored without explanation by more than one scholar reproducing this passage (Aronson 1959; Taylor 1989).

7 This claim is developed in the "Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit" (I
"struck at all fundamentals." Despite all apparent differences between Hobbes and Locke (of which Shaftesbury is profoundly aware), Shaftesbury charges Locke with being a clandestine Hobbesian. Specifically, it was Locke's cautious, gentlemanly presentation and liberal political program that allowed him to succeed in debasing human beings where Hobbes fell short. Whatever sort of liberal Shaftesbury may have been, he certainly was not a "modern liberal" in any usual sense of the term.

Shaftesbury's interpretation of Locke's philosophy, especially where morality and religion are concerned, is, without question, very different from the standard interpretation today. While few would contest the observation that Locke's political philosophy results in a politics much less involved in matters of morality and religion than any that preceded it, only very few understand Locke's philosophy to be so comprehensively hostile to moral and religious seriousness as Shaftesbury maintains it to be. Shaftesbury's reading of Locke depends greatly on his insight that Locke was one of those "free writers," who "espoused those principles which Mr. Hobbes set a foot in this last age" (LTAS, 31-32). Most scholars today, on the contrary, perceive and stress fundamental differences between Hobbes and Locke. Indeed, Charles Taylor, who takes note of the apparent anti-Lockeanism of Shaftesbury's correspondence,
judges Shaftesbury ultimately "a product of the age of Locke" (Taylor 1989, 247-259). It is evident, however, that Taylor insufficiently appreciates the radical character of Shaftesbury's specific charges against Locke. As mentioned in the introduction, a satisfactory consideration of those charges would have forced Taylor (at the very least) to reconsider his confidence that Locke was a morally benevolent deist. John Dunn, who seeks at the same time to make so much of the formative influence on Locke's political ideology of his tenure among the Shaftesbury entourage, and so little of Leo Strauss's argument that Locke and Hobbes were kindred thinkers, oddly refrains from commenting on the statements of the third Earl that I quote above; this despite the fact that there can be no doubt that Dunn is familiar with them (Dunn 1973, 27-30, 169n. 4, 218-219). In effect, Dunn urges us to consider the possibility that the advantages Locke enjoyed through his association with the Shaftesbury family may explain Locke's liberal politics. Dunn, however, (selectively?) ignores the fact that the Third Earl makes it clear that he thought Locke's political philosophy to be essentially Hobbes's, "still the same man -- same genus at bottom" (SC, 178). Indeed, Shaftesbury's indignant criticism of Locke's amoral, irreligious account of human nature

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8Compare especially Dunn 1972, 222 with 102n. 2 in light of Dunn's observation of irony at 169n. 4. Dunn must be aware of Shaftesbury's equation of Locke with Hobbes, since he cites the very letters in which these equations are found, but refrains from commenting on them.
contrasts markedly with Dunn’s view of Locke as a “profoundly
and exotically incoherent,” deeply Christian, inheritor of
the natural law tradition (Dunn 1969, 29, 96-101). Leo
Strauss, Robert Goldwin, and Thomas Pangle all offer
interpretations of Locke that harmonize with Shaftesbury’s,
though they are certainly in the minority (Strauss 1953, 202-
251; Goldwin in Strauss-Cropsey 1987, 476-512; Pangle 1988,
129-279). It is not the purpose of this study to settle
questions about Locke’s “real mind” on the issues at hand.
We seek, rather, to understand Shaftesbury’s critical view of
Locke in order to uncover a forgotten view of the thinker who
is most responsible for laying the foundation of modern
liberalism. We endeavor to establish that Shaftesbury’s
judgment of Locke certainly merits greater consideration than
it has received. His intimacy with Locke, his place at the
center of the fundamental controversies from which modern
liberalism emerged, and his stature as one of the philosophic
giants of the eighteenth-century require us to confront with
serious attention his understanding of Locke as we struggle
to form our own.

The statements in the correspondence make explicit much
that in the Characteristics remains implicit. The letters
provide important clues that help us to discover how
Shaftesbury’s defense of liberalism in the Characteristics
serves at the same time as a back-handed critique of modern
liberalism. The letters offer us an easier route to the
conclusion that Locke is the primary target of Shaftesbury’s
most powerful criticisms. However, the letters contain only fragments of arguments. A complete account of Shaftesbury’s differences with Locke emerges only as Shaftesbury’s own philosophy of liberalism unfolds in the Characteristics. A dialogue may then be discovered between Locke, the greatest philosophic founder of modern liberalism, and Shaftesbury, the first great liberal critic of modernity. This dialogue, furthermore, is not without a certain drama. It is the drama of a student whose thought is presented in deliberate opposition to his famous teacher, “whose name is so established in the world, but with whom [he] ever concealed [his] differences... as much as possible” (LL, 332).

We must ask, among other things, why Shaftesbury was so determined to conceal his differences with Locke. The demands of gratitude, gentlemanliness, and familial loyalty might have been important factors; but they can hardly have accounted for Shaftesbury’s decision to conceal a position so central to his thought. In fact, as we shall see, Shaftesbury continued to share deep political sympathies with Locke even as he criticized Locke’s moral and philosophic views. Specifically, Shaftesbury is first and foremost a critic of religious fanaticism and of the persecution and sectarianism that it breeds. He is only secondarily (if nevertheless relentlessly) a critic of the modern solution to these problems. The Third Earl confronts this difficulty with suitable discretion.
In an effort to capitalize as much as possible on the insight afforded by Shaftesbury's private whisperings concerning his former teacher, we shall next consider the arguments and fragments of arguments that appear in the four letters that express Shaftesbury's anti-Lockeanism most openly and directly. The letters to General James Stanhope on November 7, 1709 and to Michael Ainsworth on June 3, 1709 both contain explicit accounts by the mature Shaftesbury of his specific objections to Locke's political philosophy. Shaftesbury's letter to Locke himself on September 29, 1694, written when Shaftesbury was just twenty-three years old, communicates the objections that initiated his rejection of the modern outlook (COL, v. V, 150-154). Finally, we shall examine the letter addressed simply "To a Friend," in which Shaftesbury issues a very harsh judgment of Locke (based on his dying words) just five weeks after his death in 1704 (LL, 344-347). It is noteworthy that we find no evidence of Shaftesbury admitting his differences with Locke to a third person prior to Locke's death.

9The letter to Ainsworth appears in LTAS, 31-35, and, with a few minor differences, in LL, 403-405. The letter to Stanhope appears in LL, 413-417.
Chapter 2

The Letters to Stanhope and Ainsworth

The letter to Stanhope takes the form of a response to a confession by the latter that he has a secret passion for studying philosophy in his hours of leisure. General Stanhope, at the time of this letter, had already established a brilliant military career. Churchill offers this account of his stature and accomplishments:

Stanhope ranks high among the heroic and brilliant figures of the age of Anne. He was an accomplished soldier... During the battle of Almenara in 1710 he actually, as Commander-in Chief, cut down with his own sword the opposing commander. When it is remembered that to these unfading laurels he subsequently added the successive discharge of the duties of Foreign Secretary and eventually Prime Minister, his title to rare distinction cannot be disputed. (Churchill 1938, v. III., 339-40)

Shaftesbury begins his letter by praising the General’s philosophic pursuits, assuring him that while this may be a rare taste among moderns, "you have the best of ancient heroes to keep you in countenance" (LL, 414). This distinction between ancients and moderns serves as an entering wedge for a critique of modern political philosophy, and of Locke in particular.
Modern heroes cannot find in modern philosophy "the good nourishment and preservative of the patriot and the statesman" that philosophy, according to Shaftesbury's account, historically has provided and always should provide (Id.). This is a consequence of the modern view that denies to human beings any natural social or political inclinations. Shaftesbury draws an inevitable and radical conclusion from that view: "[a]nd this for certain is most true, that if man be not by nature sociable, he is the foolishest creature on earth to make society or the public the least part of his real care or concern" (Id.). Of course, the modern account that portrays the natural condition of human beings as autonomous, asocial, individualistic, and (most importantly) apolitical, provides a necessary justification for the contractarian politics that the moderns inaugurate. And it is only from the contractarian understanding of political association that modern liberal notions of individual rights and strictly limited government derive their meaning. But civic-spirited, heroic individuals such as Stanhope excite the admiration of Shaftesbury, Churchill and others precisely because their motives are not founded on utilitarian calculation. They understand their actions as driven by a non-contractarian devotion to the "society or public," and their devotion makes them willing to make great sacrifices when necessary. What reward or recompense could justify risking one's life for others if human beings are defined by nature as radically individualistic? Shaftesbury thus
introduces a troubling paradox characteristic of modern liberal thought: the very precepts that support contractarian politics (and, hence, the modern liberal political climate) are corrosive of those generous and devoted motives and ambitions that evoke our most profound admiration (cf. Pangle 1988, 211).

An example of this paradox is to be found in the oft-quoted remark of President Kennedy, "and so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" (Sorensen 1965, 248). Kennedy’s statement succeeds in inspiring us by appealing to a conception of citizenship that involves actions and aspirations that transcend self-concern. He invites us to participate in a common project the aim of which is somehow grander and more promising than our ordinary preoccupation with satisfying our individual, private needs. But I would submit that what makes Kennedy’s exhortation so memorable is the sense we have that it is uncharacteristic of our lives as citizens in a modern liberal democracy. Even as it flatters us to think ourselves capable of such noble aspirations, we sense at the same time something in his message that is alien. Liberal individualism is, in a sense, all about "what your country can do for you." As Locke puts it in his Second Treatise, "[t]he great and chief end, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property" (§124; cf. also Strauss, Cropsey 1987, 495-6). Are we not inclined
ultimately to regard Kennedy’s sentiment as “idealistic,” or, in other words, out of place with reality soberly understood?

Shaftesbury, though, is unwilling to concede that men like Stanhope (who gracefully embody Kennedy’s ideal) are the “foolishest creature[s] on earth.” On the contrary, the Stanhopes of the world serve as powerful evidence for doubting the modern conception of human nature.¹ Shaftesbury offers this alternative conclusion from such examples of civic-spiritedness: “...if when he tries to shake off this principle, he has either no success or makes things worse with him than before, it is a shrewd presumption of what he is born to” (Id.). The Third Earl consistently portrays social and political inclinations as intrinsic to human nature, and this distinction marks the starting point for his rejection of Lockean liberalism. What is more, never does he justify this portrayal in terms of society’s need for civic-spirited types in times of crisis. Rather, Shaftesbury implies that to leave undeveloped and repressed that aspect of our humanity that is attracted to public service “makes things worse” for the individual himself. Indeed, there has been, in liberal societies, little scarcity of individuals willing to take great risks for society in times of crisis. The difficulty, as Shaftesbury points out, is that such persons inevitably lack a basis for understanding themselves

¹In the Characteristics, Shaftesbury interprets examples of the behavior of Hobbes and “other modern reformers” as unwittingly providing evidence in support of human sociability (I 57-65).
in modern terms. Even or precisely as individuals we have needs and aspirations that modern liberalism leaves unexplained, unattended, and underdeveloped.

A further respect in which Shaftesbury expresses important differences with Locke concerns the status of morality and religion in relation to human nature. Apparently in response to a question from Stanhope, Shaftesbury condemns Locke’s preoccupation with the controversy over “innate ideas” as “one of the childishest disputes that ever was” (Id.). This issue is also discussed in a letter to the young divinity student Michael Ainsworth, and we shall here consider Shaftesbury’s criticism as it appears in both places.

In order to address the question of the source and foundation for human moral and religious inclinations, Shaftesbury insists that we must descend from the metaphysical heights of the innate ideas controversy and approach the question as the ancients approached it. This provides Shaftesbury with an occasion to introduce to Stanhope what will become a familiar theme of his critique of Locke, that Locke and the modern rationalists before him did not understand ancient philosophy or the ancient philosophers (cf. LL, 404; LTAS, 33; Characteristics, I 61).

Well it is for our friend Mr. Locke, and other modern philosophers of his sire, 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 Stagyrite 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... [i]t is the same old contest when rightly stated.

"Nature has the power to separate the just from the unjust" "What leads us to friendships?" 2 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. 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... They could allow nature to bestow ideas suitable and proportionable to the organs,

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2Italics not in the original, which appear only in Latin, and are apparently references to Horace, Satires I.iii.113-114 and II.vi.75 respectively. There is a difficulty with ascribing the Latin quotations to Horace unqualifiedly, since the first quotation (I.iii.113) reads in Horace not "Nature distinguishes..." but "nec natura potest iusto secernere iniquum, dividit a bona diversis, fugienda petendis" or "Nature does not distinguish the just from the unjust as she divides the good things from those to be avoided." Also, the second quotation (II.vi.75) continues on in Horace to raise the question whether we enter friendships out of interest or, rather, for the practice of moral virtue. It seems to be the case that Shaftesbury here selectively quotes Horace for his own purpose.
Locke’s denial of the existence of principles innate to the human mind appears to support the view that human beings are naturally without an inevitable moral or religious character. It may be especially necessary for Locke to argue for such a conception of human nature in order to pave the way for a politics that is distinguished above all by an unprecedented apparent neutrality in matters of morality and religion.

Shaftesbury concedes that a genuine controversy exists concerning the question of the origin of moral and religious opinions. But he charges Locke with skirting the real question when arguing the matter in terms of innate ideas. By denying the existence of innate ideas, Locke appears confident that he has at once refuted the challenges that both Christian theology and classical philosophy pose to his modern conception of human nature. But Locke in fact deals with classical philosophy only in the form in which it is presented by the Christian theologians who dominated the English schools of philosophy. Although Shaftesbury nowhere directly discusses, for example, Plato’s doctrine of ideas or Aristotle’s metaphysics, his unmistakable implication is that the ancients provide arguments for the existence of natural moral characteristics independent from any metaphysical proofs. Shaftesbury cites numerous examples of unlearned “ideas” that correspond to various creatures’ natural constitutions. Winged creatures anticipate safety in the air even before their first flight; likewise, the idea of nursing
occurs to viviparous creatures and their offspring without the aid of art or instruction (Id.). The question to be answered is whether or not there are certain social, moral, and religious impulses in human beings that are everywhere manifest. By denying that specific moral ideas and religious principles are imprinted on the human mind, Locke pretends to establish an accurate conception of human nature that lacks intrinsic moral or religious characteristics. It is with this that Shaftesbury takes issue, and he rightly sees that massive social and political consequences are at stake.

To Ainsworth, in a similar vein, immediately after charging Locke with throwing "all order and virtue out of the world, and [making] the very ideas of these (which are the same as those of God) unnatural and without foundation in our minds," Shaftesbury locates a chief cause of this sad effect in Locke’s denial of innate ideas.

*Innate* is a word he poorly plays upon: the right word, tho’ 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 enter’d, or the *moment* that one body come 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. (*LTAS*, 32; cf. *LL*, 403)
If no innate ideas, it might seem to follow, then no natural foundation for politically relevant ideas of morality and religion. Locke would, on this basis, be able to expel from political discourse those age-old moral and theological questions that have so often proven disruptive. Once the slate is wiped clean, he can argue for a new and more narrowly rational politics, aimed strictly at providing for public peace and ensuring the security of private property. Thus Locke hopes effectively to secure both the "public good" (i.e., peace, security) and human happiness -- or, as he would have it, "contentment" (STR, §3; LCT, 26; ECHU, II.xxi.59). These basic political goods can be provided for, moreover, without exposing men to tyranny of either the Christian or Hobbesian varieties. But however effective Shaftesbury may admit Locke's arguments concerning innate ideas to be in answering the "gibberish of the schools" that represents an "egregious form of intellectual bondage," it is Shaftesbury's position that they fail to achieve their deepest objective.³ To deny that specific ideas are imprinted on our minds proves less than may appear. The observation that children do not have moral or religious ideas at birth (an observation that Locke makes much of

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³LTAS, 34. Shaftesbury in several places concedes that Locke's philosophy is a welcome corrective to "the rubbish of the schools in which most of us have been bred up" (LL, 416). See also LTAS, 2, where Shaftesbury offers his strongest praise of Lockean philosophy as a welcome influence given the intellectual climate of the late seventeenth Century. Compare with Characteristics (I 65).
by no means leads to the conclusion that no moral or religious ideas are natural to human beings. Furthermore, Shaftesbury regards any abstract discussion of "innate ideas" as misleading. This is because he holds that there are no human ideas apart from the "connatural" ideas we form through the encounter between our perceiving minds and the perceivable natural world. Far from being a passive receptor of sensory perceptions, the human mind is a part of nature, incorporating the full range of human needs and longings, which figure prominently in its apprehension of the world. Human beings need not have particular "characters" imprinted on their minds prior to their experience of the world in order to possess certain moral and religious "characteristics" that have definite political implications. The real controversy, according to Shaftesbury's formulation, is then whether the human mind (itself an integral part of nature), when operating in the world, does or does not

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5Shaftesbury does not elaborate here or elsewhere the precise meaning of the term "connatural." It is nevertheless worth observing two further implications of the term that contrast with the Lockean position. First, Shaftesbury seems to imply that the needs or longings we bring to bear in apprehending the world may cast light on (rather than distorting or hopelessly subjectifying our understanding of) the world outside of ourselves. Second, the term does not seem to require (as Locke's epistemology certainly does) the recognition of a reality to nature that is separate from and hopelessly inaccessible to human apprehension. This second implication distinguishes Shaftesbury from both the Lockean and the Christian views, each of which posit the existence of an entirely mysterious world outside of the world of human experience.
inevitably form certain characteristic ideas regarding morality and divinity.

In the letter to Ainsworth, Shaftesbury admits that certain anthropological evidence is relevant to this question. We cannot identify the "Characteristics of Man" without observing and talking to human beings wherever they are discovered. Indeed, in his Essay, when denying that the idea of a god is innate, it is Locke who is eager to interpret reports of distant native peoples in such a way as to portray such peoples as lacking any notion of a god (ECHU I.iii.9; I.iv.8; cf. I 223, n. 1). But most of the evidence presented by Locke suggests only the presence of atheistic individuals among many peoples, which hardly indicates the absence of an idea of god. Where Locke makes claims more directly to the point (i.e., that there are peoples who have never even conceived of a god), Shaftesbury questions "the credulous Mr. Locke[‘s]" rendering of the reports, describing Locke’s assertions as "but a negative upon a hearsay" (LTAS, 33). Furthermore, Shaftesbury, who was a vehement critic of the treatment suffered by natives in the Americas, observes that such natives had been given good cause to conceal secrets from their European persecutors (Id.).⁶ Developments in the field of anthropology tend to vindicate Shaftesbury’s

⁶Cf. Voitle 1984, 57. Voitle prints a letter from the Shaftesbury collection in which the third Earl indignantly chastises the governing body of South Carolina (where the Shaftesburys had land interests) for their barbarous treatment of the native inhabitants.
inclinations on these matters. Everywhere that human beings have been discovered, they live together in some sort of political association. Likewise, concepts of moral right and wrong, of piety, the sacred, and a providential deity have been observed among even the most insulated and remote of peoples.

If we are of a nature as human beings such that moral, civic, and religious concerns are an inevitable part of what we are, then what are we to think of the account of that nature that is advanced by modern liberal individualism? Must we not suspect, however much we may treasure the peace and liberty that modern liberalism appears to secure, that certain distortions and dissatisfactions must follow from a political system that is designed for a type of being decidedly different from ourselves?

Shaftesbury offers in these letters little specific explanation of the method that we should employ in addressing the questions he raises about morality and human nature. It is likely that the heroic Stanhope and the pious Ainsworth would be less inclined than ourselves to press this issue, since they would find Shaftesbury's elevated language and moralistic assurances so comforting. His references to

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7See Morgan 1972 [1851], 149-259. Morgan's classic study, the culmination of thirty years residence among the Ho-De'-No-Sau-Nee (Iroquois) people makes a powerful argument for the view that "the mind is, by nature, full of religious tendencies" (149). Cf. also, Durkheim, 1995 [1912].
Horace point to certain questions we must undertake to answer, but they do not by themselves indicate the proper way to approach them. The title of his major work, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*, may indicate what Shaftesbury ultimately has in mind. If there are certain human characteristics that apply to all men everywhere, to their manners (or “morals” as the word then encompassed), and to their opinions about morality, religion, and politics; and if these characteristics are manifest in all human times, then they would need to be accommodated by a liberalism that adequately attends to the full range of human needs.

The letters to Stanhope and Ainsworth include a number of other provocative observations concerning Locke. These observations contain less elaboration than we might hope for, and therefore they represent, in the truest sense, clues that must be put together with things said elsewhere (especially in the *Characteristics*), in order to gain satisfactory insight into Shaftesbury’s position. They deserve attention here because they introduce themes that he returns to frequently in places where Locke is not explicitly named.

As if to explain the what might otherwise appear to be counter-intuitive claims that Locke’s philosophy advances a view of human nature that denies any natural social or moral attributes, Shaftesbury urges Stanhope to observe the thinly-veiled Hobbesian character of Locke’s state of nature.
But all 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’s, that is more of a piece, as I believe. (LL, 415)

By “your author,” Shaftesbury evidently refers to himself, thus directing Stanhope to consider Locke’s presentation of the “state of nature” in the Second Treatise in accompaniment with Shaftesbury’s discussion of that doctrine in *The Moralists.* The political theories of Hobbes and Locke are, of course, both grounded in specific accounts of the pre-political, “natural” state of human beings. Locke’s account of the “state of nature” begs comparison with Hobbes’s, and scholars have regularly engaged in that comparison. It is sufficient for present purposes to assume hypothetically the validity of Shaftesbury’s claim that Locke’s “State of Nature” is “chimerical” and essentially (however covertly) Hobbesian, and to consider the implications.

The most significant implication of such an equation is that the sincerity of Locke’s apparent claim that the state of nature was originally a benign state of peace and plenty comes into doubt (cf. ST, §6, 31). Hobbes’s "state of

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8 The *Moralists* appears as the fifth treatise in the *Characteristics.* It first appeared in separate publication in 1705, before the date of this letter, so we may presume that this is what Shaftesbury is referring to.

9 The clearest treatment of the relationship between Locke’s state of nature and Hobbes’, which argues for their fundamental similarity is Goldwin in Strauss-Cropsey 1987, 476-512. Locke brings his account of
nature" is the perpetual "war of all against all," a condition of penury, absent of any of the conditions for (or inclinations to) concern for others. And the obvious difference in Locke's presentation, his claim that a state of peace preceded that of war for pre-political man, provides a crucial basis in nature for Locke's preference for liberal politics against Hobbesian despotism. The Lockean citizen can appeal to a pre-political human condition that is preferable to the condition of being subject to despotism. Locke writes, "...for no rational creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse" (Id., §131; also §137). But what becomes of Lockean liberalism once the appeal to a pre-political condition of liberty and harmony loses its credibility? Does not Locke's preference for limited government and individual rights become a matter of taste instead of natural right? From this perspective, Hobbes's system, which forbids limits on political authority on the ground that the condition of civil war is incomparably more hazardous, comes to light, as Shaftesbury puts it, as "more of a piece."

Our understanding of Shaftesbury's response to Locke's doctrine of the "state of nature" is assisted by a discussion occurring in the "Moralists," the dialogue that serves as the fifth of six treatises that constitute the Characteristics (II 77-84). The discussion consists of two parts. In the
first, Philocles (a modern "skeptic") argues to an unnamed "old gentleman" that the state of nature was a state of war. In other words, he offers a Hobbesian criticism of the Lockean view that human beings were originally at peace in the state of nature. When the old gentleman states his belief that man is not by nature sociable, Philocles forces him to conclude that man was led to associate not by "natural inclination" but "from some particular circumstances" (II 78).

The core of Philocles' argument is that if human beings were not sociable, there would be no reason to have concern for each other. "If according to their nature they could live out of society with so little affection for one another's persons," Philocles declares, "'tis not likely that upon occasion they would spare one another's persons" (II 79). Locke, of course, argues that it is ultimately a state of war that leads to the formation of civil society (STR, §20). Philocles' argument casts doubt on the plausibility of Locke's claim that any peace could have preceded war for human beings who are naturally unsociable. The old gentleman is described as very irritated by Philocles' argument, no doubt because it undermines the reverence he earlier expresses for the "social compact" by portraying it as the outcome of a conflict between beings indistinguishable from beasts (II 79).

in the Second Treatise (§ 123-127).
In the second part of the discussion, Theocles (the sage of the dialogue) argues against the significance of modern state of nature doctrines. Even if men originally were in such a condition, which he doubts, Theocles denies that the characteristics of our primitive state reveal more about us than the characteristics of our civilized one.

