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Ph.D. THESIS

THE MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

OF ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, THIRD EARL

OF SHAFTESBURY: 1671 - 1713

Submitted by James Francis Harrison

to the University of Durham.

June, 1970.

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Ph.D. ABSTRACT

Title: The Moral and Political Philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper,  
Third Earl of Shaftesbury: 1671-1713\*\*

Submitted by James F. Harrison (Department of Politics)

This work attempts to explain the meaning, the relationship between, and the implications of Shaftesbury's ideas on morality and politics. Criticisms of Shaftesbury's thought are limited to the pointing out of logical contradictions that are present in his writings. A central contradiction is seen to be Shaftesbury's undifferentiated appeal to both "reason" and "emotion" as the source of moral approbation and disapprobation. The author of this work uses the distinction between reason and emotion as a means of separating from Shaftesbury's writings two independent theories of morality. Both approaches to moral judgement involve the belief that the universe is a perfectly organised whole, the belief that we behave morally when we consciously pursue the public welfare, and the belief that we maximise our happiness by behaving morally.

The "emotional" approach to morality is seen to be closely related to Shaftesbury's concern with aesthetic subjects. For Shaftesbury, the emotional ability that men use to distinguish between good and evil is the same ability that allows them to distinguish between beauty and ugliness. As a consequence of this, the artist is given a moral role by Shaftesbury. Also, a cultural significance is given to those political preconditions that are seen by Shaftesbury to be necessary for any society that is to become moral.

There can also be found in this work a discussion of Shaftesbury's debt to earlier thinkers, a discussion of his theory of moral obligation, an explanation of the unsystematic nature of his writings in the light of his attempt to avoid "enthusiasm", an explanation of the relationship between his moral views and his political recommendations, and an assessment of the significance of Shaftesbury to our understanding of the philosophic climate in England during the eighteenth century.

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\*\* This work was first submitted in the summer of 1968. It is now being resubmitted according to the regulations of the University of Durham after an oral examination in June, 1969.

PREFACE

The influence of the third Earl of Shaftesbury upon eighteenth century English thought has been described by A.O. Aldridge as follows:

.... Shaftesbury is associated with Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, and Lord Kames, who regarded him as the initiator of a trend in philosophy, of which they were part, to consider morality in general to derive its existence from a taste, sentiment, or feeling of the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice.<sup>1</sup>

R.L. Brett also informs us that in Germany Shaftesbury's influence extended to Lessing, Mendelssohn, Wieland, Herder, Kant, and Schiller.<sup>2</sup> In France his influence is evident in the young Diderot who, in 1745, produced Shaftesbury's Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit as Essai sur la Mérite et la Vertu. Considering this apparent influence, it is surprising how little interest Shaftesbury appears to have stimulated since the end of the eighteenth century.\* There are few comprehensive criticisms of

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\* In the last quarter of the nineteenth century we find Leslie Stephen stating that, "The third Lord Shaftesbury is one of the writers whose reputation is scarcely commensurate with the influence which he once exerted .... All the [British] ethical writers are related to him, more or less directly, by sympathy or opposition." History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, II, 18.



his moral theories, and to my knowledge no attempt has ever been made to outline in detail the social and political aspects of his thought. The object of the present study is to elaborate the detail and implications of both the moral and political ideas that can be found in Shaftesbury's writings. This preface has been written to explain what these writings were, and to provide an outline of the context in which they were written. I have taken the advice given by Carlyle in his Sartor Resartus, and shall not present the reader with the theoretical detail of Shaftesbury's philosophy, "... till a Biography of him has been philosophico-poetically written, and philosophico-poetically read."<sup>3</sup>

Anthony Ashley Cooper was born on February 26th, 1771, at Exeter House in London. In the following year his grandfather received an earldom and became the first Earl of Shaftesbury. As a member of the Shaftesbury household the future third Earl was, in his youth, subject to the political influence of his grandfather and the intellectual influence of his grandfather's physician, John Locke. The first of these influences was to instil into the third Earl a sympathy toward the Whig party, which the first Earl had established as a coherent political group during the late 1670s. Under the influence of Locke the

young Lord Ashley was given full opportunity to develop his intellectual potential, and "... as a lad of seven the precocious Ashley could read Latin and Greek with ease."<sup>4</sup> However, Locke's influence must not be over-emphasised; for between 1675 and 1679 Locke was in France, and after 1683 in exile in Holland.\*

After Locke's flight to Holland in 1683, the twelve-year-old Ashley went to Winchester School, which he attended until 1686. In the following year, at the age of sixteen, he set out for a tour of the continent. Having visited Locke in Rotterdam, he then proceeded through France and the Austrian Empire arriving back in England in 1689. In a letter to his father that was written during these travels, we find the first expression of his belief in the oppressive character of the Roman Catholic Church. Referring to the presence and influence of the Jesuits in Bohemia (enforceably converted to the Church of Rome during the Thirty Years War) Shaftesbury wrote:

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\* Locke's association with the first Earl of Shaftesbury, who died in 1683, made his affiliation to the monarchy under James II suspect. It was only after the 'Glorious Revolution' that Locke was able to return to England with impunity.

Out of Moravia we went into the kingdom of Bohemia, and stayed at Prague two days. This is one of the biggest cities I ever saw. The country is a mighty fine one .... I need not describe to your lordship how miserable the people are, after I tell you the number of Jesuits that are amongst them. In Prague they reckon about 2000. I leave your lordship to reckon on the condition of this poor place under the swarm of such vermin, by the trial we have had lately of a few of them only amongst us. Your lordship may imagine, perhaps, the ill-condition we had been in if fallen into their hands, for this country was their conquest from an established strict profession of the pure Protestant religion." <sup>5</sup>

This attitude was held by Shaftesbury throughout his life, and will be seen to be significant to his general theory of government in Chapter Seven of this work.

After his return from the continent Shaftesbury devoted the next five years of his life to study. Then, in May, 1695, he entered the House of Commons as member for Poole. He entered into affairs of state with a great deal of enthusiasm; so much so that after the dissolution of Parliament in July, 1698, he had to retire from public service for reasons of health, whereupon he went to Holland for twelve months. However, before leaving for Holland he wrote a preface to an edition of Benjamin Whichcote's Sermons, which was published in the same year. This was Shaftesbury's first published work, and contains



many of his ideas in embryonic form. It has only been republished once since 1698 (in 1742) for which reason I have included it as an Appendix to the present work (See Appendix A).

Shaftesbury returned to England in 1699 after, in the November of that year, his father had died and he had succeeded to the earldom. In the same year, without his knowledge, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit had been published by Toland. The unsought literary reputation which followed the publication of this work does not seem to have concerned Shaftesbury. Having inherited the earldom, he took his seat in the House of Lords in January, 1700. From then, until the death of William III in March, 1702, his time was taken up with political affairs. Although not holding an official post he appears to have gained William's respect for his efforts in the two elections of 1701, in which he used his influence to get Whig supporters of the king's foreign policy into the House of Commons. According to Shaftesbury:

My zeal for the Revolution, and for that principle which effected it, made me active for the support of the Government, and for the establishment of the Protestant succession, and it was my good fortune to have my services well thought of by the King and acknowledged by him with great favour.



I had the honour of many offers from the King, but thinking that for my own part I could best serve him and my country in a disinterested station, I resolved absolutely against making any advantage from the public; either to myself or family, by taking any employment at Court.<sup>6</sup>

Then, with the death of William, Shaftesbury lost all his influence when Queen Anne turned to other counsellors. Also, his health was declining rapidly. In a letter to a friend in Holland written in November, 1702, Shaftesbury wrote

.... I am now much withdrawn, and must be more so, not only because of this season, in which it is not so proper for such as I am to act; but in truth because my efforts in time of extremity, for this last year or two, have been so much beyond my strength in every respect, that not only for my mind's sake (which is not a little to one that loves retirement as I do), but for my health's sake .... I am obliged to give myself a recess, which will have this agreeable in it, besides the retirement which I love, that I shall promise myself the happiness of seeing you in Holland.<sup>7</sup>

Shaftesbury was true to his word. In August, 1703, he travelled over to Holland, returning in the August of the following year. By now he was, at the age of thirty-three, a confirmed invalid, attending Parliament only occasionally.\* From now until his

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\* According to Shaftesbury's doctor, his ailments were, ".... Convulsive Asthma," which was "joyn'd with a Tertian Ague"  
(continued overleaf)

death all his energies were directed towards the care of his unhealthy body and towards his writing.