Let us go on, however, and on their hypothesis consider which state we may best call Nature's own... "She has by accident, through many changes and chances, raised a creature which, springing at first from rude seeds of matter, proceeded till it became what now it is, and arrived where for many generations it has been at a stay." In this long procession (for I allow it any length whatever) I ask, "Where was it that this state of Nature could begin?" The creature must have endured many changes; and each change, whilst he was thus growing up, was as natural one as another. So that either there must be reckoned a hundred different states of Nature, or if one, it can be only that in which Nature was perfect, and her growth complete. Here where she rested and attained her end, here must be her state, or nowhere. (II 81)

In the end, Theocles expresses a slight preference for the Hobbesian version of man's pre-political state over the Lockean version, but for an un-Hobbesian reason. "The greater dread we have of anarchy," Theocles determines, "the better countrymen we shall prove, and value more the laws and constitution under which we live, and by which we are protected from the outrageous violences of such an unnatural state" (II 83). Taken together, Philocles and Theocles
appear to reveal Shaftesbury's position. Shaftesbury agrees with Hobbes that from natural unsociability follows a state of war, but is himself convinced that we are naturally social beings.

Returning now to the letter to Stanhope, Shaftesbury adds to his charge that Locke was covertly in agreement with Hobbes by offering a cryptic suggestion. He directs Stanhope to compare Hobbes's "Letter on Liberty and Necessity" with what Locke has written on the subject, and he further directs him to compare Locke's own various statements on the subject with each other (LL, 415-416). In the letter by Hobbes to which Shaftesbury refers, Hobbes (with characteristic iconoclasm and boldness) attacks Christian accounts of free-will, and he defines "liberty" narrowly as the "the absence of external impediments" (Hobbes 1962, 275-276). Choices made in a condition of liberty from "external impediments" are, in Hobbes's presentation, nevertheless the product of

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10 An additional argument criticizing modern states of nature doctrines is provided by Shaftesbury in the second treatise of the Characteristics, "Sensus Communis; An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour" (I 73-74). There Shaftesbury objects that since the original social compact is agreed to while human beings are still in the state of nature, either "faith, justice, honesty, and virtue, must have been as early as the state of nature, or they could never have been at all" (I 73). The agreement to a contract by men who are unrestrained by justice does not create binding restraints. On this point, Shaftesbury appears in agreement with the "fool" who "hath said in his heart: "there is no such thing as justice" that Hobbes responds to (LEV, 90-93). But Shaftesbury, unlike Hobbes, would argue that human beings are naturally moral.
necessity (Id., 242). Deliberate actions originate from the will, but our will depends on appetites, tastes, hopes, and fears that we do not will. Hobbes at one point goes so far as to define the "will" as merely "the last appetite or aversion immediately adhering to the action" (Hobbes 1994, 33). Where enlightened reason prevails, our primary passion, to avoid painful death, is the chief director of our will (LEV, 76, 79-80). Hobbes speaks of freedom not as a positive human good or as a quality that provides dignity to human beings. Freedom is a means to an end -- an end, what is more, that is determined by the necessary causes that direct our will. Individual freedom is glaringly absent from Hobbes's political project. Natural freedom, for Hobbes, is part of the problem that makes the state of nature an unlivable chaos (LEV, 79). His politics call for the concentration of nearly unlimited power in the hands of a stabilizing authority. Freedom is forfeited for what we really want: security.

The status of freedom in Locke's system initially appears to be very different from that of Hobbes's. The difference, furthermore, is greater than would seem to be justified by the apparent distinguishing characteristics of Locke's "state of nature" teaching, which appear to provide human beings with a natural standard for preferring freedom to subjection. Although Lockean politics are aimed ultimately at peace and security (above all the security of personal property), Locke employs a rhetoric when discussing
freedom in the Second Treatise, A Letter Concerning Toleration, and Some Thoughts Concerning Education that suggests a dignity or majesty to freedom that transcends its political utility. Men are originally in a state of "perfect" freedom (STR, §4); they are "by nature all free, equal, and independent" (Id., §95); genuine religious faith can only be attained through "free and voluntary" worship (LCT, 28); the possession of freedom gratifies our desire to "be thought Rational Creatures" (STOE, §41); children are rightly taught to identify freedom with manhood (Id., §94); and above all, "we naturally... even from our cradles, love liberty, and have therefore an aversion to many Things, for no other Reason, but because they are injoyn'd us" (Id., §148, emphasis added). Locke appeals to human pride when he invites us to associate individual freedom and liberal politics with a certain dignity (cf. Pangle 1988, 262-279). The most sparkling example of that association is manifest in the American Declaration of Independence, where Locke's obvious influence (to a greater or lesser extent) is undisputed (cf. Tarcov 1984, 1-8). Indeed, as has been mentioned, it is Shaftesbury's position that "Mr. Hobbes' character and base slavish principle of government took off the poison of his philosophy" (LTAS, 32). Locke's liberal political rhetoric is, then, in Shaftesbury's view, the aspect of his philosophy that was decisive in providing for the successful reception of the comprehensive Lockean worldview.
That the Lockean world-view is essentially identical to the Hobbesian world-view, even or precisely on the question of human freedom, appears to be Shaftesbury's ultimate point in this context. This becomes clear when we follow Shaftesbury's directions and compare the glowing terms Locke employs when writing about liberty in the examples above with his treatment of the subject in the *Essay*: "For he made great alterations on these points where, though a divine may waver, a philosopher, I think, never can" (LL, 415). An examination of the account of human action in the *Essay* discovers Locke perfectly in agreement with Hobbes on the most salient points. Human action is a function of necessity (ECHU, II.xxi.33-35); passions and desires compete against one another, and choice is determined according to the relative strength of those passions or desires (Id., II.xxi.40). Furthermore, the desire for security, or (as Locke puts it) the priority for human beings of an aversion to "uneasiness," reigns supreme as the determining cause of our actions (Id., II.xxi.44).

To be fair, Locke preserves at least a rhetorical distinction from Hobbes; he does not say that the will is merely the last appetite or aversion prior to action. He grants us a certain, if unconventional, definition of liberty in addition to the mere absence of restraint.

There being in us a great many uneasinesses always soliliciting, and ready to determine the will, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest, and most pressing should determine the will to the next
action; and so it does for the most part, but not always. For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires... is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides and weigh them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has... This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd Free will. For during this suspension of any desire, before the will be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due examination we have judg'd, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness; and 'tis not a fault but a perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair examination. (ECHU II.XXI.47, pp. 263-264)

This statement, a perfect example of Locke's talent for equivocation, might be taken to imply the existence of some "freedom" that distinguishes him from Hobbes. But it implies no such thing (cf., Pangle 1988, 269). To use Hobbes's words: "the liberty of election does not take away the necessity of electing this or that individual thing" (Hobbes 1962, 245). Human action according to Locke is a mechanical process, distinguished from photo-synthesis in plants only by the specific mechanical capacity to "weigh" our options against our desires before proceeding. To employ this capacity well is to be rational, to be "free." In fact, it
would be difficult using Lockean terms to distinguish human choice from that of animals, except on the basis of the relative complexity of our strategic forethought. Every choice is determined by the desire to avoid uneasiness.

Most striking is the complete absence, in Locke's account of human action, of any recognizable moral dimension. To put things somewhat bluntly, it follows from Locke's formulation that a man who encounters another man in public, and decides that he does not like the man's looks, then carefully considers his options and concludes that his own uneasiness would best be relieved by murdering the man -- and does so, has "done [his] duty, all that [he] can, or ought to do, in pursuit of [his] happiness." Duty, for Locke, does not involve moral responsibility. Laws can (and Locke would agree should) prescribe punishment for such a man, but in such cases the laws punish a man who has "done [his] duty."

It is apparent, therefore, that a disproportion exists between the "freedom" Locke describes in the Essay and the notion of freedom that he appeals to when promoting his political doctrines in his other writings. Locke is willing to exploit the human attraction to dignity, even though he systematically reduces human action to its most base, undignified and cowardly aspects (cf. I 77). But does Locke anywhere sufficiently address the human concern for dignity or nobility as it is experienced by men like Stanhope (see Pangle 1988, 213-214)?
In direct contrast, Shaftesbury will justify political liberty by arguing that it is the best condition for the development of moral, intellectual, and creative excellence. Liberty serves the highest human possibilities, not merely its most basic appetites. But liberty, for Shaftesbury, is more than a means to an end. Political liberty also suggests, by analogy, a more profound liberation that is available to human beings. True or complete human liberty is enjoyed only by those who undertake great efforts of self-examination. The enjoyment of true liberty requires a liberation from our ordinarily confused, inconstant, and contradictory opinions about what is important in life (cf. II 31-2, II 44, II 280). It is above all Shaftesbury's position that we cannot be free people unless we devote serious attention to the moral dimension of our lives. And it is exactly such serious attention that Locke and his modern colleagues seek to relieve us from undertaking.

Shaftesbury closes both letters that we have been considering by repudiating the relativism that Locke's thought engenders.

Thus 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: and God indeed is a perfect free agent in his sense; that is, free to any thing, that is however ill: for if he wills it, it will be made good; virtue may be vice, and vice virtue in its turn, if he pleases. And thus neither right nor wrong, virtue nor vice are anything in themselves; nor is
there any trace or idea of them naturally imprinted on human minds... This is very poor philosophy.

(LTAS, 33-34; italics in original)

But if, instead of the phantom he opposed and had always before his eyes, he had known but ever so little of antiquity, or been tolerably learned in the state of philosophy with the ancients, he had not heaped such loads of words upon us... This you will find easily in him upon your reading, if you take but any remarkable word of his, as in particular the word law; which leads him into so many labyrinths, and was the reason why, after having found out other sorts of laws, he wanted a law for fashion and opinion. And this according to him was virtue and honesty. As if writing to the Italian or other good masters, or understanders of music, he had said that the law of harmony was opinion; or writing to the maker of scholars in statuary or architecture, he had said in general that the law of design or the law of beauty in these designing arts had been opinion. Had Mr. Locke been a virtuoso, he would not have philosophized thus. For harmony is the beauty, the accord and proportion of sounds; and harmony is harmony by nature, let particular ears be ever so bad, or let men judge ever so ill of music... The same is the case of virtue and honesty; the honestum and the decorum in society, for which you, my friend, can never, I know, lose your relish.

(LL, 416-417; italics in original)

In the statements above, Shaftesbury responds to the passages in Locke's Essay where morality is argued to be dependent on divine and political will (enforced by punishments and
rewards); or the product of fashion, varying from time to
time, place to place, and having no intrinsic natural content
(ECHU, II.xxviii.5-15). Such a perspective has radical
implications for anyone who accepts it. The aspirations of
the lover, the hero, the artist, and the civic-spirited
citizen cannot be sustained where the beautiful, the noble,
the inspiring, and the just are understood to be infinitely
variable, the result of fashion or whim (II 174-175).

Such human types all share in common priorities that are
not rational by Lockean standards; none of them would rank
security as their chief concern. These types, types who have
traditionally been the object of human admiration and, at the
same time, have taught human beings how and what to admire,
are all willing to endure extraordinary "uneasiness" to
achieve their ends (cf. II 32). All pursue a fulfillment
that transcends material ease, personal security, and bodily
satisfactions, a fulfillment that Locke regards as illusory.
Despite his allegiance to the cause of political liberalism,
Shaftesbury is unwilling to jeopardize the viability of the
noblest human aspirations.

The letters to Ainsworth and Stanhope thus provoke us
to form certain expectations concerning Shaftesbury’s
advocacy of liberalism in the Characteristics. Our
expectations are not disappointed. Shaftesbury's sympathies
for liberal politics retain an understanding of human beings
as naturally social. He observes politically relevant moral
characteristics among human beings, moral characteristics
that can support liberal ends and are, simultaneously, potentially refined and perfected in a liberal political climate. Moreover, Shaftesbury attempts to establish liberty as a political priority without undermining the pursuit of a liberation or fulfillment that transcends political liberty, seeking thereby to avoid the paralyzing relativism that Lockean thought engenders.
Chapter 3

"Itt is not with mee as with an Empirick": Shaftesbury's Initial Rejection of Modern Rationalism

Our understanding of Shaftesbury's rejection of modern philosophy is further enriched by a letter that he wrote to Locke on September 29, 1694. Shaftesbury was just twenty-three years old at the time of its writing. The historian Lawrence Klein very aptly describes this letter as "Shaftesbury's declaration of philosophic independence" (Klein 1994, 27). It consists of two parts. In the first, Shaftesbury describes the philosophical approach that he rejects, the approach of "Decartes, or Mr. Hobbs, or any of their Improvers" (COL, v.5, 151), that of the new modern rationalism. In the second part, he sketches his own contrary approach, one that he identifies with the philosophers of Greek antiquity, and he provides an argument detailing the reasons for his preference.

Despite the polite tone that the young Shaftesbury always maintains, there is a striking degree of antagonism expressed in this letter.

Itt is not with mee as with an Empirick, one that is studdying 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 Divertion or for tryall of their Acuteness (which is all one as if it were some new Play, a Chess, or a Game of cards that were envented). 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 the
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 practizing Apothecary or a mountebank has to bee jealous about the Compositions that are to goe by his name. for if itt bee not a Livelyhood is aim'd; 'tis a Reputation. and what I contend for Reputation in, I must necessarily envy another man's possession of. (Id.)

It has become clear to us from his later statements to Stanhope and Ainsworth that Shaftesbury thought Locke to be the most significant and dangerous "improver" of Hobbes' thought (LL, 416; cf., Klein 1994, 27-28). There can be little doubt that Locke would recognize himself as the chief target of Shaftesbury's criticisms.¹ Those criticisms are three-fold. First, Shaftesbury asserts that the accomplishments of the new modern science and philosophy are over-blown and fundamentally insignificant. Second, he charges the moderns with advancing the prestige of their

¹By declaring his opposition to "empirics," and then going on to compare them with "mountebanks" or "apothecaries," Shaftesbury makes a seventeenth century pun that is likely to fall deaf on our twentieth century ears. "Empiric" ranks just below "skeptic" at the top of the list of most vague terms in the philosophic vocabulary, but one of its meanings is "a quack" or "a pretender, impostor, charlatan" (Oxford English Dictionary). Locke is undeniably an empiric according to the modern philosophic designation; he accepts as knowledge only ideas derived systematically from our sense perception. Shaftesbury believes empiricism to be dangerously misguided, and therefore by comparing empiricists to mountebanks and apothecaries brings to mind the pejorative sense of "empiric."
"invented" systems through an (unjustifiable) attack on "ancienter" systems, which presumably were not "invented," or at least were not "invented" in the same sense.² Third, Shaftesbury questions the philosophic motives of modern thinkers by portraying them as hungry for money or reputation. The third charge is related to the second since Shaftesbury implicitly attributes the moderns' hostility toward "those Learned men that went before" to a desire for reputation that prevents modern thinkers from extending due credit.³

²Shaftesbury contrasts the pursuit of "discoveries or inventions" characteristic of modern empiricism with the philosophic objective that he endorses. He wishes that men would "live up to what they know; and that they might bee so wise as to desire to know no other things then what belong'd to 'em, and what lay plain before them; and to know those, to PURPOSE" (COL, v. V., #1794, p. 151). Shaftesbury here appears to be pointing to the dialectical approach to philosophy as practiced by the ancients. Since the practice of dialectics involves drawing out propositions from common opinions in the course of interrogative conversation, the philosophical conclusions arrived at through the dialectical approach are not properly speaking "inventions" or "discoveries," but realizations of things already known but previously either unappreciated or contradicted by false opinions. This would explain Shaftesbury's desire that we know "to purpose" the things that "belong to [us]," which implies the possibility of knowing something but failing to apply it consistently (see especially I 185 (bottom) - 186 (top)).

³Shaftesbury's charge that the moderns were motivated chiefly by a desire for reputation and material gain is not repeated in the Characteristics, where their motives are explored at length (I 57-65). His mature analysis of the motives of the modern philosophers focuses upon the disparity between the modern account of man as entirely selfish
Shaftesbury’s assertion of the fundamental insignificance of modern inventions must strike us as incredible. This is because we are the inheritors not only of an enormous and spectacular wealth of technological convenience produced by the new science, but also of the political theories associated with the new science -- theories of individual rights, popular sovereignty, religious toleration, capitalist economics and modern institutional organization -- that have transformed the political landscape. What can this twenty-three-year-old future philosopher mean by comparing the theoretical discoveries or inventions of early modernity to a new game or diversion, and its progenitors to snake-oil salesmen? The answer to this question lies in Shaftesbury’s account of the specific consequences of the moderns’ success in discrediting the ancient philosophers.

The modern approach to philosophy subtracts from the activity any attempt at self-examination or self-criticism. Modern empiricism, concerned as it is with the investigation of things outside of us, or, more specifically, of the mechanical relationships of things outside of us, leads to a conception of knowledge that does not include a personal and the modern philosophers’ civic-spirited efforts to rescue humanity from its self-destructive delusions. In effect, Shaftesbury regards the actions of the moderns themselves as powerful evidence against the modern thesis. Instead of charging the moderns with acting avariciously, the mature Shaftesbury charges them with preaching avarice without practicing it.
dimension. This is to say that philosophic achievement as the moderns understand it does not coincide with an ever deeper understanding of how to live well. It is not a project driven by a deliberate desire for self-improvement. The practice of "soliloquy," as Shaftesbury refers to critical moral self-examination, holds no place in modern philosophy (I 110-112; 123-4). Shaftesbury observes that among the classical Greeks there existed men similarly "curiouse in what signify'd nothing," the sophists (COL v.V., #1794, p. 152). But the sophists did not enjoy a monopoly over speculative pursuits. The philosophy that sought knowledge about morality and the human good regularly confronted sophistic claims. These "True Philosophers," as Shaftesbury refers to them, whose greatest representative was Socrates, were, in Shaftesbury's account, advantaged in their approach by a tradition in Athens dating back a century before Socrates' birth, the tradition of the "Seven," or "Seven Wise Men of Greece", including Solon, Thales, Pittakus, and Bias, "whose study was that of knowing themselves, and learning how to bee serviceable to Others" (Id.).

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4Shaftesbury here appropriately references Shakespeare's Macbeth (V. 5. 27).
5Grote (1919, vol. iv, pp. 94-96). Grote observes that the "Seven" were remembered for their laconic maxims, which did not resemble anything that would be recognized as philosophical argument a century later. Grote writes: "Their appearance forms an epoch in Grecian history, inasmuch as they are the first persons who ever acquired an
established plausibility and esteem in Fifth Century Athens. Socrates "made the Sophists know themselves, and keep their distance"; in effect, he prevented them from establishing exclusive claim over speculative activity, and thereby succeeded in keeping alive a conception of philosophy that genuinely engages the ordinary moral and practical dilemmas that confront human beings (Id.). The sophistic doctrine of "conventionalism" -- which led them to deny any intrinsic validity to moral claims and thus allowed them to teach rhetoric as a tool for unbridled personal gain -- obviously reminds Shaftesbury of the relativism consequent of the modern view that morality has meaning only where the certainty of punishments and rewards is established. The

Hellenic reputation grounded on mental competency apart from poetical genius or effect -- a proof that political and social prudence was beginning to be appreciated and admired on its own account. Grote also supports Shaftesbury's historical account as regards the preoccupation of the "Seven" with social, moral, and political questions, and their general disinterest (with the exception of Thales) in "physical philosophy." Cf. also, II 307, for an emphatic statement of Shaftesbury's estimation of Socrates as a philosopher. Indeed, the inscription on the Delphic temple, "know thyself," was attributed by Plato to the "Seven," who were reported to have inscribed it there (Plato, Protagoras, 343b). It should be observed that Shaftesbury's hostility to modern science in this letter, a hostility that is repeated in the Characteristics, leads him to express a general hostility towards speculation about physical phenomena that is at odds with the practice of the Socratic school. Shaftesbury may also have in mind a parallel between the sophistic practice of teaching for pay and his charge that the moderns are avaricious for money. This parallel might extend to the sophistic
difference is that in modernity there is no Socratic competitor to the conventionalist thesis. Shaftesbury admits that in late antiquity, when "the Socratick Spirit sunk much," the distinction between sophistry and philosophy became less clear (Id). Yet he identifies a radical turn in modernity uncharacteristic of late antiquity.

but it was never known till more late days that to Profess Philosophy, was not to Profess a Life: and that it might bee said of one, that Hee was a great Man in Philosophy; whilst nobody thought it to the purpose to ask how did Hee Live? (Id.)

The modern individual will recognize that the philosophy responsible for his conveniences and political institutions is without answers to the questions of how to live or what the truly happy human life involves. He will consider the powerful practical effects of modern philosophy to confirm the truth of modern philosophy. As a result, when frustrated by uncertainty about what is important, what his duty is, where or how to pursue fulfillment, one thing is certain: he or she will not look to philosophy for guidance.

This is not to say that modernity is silent regarding our way of life. There is, of course, a political teaching associated with the new science. Moreover, we are offered certain insight into what our priorities should be, security being paramount. The mechanistic perspective that the moderns adopt in their analysis of the physical world is desire for fame, a desire with which he also charges the moderns.
brought home to roost in their analysis of human things.\textsuperscript{9}

But since Locke assures us that we have "[n]o innate practical principles" (ECHIJ, I.iii.1-27), philosophy as such, in the Lockean presentation, cannot answer our most profound practical dilemmas. Or, rather, as the moderns would say, there is only a single practical dilemma and it is solved by the elevation of security to a status as the highest human priority; other dilemmas are unsolvable and, ultimately, not dilemmas at all but matters of taste (LEV, 28-9, 34-5, 41, 57-8; ECHU II.xxviii.12, 15). Reason can teach us to subordinate our other priorities to our (universally human) need for security; to be "rational" (or to live up to the apprehensible "law of nature") is to do exactly (and only) that. But what reason cannot do is to adjudicate between various claims involving practical principles other than the desire for security. Modern political philosophy is over almost as soon as it gets started, at least in the sense that the end or organizing principle of politics -- security -- is

\textsuperscript{9}The best statement explaining the relation between the modern account of the universe and the establishment of security as humanity’s unrivaled goal belongs to Strauss (1959, 181): "Hobbes’s view of man, as far as it is essential to his political teaching, expresses how the new view of the whole affects “the whole man” -- man as he is understood in daily life or by the historians and poets, as distinguished from man as he is to be understood within the context of Hobbes’s natural science. ‘The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens’ man: the mood generated by the truth, the true mood, is fear, the fear experienced by a being exposed to a universe which does not care for it by properly equipping it or by guiding it.”
revealed to be simple, single, and incontrovertible. The areas where there remain great prospects for philosophic progress involve the physical sciences and their application for the relief of man's estate.

Shaftesbury rejects this view because he (like the ancient Socratics) identifies the fundamental practical dilemmas to be the fundamental human dilemmas. It is especially those dilemmas that emerge in our moral life that demand our strict, relentless attention. Moral uncertainty being the inevitable initial condition of every adult human being, we all desire insight to resolve the perplexity that confronts us. Any form of philosophical inquiry that fails to appreciate this fact, and thus fails to provide guidance in realizing the proper human practical priorities (that fails to help us address the age-old question of how to live in the best possible way), necessarily fails to address our primary philosophical concerns.¹⁰ What is worse, by masquerading as wisdom or science, such teachings bring to the matter an authoritative air that discourages human beings from seeking from philosophy insight or enlightenment regarding practical principles. We are left adrift without a practical or moral compass.

Announcing to Locke that he is "far from thinking that mankind need any new Discoverys, or that they lye in the dark and are unhappy for want of them...", Shaftesbury insists

¹⁰Cf. Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics, 1215a4.
that "could I make any of those admirable Discovers, which were nothing worth but to bee commended for their Subtility; I would doe as Timon did (though out of a just contrary principle) when he found Gold: after I had by chance dugg upon itt and found what itt was; I would put the Clod over itt again, and say nothing of itt, but forgett it if I could" (COL, v.5, 151). Modern rationalism and the scientific "discoveries" that follow from it fail to fulfill philosophy's obligation to lead us to greater clarity regarding what constitutes human happiness. It is on this account that Shaftesbury judges such discoveries to be trivial. He expressly refuses to grant modern philosophy's claim to promote enlightenment. Since we do not "lie in the dark" for want of discoveries or inventions, such discoveries or inventions can hardly be expected to cast light on our situation. On the contrary, Shaftesbury exclaims that he would "ask of God" that all such "affectation of knowledg Hee would preserve us from, as from a Desease: in which sort of knowledg if wee excell'd ever so much; and were masters of all as far as wee coveted; Itt would not help us to bee one jott the Honester or Better Creatures" (Id.). Shaftesbury

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11Shaftesbury's use of the phrase "ask of God" is employed here not in the sense of an invocation but, very literally, as an expression of what he would wish. We should not by lulled by Shaftesbury's use of pious terms into thinking his critique of modern rationalism to follow from a form of Christian reactionism. As will become clear, there is too much evidence to the contrary (in this letter and elsewhere) for such a conclusion to be plausible.
thus reveals the principal negative consequence of modern "knowledge." It instills an affectation of wisdom while distracting us from the need for critical self-examination which so much preoccupied the classical philosophers. In modernity, one can claim the title of "philosopher" without implying anything about one's practical priorities or moral convictions. One can claim the title of philosopher without even arguing for the goodness of philosophy.12

Shaftesbury begins to communicate his own position to Locke by identifying the requirements of genuine knowledge in contrast to the "affectation of wisdom" that he accuses the modern empiricists of encouraging. More precisely, he identifies certain components of what he asserts to conduce to genuine knowledge by providing a list of propositions which, when denied, ensure ignorance. He may be said to offer a list of initial prerequisites to genuine knowledge.