After his retirement from the political scene, Shaftesbury's first published work was, A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to My Lord \*\*\*\*, the mysterious nobleman being Lord Somers (to whom Swift dedicated his Tale of a Tub), with whom Shaftesbury maintained a friendly correspondence. The stimulus for this work was the impact which was created by the arrival in London of three Camisard prophets in September, 1706 - the Camisards being a religious sect who had suffered under the religious policies of Louis XIV. These three individuals - Elias Marion, John Cavalier, and Durand Fage - were prone to religious fits during the course of which they would make prophecies. It is doubtful that these antics would have attracted Shaftesbury's attention if two English gentlemen had not chosen to imitate the Frenchmen. When John Lacy and Sir John Bulkeley took to

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(continued from previous page)

upon his return from Rotterdam in 1704, "Periodick Sweats," and "Symptoms of an Acid Putrilaginous Ructus, with a small Acid Expuition, severall in the Day ...." His case is summed up as, "a Scorbuticall Disorder from a too Acid Dyscracy of his Lordship's Blood." A medical report by Dr. Christopher Pitt, Public Records Office, PRO 30/24/20/100.

uncontrolled prophetic fits, polite English society began to take interest, especially after Lacy published, A Cry from the Desert: or Testimonials of the Miraculous Things lately come to pass in the Cevennes AND Warnings of the Eternal Spirit (1707). In the following year Shaftesbury's Letter appeared. In contrast to the Inquiry which is a straightforward elaboration of what Shaftesbury considered to be the moral nature of man, the Letter is a pronouncement against all those who satisfy their search for truth by riding a tide of uncritical religious enthusiasm. In order to combat such irrational enthusiasm as was found in Lacy, ridicule is advocated. The prophetic spirit must be laughed out of court. This was further elaborated in the following year with the publication of 'Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour (1709).<sup>\*</sup> In this work Shaftesbury recommends "good humour" in our approach to moral and religious problems.

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\* "Shaftesbury in Sensus Communis (1709) tried to justify the use of wit in discussing religion. For the rest of the century Shaftesbury's position was the center of heated debate, with Akenside supporting, and John Brown and Warburton opposing the employment of wit in religion." E.N. Hooker, "Introduction" to the Augustan Reprint Society's Essays on Wit, No. 2, page 3.



Following the Sensus Communis there appeared a work entitled The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody (1709). This work is a dialogue between two hypothetical philosophers, Philocles and Theocles. Through the person of Theocles we are presented with a description of man's moral potential which centres upon the individual's appreciation of a harmonious cosmos. Of this work, Leibniz wrote in his Judgement . . . . of the Characteristics (in which all Shaftesbury's works were embodied in 1711),

I at once found there almost my whole Theodicée, (but more agreeably turn'd) before it had come abroad. The Universe all of a piece, its Beauty, its Universal Harmony, the Disappearing of real Evil especially with Regard to the Whole, the Unity of true Substances, the Great Unity of the Supreme Substance, of which the others are but Emanations and Imitations, are there placed in the most agreeable light imaginable . . . . I expected only to have found a Philosophy like that of Mr. Lock, but I was led beyond even Plato, and Des Cartes. If I had seen this book before the publishing of my Theodicée, I should have made that use of it I ought to have done, and have borrowed from thence very considerable Passages; and I am only sorry that this Treatise does not fill a whole Volume.<sup>8</sup>

In the same year as the Sensus Communis and The Moralists appeared Shaftesbury was married to Jane Ewer, youngest daughter of Thomas Ewer of Lee, Hertfordshire. Shaftesbury's reason for



making this match was to provide himself with an heir -- as we are informed in a letter to Robert (later Viscount) Molesworth after his marriage:

For my own part, if I find any sincere joy, it's because I promis'd my self no other, than the satisfaction of my friends; who thought my family worth preserving, and my self worth nursing in an indifferent crazy state, to which a wife (if a real good one) is a great help. Such a one I have found: and if by her help or care, I can regain a tolerable share of health; you may be sure it will be employ'd as you desire, since my marriage it self was but a means to that end.<sup>9</sup>

Shaftesbury's wishes were gratified when he was presented with a son on February 9, 1711. However, by the July of that year his health had deteriorated to such an extent that he left for Naples (overland, via France) in the hope that the warmer climate would alleviate his sufferings.

Before leaving for Naples his Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc. was published (1711). The three volumes included the works mentioned above, plus two others. The other two works were 'Soliloquy,' or Advice to an Author (first published 1710), and Miscellaneous Reflections on the Preceding Treatises, Etc. The Soliloquy is a statement of his belief that both self-examination and freedom of criticism are

necessary pre-requisites to the formation of a just, moral and artistic outlook, a theme which complements that of the Letter and the Sensus Communis. The Miscellaneous Reflections are a restatement and critical discussion of all the major ideas that are contained in the other pieces. The order in which these works were placed in the Characteristics is as follows:

1. A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm .... (1708)
2. Sensus Communis .... (1709)
3. Soliloquy .... (1710)
4. An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit (1699)
5. The Moralists .... (1709)
6. Miscellaneous Reflections .... (1711)

During the eighteenth century the work was very popular and went through twelve editions up to 1790: (1711, 1714, 1723, 1727, 1732, 1733, 1737-38, 1743-45, 1749, 1757, 1773, and 1790).

When looking at Shaftesbury's published work as a whole, it is in the last two essays - The Moralists and the Soliloquy - that we are given the clearest expression of what has come to be recognised as the most original element in his writings. It is here that we find the deliberate combination of ethics and aesthetics. This use of aesthetic concepts and aesthetic

experience as a means of elucidating ethical questions does not suddenly appear in Shaftesbury. There is evidence of it in all his writings. However, it would seem that his interest turned more and more towards the creative arts as he got older, and this can be seen if we look at the chronological sequence of his works. In the last years of his life (1711-1713) his time was taken up in concentrating upon the moral character of artistic pieces. Between leaving for Naples and his death on February 4, 1713, he wrote two short works in which art is the central theme. These were, A Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules (included in the 1714 edition of the Characteristics) which discusses the style and content of a painting in which Hercules is the main character; and A Letter Concerning Design (published for the first time in the 1732 edition of the Characteristics).

We see that Shaftesbury's literary output was largely confined to the years after his retirement from public life up to his premature death at the age of forty-one. In addition to the works outlined above there are various other sources of material which have been utilised for the present study. A complete list of primary sources is as follows:

1. Preface to the Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot, London, 1698.
2. Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times Etc. Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by J.M. Robertson. Two volumes. Glouc., Mass., 1963.
3. Letters of the Earl of Shaftesbury. London, 1746. Included are a) Letters of the Earl of Shaftesbury to a Student at the University (first published 1716), b) Letters from the Right Honourable the Late Earl of Shaftesbury to Robert Molesworth, Esq. (first published 1721), and c) A Letter sent from Italy, with the Notion of the Judgement of Hercules &c., to My Lord \*\*\*\*, the mysterious nobleman again being Lord Somers.
4. The Original Letters of Locke, Sidney, and Shaftesbury, (ed. T. Forster), London, 1830. Included here are Shaftesbury's letters to Mr. Furley of Rotterdam and to his son, Arent Furley.
5. The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, (ed. B. Rand) London, 1900. The Life here was written by Shaftesbury's son, the fourth Earl. The Philosophical Regimen is Shaftesbury's private philosophical notebook.
6. Second Characters, or The Language of Forms, (ed. B. Rand), Cambridge, 1914. As well as containing the Letter Concerning Design and the Notion, this publication includes the notes that were made by Shaftesbury in preparation for a treatise which was to be called, Plastics, or The Original Power and Progress of Designatory Art.
7. Shaftesbury Papers, which are to be found in the Public Records Office in London. Ref. PRO 30/24.

In considering the moral and political philosophy of these writings, the present work does not attempt to enter into a



philosophical dialogue with the third Earl. I have sought rather to analyse the meaning, relationship between, and implications of Shaftesbury's central ideas. In this task criticisms of Shaftesbury have been limited to pointing out the logical opposition of some of his ideas and approaches. His analyses and recommendations find neither acclamation nor condemnation, the attempt here being to understand them in the light of his own conceptual framework.

In the first chapter the reader is introduced to what is in Shaftesbury's philosophy an undifferentiated appeal to both reason and emotion as the basis of moral approbation and disapprobation. These are seen by the author of this work to constitute two distinct approaches to moral subjects - a distinction not made by Shaftesbury himself. Using this distinction as a basis for analysis, the "rational" elements of Shaftesbury's moral theories are isolated and discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. Chapter Five discusses the non-rational or "emotional" theory of morality. Common to both of these approaches are the beliefs that

- a) the cosmos (universe or Nature) is a perfectly organised whole.
- b) the individual behaves morally when he consciously pursues the public welfare, and

- c) the individual finds happiness when he behaves morally.

In Chapter Two, where Shaftesbury's debt to the rational theology of the Cambridge Platonists is the focal point of discussion, Shaftesbury is seen to recommend the rational independence of all men from any external authority in their pursuit of moral and religious truths within the perfect cosmos. Chapter Three is centred on Shaftesbury's belief that Nature is perfect, and on his view of the role of man in this perfect structure. His admiration of the Roman Stoics and his rejection of the Epicureans and Hobbes in matters concerning metaphysics, morals, and political society find expression here. Chapter Four is concerned with some questions that arise out of the discussion in previous chapters. An attempt is made to explain Shaftesbury's acceptance of the possibility of both "evil" and "freedom" within a universe where everything necessarily happens for the best. Shaftesbury's theory of moral obligation is also discussed.

Chapter Five considers Shaftesbury's views on man's "emotional" ability to distinguish between good and evil. These views are seen to find their origin in his belief in the equation of "beauty" and "morality", and his belief that man is

attracted to these things by the "moral sense" (which is also termed the "aesthetic sense" in this work). What Shaftesbury means by the term "beauty" and the relationship between beauty and art are both discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Six re-emphasises Shaftesbury's confusion of two logically distinct approaches to morality. This confusion is seen to be the product of his explicit desire to avoid being "enthusiastic". His recommendation that we adopt both "ridicule" and "good humour" as safeguards against "enthusiasm" is also analysed.

In Chapters Seven and Eight the analysis is directed towards an understanding of Shaftesbury's political ideas. It should be recognised here that Shaftesbury did not ever attempt a systematic presentation of a political philosophy. It is true that he thought that his ideas had political implications (see Chapter Seven, Section I), and political discussion can be found in his elaboration of moral argument throughout his writings. Also, certain political arrangements are seen by him to be a prerequisite to the discovery of moral truth by the individual, and a particular sort of political activity (i.e. activity to promote the welfare of the community) is a necessary consequence

of being moral. However, having outlined what characterises a moral individual, and having explained how we can reach this condition, Shaftesbury does not go on to discuss the characteristics of a moral community in any consistent manner. Instead, he seems to have become more interested in the relationship between the arts and morality, and was preparing a work on this subject at his death (see above).

Making use of the material that is available to us - much of it from his private correspondence - Chapter Seven discusses Shaftesbury's ideas concerning the necessary organisation of government in a country that hopes to maintain moral standards among its citizens. His opposition to tyranny (by which he means any form of authority that denies to the individual the means of developing a moral character), his avoidance of "utopias", and his "conservatism" are explained in this chapter.