If there bee any one that knows not, or believes not that all things in the Univers are done for the best, and ever will goe on so, because conducted by the same Good Cause; If there bee any one who knows nothing like this of God, or can think of him constantly in this manner; and who cannot see that he 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. But if this bee known (as what is easyer to know?) there is not, then, one Studdy or

12See Pangle (1988, 269-270) for a discussion of whether Locke anywhere explains his own attachment to speculative activity as a way of life.
Science that signifies a rush, or that is not wors the Ignorance; which gives a Man no help in the persuance of what he has learnt to bee his Duty; Assists him not in the Government of the Irrational part of himself; which neither makes him more truly satisfy’d with what God does in the World (for that is Loving God) nor more Sociable more Honest or more Just, by removing of those Passions which hee has allways to Struggle with, that he may preserve himself so. (Id., 151-152)

It is fair to remark that, even for the often enigmatic Shaftesbury, this is a singularly enigmatic list. We observe, first of all, that Locke would seem to disagree with each of the components of the list. Of Locke’s denial of human sociability and of his further denial of a natural human end, we have mentioned it above and will have occasion to elaborate it more below. To the extent that Shaftesbury is right to judge Locke’s philosophy to be in agreement with Hobbes, the world is not a benevolently governed cosmos but a lonely, hostile, and ultimately inapprehensible chaos characterized by scarcity, human fragility and exposedness. Such a condition culminates in the universally human sense of “uneasiness.” The “felicity” that pre-enlightenment man longs for is unavailable (ECHU, II.xxi.42, 51-68). And while reason may be used as a tool (the tool) for transforming a hostile world into a more hospitable one, we are not strictly speaking “rational.” This is evident by the fact that reason (in the modern presentation) is portrayed to be entirely in the service of our most basic passionate desires. Those
desires are primary.\textsuperscript{13} It is evident, furthermore, by the fact that, in the Lockean presentation, reason is impotent as a faculty for apprehending the "qualities of substances"; sensory data does not provide access to the essential truth about the world around us, which remains hopelessly mysterious (ECHU IV.i.5; IV.vi.11; cf., Strauss 1946, 338-9, especially 339n.8). To speak of humankind as "rational," while denying the existence of a natural human end, is to regard reason as the clothing worn by the man who is all dressed up with no place to go. We do not really fit in the world; we are not at home. Life is a scene of tragic vulnerability, characterized by perpetual and often undefined neediness.

The belief that "all things in the Univers are done for the best" is the component of Shaftesbury's list that is at once most puzzling and most revealing. Upon considerable reflection this passage persists in giving the impression that it does at first glance, that Shaftesbury advances an unorthodox doctrine of natural religion the precise pedigree of which is unidentifiable. His doctrine is not clearly Deist, Stoic, Aristotelian, Neoplatonist or Platonic, although it might be possible for Locke to interpret it as

\textsuperscript{13}What is more, the desire to avoid pain far exceeds any attraction to any perceived particular good, whatever our perception of its greatness, to such an extent that it would be more precise to regard reason to be the handmaid of our aversions rather than that of our desires (ECHU II.xxi.44). See also Strauss (1953), 249-250, especially n. 128.
The most that can be discerned with certainty from what Shaftesbury recommends is

14Shaftesbury seems content to be imprecise about the cosmological implications of the belief that he endorses. He substitutes "God" for the "Good Cause" without explaining the shift in terms, and he presents being satisfied with God's actions in the world as coequal with "Loving God" without even pausing to acknowledge the unorthodoxy of such an equation. His view appears at once to affirm a majestic providential force at work in the world and also to preclude human beings from entertaining any hopes for divine assistance beyond the observable givens of the world as it appears. Furthermore, he makes the counter-intuitive assertion that the components of his list are the most easily known facts of the human condition. He may be baiting Locke at this point, or he may be tempting Locke to dismiss him as a half-baked moralist with idiosyncratic religious views. Shaftesbury opened this letter by expressing regret that he could not provide Locke with anything he is working on (Locke apparently requested to see Shaftesbury's work), on the grounds that it would not be "anyways profitable, or other then superfluouse to you." There is no evidence in the correspondence that Shaftesbury ever shared his work with Locke. He may have possessed no hope of persuading Locke to abandon or even substantially to revise his modern empiricist convictions. If this were the case, then Shaftesbury might only have something to fear from Locke were Locke to become aware of the full scope and character of Shaftesbury's anti-Lockean philosophy. Better to wait until Locke is dead (and silent) and then unleash his critique, which is exactly what Shaftesbury did. This (historical) conjecture is supported by Shaftesbury's remark to Stanhope that he "ever concealed" his differences with Locke. It remains obvious, however, that Shaftesbury intended this letter to provoke something from Locke, if not a fully informed consciousness of the terms of his student's dissent. We are unfortunate not to be in possession of Locke's reply, which we know was posted just over two weeks after he received the letter in question. Whatever his response, one thing is certain: this letter marks the end of communication between the two men concerning philosophic matters. All later correspondence is perfunctory and formal, dealing repeatedly
that it contradicts simultaneously modern philosophy's metaphysics of blind causation and anything recognizable as Christianity.\textsuperscript{15} The presentation in this letter foreshadows the "optimistic cosmology" that many of his commentators credit him for advancing in the \textit{Characteristics} (Brett 1951, 63-74; Fowler 1882, 103-116; Gadamer 1989, 25; Grean 1967, 73-88; Taylor 1989, 251-255; Willey 1949, 61-67).\textsuperscript{16} In the \textit{Characteristics}, this doctrine is labeled "theism," and while Shaftesbury undoubtedly promotes "theism" as preferable to the "atheism" of modern and ancient "atomists," he stops short of endorsing its validity in his own name (a fact that not one of his commentators appear to notice) (II 58, 93, 197, 255).\textsuperscript{17} Though it inspired a generation of British and German romantics, the memorable poetic elaboration of Shaftesburian theism in the dialogue "Moralists" springs from the mouth of the character Theocles, who introduces it to defend his "friend" (Shaftesbury) against the charge that the

\textsuperscript{15}Brett and Willey observe, along with myself, that Shaftesbury makes criticisms simultaneously directed at the moderns and the "orthodox" (Brett 1951, 77; Willey 1949, 59, 62).

\textsuperscript{16}Shaftesbury never uses the term "optimism" to describe either his philosophy or his natural theology.

\textsuperscript{17}Shaftesbury's formulation signals a tentativeness or questionable verifiability of the proposition that things are "done for the best" by asserting the necessity of knowing or believing the proposition.
"Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" disadvantages Christianity by undermining the need for providential rewards and punishments (II 50-77). And the miscellanarian makes a point of informing us that (a) Theocles is not a "perfect character"; (b) Theocles conceals his "real character" by becoming a "feigned preacher"; and (c) "even when his real character comes on, he hardly dares stand it out; but to deal the better with his sceptic friend he falls again to personating, and takes up the humour of the poet and enthusiast" (II 334-335; 334n. 1). Does Shaftesbury, in this youthful letter to Locke, advance an enigmatic doctrine of natural religion only "to deal the better with his skeptic [teacher]? Are the optimistic religious overtures in this

18 Pay special attention to the transition occurring at II 60-61.
19 It is significant that Shaftesbury indicates that Theocles is not a "perfect character," since, when discussing the Platonic dialogues, Shaftesbury indicates that Plato intended us to view Socrates as a "perfect character" (I 128). Thus, while "The Moralists" aspires to the "just character and correct form of those ancient poems," it lacks a direct stand-in for Socrates.
20 The miscellenerian also informs us that the "Moralists" is designed as a "strict imitation of the ancient poetic dialogue" (II 334n. 1). The most famous of ancient dialogues, those of Plato, often employed myths, such as the famous myth of Er told by Socrates to Glaucion and Adeimantus when they prove unable to accept Socrates' philosophic defense of the goodness of Justice. Theocles' famous account of theism occurs only when Philocles and the unnamed company prove unwilling to accept the rational defense of Shaftesbury's Inquiry, and begin "persecuting him" and "laying claim to his sermon" (II 60). It is reasonable to conclude on the basis of this evidence alone that the metaphysical invocation of nature that Theocles employs in his self-described "sermon" is an example of Shaftesbury's imitation of Plato's employment of myth.
letter intended to serve as short-hand for a perfectly rational understanding of the human situation in the world that opposes a pessimism characteristic of the modern understanding? Perhaps modern "scepticism" depends on a pessimism that is unreasonable.

There are further grounds for suspecting that Shaftesbury does not oppose Locke primarily for religious or metaphysical reasons. Shaftesbury's deprecation of the modern "Founders of Metaphysics" later in this very letter (152), and his equally strong statement in the Characteristics concerning the "metaphysical part" of philosophy, that "it is in a manner necessary for one who would usefully philosophise, 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" (II 286), tends against the hypothesis that Shaftesbury would rest his critique of modern empiricism on metaphysical grounds.²¹ To the extent that his favorable judgment of the world takes on a specifically religious guise (Shaftesbury vacillates without explanation between accrediting it to "God" and to a "Good Cause") there remains, both here and in the more extended treatment in the Characteristics, a controversy over the very existence of a "general mind," and, furthermore, a repeated exhortation that we approach that controversy with a critical open mind (I 25, 28-9; II 56-57). Shaftesbury's

²¹Cf. II 65.
critique of modern rationalism is consistently presented as a moral critique that is not dependent on a religious position (I 238; II 53; cf. Fowler 1882, 63). And it is the moral implications of the view that things in the world are done for the best that we must consider.

Now the moral consequences of Shaftesbury's unqualified affirmation of the goodness of the world come to light by way of contrast with the opposing view, the tragic view of the world. We are led to draw this contrast by three pieces of evidence found outside of this letter. In his eulogy of Locke, which we will consider in Chapter 4 of this study, Shaftesbury argues that Locke's gloomy last words were the consequence of moral confusion (LL, 344-347). He opposes Locke's tragic view of life with his own more favorable one, insisting that his own view is informed by a more consistent moral position. In the Characteristics, Shaftesbury indicates that the chief obstacle faced by those intent on promoting liberal politics is religious "enthusiasm" or fanaticism. Confronting this phenomenon successfully requires us to understand and engage the "melancholy" that underlies the fanaticism of the "tragical" men who encourage the persecution of dissenters (I 17, 24, 47, 52, 303; II

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22 Cf. I 279: "Now if the subject and ground of this divine passion be not really just or adequate (the hypothesis of theism being supposed false) the passion still in itself is so far natural and good, as it proves an advantage to virtue and goodness, according to what has been above demonstrated." See also II 52 (bottom).
237). Finally, Shaftesbury's discussion of tragedy as a genre in his "Advice to an Author" warns of the "false sublime" evoked by the tragedians, which demands grave reception, eschews free criticism, and plants immoderate hopes (I 160-161, 202-204). Shaftesbury argues for the superior refinement of comedy over tragedy because of its greater probity, disinterestedness, and effectiveness as an antidote to the temptations of tragedy (I 165, 204-5). He thus regards the emergence of Greek comedy to be an event marking a significant step forward for Greek civilization, and he ranks the Greek level of civilization much higher than that of early Eighteenth Century England (I 160-165, 175-180). But this position requires him to reject the tragic interpretation of human events as false. In fact, Shaftesbury's view of the human condition (in this letter as in the Characteristics) might well be described as a singularly "non-tragic" view. His doctrine of natural religion (in its various manifestations) reflects his rejection of the tragic outlook. The terms of that rejection, however, are laid out in moral arguments that grow from his analysis of human characteristics, especially the characteristics of our moral opinions.

The tragic view of the world is characterized first of all by the unavailability of a substantial and durable happiness to human beings in this world.\textsuperscript{23} It is 

\textsuperscript{23}The "tragic view of the world" must be distinguished from the most profound view of the world offered by the greatest tragedians, who
characterized, furthermore, by a desperate, almost hysterical sense that we deserve a better lot than life allows (thus the prevalence in theatrical tragedy of the shedding of tears). Most importantly, a tragic view of the human condition leads inevitably to a conviction of the impotency of human virtue. In theatrical tragedy what really sticks in the audience’s craw is the fact that the good are portrayed as suffering; their virtue or goodness does not protect them from misfortune at the hands of malevolence (human or divine) or chance. That the “good sufferer” deserves better is somehow reinforced by the spectacle of indifferent calamity. Hope follows briskly on the heels of fear and astonishment, and this is what Shaftesbury means by the “false sublime” of tragedy (II 347-348). Shaftesbury equates being “satisfyed with what God does in the World” with “Loving God” (COL, v. 5, 152), and he includes as an aspect of “True Learning” that which teaches us “how to bee allways friends with Providence though Death and many such Dreadfull Businesses come in the way” (Id., 153). Moreover, this anti-tragic view of the world is presented as an alternative to that of the moderns. It seems to be Shaftesbury’s great insight that the modern empirical account of the universe as a system of causal

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celebrate the human ability to overcome terrible circumstances or at least to struggle against them without falling into despair. Although Shaftesbury rejects the “tragic view,” he admires the works of certain great tragedians (cf. I 180, 205).

24See Aristotle Poetics 1453a1-10.
necessity indifferent to man's needs and man's plight is at bottom a tragic tale that has roots, despite all claims to the contrary, in the Biblical account of the world and man's situation.\textsuperscript{25} The drama of Oedipus, Adam, and the individual of Hobbes' or Locke's "state of nature" all have something fundamental in common. In each account, the human experience on Earth is one of toil and scarcity, punctuated by suffering and likely to end badly.

But there is a significant distinction between Greek tragedy or the tragedy of Biblical fallen man on the one hand, and the tragic account of man's original condition as understood by the modern rationalists, on the other. Christians and Greek religionists confront the disparity between what we believe we deserve and what life allows with a hopefulness that the modern scientific account of the world precludes. Greek and Biblical man hope for a providential dispensation to correct that evident disparity. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke all confront the world under the operative conviction that we are on our own.\textsuperscript{26} Reliance upon "imaginative principalities" (including the "City of God"

\textsuperscript{25}Thus Shaftesbury intimates that Locke's dying words betray a latent Christianity (LL 345), as we will examine directly below. Furthermore, in the \textit{Characteristics}, Shaftesbury makes it a practice (following in the footsteps of Cudworth) of referring to the modern philosophers as the "enthusiastical atheists," suggesting that the crusading spirit they bring to bear in their critique of Christianity and its political consequences betrays (not to mention promotes) a hybrid fanaticism (I 14, 37, 63; II 196).

\textsuperscript{26}Cf. Nietzsche 1966, 66 (#53).
distinguished by its exemplary piety) is regarded as a recipe for disaster (Machiavelli 1985, 61; Strauss 1953, 175). There is instead born a revolutionary form of self-reliance, energized by an intense hopefulness regarding the relief that humanity can accomplish once it sets its sights on conquering an inhospitable natural world.\(^{27}\) (Modern science assumes the place previously held by Christian providence.)\(^{28}\) Shaftesbury's natural theology differs from all tragic views by portraying nature as orderly and benevolent. It thus denies the reasons that lead human beings to hope for a providential supplement to nature.

If we know the goodness of the world, "there is not, then, one Study or Science that signifiyts a rush, or that is not wors than Ignorance," which does not contribute to our moral refinement (COL, v. 5, 151-152; cf. I 189). In other words, if we are convinced of the availability of human happiness, the priority of philosophy will be (as prior to modernity it was) to teach us how to live rightly, to live in the best possible way. Such a position requires that there exist a way of life that satisfies our truest needs in an adequate way. Philosophy only shifts direction and changes its priorities when it is moved by the conclusion that a

\(^{27}\)It should be observed that such relief results in an unprecedented degree of security, but not in happiness per se. Individual happiness is emphatically not the goal of modernity. See Strauss' discussion of "public happiness" as understood by Locke (Strauss 1953, 213-214; compare with 249-251).

\(^{28}\)Cf. Brett 1951, 77.
substantial happiness is not available to human beings through moral refinement, when it adopts a tragic view of man’s situation in the world. (As we shall realize through an examination of Shaftesbury’s damning eulogy of Locke, when philosophy adopts the tragic view of the world it ceases to be philosophy.)

Shaftesbury expresses doubt regarding modern philosophy’s prospects if it does not have as its primary goal, right in front of its eyes in its every investigation, the question of the human good and the way of life that exemplifies it (COL v.5, 153). He wonders aloud what would be the point of an investigation that did not seek such knowledge.

What if wee knew the Exact System of [the cosmos] and of our Frames; Should wee learn any more then this, that God did all things Wisely and for the best? ...and such itt [is] easy to conceive... without knowing any more of the things of Nature then wee allready doe. (Id.)

Shaftesbury perceives a correlation between the turn of philosophy toward questions of nature’s mechanical workings and the conviction of modern philosophers that happiness as pursued by pre-modern man is unavailable. He may justly be charged with overstating the case against natural science; the ancient philosophers (including the Socratics), after
all, practiced it. Moreover, the ancients would never separate the aspiration to discover the best way of life from the aspiration to know the whole in the way that Shaftesbury seems to do, even though they might agree with Shaftesbury that inadequate moral opinions can support inadequate views of the whole. But so great is the distraction effected by the modern preoccupation with curiosities of nature's workings that, in Shaftesbury's eyes, the all-important human questions are left hopelessly unattended. His defense of the human questions therefore takes the form of an antagonism toward natural science as such.

By defending the world from the indictments issued by the various schools of tragedians, Shaftesbury seeks to preserve the viability of conceptions of human excellence (moral and otherwise) that are in accordance with nature.  

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29 Of course, the ancient practitioners of natural philosophy differed greatly from the moderns. The ancients (Socratic or Sophistic) were not animated by a determination to unlock the secrets of nature with a view to conquering and controlling it.

30 Shaftesbury formulates matters in the most eloquent of terms at I 202-204: "One of the most dangerous of... enchantresses appears in a sort of dismal weed, with the most mournful countenance imaginable; often casting up her eyes, and wringing her hands, so that 'tis impossible not to be moved by her, till her meaning be considered and her imposture fully known. The airs she borrows are from the tragic muse Melpomene... Her art is to render herself as forbidding as possible, that her sisters may by her means be the more alluring. And if by her tragic aspect and melancholy looks she can persuade us that Death (whom she represents) is such a hideous form, she conquers in behalf of the whole fantastic tribe of wanton, gay, and fond desires. Effeminacy and cowardice instantly prevail. The poorest means of life grow in repute when the ends and
Put simply, happiness must be available to human beings through their own efforts if conceptions of virtue are to have any meaning. For if virtue exists, then it must at least contribute to our happiness (cf. I 243-244; Plato Laws, 662d-663a). To know the goodness of the world entails knowing the availability of happiness to those who cultivate the exemplary human qualities. We need to consider the reverse as well, to know the availability of happiness to those who cultivate the exemplary human qualities goes a long way toward establishing knowledge of the goodness of the world. Thus we see how the "optimism" of Shaftesbury's doctrine of natural religion is reflective of a moral position (or moral confidence) that contradicts simultaneously the metaphysical vision of modern science and the cosmological vision of the Bible. It contradicts the

just conditions of it are so little known, and the dread of parting with it raised to so high a degree. The more eagerly we grasp at Life, the more impotent we are in the enjoyment of it. By this avidity its very lees and dregs are swallowed. The ideas of sordid pleasure are advanced. Worth, manhood, generosity, and all the nobler opinions and sentiments of honest, good, and virtuous pleasure disappear and fly before this Queen of Terrors... 'Tis a mighty delight which a sort of counter-philosophers take in seconding this phantom, and playing her upon our understandings whenever they would take occasion to confound them."

31 This is one way that a moral argument can confront a metaphysical challenge (in this case the challenge of modern science), without being forced to resort to metaphysical arguments. There may be other ways for such a confrontation to take place, as we will explore in our discussion of Shaftesbury's proposed antidote to religious enthusiasm in Chapter 6 of this study.
former by denying the hostilities of nature (the infinite disparity between our needs and nature's conditions, the uneasy absence of purposive relation between human nature and external nature, the resistance of nature to rational apprehension) and thereby removes the urgent necessity to conquer nature. It contradicts the latter by removing the necessity for either divine salvation to remedy a fallen condition or a providential dispensation to correct a perceived disparity between what justice demands and what the practice of the world allows (cf. II 57-60). Regarding this last point, it should be observed that Shaftesbury does not deny the appearance of some disparity between what justice demands and what the practice of the world allows, though he certainly takes pains to minimize such an appearance (II 57). What he emphatically does deny is the view -- shared by moderns and Christians -- that virtue depends for its goodness upon external rewards, and that vice requires super-added punishments to make its practice undesirable. If he can be successful in arguing for the sufficient goodness of virtue as a vehicle for achieving "much and solid satisfaction"32 in this world (if not some imagined notion of perpetual, unadulterated bliss), then he may be able successfully to criticize both the modern and the Christian accounts of the world without being forced to counter their cosmology with a novel version of his own. Even in the above

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32LL, 345.
mentioned "sermon," Shaftesbury provides a statement firmly
demonstrating the insufficiency of all cosmological or
metaphysical arguments.\textsuperscript{33} The "optimistic" natural religion
reflects Shaftesbury's dissent from Christianity and
modernity; his moral arguments form the basis of that
dissent.

Making sense of Shaftesbury's enigmatic list therefore
requires us to conceive the statement that "all things in the
world are done for the best" as communicating something more
"realistic" or "down to Earth" than may initially appear.
Shaftesbury does not display a deluded optimism that denies
the existence of painful events. His insistence upon the
indispensability of philosophy as an aid in facilitating the
cultivation of the virtues "by removing those Passions which
[man] has always to struggle with" excludes the possibility
that Shaftesbury is naively asserting life to be without
"struggle" (COL, v.5, 152; cf., II 58). His concern, stated
in this letter, that we recover the means to guard against
corruption and to root out inconstancy and self-contradiction
stands as further evidence against the view that he had his
proverbial "head in the sand" where life's difficulties are
concerned (COL, v.5, 153). Moreover, Shaftesbury observes
that life involves confronting "death" and "other Dreadful

\textsuperscript{33}Cf. II 65: "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."
Far from the romantic optimist that many consider him, Shaftesbury reveals himself as a hard-nosed realist who is, nevertheless, courageous enough and consistent enough to retain a relish for the genuinely good things available to man, and who is not tempted to the delusive melancholic ruminations that are responsible for some of the greatest forms of human folly. The persona of the cheerful optimist is closer to the actual disposition of a reasonable human being than is the persona of the grave and melancholic pessimist. This formulation helps us to make sense of a paradox in Shaftesbury's thought: he constantly recommends levity or "good humour" while nevertheless coming across as one intent on coming to the rescue of moral and religious seriousness.

When we consider that modern "empirical" philosophy begins with a mistrust of arguments that are reliant upon "common sense" opinions about the world, Shaftesbury's choice to present his views in the language of natural religion comes to light as an appropriate response to the modern cosmology of blind causation. The language of natural

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34 In his "sermon" elaborating "theism," Theocles defends his favorable judgment of the world by refuting those who wish for imagined improvements over the givens of the world (II 58, 72-77). He also succeeds in exposing as vanity the insistence by many that human welfare must be understood to be the primary focus of nature's operations if nature is to be judged "good" and "orderly"; our perceived inconveniences do not necessarily spoil nature's goodness (II 62).