Chapter Eight considers Shaftesbury's views on "freedom", and the good consequences for a society that possesses this quality. The distinction between "rational" and "emotional" elements in his thought is again seen to be an appropriate means for analysing his ideas. In either case Shaftesbury is seen to advocate freedom as a means of improving both the individual and



the society within which he lives. A concern with the "culture" of society is seen to be relevant in relation to the emotional (aesthetic) element in his thought. The rational element is seen to be in favour of religious toleration. However, it is stressed that Shaftesbury was a conservative and has less faith in the moral, religious, and social abilities of mankind than would at times appear.

In spite of contradictions in his philosophy, Shaftesbury seems to have been both influential and popular during the eighteenth century. Chapter Nine points to the fact that, in addition to contributing to a debate on moral subjects that was to continue after his death, Shaftesbury deals with subjects that were to remain of interest to British philosophers and their public until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Two appendices have been included in this work. "Appendix A" is Shaftesbury's "Preface" to Whichcote's Select Sermons (1698) mentioned above. "Appendix B" is a letter written to the student, Michael Ainsworth, in 1709 - taken from the volume of Letters (1746) which is included in the list of primary sources above. In this letter there is an interesting rejection of Locke's epistemology that is further analysed in Chapter Five

of this work.

At the end of each chapter of this work, with the exception of the final one, there can be found a summary of the central points that have been discussed in any chapter. It is hoped that these will be of use to the reader should he at any point wish to remind himself of previous discussion.

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THE MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

OF ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, THIRD EARL

OF SHAFTESBURY: 1671 - 1713

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## CHAPTER ONE.

SHAFTESBURY'S INTELLECTUAL ORIENTATION.

- I -

If we look at the intellectual environment in England during the time that Shaftesbury was writing, we find there a growing confidence in the rational faculties of man. England offered conditions under which those theological writers who insisted upon the primacy of the individual's mind and conscience were allowed to publish their ideas. These conditions were utilised by the Deists, who thought that religious truths were rational truths. Charles Blount, in his Summary Account of the Deists' Religion (1686), advocated a break with the established church and recommended the worship of God by leading a life based upon the rational pursuit of morality. Casting doubt upon the credibility of the Bible, and rejecting miracles outright, he advocated the replacement of faith by reason.\* John Toland, after first attempting to show that there was nothing in the Bible that is contrary to reason\*\*, later turned to a criticism of the Bible on rational grounds.†

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\* See also Blounts Oracles of Reason (1693).

\*\* See Christianity Not Mysterious (1696).

+ See Nazarenus, or Jewish, Mahometan, and Gentile Christianity (1718).

Writers like Blount, Toland, Anthony Collins, and William Whiston all opposed reason to revelation. The name of John Locke with all its prestige was added to the list of those who looked to reason as the source and measure of religious truth when The Reasonableness of Christianity was published in 1695.\* In the person of Locke we also have an individual who raised men's hopes in reason when he published his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). Locke's ".... success in explaining the human understanding created the impression that man's reason is sufficient to unlock all the treasures of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> This confidence in the human intellect received both confirmation and impetus from Newton's theory of gravitation which apparently explained the complexities of the universal machine by means of an all-embracing formula.\*\* This was the spirit of the times and Shaftesbury could hardly fail to be influenced by it. Shaftesbury can be seen confidently referring to human reason as the means whereby man can acquire knowledge of moral truth.

What do we mean by "reason" when we use the term in

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\* Locke's theological "rationalism" was qualified by an acceptance of irrational elements (such as miracles) upon faith.  
 \*\* Newton's Principia mathematica philosophiae naturalis was first published in 1687.

relation to Shaftesbury? If we look at Shaftesbury's writings we do not find much help. Reference to reason in justification of his ideas occurs regularly, but Shaftesbury never clarifies what he means by reason. However, the fact that he refers to it implies first of all that Shaftesbury sees the possession of something called reason as a characteristic of all men (as a result of which Shaftesbury can indiscriminately refer his readers to it). Secondly, it can be said that through their common possession of reason, men are capable of forming unanimous opinions concerning what is true\*; and it is possible to regard Shaftesbury as a person who advocated reason as a measure of truth in the hope that men might achieve a common measure (leading to a common knowledge) concerning the true and the false. However, this does not help us in understanding how reason works. What is the process of reasoning? For Shaftesbury, when he uses reason in relation to moral