35 See Descartes 1969, 154-170.
religion, Shaftesbury might reasonably determine, is the only effective way to communicate his position to those who understand themselves to take their bearings from the account of the world that follows from modern empiricism. By advancing what he calls a "theistic" natural religion, Shaftesbury forces Locke to recognize that modern empiricism advances a form of "atheistic" natural religion (I 239-242). The movement from the assertion that geometric concepts are the most infallible forms of human understanding to the generalized geometric account of the whole is a dubious and speculative one. Shaftesbury speaks Locke's language in order to contradict Locke's position, even though the true terms of Shaftesbury's dissent are not based on any abstract theory of nature. It is likely that the response Shaftesbury hoped to evoke from Locke with this letter is one of bitter mockery. If Locke should respond to Shaftesbury's expression of profound satisfaction with the world by communicating a bitter, resentful, or contemptuous retort, perhaps Shaftesbury could confirm that lurking just beneath the surface of the cool-headed, impartial, abstract account of the world that the moderns claim to deduce from their empirical observations, is a deep bitterness toward the world for not living up to what, in their heart of hearts, they believe humanity to deserve. In other words, Shaftesbury might be able to confirm that lurking beneath the surface of

36Hence, Shaftesbury is quick to compare the moderns with Epicurus and Lucretius (I 34-37, 78-79, 195-196; II 41-42, 53-54, 70, 105).
modern philosophy is the melancholy characteristic of religious fanaticism. If successful, Shaftesbury could bring into question the "scientific" posture of modern philosophy by revealing that the modern outlook, despite itself, stands or falls with certain moral claims that the moderns would be uncomfortable admitting to hold.

Shaftesbury's account of the specific moral insights that support his objections to modern philosophy is too brief in this letter to constitute a satisfactory vindication of the philosophic agenda of his favorite Greeks. His letter to Locke concludes with a statement of what he considers "True Learning" that provides some clues.

What I count True Learning, and all that wee can profitt by, is to know our selves; what it is that makes us Low, and Base, Stubborn against Reason, to be Corrupted and Drawn away from Vertue, of Different Tempers, Inconstant, and Inconsistent with ourselves: to know how to bee allways Friends with Providence though Death and many such Dreadfull Businesses come in the way; and to be Sociable and Good towards all men, though they turn Miscreants or are Injuriose to us. (153)

That the pursuit of self-knowledge should be the principal goal of philosophy is by now a familiar aspect of Shaftesbury’s critique of the moderns. His identification of corruption and vice with being "stubborn against reason" is an obvious extension of his celebration of classical philosophy, and appears in pointed contrast to the modern account of the hierarchy between reason and passion. But the
aspect of his statement above that most presages the moral teaching of the Characteristics is his observation that inconstancy and self-contradiction are symptoms of the ignorance that philosophy, to live up to the name, must make it its business to remedy. This attention to contradictions and inconstancy with a view to discovering resolutions that result in consistent human opinions indicates Shaftesbury’s adoption of the dialectical approach to political philosophy. His “method of analysis” of social and political phenomena differs from that of the moderns. In the Characteristics, Shaftesbury observes that it is the consciousness of one’s own “inconstancy” that traditionally leads human beings to pursue philosophy (I 185). Furthermore, his strategy for promoting a political climate of religious toleration involves demonstrating to persecuting fanatics that their punitive zeal contradicts certain moral opinions that they hold (I 24-30). Shaftesbury's attention to inconstancy and self-contradiction also plays a part in his criticism of the modern philosophers. He observes a contradiction between the moral skepticism of the modern philosophers and the numerous examples of civic-spirited actions undertaken by them at great personal hazard. In fact, he regards their examples as evidence for the natural sociability of human beings and for their inevitable attachment to the cause of virtue (I 57-65).
Chapter 4

A Student's Eulogy: Shaftesbury on Locke

The most frank and remarkable of Shaftesbury's letters concerning Locke is addressed simply "To a friend," and was composed on December 2, 1704, just five weeks after Locke's death. This is the earliest example in Shaftesbury's correspondence where he admits his differences with Locke to a third person. The letter responds to Locke's dying words as reported by an unnamed "disciple" of Shaftesbury (U, 345). We are certain of the validity of the statements attributed to Locke because they are drawn from a farewell letter Locke left for Anthony Collins with the instruction that it be opened upon his death (COL, v.8, 417-419). Shaftesbury does not, therefore, respond to hearsay. Nor does he respond to statements made in a condition of agony. Locke was presumably of sound enough mind and body to compose these statements while being fully aware that they would be remembered as his last.¹

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 that you loved me living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead.

¹That this letter expresses sentiments deliberately composed to be remembered as Locke's "last words" does not establish the sincerity of the sentiments beyond every doubt. That Shaftesbury regards them as sincere is certain.
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 hopes of another life. This is what I can say upon experience, and what you will find when you come to make up the account. Adieu. I leave my best wishes with you. (LL, 344-345)

Shaftesbury begins his response by observing that Locke's letter "savours of the good and Christian," and that it reminds him of "those dying speeches which come out under the title of a Christian warning piece" (Id, 345). He further remarks that he would never have guessed the above sentiments to be those of a "dying philosopher" (Id.). What stands out most prominently in Locke's statement is the bitterness of his dissatisfaction. By referring to Locke's "bitterness," I intend to draw attention not merely to Locke's observation of deficiencies in life, but, more particularly, to the sting of resentment he expresses as he details his complaints. Shaftesbury places Locke in the camp with the Christians primarily because Locke agrees with them that the condition of human beings in this world is one of lamentable dissatisfaction. Locke's view of life is a tragic view. He bemoans life's conditions in a minor key; the specter of self-pity is perceivable in the background, tormented by the vision of "suffering merit" (II 348). Shaftesbury makes it clear that philosophers are not allowed to be bitter, they do not confront difficulties in life by attaching tragic significance to them. They are not seduced by the "false
sublime" that leads the non-philosophic to associate undeserved misfortune with an entitlement to providential compensation. Philosophy as a way of life differs from Christianity on no issue so greatly as that of the sufficiency of reason to discover the human good and to direct us to its attainment. From a certain point of view, therefore, if there exists no such thing as a human good and a happiness discoverable by philosophy, philosophy would be impossible.² Locke's philosophic credentials are thus brought into question.

Shaftesbury proceeds to interpret Locke's endorsement of "the consciousness of doing well" to be conditional upon his subsequently disclosed "hopes of another life." Shaftesbury writes, "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" (Id.). Now the link between the consciousness of doing good³ and the hope of an afterlife is not expressly drawn by Locke, who reveals these two exceptions to his view that life "affords no solid satisfaction" as if they were

²To put things another way, if philosophy discovered the unattainability or inexistence of human happiness, its wisdom would be, as such, unlovable.

³Shaftesbury takes Locke's statement regarding the "consciousness of doing well" to refer to doing "good," performing good actions. This seems reasonable since the alternative interpretation, that Locke means "doing well" in the sense of "doing well for yourself," would be absurd given that Locke has just stated that life "affords no solid satisfaction."
entirely separate. Locke does, however, invoke the view that exemplary action merits reward when he expresses his hope that Collins enjoy the providential "blessings" to which his virtue "entitles" him (Id.). It is likely, though, that Locke's statement triggers a recognition by Shaftesbury of a tendency among religious believers of which he is most critical in the Characteristics. In his "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" Shaftesbury forces religious believers to consider the troubling implications of the role that divine rewards and punishments play in their view of things. If the doing of good is conditional upon a reward, then the doer "discovers no more worth or virtue here than in any other bargain of interest" (I 269). Genuine virtuous action, to be worthy of admiration, must be undertaken for the goodness that the action itself represents. Any expectation that punitive or compensatory dispensations will follow from the action diminishes the distinctively virtuous content. The very belief that virtue needs rewards to make it attractive implies that, by itself, virtue is bad and unattractive. Hence, in Shaftesbury's title, "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," the "or" does not link synonyms. In his "Inquiry," Shaftesbury concedes the utility of punishments and rewards only as tools to restrain the hopelessly vulgar or to exhort

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4 Shaftesbury provides an illuminating formulation of the proper relationship between virtue and merit at II 67: "Man may be virtuous, and by being so, is happy. His merit is reward; by virtue he deserves, and in virtue only can meet his happiness deserved."
marginal cases to undertake the practice of virtue in the hope that they will eventually discover its intrinsic goodness and dispense with fears of punishment and hopes for reward (I 270-274). Locke’s “hopes for another life,” if grounded on a “consciousness of doing well” in this life, represent a “sorry account” of the good he claims consciousness of doing, and end up undermining the basis of his hopes.

Shaftesbury replies to Locke’s judgment of life by rewriting it from his own point of view. At the age of thirty-three, Shaftesbury was suffering from the asthma that had claimed Locke. At the time of this letter, Shaftesbury had already nearly perished from his ailment, and he was by no means expected to survive the decade longer that he would prove to endure. Shaftesbury offers a “counter charge” (Id.).

As for good wishes, you have abundance, though without compliments. For loving me or my memory, be that hereafter, as it may prove best for you, or as you can bear it. The use I would have you make of it is, that our life, thank heaven, has been a scene of friendship of long duration, with much and solid satisfaction, founded on the consciousness of doing good for good’s sake, without any farther regards, nothing being truly pleasing or satisfactory but what is thus acted disinterestedly, generously, and freely. This is what I can say upon experience, and this you will find sufficient at last to make all reckonings clear, leaving no terrible account to be made up,
nor terrible idea of those who are to account with.
(1d.)

Each sentence of this statement reveals a specific point of contrast with a corresponding sentence in Locke’s. Shaftesbury’s “good wishes” are offered “without compliments.” By this Shaftesbury means to avoid appearing to ingratiate himself to his addressee; unlike Locke, Shaftesbury expresses indifference to being remembered. His clear implication is that Locke’s concern with being remembered is a consequence of a desire to escape death that Shaftesbury does not share (cf. II 313-314). At the same time, his withholding of compliments indicates his rejection of the practice exhibited by Locke of following observations of virtue with assurances that such virtue merits compensation. Shaftesbury would have his disciple employ any preserved memory of him to bring to mind certain palpable fulfillments available in life. Long friendship is the first thing he mentions, and reflects Shaftesbury’s conviction (in opposition to the moderns) that man is naturally social and that part of his fulfillment derives from social life (I 77-81). When good actions are chosen for the goodness they afford, without ulterior motives or extraneous hopes, then only do human beings discover the “much and solid satisfaction” that is their rightful province. Notice the measured tone of Shaftesbury’s characterization of human fulfillment; “much and solid” means only “enough,” suggesting that in order to enjoy substantial felicity one must divest
oneself of immoderate hopes for some imagined condition of unmitigated bliss.

The most striking part of the “counter charge” is the final sentence, which stands in the place of Locke’s assertion that Collins will discover in his own time of dying the truth of Locke’s view of life. Shaftesbury instead assures his “disciple” that his “counter charge” is sufficient to “make all reckonings clear, leaving no terrible account to be made up, nor terrible idea of those who are to account with.” In other words, Shaftesbury’s renunciation of compliments, indifference to fame or being remembered, endorsement of friendship, and insistence that real satisfaction follows only from good actions that are free of mercenary motives, add up to a view of human life that removes the temptation to give a tragic or “terrible” account of life when facing its conclusion. To live enjoying the good things that are available to us can be enough to allow us to resist the folly of hysterical dissatisfaction.

Taking matters to another level, Shaftesbury claims that his outlook preserves one from entertaining a “terrible idea of those who are to account with.” In other words, it removes the basis for a belief in punitive gods. This radical claim is advanced by Shaftesbury without the arguments that support it. He has indicated, however, the beginnings of a moral critique of the belief in punitive gods (or rewarding ones for that matter) through his objections to Locke’s mercenary conception of morality. Shaftesbury
defends virtue by insisting upon its goodness for the practitioner of virtue. He also condemns vice by insisting upon the damaging effects it has on the vicious. From his perspective, therefore, particular providence of the sort that awakens both dread and hope in Christians is revealed to be superfluous. The wicked are already punished by the vice they choose; the corruption and mutilation of character they suffer from their viciousness precludes them from enjoying the good things that follow from virtue. To believe otherwise is to admit unwittingly that, apart from the prospect of punishment, vice is good and its practice desirable. If such were the case, then a god who punished the vicious would be acting to discourage them from behaving in ways that are intrinsically good for them. The belief in punitive gods thus paradoxically implies both the intrinsic goodness of vice and the apparent injustice of the gods. But Shaftesbury, who has discovered satisfaction in friendship and other good actions chosen "disinterestedly," claims knowledge that the actions of the vicious are intrinsically repulsive. From his point of view, therefore, the notion would never independently occur that gods should punish those who are already suffering grievously for their actions.

Nevertheless, the fact that many attest belief in punitive gods poses a challenge to the Shaftesburian position. His must, if his position is truly "sufficient," be able to answer that challenge. This would require him to establish that the various religious people who believe in
punitive gods can be compelled to agree that the fear of punishment is no creditable grounds for refraining from sin (I 262, 267). Most believers would shrink from conceding the intrinsic goodness of vice or sin, just as they would shrink from regarding it the act of a righteous and just god systematically to discourage human beings from enjoying truly good things. It may be possible to apply to Christians generally Shaftesbury’s observation that Locke gives a “sorry account” of the good he claims credit for if his choices are contingent upon an expectation of reward. There would, however, remain the claimants who appeal to the mysteries of revelation to resolve apparent contradictions such as the incompatibility of self-interest and entitlement to providential rewards. We might suspect that Shaftesbury would charge those appealing to revelation with insufficiently appreciating the contradictory character of the moral positions their revelation supports. In the Characteristics, Shaftesbury certainly shows himself determined to promote a purification of the Christian religion by pointing out its moral insufficiencies. But on the issue of revelation, Shaftesbury announces repeatedly and emphatically his intention to remain silent (I 220; II 200, 352).

We are thus afforded a glimpse of Shaftesbury’s unorthodox stance on religion. In the “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” we shall see how this stance proves essential to Shaftesbury’s anti-Lockean defense of religious toleration,
and of liberal politics generally. The moral critique of gods who punish proves to be useful also against men who persecute dissenters. For the moment it is sufficient to observe that one of Shaftesbury’s chief criticisms of Christianity is introduced to criticize a view expressed by the greatest founder of modern liberalism (the political philosophy that is designed to provide a political solution to the problem of Christianity).

The balance of this letter consists of “a word or two by way of remark” on the further implications of Locke’s statement. By stating categorically that life is “vanity,” Locke simultaneously makes a philosophic declaration, a personal confession and a desperate complaint. Locke declares that life consists only of pursuits that are ultimately unworthy, even though we undertake them with the (false) opinion that they are worthwhile. He confesses that his every endeavor, including his philosophic ones, prove in the end to be driven by an illusion that some significant objective is being accomplished. And he complains that life, by denying us the very existence of substantial goods to fulfill us and to allow us to measure our lives by, fails to correspond to our deepest needs, needs with which nature apparently invests us. The conception of human nature Locke implies here appears at odds with the conception he advances in his philosophy. In the Essay and the Second Treatise, Locke strives to dissuade human beings from vain pursuits in order that they may focus their
energies on the pursuit of security and on the acquisition of the material abundance necessary for security. It is noteworthy that on his deathbed Locke makes no mention of the solid fulfillments (or even conciliatory fulfillments) a long and secure life has provided him. Does the fact of his mortality, made undeniable by its imminence, expose the life devoted to ever greater security -- a life that admits no competing priorities -- to be grossly insufficient?

Shaftesbury, by way of retort, insists that “life is vain (‘tis true) for those who make it so” (LL 346). Claiming himself to be invulnerable to the love of “riches or the world,” Shaftesbury is able to face parting with life “without calling names or giving hard words” (Id.). Shaftesbury can “give [life] a good testimony” in part because he never put an overly great premium on its preservation. To have done so would have required him to overvalue mere life at the expense of worthwhile life priorities that may come into competition with the single-minded pursuit of security. He finds life “not so uncomfortable as it is made,” but, at the same time, “nor so over-comfortable as to make one melancholy at the thoughts of parting with it, or as to make one think the time exceeding short and passing” (Id.). This testimony of measured satisfaction with life (made remarkable by the fact that it is offered by a young man facing the prospect of an early death) provides occasion for Shaftesbury to observe a glaring contradiction in Locke’s complaint.
For why so short if not sound and sweet? Why complain both ways? Is vanity, mere vanity, a happiness? or can misery pass away too soon? But the sweet is living (it seems), mere living and doing just the ordinary animal offices of life, which good manners will not allow one to call by plain names. As for other offices more immediately human, and of the rational kind, such as friendship, justice, generosity, acts of love, and such like, the exposing of life, health, or fortune, spending of it, throwing it away, laying it readily down for others -- for friends, country, fellow-creatures -- these are no happiness (‘tis supposed); no solid satisfaction without a reward. 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. -- 0 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 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. The certain way for this being (as I conceive) to do the most good, and that the most freely and generously, throwing aside selfishness, mercenariness, and such servile thoughts as unfit us even for this world, and much more for a better. (LL 346-347)

Shaftesbury here provokes us to wonder about the idiosyncratic coupling in modern political philosophy of an intensified attachment to the preservation of life and a
radical dismissal of much of what, for pre-modern man, constituted the substance of that life. To achieve greater political and individual security, the orientation of human life is transformed beyond recognition. The fear of death must be intensified in order to focus our energies on preventing its early or unnecessary arrival. Aspirations or concerns not directly serving the cause of security represent either frivolous or dangerous distractions. These include, in Shaftesbury's view, all of the "offices more immediately human, and of the rational kind." We are left with the bodily functions, the concern with which only tends to complement the concern with the body's security.\(^5\) Money is for providing security, not for facilitating noble action. Any pursuit not in the service of security is undertaken for the sake of rewards that are in that service. Our lives are all about time, comfortable and secure time to be sure, but since our eventual mortality is an unavoidable reality, and its postponement the single preoccupation of a right-thinking individual, time is the measure of all. Nothing eternal or transcendent is available. As a result, when death comes and there is no time left, modern man faces unmitigated tragedy.

But how, Shaftesbury asks, can a life that admittedly comes to light as having "no solid satisfaction" be worth living in the first place? Does not the modern account of the character of human life negate the modern postulate that

\(^5\)Cf. I 203: "The abhorrence of an insensible state makes mere vitality and animal sensation highly cherished."
"self-preservation" must be the relentless pursuit of every enlightened human being (I 82)? In short, is the protracted (though finite) continuance of "the ordinary animal offices of life" enough to justify a pursuit that must, by definition, end in horrific, isolated, undignified, and empty annihilation? It is not entirely clear why even suicide would not be an equally reasonable response to the Lockean version of the human condition.

Shaftesbury thus blames modern philosophy for "making virtue burdensome and death uneasy." He does not, however, leave us without an attractive (if not unproblematic) alternative. "[F]riendship, justice, generosity, acts of love, and such like" represent human aspirations that defy the modern outlook. Each of them involves the aspirant's understanding that he or she acts for the sake of objectives that transcend self-interest. Shaftesbury assures his disciple that by "throwing aside selfishness, mercenariness, and such servile thoughts," he may enjoy a solid satisfaction that, by incidentally subordinating preservation to more noble pursuits, produces the happy consequence of diminishing the painful significance of mortality. The exalted conviction that some things are worth risking death supports an understanding of life as more than marking time to the beat of the body's functions, an understanding that preserves a conception of genuine fulfillment.

The closing paragraph of this letter reveals that Shaftesbury entertains some unconventional views that must be
considered as we evaluate his moral position. Claiming to have offered his "best advice" to his disciple, Shaftesbury appeals to the various testimony of human experience as the final arbiter of the Locke-Shaftesbury dispute over happiness and the human good (LL 347). But then he says something quite unusual.

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 have never yet served God or man, but as I loved and liked, having been true to my own and family motto, which is -- LOVE, SERVE. (Id.)

This statement provides a perfect example of the distinctive method of writing that Shaftesbury employs in the Characteristics. Shaftesbury consistently presents himself to be the defender of moral virtue against the modern assault on it, while at every point quietly indicating his awareness of the problems attendant to ordinary conceptions of morality. At first glance he indeed here seems to be making a high-minded moralistic claim. He renounces any concern with rewards; his commitment to the "doing of good" is unadulterated by mercenary calculations. Being virtuous is its own reward. But almost imperceptibly Shaftesbury has renounced the conventional spirit of the moral exhortations he voiced earlier in the letter.

If one truly "find[s] heaven" in doing good, then in what sense is such behavior unselfish? If doing good and
enjoying the good are identical, then even when an action is directed entirely to the benefit of others, the indispensable gratification of the actor himself renders the action to be of a decidedly self-regarding character. And yet it is precisely the overcoming of selfishness that Shaftesbury has apparently been praising. In light of his latter statement, however, it seems that Shaftesbury’s disagreement with Locke is based not on the question of the self-regarding origin of human action, but on the specific character of the human good.  

Shaftesbury’s critique of human selfishness in fact depends on a narrow definition of what constitutes selfishness. In the *Characteristics*, the self-interest Shaftesbury disparages consists of the Lockean interest in self-preservation when pursued at the expense of our “natural affection” for our “species or society” and, in addition, the interest in sensual gratifications at the expense of the intellectual or moral ones (I 317-330). However understated his formulation of the inevitable problems of moral life may be, it is necessary to realize that Shaftesbury’s own understanding of moral action is radically different from the understanding of the moralists or moral actors he seeks to insulate from modernity (including that of Shaftesbury’s

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6 That Shaftesbury regards true moral action to be identical with the self-regarding choice of the true human good is made unmistakably clear throughout the *Characteristics* (I 80-81, 184-185, 199, 316; II 29, 144, 153, 287). For example, at I 81 Shaftesbury confides, “[t]his the height of wisdom, no doubt, to be rightly selfish,” and then goes on to criticize the modern account of what constitutes human interest.
celebrated eighteenth century advocate, Francis Hutcheson). Shaftesbury’s moral philosophy, understood in strict terms, denies the moral categories of duty or sacrifice. This is made very clear by his unorthodox endorsement of his family motto, “LOVE, SERVE,” which surely means “DO LOVE” and “DO SERVE,” even or precisely at the expense of your own interests. Shaftesbury refers to the motto to justify his assurance that he has “never yet served God or man, but as [he] has loved and liked.” In other words, he interprets an unconditional moral exhortation to dutiful action to communicate a conditional prohibition against serving where one does not love or like the served (or at least love or like the service itself). Whether or not his “disciple” fully appreciated his meaning is beside the point.

Shaftesbury is displaying a sophisticated awareness that ordinary citizens require that moral action be performed unselfishly and, at the same time, that moral action be good for the person performing it. Shaftesbury knows that this is impossible; he knows that moral man as such pursues something impossible. Shaftesbury appeals in grandiose language to one half of the moral equation at the pointed expense of the other.

There should nevertheless be no doubt that Shaftesbury is perfectly serious about his defense of ordinary morality against the Lockean imposition. If one who defends morality

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7Cf. I 81-81 for a statement of Shaftesbury’s interest in shielding ordinary morality from “the philosophy or philosophers of our days.”
is a moralist, then Shaftesbury certainly qualifies for the designation, however unorthodox his deepest understanding of moral phenomena may be. This is so because, even according to his deepest understanding, the conception of the good adhered to by the ordinary moral person is closer to the truth than that of the Lockean. Shaftesbury’s regard for friendship and his conviction that man is naturally social places him squarely in the camp of traditional morality, which praises action that expresses a concern for others. It is no small factor that, in Shaftesbury’s informed judgment, moral man will be happier than Lockean man. Whatever the imperfections of moral man’s self-understanding, they do not compare with the perverse misconceptions that inform the lives of Lockeans.

To explain matters another way, Shaftesbury never pursues the question of the tension between one’s own interests and the good of others with the Glauconian extremism with which that question is brought to the surface by Plato in the Republic. He does not do so because he is writing under circumstances entirely different from those under which Plato wrote. Whereas under normal circumstances the philosopher will make it his primary activity to question fundamental popular beliefs, Shaftesbury finds himself compelled to come to traditional morality’s defense in order to counter what he considers a potentially disastrous agenda

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8Plato, Republic 357a-362d.
being pursued by Locke and his modern predecessors. His situation is further complicated by the political fact of Christianity, against which the moderns' agenda is directed. Shaftesbury is sympathetic to the modern concern over the political distortions caused by Christianity; like his modern cousins, Shaftesbury, being a free-thinker, feels the pinch of Christian intolerance very personally. In fact, Shaftesbury has grave concerns about the influence of Christianity that the moderns do not share (Cf. I 66-67, 67n.1; II 45-47). But where Shaftesbury would administer antibiotics, the modern philosophers cry out for the amputating scalpel. Shaftesbury is thus forced to conceive a peculiar rhetorical strategy that subordinates the age-old philosophic objective of provoking, where possible, awareness

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Shaftesbury’s remarks in this final paragraph afford two additional pieces of evidence that cast light on his critical view of Christianity. First, by stating that apart from doing good "[he] know[s] nothing else that is heavenly," Shaftesbury indirectly implies that heaven itself is not heavenly, or that he knows nothing of heaven as a place or as a state of supernatural existence. His pious sounding moralism is therefore followed directly by a most impious implication, leading us to doubt any sincere piety on his part. Second, by announcing that if his devotion to doing good reveals a "disposition" insufficient to earn admission to heaven, then he does not desire to enter heaven at all, he invokes the view (which he later ascribes to human beings generally (I 28-30, 193, 262-265)) that God's providence and judgments must conform to standards of moral goodness that are apprehensible to human beings (i.e., that are not "mysterious") if God is to deserve our esteem. Shaftesbury employs this observation as the basis for his claim that philosophy, by providing the means of discovering the character of "good," has a demonstrable right to censure religion (cf. I 193, 255).
of the difficulties attendant to every ordinary set of moral beliefs. The highest objective of philosophic writing is kept partly hidden behind the curtain as Shaftesbury half-joins the moderns in attempting to erode Christianity’s political influence while he strives, simultaneously, to prevent those same modern “transformers of human nature” from mutilating human social and political life in their attempt to improve it (II 83).
Chapter 5

Shaftesbury’s Official Discussion of the Proper Objectives of Philosophy

Shaftesbury’s eulogy of Locke casts light on one of the most fundamental sections of the Characteristics. We turn our attention to Part III, Section I of “Advice to an Author” not only because this is where Shaftesbury discusses the proper objectives of philosophy, but also because Shaftesbury here reproduces verbatim a substantial excerpt from his letter responding to Locke’s valedictory.

“Philosopher, let me hear concerning what is of some moment to me. Let me hear concerning life what the right notion is, and what I am to stand to upon occasion; that I may not when life seems retiring, or has run itself out to the very dregs, cry Vanity; condemn the world and at the same time complain that life is short and passing.” For why so short if not found sweet? why do I complain both ways? Is vanity, mere vanity, a happiness? Or can misery pass away too soon? (I 196)

While expressing his dissatisfaction with modern philosophy’s inability to address the most urgent human concerns -- the concerns over what Locke calls “practical principles” -- Shaftesbury repeats his criticism of Locke’s valedictory in order to plead for a philosophy that provides satisfactory insight into the question of how to live. The philosophy that Shaftesbury would approve would be distinguished by its ability to remedy the confusions or misconceptions exhibited
in Locke’s sad ending. It would do so by effectively revealing the character of the human good or “the right notion,” by making available the “much and solid satisfaction” that simultaneously makes life worth living and abates the dread of mortality (I 189).

It is striking the degree to which the specter of Locke looms in the background of this section, even though his name goes unmentioned. Shaftesbury’s characterizations of the philosophy he opposes inevitably take the form of thinly-veiled references to Locke’s Essay (I 188-197). For instance, near the end of this section Shaftesbury wonders how Locke’s philosophy would speak to the most fundamental dilemma faced by man in political life: whether or not it makes sense to risk one’s life on behalf of others.

What signifies it how I come by my ideas, or how compound them; which are simple, and which complex? If I have a right idea of life, now when perhaps I think slightly of it, and resolve with myself “that it may easily be laid down on any honourable occasion to my friends or country,” teach me how I may preserve this idea, or at least how I may safely get rid of it; that it may trouble me no more nor lead me into ill adventures. (I 196)

The epistemological investigations of Locke’s Essay, however, neither reveal the “right idea” of the human good nor instruct us in a way that would cease the contradictory and all-too-familiar fluctuations of opinion that inform our lives and direct our actions. Locke’s analysis of the human aversion to “uneasiness” would seem to provide a firm case
against any risky actions on behalf of others. Yet Locke surely does not expect that the Lockeans he strives to create will refuse to engage in military service involving personal risk (even though as Shaftesbury points out to Stanhope, such risk would appear foolish according to strict Lockean individualistic standards (LL, 414)). Political life not only requires such sacrifices, but we believe that those willing to make them are deserving of the highest admiration and honor.

The frequent imposition of civic duties introduces grave dilemmas that are intrinsic to the human experience. Such dilemmas provide the most poignant occasions for reflection upon the question of the human good. Shaftesbury cannot conceive how Locke can proceed with such relish in the investigation of "ideas" as such without ever confronting directly the question of which are the right ideas to maintain in the face of our most profound practical dilemmas. He closes this section by repeating the sentiment (first expressed in his 1694 letter to Locke) that while he is determined to devote every energy to philosophy if the activity yields practical principles, he can conceive no interest in a science or philosophy that leaves his most urgent questions unaddressed.

Our historical vantage point necessitates a greater appreciation (if not simple approval) of the awesome potential of modern philosophy than Shaftesbury displays. His judgment of modern philosophy as deeply misguided at
best, poisonously distracting and distorting at worst, seems archaic in light of the fantastic technological achievements of modern science. To be fair, Shaftesbury’s critical target in this section is primarily Locke’s philosophy as it appears in the Essay, and not modern natural science. Shaftesbury objects that Locke gives an account of knowledge that obscures the question of the human good.¹ Still, there is something initially disappointing about the way that Shaftesbury dissents from Locke without refuting the arguments of the Essay point by point. Instead of a “formal deduction” of the unsatisfactory character of modern philosophy, Shaftesbury employs his “method of soliloquy” as a means to “serve turn” (I 190). Shaftesbury confronts Lockean empirical deductions and inductions with a dialectical account of the primacy of the question of the good for all human speculation. Once that primacy is established, he argues, the defects of the Lockean approach become visible. Shaftesbury’s cryptic reference to Locke’s dying statement (and to his own critical retort) punctuates his objections to Lockean philosophy. Because Locke died expressing an inadequate and contradictory view of the good, Shaftesbury feels justified in doubting the validity of Locke’s philosophy.

¹In his correspondence and in the Characteristics, Shaftesbury does acknowledge the salutary influence of Locke’s philosophy as a combatant against the mystical philosophy of “the schools.” See LL, 416; LTAS, 2; Characteristics I 65.
But in rejecting Locke’s philosophy, and the modern philosophic tradition that stands behind it, Shaftesbury implicitly rejects the assumptions that stand behind not only modern political or social philosophy, but also modern natural science. And does not the success of modern science confirm the validity of the modern pre-scientific hypotheses about the whole, man’s place in the whole, and the character of human nature understood in light of man’s place in the whole? Can we take seriously Shaftesbury’s attempt to “serve turn” in light of the evident confirmation of the modern perspective on the whole that is provided by the success of modern science? In other words, however bleak Locke’s ultimate view of human life may be, must we not regard his account with the hard-nosed resignation that it is “sad but true”?

It may be possible to question modern philosophy’s account of the world and of the human condition without rejecting the claims of modern science in their entirety. Modern science presents itself as progressively uncovering the whole knowable truth about the whole. Without resorting to a categorical rejection of its claims, a critic of modern science could respond by contending that modern science may provide only a partial understanding of a part of the whole (Cf. Pangle 1992, 189). Such a response would begin by pointing out that at the basis of modern science, defining its scope and providing its impetus, is a pre-scientific awareness of the world and also a pre-scientific opinion of
the good things worth knowing about it.² The human good, according to modern political philosophy, is security; and this view is accompanied by the opinion that security is very difficult to establish. The investigative agenda of modern science is, unsurprisingly, designed to ask questions that lead to answers that speak to our fundamental (and yet unscientific) opinion about what is good. Hence, modern science yields precise insights into the causal relationships of the material world, insights of a sort that make possible the manipulation of that world for the sake of producing human comfort or security. Its success tends over time to obscure its particularity or partiality, its rootedness in a prior unexamined opinion about the human good. Meanwhile, the account of the whole that modern science projects necessarily reflects (and, by its successes, indirectly fortifies) the view that the world is, at best, uncaring, and, at worst, hostile toward human beings. In such a world human comfort and security (the avoidance of death) are the most reasonable and only completely defensible objectives of human action.

The investigation of the character of human knowledge undertaken by Locke in the Essay may be said to unfold along similar lines. The real core of the book is not the dazzling series of deductions and inductions regarding simple and complex ideas, the nonexistence of "innate ideas," etc. The

²My arguments here and immediately following are deeply indebted to the account of "Socratic Dialectic" provided in Pangle 1992, 184-194.
core of the book is the denial of a "Summum Bonum," which really amounts only to the assertion of a specific conception of the human good as security or "contentedness," combined with the qualification that security is not durable or lasting and hence must continually be sought (ECHU, II.xxi.55-58). Locke's magisterial deductions and inductions of the operations of the human mind proceed from the presumptions that our nature directs us toward no positive fulfillment and that our situation is akin to that of permanent refugees in a hostile world, constantly on the defensive. But Locke never genuinely confronts competing views of the human good on their own terms. He does not examine the self-understandings of those who maintain competing views in order to reveal the contradictions or incoherencies latent in their views of the good. Instead he explains the behavior of those he criticizes according to criteria derived from his own view of human interest.

By insisting that the question of what constitutes human interest, of what our good really is, be the primary focus of philosophic inquiry, Shaftesbury endeavors to reveal some advantages that his approach has over Locke's. To begin with, his approach speaks directly to our most urgent and pervasive practical dilemmas as we experience them. It does not proceed from a preconceived hypothesis upon which a philosophic "system" is constructed. By beginning with a

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4At I 189 Shaftesbury remarks: "The surest method of becoming foolish is
question, Shaftesbury establishes an openness and attentiveness to the full range of serious answers. As a result, Shaftesbury's approach preserves at least the possibility of ascending to non-hypothetical knowledge, of earning its status as authoritative.

This is the philosophy which by Nature has the pre-eminence above all other science or knowledge. Nor can this surely be of the sort called vain or deceitful, since it is the only means by which I can discover vanity and deceit. This is not of that kind which depends on genealogies or traditions, and ministers questions and vain jangling. It has not its name, as other philosophies, from the mere subtlety and nicety of the speculation, but by way of excellence, from its being superior to all other speculations, from its presiding over all other sciences and occupations, teaching the measure of each, and assigning the just value of everything in life. By this science religion itself is judged, spirits are searched, prophecies proved, miracles distinguished: the sole measure and standard being taken from moral rectitude, and from the discernment of what is sound and just in the affections. For if the tree is known only by its fruits, my endeavour must be to distinguish the true taste of fruits, refine my palate, and establish a just relish in the kind. So that to bid me judge authority by morals, whilst the rule of morals is supposed dependent on mere authority and will, is the same in reality as to bid me see with my eyes shut, measure without a

by a system."
standard, and count without arithmetic. (I 193, emphasis added)

This statement illustrates more clearly than any other Shaftesbury’s adoption of the classical or Socratic dialectal approach to philosophy in opposition to modern “systematic” or “methodological” empiricism. Knowledge of the human good comes to light as the necessary prerequisite to all other investigations, ranking them in priority and directing them toward worthwhile ends. Although this cannot be regarded as a satisfactory account of the superiority of dialectics, Shaftesbury does make a powerful case for the view that our opinion of the good serves as our chief orienting principle. Shaftesbury’s advocacy of a particular type of “soliloquy,” or private self-examination and cross-examination of one’s own fundamental opinions, is nothing more than a version of the conversational investigations characteristic of Plato’s Socratic dialogues (II 252-255).⁵

Even the veracity of religious doctrine, Shaftesbury insists, must come under the scrutiny of our opinions of the good. And by making this point he indicates his awareness of a problem that Locke and the moderns seem to ignore. Every scientist or philosopher, by presuming to investigate the

⁵That Shaftesburian soliloquy is dialogic and not akin, say, to withdrawn meditation, is made evident by the fact that the practitioner is required to investigate the ways and opinions of others in the world with a view to discovering insights and challenges relevant to his own predicament.
world through reason alone, makes certain assumptions about the world that conflict with the claims of traditional religion. He or she assumes the existence of a predictable natural order about which valid knowledge can be acquired. But the Biblical tradition, among others, claims that we live in the midst not of a natural world, but of a mysterious creation where miraculous interruptions of any apparent regularities can and do occur at any moment. The scientist or philosopher also assumes that his activities will not warrant punishment in the eyes of a jealous and demanding god. When denying that the philosophy he endorses is "of the sort called vain or deceitful," Shaftesbury footnotes five passages from the New Testament that warn against the deceptions of philosophy (I 189 n. 1-4). Philosophy cannot merely pass judgment on religion, it must vindicate itself against a powerful challenge posed by religion, a challenge where the stakes could not be higher (Pangle 1992, 189-190).

By insisting that the kind of philosophy he recommends does not fall under the category of that which is prohibited by the Bible, Shaftesbury acknowledges the necessity of answering that challenge. What is more, Shaftesbury's specific claim that his philosophy is not vain because it is only through the impartial and relentless investigation of the good that "vanity and deceit" are discovered, illustrates at least the beginnings of a dialectician's response to the challenge of religion. The nerve of this response is the justification of philosophy according to moral standards
adhered to by the believers themselves. Shaftesbury's insistence that moral standards must be apprehensible in terms that are independent of "authority" is a fundamental theme of his philosophy, and is invoked repeatedly to criticize both Christians and modern "freethinkers" like Locke. Just as we cannot "see with [our] eyes shut, measure without a standard, and count without arithmetic," we cannot make moral judgments (including judgments condemning philosophy as vain) without moral standards apprehended by reason alone and independent of any authority but reason.°

We have so far been considering the culmination or conclusion of Shaftesbury's discussion of the proper objectives of philosophy. We have done so for good reason, since it is here that we find a porthole from Shaftesbury's explicit (if private) critique of Locke to his implicit (public) version. But it is necessary now to trace the steps leading up to that culmination in order to understand more fully Shaftesbury's account of philosophy and his explanation of how Locke and the moderns went wrong.

With deceptive lightheartedness, Shaftesbury opens this section by expressing dismay at the frequent application of the compliment to writers, "that he has undoubtedly surpassed

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6 I 25, 28-30, 237-239, 264. Compare with ECHU, II.xxviii.13-17
7 In other words, all human beings (including the pious) conceive of pious obedience as just and righteous, as distinguished in kind from mere servitude, and therefore require independent standards according to which divine commandments may be judged.
himself" (I 182). Shaftesbury notes the ultimate neutrality of this compliment, observing that, strictly understood, it implies only that the author has differed in some way from his previous work. He goes on to observe the similar neutrality of the compliment most often paid to "great men and princes": "That they have acted like themselves, and suitably to their own genius and character" (Id.). The favorable reception that these compliments almost always receive indicates a conviction on the part of the recipient that the reference to his "self" has favorable implications.

For what person is there who in his imagination joins not something worthy and deserving with his true and native self, as oft as he is referred to it, and made to consider who he is? Such is the natural affection of all mankind towards moral beauty and perfection that they never fail in making this presumption in behalf of themselves:

"That by nature they have something estimable and worthy in respect of others of their kind; and that their genuine, true, and natural self is, as it ought to be, of real value in society, and justly honourable for the sake of its merit and good qualities"...

Thus is every one convinced of the reality of a better self, and of the cult or homage which is due to it. The misfortune is, we are seldom taught to comprehend this self by placing it in a distinct view from its representative or counterfeit. (I 182-183)§

§Notice how Shaftesbury's argument here relies on dialectical evidence instead of an empirical hypothesis. The universal human acknowledgment
An affirmation of the existence of a "better self," a standard of human perfection that is justly aspired to and admired, may be solicited from anyone. Most will take it for granted that they possess the truly worthy qualities. Only seldomly are individuals taught to undertake the "speculation" of what constitutes "moral beauty and perfection" for a human being. Since a conception of our real interest forms "the basis and foundation of our actions," this speculation centers upon the question of where our "real interest" lies (I 183-184).

Christianity, Shaftesbury notes, is of little help in provoking such speculation. This is because, apart from some notable exceptions, "self-interest is there taken as it is vulgarly conceived" (I 183). It is especially the inconsistent fluctuation of the Bible regarding our interest of "the reality of a better self" is confirmed by an inter-subjective consensus that is easily uncovered (in this case by observing a particular manifestation of pride). Shaftesbury's assertions that everyone believes in a "better self," a self that is distinguished by its "real value in society" and is honored for its "good qualities," is not advanced dogmatically. Implicit in his assertion is the promise that it is independently verifiable. Shaftesbury implies, as it were, that his claim can be verified by talking to human beings wherever one encounters them.

Shaftesbury cites Moses and St. Paul as examples of the "hints... of a nobler self" offered by the Bible. It is their expressions of "highest contempt for all such interested views, [and their] willingness to suffer without recompense for the sake of others" that marks them as exceptions. It is therefore striking that he does not cite Christ as such an example.
that draws Shaftesbury's criticism. Even when "a greater and purer Light disclosed itself in the chosen nation"

1Cf. I 183-184: "Our real and genuine interest is sometimes supposed that ambitious one which is fond of power and glory, sometimes that childish one which is taken with vain show, and is to be invited to obedience by promise of finer habitations, precious stones and metals, shining garments, crowns, and other such dazzling beauties, by which another earth or material city is represented." Shaftesbury's frequently impious references to Christianity are sometimes reminiscent of the Spinozistic "high-criticism" that was quickly gaining prominence during his lifetime. His observation in this context that the "celestial phenomena" are treated in the Bible "according to common imagination and the then current system of Astronomy and Natural Science" is of this sort (I 184). And there is evidence in the Characteristics that Shaftesbury is sympathetic to aspects of Spinoza's skeptical analysis of miracles (II 84-95; 200-201). Modern "high-criticism" of sacred texts is distinguished by the use of modern analytical categories (historical, psychological, archeological, "scientific") that are entirely foreign to the subject being analyzed. Such critics base their judgments of the claims of sacred texts on these categories while failing to appreciate the powerful challenge to such criticism that follows from the religious believer's claim that the texts are sacred, based on revelation, and therefore invulnerable to merely rational critique. The indications in Shaftesbury's thought of some sympathy with the modern approach must be evaluated in light of his simultaneous employment of a critical approach that is distinctly unmodern. When he observes the inconsistency of the Bible's portrayal of human interest, Shaftesbury does not raise a question explored by the high-critics. Furthermore, he does not raise a question that the religious believer can shrug off with the ease that he can, say, Spinoza's intimations that the prophets suffered from over-active imaginations (cf. Spinoza 1989, 73-87). The believer cannot shrug off Shaftesbury's cross-examination of his or her "interests" because the believer testifies to having those interests; in effect, he or she testifies (assuming Shaftesbury is correct about the Bible's fluctuation on the issue) to holding multiple and incompatible interests. The believer is thus forced to explain himself.
(namely, Christ), the people "were apt to construe every divine saying in a belly-sense, and thought nothing more self-constituent than that inferior receptacle" (I 184). In places where he is less frank on this matter, Shaftesbury surmises that Christianity ignores the "heroic virtues" so as not to include them among the duties that entitle one to providential rewards, thus leaving room for some nobility or "disinterestedness" in human life (Cf. I 66-67). Shaftesbury's remarks on this subject serve not only to indicate his conviction that a revival of genuine philosophy can occur only in opposition to the influence of Christianity (a conviction he shares with the moderns), but also to attribute the prevailing vulgar opinion of human interest to Christianity's influence.

The latter observation is particularly significant because Shaftesbury in this section (and in several other places in the Characteristics) criticizes Christianity and modern philosophy as if they were interchangeable. The reader is sometimes forced to wonder whether Shaftesbury is criticizing Christianity or modern philosophy, since (as we shall see) he begins openly criticizing the one and, through an apparently seamless transition, ends up openly criticizing the other. When we consider the question of human interest as it is answered by Christianity and by modern political philosophy, we discover some important similarities.

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11 Shaftesbury refers specifically to Matt.xvi.6-8.
Christianity, by connecting salvation with the promise of eternal life, may be said to imply that avoiding death is the primary interest of human beings. This conception of our interest is perfectly mirrored in the political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke. The fluctuation that Shaftesbury observes in the Bible’s portrayal of our desires in matters inferior to mortality also corresponds to parallel claims in modern philosophy. Hence, other than the desire for self-preservation, which reason reveals to be primary for all human beings, all other objects of desire are relegated entirely to individual taste.

It thus becomes evident that Shaftesbury’s criticism of modern philosophy for not satisfactorily undertaking the question of the good is combined with an intimation that the moderns unwittingly inherited a fundamentally Christian outlook on the human good. Modernity would then come to light as the attempt to achieve through human effort alone the supposed good things that Christians seek from God. The modern break with Christianity, initiated dramatically by Machiavelli and developed by Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke would amount only to a partial break. By retaining fundamentally Christian opinions about the human good, modern philosophy would then be only partially philosophic. It would be philosophy in the service of a particular set of human objectives posited by a particular religion. The

12Cf. ECHU IIxxi.55.
modern rationalists may have turned away from God out of an impatient frustration with God’s providence or apparent lack thereof, but they continue to accept uncritically the biblical view of what human beings most need.

And it is clarity regarding human interest that Shaftesbury regards as the highest objective of philosophy. To illustrate the priority of the question of the good for human beings, Shaftesbury employs the image of an “intimate friend” who has returned from a long journey to distant lands. Should the friend’s outer appearance have changed to such an extent that he is unrecognizable, we would be assured of his identity after a little conversation without great concern (I 185). Much more traumatic would be a situation where the friend appeared outwardly unchanged but displayed “thoughts and humours of a strange and foreign turn, with passions, affections, and opinions wholly different from anything we had formerly known” (Id.). Such a change would render the friend alien in a much more radical sense. When such fluctuations of character occur, Shaftesbury observes, “’tis to philosophy we then appeal” (Id.). When we pursue at various times not the “same interest,” but often rather “a direct contrary one” we are inclined to attribute our inconsistency to a lack of self-knowledge.

And thus we recognise the authority and proper object of philosophy; so far at least, that though we pretend not to be complete philosophers, we confess “that as we have more or less of this intelligence or comprehension of ourselves we are
accordingly more or less truly men, and either more or less to be depended on in friendship, society, and the commerce of life." (I 185-186)

Now according to Hobbes or Locke an individual should never be surprised to find himself or herself pursuing an interest directly "contrary" to an interest pursued in the past. To do so is fully in accord with the modern view that there are no intrinsically good human pursuits apart from security. But Shaftesbury’s view is closer to common sense. Indeed, it stands or falls according to its accuracy as an articulation of the common sense view. It is a dialectical claim and not an empirical claim because it invokes a specific conversation (a conversation with one who discovers himself in contradiction with himself) as the foundation for the claim. Hobbes and Locke conclude from the great frequency of self-contradiction regarding human interest that individuals should pursue power in the abstract (money, reputation, etc.) in order to be able to satisfy desires as they unpredictably emerge (LEV, 57-58; ECHU, II.xxi.58-60). But Shaftesbury responds that human beings can be led to confess a grave dissatisfaction with the continual pursuit of contradictory interests. What we want is clarity concerning what is good or desirable, the clarity that only philosophy can provide. Any so-called philosophy that fails to deliver such clarity would be a mammoth failure.

Shaftesbury next turns to discussing the difficulties faced by human beings in his time who might be inclined to
turn to philosophy seeking the clarity concerning human interest that would eliminate self-contradiction. Philosophy as it is established, the philosophy of "some famous schools," he likens to "choking weeds" that strangle the tree of true philosophy and prevent it from yielding fruit (I 186). This is the philosophy that Hobbes attacks so relentlessly and that Shaftesbury praises Locke for countering (LTAS 2-3).

There can be nothing more ridiculous than to expect that manners or understanding should sprout from such a stock. It pretends indeed some relation to manners as being definitive of the natures, essences, and properties of spirits, and some relation to reason as describing the shapes and forms of certain instruments employed in the reasoning art. But had the craftiest of men, for many ages together, been employed in finding out a method to confound reason and degrade the understanding of mankind, they could not, perhaps, have succeeded better than by the establishment of such a mock-science. (Id.)

The "philosophy" taught by the scholastics, deeply Christian thinkers, can almost be regarded as a decoy erected to lure anyone attracted to philosophy away from its genuine version, which is always threatening to every entrenched religious orthodoxy. Shaftesbury joins the moderns in opposing the schools.

But with his criticism of the schools, Shaftesbury initiates a sustained critique that culminates in his directing his greatest disapproval toward an approach to
philosophy we easily recognize as Locke’s. There is, furthermore, no clear transition from the critique of scholastic philosophy to the critique of modern philosophy, which suggests a hidden connection between the two. Shaftesbury ultimately regards modern philosophy to be just as great an obstacle to genuine philosophy as scholasticism because it too obscures the question of the human good.

The critique begins by relating a story of an anonymous missionary who found himself imprisoned in a dark cell in a country “where prophetic missions are treated as no jest” (I 186). Shaftesbury observes that this occasion might have provided a fine opportunity to engage in “our oft-mentioned practice of soliloquy” (I 187). But this missionary was a “novice” where “moral science or anything relating to self-converse” was concerned. Instead, he spent his time engaged in phonetic experiments, “bellowing,” ‘roaring,” and “snarling” in the dark in order to discover the physiological motions productive of various verbal sounds. When set free, this missionary composed a “philosophical treatise” (I 188). But the missionary’s insights, Shaftesbury observes, would be utterly useless to readers seeking to improve their voice or refine their verbal delivery. Nevertheless, the missionary took enormous pride in being the only “master” of this obscure science despite his ignorance of matters more fundamental and urgent. The charge of pridefulness is one that Shaftesbury levels against Locke both in the letter to
him of 1694 (COL, v.5, 151) and in this section of the Characteristics (I 188; 189-190; 195).

Shaftesbury next discusses the various fields of human inquiry according to their contribution. A certain approach to phonetics, he concedes, has a place among the other sciences, assisting grammarians who in turn assist rhetoricians (Id.). Of mathematics he approves, observing the contribution mathematics makes to other "beneficial arts and sciences" (I 189). It is especially the mathematician's "modesty" that impresses Shaftesbury. Mathematicians are distinguished by their willingness to concede that for "knowledge of human nature or the world," we must turn to other studies (I 190). Shaftesbury reserves judgment on metaphysics, and also on logic and ethics as taught by the schools, expressing a willingness to admit these pursuits to "pass for philosophy" when he can be persuaded that they promote self-understanding and contribute to moral refinement (I 188).13 He then adds a qualification that signals the transition from his critique of scholasticism to his critique of modern philosophy.

But if the defining material and immaterial substances, and distinguishing their properties and modes, is recommended to us as the right manner of proceeding in the discovery of our own natures, I shall be apt to suspect such a study as the more

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13For Shaftesbury, all genuine understanding contributes to moral refinement.
Shaftesbury broadens the scope of his critique suddenly to include not only the "schools," but all those who engage in metaphysical disputes with the belief that they can discover the truth about human nature. The investigative agenda of Locke's Essay is clearly on trial in these remarks. In the passages that follow, Shaftesbury removes any doubt that he has Locke in mind.

But for the philosopher who pretends to be wholly taken up in considering his higher faculties, and examining the powers and principles of his understanding, if in reality his philosophy be foreign to the matter professed, 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 anything is to wisdom, if it be not plainly the thing itself, the more directly it becomes its opposite. (I 189)

Locke's Essay exemplifies the approach Shaftesbury here condemns. The magnificent ambition of one who "pretends to be wholly taken up in considering his higher faculties, and examining the principles of his understanding" inspires awe in ordinary readers. Hobbes and Locke seem (like the philosophers of the schools) to be above the ordinary human concerns. From their exalted heights, they can pronounce disparagingly on the common-sense opinions and ordinary
dilemmas of those uninitiated in what Shaftesbury at one point refers to as “this super-speculative philosophy” (I 190). The boast that one’s view of the world and the human condition is derived entirely from sophisticated metaphysical and epistemological ruminations lends a “countenance of authority” to one’s conclusions, no matter how counter-intuitive they may be.

Such “wisdom,” Shaftesbury insists, if genuine, should distinguish its possessor as a model of human excellence.

One would expect it of these physiologists and searchers of modes and substances that being so exalted in their understandings and enriched with science above other men, they should be as much above them in their passions and sentiments. The consciousness of being admitted into the secret recesses of nature and the inward resources of a human heart should, one would think, create in these gentlemen a sort of magnanimity which might distinguish them from the ordinary race of mortals...

’Tis hardly possible for a student, but more especially an author, who has dealt in ideas and treated formally of the passions in a way of Natural Philosophy, not to imagine himself more wise on this account and more knowing in his own character and the genius of mankind. But that he is mistaken in his calculation, experience generally convinces us, none being found more impotent in themselves, of less command over their passions, less free from superstition and vain fears, or less safe from common imposture and delusion, than the noted head-pieces of this stamp.
Nor is this a wonder. The speculation in a manner bespeaks the practice. (I 189-190)

Shaftesbury complains that modern philosophy does not produce, even at its peak, the self-knowledge that allows one to control one’s passions, guard against superstition and “vain fears,” and avoid “delusion.” He no doubt has in mind Locke’s dying remarks to Collins, which he partially reproduces in the culmination to this section (I 196). At the same time, modern philosophy encourages pridefulness or the illusion that one has unlocked the hidden secrets of human nature. By observing that “the speculation in a manner bespeaks the practice” of thinking oneself wise while continuing to act in deluded, contradictory ways, Shaftesbury seems to mean that the inclination to conceive of “ideas” and the “passions” according to the dictates of “Natural Philosophy” conveniently allows one to bypass the practical dilemmas we face as human beings. By ascending to “scientific” heights we render inconsequential those dilemmas as we experience them. By understanding human nature in the abstract terms ordinarily used to understand natural forces, the modern is disengaged from the ordinary human dilemmas, which come to appear on their own terms to be troubling only to the scientifically naive. Shaftesbury’s great objection is that the apparent transcendence of ordinary practical dilemmas facilitated by modern philosophy does little or nothing to counteract inconsistent and self-contradictory behavior in the ordinary matters of human concern. The
modern philosopher, for all significant intents and purposes, ends up where he started, even though he thinks himself wise.

By designing their arguments to respond to the "philosophy" of the schools, the moderns concede that the issues discussed by the schools are the primary issues of philosophy. By answering the metaphysical arguments of the schools with superior metaphysical responses, the moderns assume they have answered the fundamental questions. But this is deluded in Shaftesbury’s view. For however much one may presume to understand about the "substances," "properties," and "modes," unless one arrives at an adequate and consistent view of the human good, the most significant aspect of human nature remains unknown. We are now in a position to appreciate why Shaftesbury chose not to respond to the arguments of Locke’s Essay with a "formal deduction" of its inadequacies. To have done so would have suggested that the questions Locke addresses are the right questions, which Shaftesbury emphatically denies.

Instead, Shaftesbury attempts to "serve turn" with his own set of questions and his own approach to those questions. He does so, however, while maintaining a dialogue of sorts with the modern philosophers. He begins by offering a metaphor or, rather, a strangely mixed metaphor, that is intended to illustrate the defects of the modern approach and to set the stage for his dialectical ("self-conversant" (I 190)) counter-approach. The metaphor is presented in two parts. In the first part, Shaftesbury observes how one
interested in learning about watches would fail to understand anything of the "real nature of the instrument" should his inquiry be limited to questions of its metallurgical composition, of what causes its sounds, and of what gives it its colors (Id.). Without investigating the "real use" of the instrument, by what movements its purpose is best attained, or how it is perfected, the properties that make a watch a watch would remain undiscovered. In the second part of the metaphor, Shaftesbury applies the watch example to modern philosophy. When a philosopher studying human nature discovers only the effects various passions produce in the body (for instance how they change its appearance or affect the muscles), the philosopher may discover something of interest to an "anatomist," but nothing suitable to advise mankind or himself.

...since according to this survey he considered 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. (I 191).

To keep his metaphor consistent, Shaftesbury should have argued that modern philosophy studies human nature the way the inept passerby studies watches. Instead, he charges the moderns with studying human beings as if they were watches. By mixing his metaphor, Shaftesbury is able to add an ironic twist to his observation that the moderns improperly regard human beings as machines. The irony is that the modern account of human nature not only portrays human beings as
machine-like, but portrays them as such without investigating the proper function or perfection of the human machine. They dismiss all proclaimed ends or purposes without ever attempting to engage and refute them. In other words, the moderns understand human beings to be akin to machines, except that, unlike machines, human beings have no positive function.

The modern basis for political life is the common human aversion to death, an entirely negative basis that becomes meaningful only through the denial of any common good or purpose. Hence, Shaftesbury at one point compares the opinion of modern philosophy to that expressed by Satan in the Book of Job:

> Our philosophy nowadays runs after the manner of that able sophister who said, "Skin for skin: all that a man hath will he give for his life." (I 82)

In a certain sense, the moderns may be said to view human beings as machines whose only "purpose" is to continue operating. But strictly speaking, this does not prove to be

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14Compare especially LEV, 3 with LEV, 57-58.
15Shaftesbury cites Job ii. 4. Shaftesbury is not so imprudent as to complete his interpretation of this passage from the book of Job. After all, Satan is here negotiating with God the terms of a test of Job's devotedness that Satan will administer. And God responds by conceding to Satan every liberty to torment Job, but commands him to spare Job's life. God therefore seems to concede Satan's point, since Job's devotedness is never tested against the threat of his own death. Once again, Shaftesbury shows the modern view of human nature to have its roots in the Judeo-Christian view.
a purpose at all; especially since the moderns understand human beings to be feverishly and unsuccessfully pursuing phantom goods or purposes while discovering "no solid satisfaction." Through the mixed metaphor of the watch, Shaftesbury indicates two distinct points of his dissent from the moderns. He is convinced that human beings are distinct from machines. He is further convinced that human beings have an end or purpose.

In the following paragraph we learn that Shaftesbury has Descartes's *Treatise of the Passions* primarily in mind when criticizing those who study the passions according to their physiological manifestations (I 191). Taking "the passion of Fear" as an example, Shaftesbury responds to Descartes's view. Though fear surely manifests itself by the knocking of knees and the chattering of teeth as Descartes reports, we cannot determine from the presence of these symptoms alone whether they signify "the cowardly symptom of flight" or the "stout symptom of resistance" (Id.). Shaftesbury denies any personal concern with Descartes's kind of speculation on the grounds that however advanced or refined our understanding of such matters might become, the knowledge we gain would neither teach us how to diminish our fears or raise our courage (Id.).

This, however, I may be assured 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 influenced by custom and practice. (Id.)
Our passions do not merely guide our actions, they also influence our opinions. But our opinions also influence our passions, increasing and decreasing them according to our understanding of their contribution to our happiness. The passions by themselves, everyone will concede, are inadequate guides. Furthermore, Shaftesbury at least never speaks of opinions as the product of "pure reason" detached from what we passionately want. Human action, in Shaftesbury's presentation, proceeds from what he calls "affections," by which he means deliberate desires, desires that are inseparable from an opinion of our good (I 193, 252-253). The task then is not to overcome our passions through reason, nor (as for the moderns) to focus our reason in the service of our strongest passion (fear), but to use our reason to examine the validity of the opinions of the good that our passions present to us.

Shaftesbury argues that all of our passions provoke opinions of the good. The various passions suggest various conceptions of happiness.

The same must happen in respect of anger, ambition, love, desire, and the other passions from whence I frame the different notion I have of interest. For as these passions veer, my steerage varies; and I make alternately, now this, now that, to be my course and harbour. The man in anger has a different happiness from the man in love. And the man lately become covetous has a different notion of satisfaction from what he had before, when he was liberal. Even the man in humour has another
thought of interest and advantage than the man out of humour, or in the least disturbed. 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 toward the knowledge of human nature and of myself. (I 192-193)

The primary task of a philosophy that seeks knowledge of the human good is to sort through and examine the versions of happiness that the passions suggest to us. Far from establishing the absence of a defensible human good, the fluctuation of interests we observe in ourselves and others begs the question of the true version of human interest (cf. II 137).

 Properly undertaken, Shaftesbury argues, this self-examination leads to a discovery of the proper balance of affections that most conduces to human happiness. According to Shaftesbury, the discovery of that balance is coincident with its acquisition (I 191). The susceptibility of the passions to “regulation and government” by opinion is the distinguishing characteristic of human beings and, furthermore, establishes philosophy as the primary human activity (Id.). Shaftesbury even goes so far, in the conclusion to his dialogue (Moralists), as to argue that every human being cannot help but engage in philosophy.

Yet, in effect, replied he, what else is it we all do in general than philosophize? If philosophy be,
as we take it, the study of happiness, must not every one, in some manner or other, either skilfully or unskilfully philosophise? Is not every deliberation concerning our main interest, every correction of our taste, every choice and preference in life to be reckoned of this kind? ...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.” (II 150-153).

According to Shaftesbury, philosophy is an activity that is intrinsic to being human. Our passions are experienced as opinions of the good, which we affirm or deny. Because we are able to notice the contradictions between the various opinions provoked by our passions, we are forced to adjudicate between them, to reflect on the question of what is truly good. Unlike machines we are able through reason to reject passionate opinions of the good and to refine our character in the process.

Hence, superstition (a subject of great concern for Shaftesbury as well as for the moderns) is insufficiently explained by the claim that it is the product of fear or anxiety. Such an explanation does not allow us to understand superstition or to guard against it.

But when the grounds of this superstitious fear are considered to be from opinion, and the subjects of it come to be thoroughly searched and examined, the
passion itself must necessarily diminish, as I discover more and more the imposture which belongs to it. (I 192)

We shall have occasion to examine Shaftesbury's account of the opinions that support superstition in the final two chapters of this study. Let it suffice for now to observe that Shaftesbury differs from the moderns by focusing not on the passionate causes for superstitious beliefs, but on the confused or contradictory opinions entertained by the superstitious. This will require him to engage especially the moral opinions that support superstition, and to demonstrate their inadequacy according to standards that the superstitious themselves acknowledge as valid.

Shaftesbury thus arrives at the culmination of his account of the proper approach to philosophy. A philosophy that would reveal our interest in a way that would allow us to cease contradicting ourselves would be the philosophy that "by Nature has pre-eminence above all other science or knowledge" (I 193). In this culmination, Shaftesbury reveals that the investigation of the true human good inevitably comes to hinge on the question of the precise character of "moral rectitude," the answer to which everyone may be said to acknowledge provides the standard for good action. Since morality purports to answer the question of the human good and to instruct us how best to direct our various passions,
it is through an analysis of moral opinions that we best gain the insight we most need.  

Shaftesbury concludes his official discussion of philosophy by repeating Locke's dying words as evidence that Lockean philosophy fails to remedy contradiction in the matters of greatest human concern. In the middle of his unattributed recitation of Locke's bitter complaints about life, Shaftesbury makes reference to a passage from Locke's Essay.

Again, what are my ideas of the world, of pleasure, riches, fame, life? What judgment am I to make of mankind and human affairs? What sentiments am I to frame? What opinions? What maxims? If none at all, why do I concern myself in speculations about my ideas? What is it to me, for instance, to know what kind of idea I can form of space? "Divide a solid body of whatever dimension," says a renowned modern philosopher, "and 'twill be impossible for the parts to move within the bounds of its superfcies, if there be not left in it a void space, as big as the least part into which the said body is divided."

The quotation Shaftesbury includes is from the Essay, II.xiii.23, although the footnote Shaftesbury provides in

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16 In claiming that everyone acknowledges a version of moral virtue to be the standard for his or her actions, Shaftesbury is very aware that he must demonstrate that even the moderns admit, at least unwittingly, their adherence to such a standard (I 57-63). We shall take up this matter in our discussion of "enthusiastical atheism" in Chapter 6 of this study.
place of a citation states only, "[t]hese are the words of the particular author cited" (I 195, n. 1). The puzzling aspect of this is that Locke has not been openly cited to this point in the Characteristics except through Shaftesbury’s unattributed paraphrasings of Locke’s letter to Collins. Furthermore, why does Shaftesbury not name the author he quotes and save us the confusion? We have to recognize Locke on our own. When Shaftesbury cites Descartes, by contrast, he provides a complete citation. Through this device, Shaftesbury signals to the reader that the words of the “author” he cites, Locke, are being invoked without attribution throughout the three concluding paragraphs of the section. Locke’s philosophy, Shaftesbury’s means for us to discover, is the primary subject of his criticism in the Characteristics.

Locke’s approach to philosophy comes to light as “super-speculative” and inattentive to the most urgent human questions. Rather than transcending the problems that follow from ignorance of the human good, Locke’s dying words indicate his continuing subjection to those problems.

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17Robertson provides the specific citation to Locke’s Essay in his annotations to the text of the Great edition (I 195 n. 1). Shaftesbury leaves his source unnamed.
Chapter 6

Enthusiasm: Religious and Modern

The most political component of Shaftesbury's critique of Locke appears in the opening treatise of the Characteristics, "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm." Here Shaftesbury makes an argument for religious toleration that is presented in pointed contrast to the Lockean version. The political objective of promoting the tolerance of religious differences can be attained, in Shaftesbury's presentation, only through the successful containment of "enthusiasm."

Shaftesbury is the first to use the term "enthusiasm" to connote something more than just religious fanaticism.¹ He employs the term much more broadly and, as Robertson observes, applies it in a "commendatory" sense as well as a critical one. Though he considers the containment of enthusiasm to be the only means of encouraging toleration, Shaftesbury is far from recommending an attempt to extinguish it.

Something there will be of extravagance and fury, when the ideas or images received are too big for the narrow human vessel to contain. So that inspiration may be justly called divine enthusiasm; for the word itself signifies divine presence, and was made use of by the philosopher whom the earliest Christian Fathers called divine [i.e., Plato], to express whatever was sublime in human

¹See Robertson's note 1 at 15 of the Greek edition.
passions. This was the spirit he allotted to heroes, statesmen, poets, orators, musicians, and even philosophers themselves. Nor can we, of our own accord, forbear ascribing to a noble enthusiasm whatever is greatly performed by any of these. So that almost all of us know something of this principle. (I 38-39)

This statement suggests that “enthusiasm” holds the place in Shaftesbury’s thought that “eros” holds in Plato’s. Shaftesbury himself admits unashamedly to experiencing enthusiasm (I 39; II 174, 176). It is an experience of longing for something more than ordinary selfish satisfactions. Although it threatens to provoke us to fanatical pursuits, it also inspires the most high-minded ones.

In the “Miscellaneous Reflections,” the miscellanarian observes that Shaftesbury does not, in his official discussion, “give us at once the precise definition of enthusiasm” (II 174). He does not define it because, unlike the moderns, he does not attempt to reduce the experience to a simple formulation. The miscellanarian does, however, attempt to supplement our understanding. By “enthusiasm,” Shaftesbury means inspiration. But the term is more comprehensive than “inspiration” suggests. In his view, it is the same longing that leads men to love justice; to admire selfless acts of devotion; to be moved by beauty and order in the world and in the human mind; and to be carried away by religious beliefs.
Whatever this subject may be in itself, we cannot help being transported with the thought of it. It inspires us with something more than the ordinary, and raises us above ourselves. Without this imagination or conceit the world would be but a dull circumstance, and life a sorry pastime... The animal functions might in their course be carried on; but nothing further sought for or regarded... Slender would be the enjoyments of the lover, the ambitious man, the warrior, or the virtuoso... if in the beauties which they admire and passionately pursue there were no reference or regard to any higher majesty or grandeur than what simply results from the particular objects of their pursuit. (II 175)

Since all of our noble longings depend on enthusiasm, piety cannot accurately be reduced (as Locke reduces it) to a particular form of vulgar self-interest. In vulgarizing piety, Shaftesbury implies, the moderns vulgarize all of our noble aspirations. The miscellenarian observes that "[w]e can admire nothing profoundly without a certain religious veneration" (II 177).²

Like the moderns, Shaftesbury recognized that religion had become an obstacle both to healthy politics and to free thinking. He was, though, unwilling to join Hobbes and Locke in throwing the baby out with the bath water by dismissing the concern with virtue as a means to disarming religion. His project, then, is to provide an argument for religious toleration that does not distort our commitment to the noble.

Any attempt to extinguish enthusiasm would be, in Shaftesbury’s presentation, both impossible and undesirable. It would be undesirable because Shaftesbury locates the origin of our noblest aspirations and greatest fulfillments in the experience of enthusiasm (II 174-175). It would be impossible because the susceptibility to enthusiasm so much distinguishes human beings that any attempt to extinguish enthusiasm would be, in Shaftesbury’s view, an “enthusiastic” attempt (I 12, 14, 37).

It is this latter folly that Shaftesbury charges the moderns with pursuing. When Locke discusses enthusiasm in his Essay, he discusses it as mere fanaticism, except that he regards all beliefs that conflict with empirical rationalism to be fanatical.

Here it is that Enthusiasm fails of the Evidence it pretends to. For Men thus possessed boast of a Light whereby they say, they are enlightened, and brought into the Knowledge of this or that Truth. But if they know it to be a Truth, they must know it to be so either by its own self-evidence to natural Reason; or by the rational Proofs that make it out to be so... And what readier way can there be to run our selves into the most extravagant Errors and Miscarriages than thus to set up phancy for our supreme and sole Guide, and to believe any Proposition to be true, any Action to be right, only because we believe it to be so? (ECHU, IV.xix.11)

The goal of the enlightenment is to replace “phancy” with reason. Shaftesbury is a critic of the enlightenment because
he believes that there is more to enthusiasm than mere "phancy." He also believes that enthusiasm is more resilient than the moderns estimate. But to understand Shaftesbury's view of enthusiasm we must first compare his case for religious toleration with that of Locke. This is necessary to no small extent due to a puzzling ambiguity in Shaftesbury's "Letter." One finds it difficult when reading the "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" to determine whether Shaftesbury's case for toleration is addressed to religious believers or to modern liberals, the "formal enemies" of enthusiasm (II 176).

Prior to the dawn of modern liberalism, disagreement over theological doctrine was at the center of both international and domestic unrest. As liberals, we are pleased to think that we have progressed far beyond such unnecessary contentiousness and restrictive narrow-mindedness. We have become tolerant. Indeed, nothing so rouses liberal indignation like the specter of intolerance -- certainly not theological dissension or heresy.

The movement from intolerant piety to liberal tolerance required that a radical transformation take place in our understanding of piety. The argument for a separation of church and state is necessarily, in origin, a theological one. For this argument we are certainly indebted to Locke. With astounding boldness at the outset of his Letter Concerning Toleration, he asserts "Toleration to be the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church" (LCT, 23)
church, according to this view, is distinguished by its willingness to refrain from announcing itself as the true church. Locke ignores the bulk of Christian moral and ritual commandments to elevate "toleration" (in the name of Christian charity) to its current status as the preeminent Christian virtue (LCT, 23). In doing so Locke founds liberal Christianity as we know it. We should notice that this version of Christian charity, in practice, leaves the believer virtually powerless in the face of the erroneous practices and beliefs held by many of his fellow citizens; this despite his conviction that those practices and beliefs will lead to their damnation.

Even if we grant Locke's most persuasive argument for toleration: that enforced belief constitutes hypocrisy and only sincere (freely adopted) belief merits salvation, this still would not amount to an argument against the enforced prohibition of those practices and testimonies that are deemed heretical (cf. LCT, 26-27). It was, in fact, the concern that the presence of heretics would pollute the orthodox community and would tend to corrupt the unwitting faithful that most energized the spirit of persecution. The issue of sincerity in no way diminishes this primary interest. Moreover, nowhere in the Letter does Locke either acknowledge the danger that such corrupting influences present, or offer arguments to diminish this concern.

*I owe this formulation to Professor Clifford Orwin (University of Toronto).*
Locke's most significant accomplishment, from Shaftesbury's point of view, is to present a pair of arguments that succeed in disarming religious belief by undermining it. It is only through the undermining of religious seriousness that Locke succeeds in promoting the conditions requisite for the subordination of theological concerns to those secular political interests that, in turn, are most directly promoted by a universal ethic of toleration.

Among the many political and theological arguments that Locke makes in the Letter, it is his presentation of the practice of religion as unabashedly mercenary, and his implication that the multiplicity of faiths indicates their relative equality, that are most damaging to traditional notions of piety. Just as human beings enter civil society solely to protect their lives and property, so too, according to Locke's presentation, they join churches and participate in religious practices only for the sake of securing their lives eternally in the hereafter. While Locke ostensibly distinguishes "the business of civil government" from "that of Religion" in order to pave the way for a separation of church and state and a climate of religious toleration, his immediate aim is to cast religion too as a business geared toward selfish ends. Locke writes, "No Member of a Religious Society can be tied with any other Bonds but what proceed from the certain expectation of eternal Life" (LCT, 28). The Lockean presentation thus abstracts from the traditional pious conviction that acts of obedience and service to the
divine proceed not from self-interest, but rather from selfless devotion and love. As a result, religion is, for anyone who adopts Locke's outlook, a far less holy or noble activity. Righteousness, now understood as another form of self-interest, can hardly be distinguished as any more admirable or uplifting than other self-interested dispositions. As a particular form of selfishness, religion loses its grandeur and, consequently, the attractiveness of devoted, self-sacrificing service to God (which sometimes forces one to forgo the Lockean goods of peace and security) falls away.

Locke's argument for toleration is also greatly promoted by his claim that the diversity of religious opinions makes the establishment of religious truth impossible. He writes, "For every Church is Orthodox to it self; to others, Erroneous or Heretical. For whatsoever any Church believes, it believes to be true; and the contrary unto those things, it pronounces to be Error. So that the Controversie between these Churches about the Truth of their Doctrines, and the Purity of their Worship, is on both sides equal; nor is there any Judge, either at Constantinople, or elsewhere upon Earth, by whose Sentence it can be determined" (LCT, 32). Locke's argument here goes beyond claiming that religious certainty is incommunicable (although that is certainly part of it); it serves to raise doubts in the minds of believers as to the

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4See Gen. 22.1-12; Mark 12.29-31. Cf. Plato Euthyphro 13a-e, Republic 362e-363e.
superiority of their own practices and beliefs by forcing them to confront the challenge that others experience the same sense of certainty while maintaining vastly different beliefs. With so much violent conflict and disagreement over religion, Locke forces every believer to ask, how can anyone with confidence exclaim that “God is on our side!” Furthermore, when the truth about religion is brought in this way into doubt, the movement toward a tolerant disposition in matters of religion that promises to deliver peace and security, suddenly becomes a plausible option.

Shaftesbury’s “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm” argues for toleration not by encouraging skepticism or mercenariness, but by arguing that the toleration of dissenting views is both the obligation of one who believes he possesses the truth and the symptom of one who really does know the truth. Furthermore, Shaftesbury resists Locke’s presentation of religious activity as mercenary. He is unwilling to portray piety as a “business.” As will become evident in our discussion of Shaftesbury’s “Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit,” the expectation of rewards from God for pious services rendered diminishes piety and undermines the basis for any expectation of rewards (II 269). Those who approach religion as a business lack all virtue, and are hence unworthy of our admiration. Instead of building his case on a vulgarization of piety, Shaftesbury addresses the pious on their own terms.
Shaftesbury’s initial argument is a very practical one. He claims that the typical means of religious persecution are counter-productive, especially in the case of Christianity. To persecute violently, especially in the case of Christian heretics, enflames the spirit of martyrdom and escalates enthusiasm on both sides. Shaftesbury remarks, “What could have been a higher honour or advantage to Christianity than to be persecuted by a Nero?” (I 19). By this logic, it is not surprising that the long history of religious wars and the ever-recurring episodes of violent persecution were unsuccessful in bringing about religious peace. As an alternative means of confronting dissenters, Shaftesbury recommends free criticism or “freedom of wit and humour.” In particular, he recommends that we subject their opinions to “ridicule” and “raillery” (I 10, 17). The application of wit or raillery by those offended explodes the pretensions of enthusiasm and restores men to a cool, rational disposition that leaves them inapt either to be

5This is an argument made by Gibbon (Vol. I, chs. 15-16, pp. 382-504). He argues that the influence of Christianity was the chief cause of the decline of Rome. Roman attempts to persecute Christian heretics merely fanned the flames of their zeal.

6The occasion for writing the “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm” was the arrival in London of a group of fanatical French Protestants, the Camisards (Grean 1967, 20-23). Shaftesbury applauds the institution of a puppet-show at their expense being staged at a local fair: “And whilst Bart’lemey Fair is in possession of this privilege, I dare stand security to our National Church that no sect of enthusiasts, no new venders of prophecy or miracles, shall ever get the start, or put her to the trouble of trying her strength with them, in any case” (I 21-22).
caught up themselves by fanatical exhibitions or to be moved to a spirit of enthusiastic persecution (I 11, 14, 17-24).\textsuperscript{7}

I believe our great and learned Apostle found less advantage from the easy treatment of his Athenian antagonists, than from the surly and curst spirit of the most persecuting Jewish cities. He made less improvement of the candour and civility of his Roman judges, than of the zeal of the synagogue and vehemence of his national priests. Though when I consider this apostle as appearing either before the witty Athenians, or before a Roman court of judicature, in the presence of their great men and ladies, and see how handsomely he accommodates himself to the apprehensions and temper of those politer people, I do not find that he declines the way of wit or good-humour; but, without suspicion of his cause, is willing generously to commit it to this proof, and try it against the sharpness of any ridicule which might be offered. (I 23)

Shaftesbury praises refined wit over vulgar ridicule. He argues that a serious confrontation between conflicting opinions can occur peaceably in an atmosphere where the more powerful persecute with ridicule instead of violence. His model is Aristophanes' ridicule of Socrates, given and received in good humor (I 23-24). He is, however, under no illusions that ridicule will be consistently refined or high-brow. Ridicule is often unfair, vulgar, and not conducive of any kind of serious debate.\textsuperscript{8} Shaftesbury is not optimistic

\textsuperscript{7}Cf. Grean 1967, 120-134.

\textsuperscript{8}Cf. Fowler 1882, 51 for an argument that ridicule is part of rhetoric and not logic. Though I agree (and believe Shaftesbury is aware) that
about the prospects for a genuine popular enlightenment (I 53). Indeed, it seems likely that the kind of toleration of religious diversity he hopes to encourage could occur only in a society where a considerable religious homogeneity prevails and where that homogeneity is of a relatively moderate (non-fanatical) sort. Only in such a society could a religious majority be expected to feel itself secure enough to indulge a climate of free opinion on matters of religion.

This brings us to the practical recommendation of Shaftesbury’s “Letter” that most contrasts with Locke’s. Shaftesbury insists that we retain a national church, albeit a non-persecuting one (I 14). When the contagion of religious enthusiasm spreads through the people, Shaftesbury insists that a national church provides an indispensable means to counter such enthusiasm.

The magistrate, if he be any artist should have a gentler hand; and... should be using the softest balms; and with a kind sympathy entering into the concern of the people; and taking, as it were, their passion upon him should, when he has soothed and satisfied it, endeavour, by cheerful ways, to divert and heal it. (Id.)

When claiming that “’tis necessary a people should have a public leading in religion,” Shaftesbury condemns the separation of church and state “as mere enthusiasm as the vulgar ridicule can hardly be thought a litmus test for the truth, I think Fowler under-appreciates Shaftesbury’s distinction between vulgar ridicule and refined ridicule. Cf. also Brett 1958, 165-185.
notion which sets up persecution" (Id.). At the same time, Shaftesbury offers no confidence or assurance that would lead us to believe that the magistrates he describes would not degenerate into those who were engaging in persecution all over Europe (Id.). In his view, there is no institutional substitute for prudent and moderate political leadership where matters of religion are concerned. Enthusiasm is political dynamite; there is no radical solution to the problem. The only historical example that he provides is the Emperor Julian, who tolerated Christians and stood by the principle that people should be persuaded by rational discourse, despite his adherence to the pagan religion (I 19, II 209-213). This might be fine, except that Julian was assassinated by one of his own Christian soldiers, leading even Shaftesbury to admit that such employment of the "moderating art... no doubt, was stretching the point sufficiently, as may be understood by the event in after time" (II 209-212). Shaftesbury observes limits to toleration that would be troubling to modern liberals. He would respond to us that the separation of church and state amounts only to the institutionalization of a hybrid form of enthusiasm, of fanaticism, directed against religion and

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9For an informed discussion of the sources of Shaftesbury's sympathy for established religion, see Grean 1967, 114-119. Grean inexplicably ignores Shaftesbury's disapproval of a separation of church and state, however, and seeks to bring Shaftesbury's views into harmony with modern liberalism.
religious people. Only an enthusiastic political repression of the religious concerns of most human beings makes possible an exclusively secular political order. Shaftesbury would understand such an institution as enforcing a kind of orthodoxy of its own. This is part of the reason why Shaftesbury refers to the modern philosophers as "enthusiastic atheists" (I 37).

By recommending ridicule, Shaftesbury recommends a response to dissent that is unfamiliar to us as modern liberals. We would be inclined to leave dissenters and their opinions uninjured in their private sphere. But we would do so only on the basis of an intractable public conviction that most religious opinions fall into the category of "indifferent things" (LCT, 39). We must all concede that our religious beliefs are private beliefs, and it is a small step from viewing beliefs as equally private to viewing them as equally arbitrary or baseless. Since the claims of religion speak of the highest things, how can we expel all such voices from public life without casting serious (public) doubt on all religious belief? Shaftesbury would not recommend denying the public a means to confront heretical views. His sympathies for liberal politics, sympathies born of a philosopher’s regard for free thinking, lead him to propose a method of confrontation that is relatively peaceable. The best that we can hope for without undermining all religious seriousness is to promote a version of religious persecution that is non-violent.
Shaftesbury provides a deeper theoretical justification for the political superiority of raillery to violence. The development and application of refined ridicule is necessary in order to make sure that one's own beliefs are not ridiculous. Rather than challenging the believers' conviction that their doctrine is the true doctrine (as Locke does), Shaftesbury argues that the tolerance of error follows from that conviction. The melancholic, tragic, and grave postures of religious enthusiasm, in Shaftesbury's presentation, betray uncertainty and doubt.

*gravity is the very essence of imposture... ... We can never be too grave, if we are really what we suppose... The main point is to know always true gravity from the false: and this can only be by carrying the rule constantly with us, and freely applying it not only to the things about us, but to ourselves; for if unhappily we lose the measure in ourselves, we shall soon lose it in everything besides. Now what rule or measure is there in the world, except in the considering of the real temper of things, to find which are truly serious and which ridiculous? And how can this be done, unless by applying the ridicule, to see whether it will bear? ...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 through ill-humour only. (I 10, 17)\(^{10}\)

By this Shaftesbury means to prescribe the proper attitude that a serious believer should assume not only in relation to the beliefs of heretics, but also with regard to his own beliefs. The diversity of claims regarding the truth about religion does not lead necessarily to the conclusion that all claims are equally false or equally worthwhile. It does, however, force us to become self-conscious of the fact that our attachment to our own beliefs is conditional upon our conviction that our beliefs are the true beliefs. This forces us to become self-critical about our beliefs in order to confirm their truth (I 24). It should provoke, furthermore, a certain sympathy for those who hold false

\(^{10}\)Shaftesbury's praise of "good humour" over gravity, coupled with his recommendation of raillery over hostility recalls the "optimism" that he expressed in his 1694 letter to Locke (COL v.V, 151-154). At one point in the "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm," Shaftesbury writes, "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 tragedies in the world" (I 24). Shaftesbury, by trying to render Christianity less "tragical," is surely fighting an uphill battle. Christianity is a religion of gravity and tragedy. The stress on man's sinful nature combined with the image of Christ the martyr hardly seems to lend itself to a spirit of "good humour." This does not make Christianity less vulnerable to Shaftesbury's claim that even the most serious Christian is required to verify the gravity of his beliefs by putting them to the test of ridicule. It does suggest, however, that Shaftesbury may be eager to see Christianity exposed as ridiculous, and rejected by at least a substantial segment of his countrymen.
beliefs, a sympathy born from an awareness that their attachment to those beliefs is based on a conviction (ultimately indefensible perhaps) that their beliefs are the true beliefs. Error deserves pity, not punishment. The impulse to punish heretics is vulnerable to the charge that the opposing views disturb one’s own, suggesting that one secretly entertains doubts that one seeks to conceal through gravity.

Most importantly, Shaftesbury argues, if our opinions about the divine are true, then this application of raillery to our opinions will have no effect. The ridicule will fall flat. Indeed, Shaftesbury even goes so far as to claim that it is the pious duty of every serious believer to apply good-humored rational criticism to his own set of beliefs, even when this forces the question, “whether [God] really be, or not” (I 24-27). Not to do so amounts to a willful repression of our understanding, and betrays the belief that to think too much about God would ruin our faith. Shaftesbury argues that the repression of our understanding for the sake of our faith ascribes unworthy attributes to God.

For, what merit can there be in believing God, or his providence, upon frivolous and weak grounds? What virtue in assuming an opinion contrary to the appearance of things, and resolving to hear nothing which may be said against it? Excellent character of the God of truth! that he should be offended at us for having refused to put the lie upon our understandings, as much as in us lay, and be satisfied with us for having believed at a venture,
and against our reason, what might have been the greatest falsehood in the world, for anything we could bring as a proof or evidence to the contrary. (I 25-26)

Shaftesbury argues that unless we think it through in a disinterested, critical way, our belief will be ridden with doubt, perplexity, and a conception of God as imperfect (I 27). In other words, our stubborn refusal to hear challenges to our religious views indirectly ascribes attributes to God that we would never directly ascribe. Toleration proves to be the characteristic of the truly self-confident believer. Such a believer would welcome dissent as an opportunity, first of all, to confirm his own views. He would welcome it, in any case, as a chance to refine or correct his views on points where he may be mistaken. True piety, Shaftesbury argues, is liberal piety.

To have an opinion of God that is unbecoming a perfect being; to doubt God’s goodness or justice, while refusing to tolerate theological claims that conflict with one’s own, is to be disingenuous in one’s devotion, and to reduce religion to mere beggary (I 26). Shaftesbury insists that one must rely on one’s own reason to discover what is morally excellent (I 28). Only then can we rightly appreciate God’s excellence and adjudicate between the variety of doctrinal claims.

One would think it were easy to understand that provocation and offence, anger, revenge, jealousy in point of honour or power, love of fame, glory,
and the like belong only to limited beings, and are
necessarily excluded a being which is perfect and
universal. But if we have never settled with
ourselves any notion of what is morally excellent;
or if we cannot trust to that reason which tells us
that nothing beside what is so, can have place in
the Deity; we can neither trust to anything which
others relate of him, or which he himself reveals
to us... Without this, there can be no real
religious faith or confidence... When we had once
looked into ourselves, and distinguished well the
nature of our own affections, we should probably be
fitter judges of the divineness of a character, and
discern better what affections were suitable or
unsuitable to a perfect being. We might then
understand how to love and praise, when we had
acquired some consistent notion of what was
laudable or lovely. Otherwise we might chance to
do God little honour, when we intended him the
most. (I 28-30)

Despite the power of Shaftesbury’s arguments, one may rightly
begin to wonder whether Shaftesbury thinks that any religious
doctrine could survive the criticism that one who takes it
seriously is, in his view, obligated to apply. Moreover,
Shaftesbury opened the Characteristics with the observation
that “To bear the being told of faults is, in private persons
the best token of amendment... ‘Tis seldom that a public is
thus disposed,” and observes in the Miscellany that “[t]here
is nothing more evident than that our holy religion, in its
original constitution, was set so far apart from all
philosophy or refined speculation, that it seemed in a manner
diametrically opposed to it” (I 5; II 203). His argument for
religious toleration begins to open up into a full-fledged rational critique of religion.\textsuperscript{11}

If this is indeed Shaftesbury's intention, we are forced to begin to doubt the practical seriousness of Shaftesbury's proposal in anything but a very diluted form. We are left with a public, or a substantial and influential proportion of a public, that takes morality seriously and pursues gentlemanly ("polite") refinements, but is inclined to laugh at Christianity with gentle indulgence. The characteristic of such a public that Shaftesbury would consider most worth defending, it seems, is that it would support the conditions necessary for the ascent, by some, to genuine clarity on matters concerning morality and religion.\textsuperscript{12} It is very significant to demonstrate that reason supports toleration, and it is perhaps even more significant to demonstrate that true piety implicitly requires the recognition of certain rational opinions that support toleration. But it is quite another thing to hope or expect that political life can ever be made sufficiently rational to guarantee religious toleration.

It seems that, like Aristotle's "best regime" and Plato's "City in Speech," Shaftesbury's "virtuous liberalism"

\textsuperscript{11}It is not surprising that Warburton reports of Alexander Pope: "Mr. Pope told me, that to his knowledge, the Characteristicks had done more harm to Revealed Religion in England than all the works of Infidelity put together" (Warburton 1809, 26, letter dated Jan. 1749/50; cited in Grean 1967, 107-108).

\textsuperscript{12}Cf. Willey 1949, 75.
is intended, in part, as a commentary on the limits of politics. There is, in his view, no satisfactory solution to the tension between genuine free thinking and the requirements of political life. This would explain why at so many points in Shaftesbury’s “Letter,” it is difficult to discern whether he is seeking to persuade religious believers to be tolerant, or, rather, to persuade moderns to tolerate the presence of enthusiasm. Shaftesbury declaims at one point against those who seek to eradicate religious enthusiasm.

But be the habit what it will; to be delivered of it at so sad a cost as inconsiderateness, or madness, is what I would never wish to be my lot. I had rather stand all adventures with religion, than endeavour to get rid of the thoughts of it by diversion. All I contend for, is to think of it in a right humour; and that this goes more than half-way towards thinking rightly of it, is what I shall endeavour to demonstrate. (I 17)

He seems, further, to be referring to the moderns when he employs, in the spirit of satire, an image of the body to illustrate the folly of the attempt to devise a permanent political vaccination against enthusiasm.

Should physicians endeavour absolutely to allay those ferments of the body, and strike in the humours which discover themselves in such eruptions, they might, instead of making a cure, bid fair perhaps to raise a plague, and turn a spring-ague or and autumn-surfet into an epidemical malignant fever. They are certainly as
ill physicians in the body-politic who would needs be tampering with these mental eruptions; and under the specious pretence of healing this itch of superstition, and saving souls from the contagion of enthusiasm, should set all nature in an uproar, and turn a few innocent carbuncles into an inflammation and mortal gangrene. (I 12)

The modern attempt to eradicate enthusiasm merely transforms it, perversely, into a hostility toward moral and religious seriousness as such. From his unique perspective at ground-zero of the liberal enlightenment, Shaftesbury predicts its inevitable failure, and sees the serious concern with virtue as taking the fall. At the end of this section, he points to a private liberalism, devoted to the study of enthusiasm "in its several kinds, both in ourselves and others" as the "great work, by means alone we can hope to avoid delusion" (I 39).

In "Freedom of Wit and Humour," the treatise that follows the "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm," Shaftesbury further develops his charge that the moderns remain subject to enthusiasm even as they attack religious enthusiasm. To put it simply, Shaftesbury sees the liberal enlightenment as

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13Shaftesbury hints, moreover, that the attempt to repress enthusiasm only heightens its disruptive potential. This seems to suggest, among other things, that the respite of fanaticism made possible by modernity will prove temporary and be followed by a new and more threatening version of fanaticism. The twentieth century has witnessed too many versions of "secular fanaticism" for us to dismiss Shaftesbury's concerns.
the fanatical rejection of virtue, undertaken for the sake of establishing universal peace and security. The blinding indignation that was formerly directed toward heretics is redirected toward those who take moral virtue or religion too seriously (I 14, 57-65, 177, 227). Shaftesbury’s judgment of the “enthusiastical atheists” (as he regards Hobbes and Locke) who are responsible for this transformation is not a flattering one. At one point, he explains that the same fear that inspires religious fanaticism can “pass into an aversion... and a certain horror and dread of imposture [that] causes as great a disturbance as even imposture itself had done before” (II 196-197 n. 3). This implies that Hobbes and Locke retain the fear of a mysterious world that animates fanatics to cling to religion as their only hope for deliverance from the threats attendant to our condition in the world. Modern fanaticism is directed “against imposture” because the modern fanatics are convinced that trusting in god is futile. If we are to be delivered from the horrible circumstances of life, we must rely on ourselves. The folly of relying on god must, therefore, be discouraged with fierce, “enthusiastic” determination.

Furthermore, Shaftesbury perceives in the modern philosopher’s own motives and actions (even as they portray man as naturally selfish and unsociable) a contradiction that vindicates generosity and sociability. Shaftesbury expresses dismay at the fact that these “anti-zealots... in the zeal of such a cool philosophy, should assure us faithfully ‘that we
were the most mistaken men in the world to imagine there was any such thing as natural faith or justice’” (I 63). They did so, in his view, so that humanity would put aside its illusions of virtue and erect a government that would ensure liberty by protecting us from each other (I 64-65). In other words, the modern’s anti-moral message is popularized for unselfish, benevolent, moralistic reasons. Why else, Shaftesbury asks, instead of taking advantage of us in our confused and vulnerable state, would Hobbes and Locke attack virtue openly, and even risk their own martyrdom in the process? (I63-64)\textsuperscript{14} Shaftesbury exclaims, “Tis not fit we should know that by nature we are all wolves... Is it possible that one who has really discovered himself such, should take pains to communicate such a discovery?” (I 63). Despite their praise of individualism, the moderns reveal themselves to be driven by public-spiritedness.

In another passage Shaftesbury flirts with the possibility that the moderns espoused such “paradoxical systems” only because they thought such systems would best serve to disarm those other false doctrines that were responsible for enslaving human beings (I 64-65).

\textsuperscript{14} At I 16 Shaftesbury compares the moderns with the crusaders of old: “The crusades, the rescuing of holy lands, and such devout gallantries, are in less request than formerly: but if something of this militant religion, something of this soul-rescuing spirit and saint-errantry prevails still, we need not wonder, when we consider in how solemn a manner we treat this distemper, and how preposterously we go about to cure enthusiasm.”
Should you therefore ask me, whether I thought these gentlemen were fully persuaded of the principles they so often advance in company? I should tell you, that though I would not absolutely arraign the gentlemen’s sincerity, yet there was something of mystery in the case, more than was imagined. The reason, perhaps, why men of wit delight so much to espouse these paradoxical systems, is not in truth that they are so fully satisfied with them, but in a view the better to oppose some other systems, which by their fair appearance have helped, they think, to bring mankind under subjection. They imagine that by this general scepticism, which they introduce, they shall better deal with the dogmatical spirit which prevails in some particular subjects. And when they have accustomed men to bear contradiction in the main, and hear the nature of things disputed at large, it may be safer (they conclude) to argue separately upon certain nice points in which they are not altogether so well satisfied. (I 64-65)

According to this interpretation, the moderns were aware of the insufficiency of certain of their arguments, but made a calculated decision to promote a “general scepticism” in order to discourage people from fighting about the truth. Modern philosophy would then have to be regarded as a kind of ideology or propaganda introduced to achieve a particular political goal that the moderns thought desirable for the sake of human beings like themselves. Shaftesbury withholds final judgment on this question, although apart from the passage above he appears convinced that the moderns were “sincerely” subject to the contradictions he observes in their thought.
In any case, by entertaining the possibility that the moderns “imagined” that introducing a “general scepticism” would produce salutary social and political effects, Shaftesbury clearly communicates his dissent from their opinion. He would never choose to undermine seriousness on matters of morality and religion in order to establish political peace. Enthusiasm is the volatile but essential spark that produces extraordinary human beings. Shaftesbury thus forces us to confront the price of a liberalism that brings into dubious repute those models of virtue that are responsible for inspiring political heroism, artistic and poetic excellence, spiritual fulfillment, and even the first movements toward philosophy (II 178).
Chapter 7

The Place of the "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" in Shaftesbury’s Critique of Locke

The defense of classical virtue in the Characteristics occurs in the treatise entitled, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit.” The “Inquiry” serves as the fourth treatise of the Characteristics. The miscellanarian reveals that in the “Inquiry” Shaftesbury deliberately imitates the manner of writing employed by Aristotle (II 333). This is evident not only in matters of style, but also in Shaftesbury’s method. Like Aristotle, Shaftesbury constantly focuses on what “we say” about morality, and he uses what we say to gain access to the actual character of virtue. In other words, he uses the dialectical approach; Shaftesbury’s claims are grounded on the testimony of human beings.

The labyrinthine argument of the “Inquiry,” which undertakes to achieve several objectives at once, could easily be the subject of an entire dissertation. We bring to the text a specific question: in what ways does the “Inquiry” contribute to the critique of Locke that develops throughout the Characteristics? In order to uncover the role that the “Inquiry” plays in Shaftesbury’s critique of Locke, it is necessary to outline Shaftesbury's vehement defense of classical virtue. This requires specific attention to the way that his defense is structured by a necessity to answer those whom he thinks pose the greatest challenges to
classical virtue, namely, the fanatical Christians and the modern rationalists. This latter aspect, the need to answer specific challenges, is important because it explains how Shaftesbury is able to undertake such an ambitious project and still draw the decisive conclusion that "virtue is the good, and vice the ill of every one" (I 338). It is possible for Shaftesbury's argument successfully to defend classical virtue against specific prominent challenges without vindicating it against all conceivable challenges. In fact, some real problems with classical virtue remain evident in Shaftesbury's presentation and, indeed, appear to be purposely brought to our attention.¹

The "Inquiry" begins with Shaftesbury's observation of an apparently unbridgeable gulf between the claims of most religious believers, on the one hand, and modern critics of religion, on the other. Shaftesbury lays out the moral-theological-political controversy of his time, the controversy surrounding the enlightenment, and situates

¹Fowler, the most impressive of Shaftesbury's critics, observes that, in the "Inquiry,” Shaftesbury' “leaves many important questions unanswered and many serious difficulties unsolved” (1882, 72) I have no objections with Fowler’s view so far as it goes, but I think his reading to be very much colored by certain expectations regarding ethical philosophy that prevailed in the nineteenth century British academy. Fowler does not at any point recognize the literary character of the Characteristics. He cannot accept that a philosopher would withhold important information from his reader, even though Shaftesbury at several points informs us that he does just that.
himself outside the perspectives of the two principal parties.

For so much is the religious part of mankind alarmed by the freedom of some late pens, and so great a jealousy is raised everywhere on this account, that whatever an author may suggest in favour of religion, he will gain little credit in the cause if he allows the least advantage to any other principle. On the other side, the men of wit and raillery, whose pleasantest entertainment is in the exposing the weak sides of religion, are so desperately afraid of being drawn into any serious thoughts of it, that they look upon a man as guilty of foul play who assumes the air of a free writer, and at the same time preserves any regard for the principles of Natural Religion. (I 238)

The believers, being under attack, cling to their sectarian articles of faith as the only standard of moral virtue. The modern rationalist tradition, from Machiavelli to Locke, advances a theory of human nature that leaves little room for conceptions of moral virtue; they dismiss the reality of virtue as part of a strategy to disarm religion. We are led to expect that Shaftesbury will serve as mediator of this conflict, and provide a resolution that will satisfy both believer and "free writer," while preserving the integrity of virtue. In fact, Shaftesbury subtly proceeds down a different (and considerably more radical) path.

Objecting to the prevailing view that religion and virtue are inseparable companions, Shaftesbury insists that the "practice of the world" defies this presumption (I 237).
Despite widespread assertions to the contrary, human beings primarily judge one another according to moral principles. As evidence for this, Shaftesbury observes that they are seldom satisfied with the character of a person after learning only of the person's religious zeal. Being assured of their moral rectitude, however, human beings are most often uninclined to ask about their religious devotion (Id.). Shaftesbury, therefore, seeks to discover what virtue is "considered by itself," and further, which religious convictions "may possibly consist with virtue and merit, or be compatible with an honest or moral character" (I 238, 242). But a significant step has been taken here, one that easily goes unnoticed. Shaftesbury is contending that (a) virtue can be understood without any reference to religion, and (b) that religious convictions may be evaluated on the basis of an independent understanding of virtue. This view of things would seem, at the very least, to be subject to the charge of heresy. Most religious believers would claim that morality finds its source in divine revelation. But Shaftesbury will endeavor to show how certain other moral convictions that the believer maintains prove incompatible with the inclination to locate the source of morality in divine authority. Not unlike the moderns, who make morality dependent upon political authority, and thereby render its content arbitrary, many religious believers hold some opinions that must be attacked by the serious defender of virtue. It will become evident below that these opinions
involve not only the source of morality, but also extend to the motivation for virtuous action. Far from being the mediator that Shaftesbury initially portrays himself to be, he is, rather, a full participant in the conflict, determined to vindicate classical virtue over and against the claims of modern rationalism and traditional religion.²

Shaftesbury's defense depends foremost upon his analysis of what we call "good," and of what we approve and disapprove of in human action (II 244). "[E]very creature," he observes, "has a private good and interest that nature compels him to seek, by all the advantages afforded him within the compass of his make" (I 243). Shaftesbury by no means understates what is required in order to vindicate virtue. Only, "if by the natural constitution of any rational creature, the same irregularities of appetite which make him ill to others, make him ill also to himself, 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, then is that goodness by which he is thus useful to others a real good and advantage to himself. And thus virtue and interest

²Cf. Willey 1949, 57. Willey observes that Shaftesbury attacks both Hobbes and "divines," but does not make the crucial connection between Hobbes and Locke, a connection Shaftesbury makes unmistakable. Willey is lulled by Shaftesbury's evident sympathies for limited government into thinking Shaftesbury to proceed "in the more sober tone of a disciple of Locke" in criticizing Hobbes (1949, 68). The evidence does not bear this out.
may be found at last to agree” (I 243-244). Shaftesbury does not dismiss the possibility that a creature could exist whose private interest is hopelessly at odds with the public interest. But he stresses the fact that human beings, despite their doubts and misgivings, are naturally attracted to the prospect of a harmony between that which makes us good for ourselves and that which makes us useful for society. Human beings consistently display an interest in being something more than self-interested (I 244-245).

Shaftesbury’s attention to this human characteristic, above all else, leads him to reject the Hobbesian-Lockean assertion that human beings are defined by a private interest in their own preservation. Excessive self-regard at the expense of the public good (selfishness) everywhere induces our disapproval (I 248). Conversely, our admiration is excited

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3There is an obvious difficulty in Shaftesbury’s formulation here. If the concern for others must be demonstrated simultaneously to be one’s own good in order for virtue to be successfully defended, it is hard to see how virtuous action can be understood to be driven by a genuine concern for others. Grean observes this problem (1967, 228-230), as does Willey (1949, 74). The contradiction appears consequent of our need to regard moral virtue as our greatest good and also to maintain that moral action is distinguished by being motivated by concern for others. Shaftesbury does not back away from this difficulty. The presence of a kind of self-interest does not, in his presentation, eclipse all concern for others. Furthermore, vulgar private interest is distinguished from interests involving “natural affection” for “the species or public” (I 248, 293-330). The conception of self-interest he disparages is the modern conception, and also the conception of Christians who practice morality only for mercenary reasons.
by the spectacle of actions undertaken for the sake of, as Shaftesbury puts it, "[the] interest of the species or public" (Id.; cf. Fowler 1882, 73).

It is necessary to observe that although Shaftesbury almost always speaks of the "interest of the species or public" in one breath, he nevertheless has in mind two separate objectives. Worthy actions undertaken with a view to the "interest of the species" are distinct from those performed for the sake of the public interest. The public interest is served by what we ordinarily consider civic action, especially when it involves risk, or even sacrifice, where our own self-interest is concerned. Actions in the "interest of the species," are those which contribute to the public interest only in the sense that "every individual ought to share [in them]." 4 Included in this latter category is the activity of philosophy. 5 By making this subtle distinction, Shaftesbury indicates his awareness of (while strategically obscuring) the problem of the tension between virtue understood as the perfection of the soul and virtue understood as the consistent willingness to meet one's obligations to others. Elucidating the character of that tension is not a prominent goal of the "Inquiry." Rather, in response to the moderns, Shaftesbury undertakes to establish that we are naturally moral beings. Furthermore, in response to the Christians, Shaftesbury undertakes to establish that

4 Id., my emphasis.
5 See Willey's insightful remark on this subject (1949, 75).
belief requires the existence of apprehensible moral standards that are independent of revelation. Theocles, the sage of the "Moralists," comments on the intention of his "friend" who wrote the "Inquiry" (I 50).

For being, in respect of virtue, what you lately called a realist, he endeavors to show "that it is really something in itself, and in the nature of things; not arbitrary or factitious (If I may so speak); not constituted from without, or dependent on custom, fancy, or will; not even on the supreme will itself, which can no way govern it; but being necessarily good, is governed by it and ever uniform with it." (II 53)

All that Shaftesbury needs to accomplish in order to prove the modern account of human nature inaccurate is to establish a natural reality to our attraction to moral virtue. The specific questions of what constitutes moral virtue and of whether moral virtue is or is not problematic in its self-understanding, all remain (or, rather, reemerge) once Shaftesbury is successful in rebuffing the challenges he perceives to be posed by modernity and Christianity.

According to Shaftesbury, we are led toward good actions by our "affections." Much could be said about what precisely he understands by an "affection." It will have to suffice for present purposes to point out that the term "affection" brings together as one phenomenon our deepest desires and our intention to pursue that which we think is our good. We form affections toward the world around us, and this is manifested in our attractions and aversions. As human beings, however,
by means of the mind's "reflected sense," we form affections not only toward external things, but also toward the affections themselves, establishing a further set of attractions and aversions (I 252). Our sense turns inward and reacts morally to what we perceive.

In these vagrant characters or pictures of manners, which the mind of necessity figures to itself and carries still about with it, the heart cannot possibly remain neutral; but constantly takes part one way or other... Thus the several motions, inclinations, passions, dispositions, and consequent carriage and behaviour of creatures in the various parts of life, being in several views or perspectives represented to the mind, which readily discerns the good and ill towards the species or public, there arises a new trial or exercise of the heart, which must either rightly and soundly affect what is just and right, and disaffect what is contrary, or corruptly affect what is ill and disaffect what is worthy and good. (Id.)

Shaftesbury's description of the experience of the "reflected sense" is clearly intended to respond to Locke's argument in the Essay that all of our ideas originate in sensory experience of the world outside of us (ECHU I.i.1-I.iv.25; cf. Klein 1994, 64-69; Brett 1951, 82-85). The experience of moral judgment is an intrinsic component of the human experience. We look inward and are pleased or repelled by what we see. We bring to bear a standard of what is good for

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"the species or public" in judging ourselves. We are naturally moral.

A sense of right and wrong is natural to us (I 260). Even the outlaw or villain experiences a consciousness of liability when he offends, not to mention the frequency with which criminals display a "sense of fidelity and honour" when running great risks to protect their associates (the result no doubt of a misapplied principle of virtue) (I 257, 259). We make moral judgments inevitably, if sometimes incompetently, and when we make them we at least think we know right and wrong. So strong is this moralistic tendency in human beings that Shaftesbury proclaims, "If there be no real amiableness or deformity in moral acts, there is at least an imaginary one of full force. Though perhaps the thing itself should not be allowed in Nature, the imagination or fancy of it must be allowed to be from Nature alone. Nor can anything besides art and strong endeavour, with long practice and meditation, overcome such a natural prevention or prepossession of the mind in favour of this moral distinction" (I 260; cf. Brett 1951, 77). This insistence that moral ideas are natural to the human mind directly contradicts the primary argument of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, which denies any natural foundation to moral ideas. In Locke's presentation, morality has meaning

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7Cf. Fowler 1882, 101: "In the Inquiry concerning Virtue, though Locke is not expressly named, there is an equally vehement protest against what may be called the cardinal doctrines of his ethical system, namely,
only as it depends upon divine will or political will, enforced by punishments and rewards; or as a result of "fashion," varying from place to place and, for that reason, appearing to be arbitrary and groundless (ECHU II.xxviii.6-15). With respect to the variety of conflicting moral views in the world, Shaftesbury draws a conclusion that avoids Locke's relativism: "Even by this ...it appears there is fitness and decency in actions; since the fit and decent is in this controversy ever pre-supposed. And whilst men are at odds about the subjects, the thing itself is universally agreed" (II 137). It is insufficient to conclude from widespread moral disagreement that there exist no moral truths. It is ludicrous to conclude from such disagreement that moral concerns are not fundamental to human nature.

I have been discussing a component of Shaftesbury's moral philosophy that is often referred to as his "moral sense" doctrine. Decades after his death, Hutcheson latched onto this phrase (which Shaftesbury uses only once) and,

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that moral distinctions depend solely on the arbitrary will of God, and that they are mainly enforced by the supernatural sanctions of hope of future reward and fear of future punishment. Indeed, no two systems could well be more opposed on many points than are those of Shaftesbury and his tutor."

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8Cf. Grean 1967, 217-219. Grean observes that Shaftesbury criticizes Locke's moral views, but cannot bring himself to take seriously the possibility that Locke regards morality to be dependent on "will" alone. He therefore charges Shaftesbury with "changing" Locke's philosophy. I find no evidence for this. Fowler shares my view (1882, 84).
presenting himself as a champion of Shaftesbury's thought, ushered in the Scottish Enlightenment. But Shaftesbury is much more a rationalist when it comes to morals than any of his subsequent followers. The "moral sense" is only half of the equation for Shaftesbury. Our affections are fallible and may mislead us. The burden is on us, therefore, to sort through rationally the issues and problems concerning right and wrong, and to refine our affections accordingly. We have a moral obligation to "attain the speculation or science of what is morally good or ill, admirable or blameable, right or wrong" (I 252). To become worthy or virtuous requires us to understand what the "public interest" is, what the "interest of the species" is, and to adopt them as the immediate objects of our actions. Practical accidents or mishaps do not rightly arouse moral blame, but a "mistake of right" causing a vicious affection leads to vicious action that deserves to be blamed. This underscores the moral necessity for rational reflection on morality (I 254).  

Turning now to the implications for traditional religion of Shaftesbury's defense of virtue, we shall focus on two

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9See Hutcheson 1975.
11By making explicit that a "mistake" of fact proves exculpatory in moral action, but that a mistake of "right" proves blameworthy, Shaftesbury quietly raises the troubling question of moral responsibility that so much concerned the ancients (cf., especially, Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1109b30-1115a5; cf. also, Fowler 1882,79-81; Orwin 1994, n. 23).
central Shaftesburian propositions: that virtue must be understood as having an independent natural reality and that virtuous action must be undertaken for the sake of its own excellence or goodness, and not with a view to some punishment or reward that follows from it.

The treatment of religion takes place in the context of a discussion of those things that can cause a wrong or false imagination of right and wrong. For instance, a society worshipping gods who encourage cannibalism may be led to vicious action by their religious beliefs (I 261). And where this is the case, human opinion is such that cannibalism must be thought to be virtuous. But this is revealing. While it is imaginable that a people could think cannibalism repugnant and still worship gods who sanction cannibalism, this is almost never how it occurs, and when it does, the only motivation for their service to the divine is fear. To think God immoral "is what religion, in the main, forbids us to imagine. It everywhere prescribes esteem and honour in company with worship and adoration" (I 262). In fact, Shaftesbury points out, wherever attributes are assigned to a deity those attributes are taken to be virtuous and are imitated by the worshipers. In other words, not only do we think God to be the model of virtue, but we understand his virtue to be apprehensible and imitable by man.

For whoever thinks there is a God, and pretends formally to believe that he is just and good, must suppose that there is independently such a thing as justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, right
and wrong, according to which he pronounces that God is just, righteous, and true. If the mere will, decree or law of God be said absolutely to constitute right and wrong, then are these latter words of no significance at all. For thus, if each part of a contradiction were affirmed for truth by the Supreme Power, they would consequently become true.

Because religious belief almost always requires the opinion that God is virtuous, religious belief requires the independent and knowable existence of virtue. Our independent rational investigation into the character of virtue is, therefore, not only consistent with piety, but a legitimate vehicle for the refinement or criticism of various manifestations of piety.

With regard to the second proposition, that virtue must, in order to be virtue, be undertaken for the sake of its excellence or goodness, and not for the sake of rewards or punishments, Shaftesbury suggests that there are only two conceivable reasons why men obey the dictates of a god. Either they anticipate some benefit or harm from him, or they obey being convinced of his excellence, "thinking it the perfection of nature to imitate and resemble him" (I 267).

if... through hope merely of reward, or fear of punishment, the creature be incited to do the good he hates, or restrained from doing the ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse, there is in this case... no virtue or goodness whatsoever.... There is no more of rectitude, piety, or sanctity in a creature thus reformed,
than there is meekness or gentleness in a tiger strongly chained, or innocense and sobriety in a monkey under the discipline of the whip... And if that which he calls resignation depends only on the expectation of infinite retribution or reward, he discovers no more worth or virtue here than in any other bargain of interest” (I 267, 269).

Since we cannot achieve worthiness through selfishness, (or, to put it differently, since we understand worthiness to follow precisely from the transcendence of selfishness) service to the divine, in order to qualify as worthiness, must be undertaken for the sake of the excellence or goodness that the action itself represents (Cf. Brett 1951, 78). Virtue comes to light, on the basis of the believer's own opinions, as the necessary end of human action. Shaftesbury even goes so far as to suggest that the only unobjectionable motive for hoping for a life in the hereafter would be a desire to continue the practice of virtue (I 273). Since virtue is something more than self-interest, the “love of life for virtue’s sake” is commendable. But if it is only an aversion to death that makes one hope for a heavenly existence, then such a person, selfish as he is, would be undeserving.

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about Shaftesbury’s intention in the “Inquiry.” Against the modern view, which reduces human social and political life to a conflict of self-interested individuals, Shaftesbury offers a powerful articulation of the moral dimension of our lives.
He reveals how, in various ways, we understand our happiness to be found in the transcendence of base self-interest. The concern for something more than our own private needs, for what Shaftesbury calls “natural affection,” comes to light as a central human characteristic. Shaftesbury asks, “How unfortunate must it be for a creature whose dependence on society is greater than any others, to lose that natural affection by which he is prompted to the good and interest of his species and community?” (I 315) The Lockean political project succeeds in establishing a predictable political peace only by forcing us to reject, theoretically and politically, the existence of natural affection. Shaftesbury’s defense of moral virtue is, at bottom, an argument that moral man is happier than modern man can be.

Against the view of many Christians, Shaftesbury reveals the necessity, from premises held by the Christians themselves, of the independent and knowable existence of virtue. Morality cannot be dependent on divine will for its character; hence, sectarian claims to a monopoly over virtue prove untenable. What is more, he quietly forces believers to consider the troubling implications of the role that divine rewards and punishments play in their view of things. He does this by demonstrating how righteousness requires a distance from the self-interest that makes us concerned with rewards and punishments.

Shaftesbury criticizes both Christianity and modernity for their insufficient moral views. In doing so, Shaftesbury
no doubt hopes to contribute to the philosophical movement to erode the influence of traditional Christianity on human affairs. Yet, he seeks, at the same time, to offer some resistance to the moderns, who believe that the effort to diminish Christianity’s influence requires a full-scale rejection of all traditional moral thinking. What is more, Shaftesbury reveals that modernity and Christianity share certain fundamental moral tendencies. Both render morality mercenary and obscure from our attention the all important question of the independent standards of moral excellence. It turns out, in Shaftesbury’s presentation, that the two great combatants in the struggle occasioned by the enlightenment have more in common than they would be comfortable admitting.

Shaftesbury takes the question of virtue very seriously because he recognizes the moral experience to be ubiquitous in human social and political life. Christians self-consciously pursue virtue, but unknowingly debunk it through their mercenariness and their insistence that morality finds its source only in revelation. The moderns knowingly debunk virtue, but betray by their own civic-spirited actions a continuing attachment to it. Shaftesbury expresses confidence that a substantial happiness can be enjoyed by morally serious human beings. He knew too many such human beings to doubt that the pursuit of virtue is worth defending. From Shaftesbury’s point of view, the declining influence of Christianity provided a rare opportunity for a
genuine moral revival, with all of the perplexity and vitality that such a revival might entail.
Conclusion

Shaftesbury's multifaceted critique of Locke opens up new avenues for critical reflection on the philosophy that supports our politics and our way of life. Because it is a liberal critique, which is to say that it does not culminate in a rejection of liberal politics, we may be assured that by entertaining Shaftesburian reflections on the deficiencies of Locke's philosophy, we do not head down a path toward illiberal politics. Indeed, it is certainly Shaftesbury's sincere (if qualified) approval of the liberal political movement that leads him to take great pains to conceal his anti-Lockeanism.

Shaftesbury is ambivalent in rejecting Locke because, although he finds Locke's thought to be fundamentally deficient, he is impressed by its power to reassert the claims of reason in public life in opposition to the entrenched authority of the Church and its schoolmen handmaids (LTAS, 2-3; LL, 416). To attack Locke openly would be to lend advantage to Locke's adversaries, who are also Shaftesbury's adversaries. Shaftesbury is a "modern philosopher" to the extent that he is a philosopher who responds to the world of political instability and injustice that resulted from Christianity's domination of Western politics and thought. It is likely that Shaftesbury would be pleased to have thinking people read Locke.¹ But he would

¹He certainly approved of Ainsworth's reading of Locke (LTAS 2-4, 31-32;
want them eventually to put Locke down and pick up the
*Characteristics* in order to begin to try to address the
dissatisfactions that follow from the Lockean view of human
nature and political life. Though Shaftesbury proved very
popular and influential for a time, the world eventually put
down Locke only to pick up Rousseau, who offers a critique of
Lockeanism within the framework of modern rationalism and who
retains, crucially, a contractarian theoretical basis for
political obligation.

Perhaps then Shaftesbury could be charged with
underestimating the appeal of modern philosophy, of
underestimating its staying-power, when deciding to present
his anti-Lockeanism so indirectly. But this only leads us to
conclude that the time to look to Shaftesbury is now. Today
discontent with modern liberalism and the modern rationalism
that supports it is more pronounced than ever before. We are
increasingly open to, even yearning for, ways to understand
ourselves that allow us to escape the malaise of modern
political and social life.

Shaftesbury presciently provokes us to meditate on the
adequacy of modern life by uncovering the ugly theoretical
basis of its supremacy. Modern liberalism posits that human
life is but a continual struggle to avoid death. This
outlook, by definition, rules out the possibility of
achieving the substantial fulfillments we long for as human
beings. It furthermore rules out the possibility that we can
recognize shared conceptions of moral virtue, since the existence of such virtue requires both the existence of a positive end to human life and the prospect of a genuine fulfillment achieved through its cultivation. The moral relativism that prevails in modern liberalism, born of the dual claims that we have no natural moral characteristics and that we are defined by a selfish dread of mortality that reduces public morality to little more than the behavior necessary for social détente, paralyzes all moral aspirations before they can develop.

It is a small step from the early modern claim that opinions of the good are relative to the late modern claim that all choices and ways of life are relative. Confidence in the “bourgeois” way of life that prevails in Lockean liberalism could not endure because the aspiration to avoid death does not prove to be a sufficient substitute for a shared notion of the human good. As human beings, we need something more to guide our actions. We need a shared notion of genuine human fulfillment. Shaftesbury anticipates later critics by identifying the insufficiency of self-preservation as a standard for social and political life. Modern liberalism has certainly evolved a great deal since Locke. But if Shaftesbury is right that Locke “struck the home blow” against moral virtue, then it is Locke who we moderns must address first and foremost in order to amend our understanding of ourselves and reestablish a satisfactory foundation for moral life.
We have needs that modern liberalism does not satisfy, needs it claims cannot be met. But is this pessimism, this tragic account of the human condition as a fallen condition that no God takes notice of, finally justified? In other words, is it reasonable? Shaftesbury argues that it is not. He suggests in various ways that the moderns retain (in their articulation of the human situation) the "grim aspect" of the "tragical gentlemen" they criticize (I 47). Their account of the whole as a mysterious chaos indifferent to human needs strikes him as all too similar to the account provided by Christianity. That the pursuit of self-preservation trumps all other human pursuits reminds him of the Christian identification of salvation with eternal life. The intense fear that results from such an understanding of man’s place in the whole appears hysterical to Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury’s “optimistic” natural theology is offered in contrast to the modern view that nature is so hostile that we must expend all of our energies defending ourselves against her threats. But the actual basis for Shaftesbury’s rejection of the tragic view of the world is his conviction that a substantial happiness is available to us. The proof of his conviction is to be found in his observation of human characteristics that inspire hope that we are, as human beings, something more than the moderns allow. One such characteristic, which affords prospects for happiness, is what Shaftesbury terms “natural affection.” By “natural affection” Shaftesbury expresses our shared concern for
others, manifested in friendship and the moral virtues, and pointing beyond itself to the interests of the "species" as a whole (cf. I 275-276). Shaftesbury not only assures us that moral man will be happier than modern man, he also maintains that the admiration and love of virtue casts the whole in a more favorable light than Christianity or modern rationalism allows.

Thus, Shaftesbury argues that the modern postulate that human beings are naturally asocial creatures, naturally preoccupied with their own needs at the expense of any serious concern for others, conflicts with the experience we all share of admiration for those whose actions are motivated by a concern for "the species or public" (I 248). If we begin to take seriously the full implications of the view that human beings are naturally social and political beings, we cannot help but begin to rethink our public and private priorities. This could lead to a more coherent public conception of obligations, of duties owed the "species and public," understood as a crucial component of our full humanity. It could, furthermore, reawaken aspirations that are currently marginalized in a modern public sphere that officially recognizes the pursuit of material abundance as the only perfectly defensible objective of life.

But a revival of the moral aspirations involves a revival of the moral dilemmas. Shaftesbury explains that the question of what constitutes the interest of the "species or public" is a challenging one (I 252 253). That we find
ourselves so often in contradiction with ourselves on matters of our true interest provokes us to raise in earnest the question of the human good. Philosophy as he understands it must address that question above all. Shaftesbury’s rejection of modern philosophy is based primarily on his awareness that it obscures, instead of engaging, the question of the good.

It may be objected that the revival of the sort of questions Shaftesbury encourages us to ask is a dangerous enterprise. After all, people fight about the good. Shaftesbury is not an idealist; his “optimism” is not born of naïveté. He does not purport to offer a permanent solution to the political problem. But he forces us to reconsider what it is we believe we are defending when we cling to the modern conception of human nature out of a conviction that it is the only means to ensure peace. Is peace to be had at any price? Furthermore, does modern liberalism actually deliver a permanent solution to the political problem? Is toleration based on the assumption that all religious opinions are ultimately indefensible, that all religious devotion is fundamentally mercenary, really toleration? Can a political theory that systematically discourages human beings from aspiring to more than the satisfaction of private (arbitrary) desires command humanity’s allegiance indefinitely?

If the conception of human nature that informs modern liberalism is, as Shaftesbury argues, inadequate, then we cannot reasonably expect modern liberalism to last forever.
Our ruminations about what might constitute a more adequate conception of human nature and a more adequate political accommodation of that nature are therefore justified by the presence of observable deficiencies in the modern understanding. If we ignore those deficiencies out of timidity, we can be sure that sooner or later some will respond to those deficiencies with zeal, and very likely without concerning themselves with preserving the liberal when rejecting the modern.
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