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\* This may be qualified by adding, "in those spheres of human enquiry in which reason's standard is thought to be relevant." However, the characteristic of Shaftesbury's age was that all disciplines were being placed under reason's standard - a fact best demonstrated by the writings of the Deists who brought religion, the sphere of faith, within reason's spectrum.



subjects (which are his main concern), there appears to be an analogy with mathematical reason - that is, the principles which he outlines are thought to be either self-evident or such as can be proved by logic. Thus, Shaftesbury says of his ideas outlined in the Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit, that "if there be no article exceptionable in this scheme of moral arithmetic, the subject treated may be said to have an evidence as great as that which is found in numbers or mathematics."<sup>2</sup> This may be taken to mean that the truths which Shaftesbury presents to us are believed by him to be either immediately recognisable as true\*, or logically derived from such self-evident truths. As such, reason can be referred to if differences are found between men, either as a means of proving one of them right (and with whom the other will agree because reason demonstrates that he was previously wrong) or to demonstrate that neither side of a

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\* It is possible to introduce at this point a difficulty in interpreting Shaftesbury's ideas that will be further developed later in the present chapter. In the immediate recognition of a self-evident moral truth Shaftesbury sometimes appears to be appealing to reason, sometimes to a non-rational "sense". Shaftesbury himself fails to distinguish between the rational and non-rational elements in his philosophy, and thus presents us with the problem: When is Shaftesbury talking rationally, and when not?

difference is true. For Shaftesbury, reason is concerned with what one man can demonstrate to others; and with the acceptance or rejection of beliefs according to whether or not they can be justified by reason.

Where reason is thought to be capable of distinguishing between the true and the false proposition, it is possible to hope and demand that all human beliefs receive examination, and that they be pronounced true or false, according to the light of reason. This is Shaftesbury's viewpoint. For, according to him, there is a distinction between the possibilities of rational activity and the actual use to which men put their mental faculties. "Men," he tells us, "are wonderfully happy in a faculty of deceiving themselves, whenever they set heartily about it."<sup>3</sup> They deceive themselves because they are not critical enough as to what they believe, and their rational capacities are not used to their fullest extent. As Philocles informs us in The Moralists:

Men love to take party instantly. They cannot bear being kept in suspense. The examination torments them. They want to be rid of it upon the easiest terms. 'Tis as if men fancied themselves drowning whenever they dare trust to the current of reason. They seem hurrying away they know not whither, and are ready to catch at the first twig. There they choose afterwards to hang, though ever so insecurely, rather

than trust their strength to bear them above water. He who has got hold of an hypothesis, how slight soever, is satisfied. He can presently answer every objection, and, with a few terms of art, give an account of everything without trouble.<sup>4</sup>

Although "truth is the most powerful thing in the world,"<sup>5</sup> men refuse to pursue it by questioning their beliefs. In their desire for a certainty which will lend significance to their own existence, men refuse to question their own hypotheses. Without any rational justification, "Every sect has a recipe. When you know it, you are master of Nature: you solve all her phenomena, you see all her designs, and can account for all her operations." Why is this so? Because men "are too lazy and effeminate .... to dare to doubt."<sup>6</sup> This is the attitude that Shaftesbury condemns in the belief that truth will emerge if rational enquiry is used: "Let but the search go freely on, and the right measure of everything will soon be found."<sup>7</sup> As Shaftesbury's most recent critic has stated, "With unquestioning faith in reason, Shaftesbury advocates that we follow reason wherever she may lead."<sup>8</sup>

We may say, therefore, that Shaftesbury advocated a questioning of all things presented to the mind, and indicated that all our beliefs be rationally justifiable. This at times



appears to lead Shaftesbury into scepticism. For if we are to question some of our beliefs, we must question all our beliefs:

There is nothing so foolish and deluding as a partial scepticism. For whilst the doubt is cast only on one side, the certainty grows so much stronger on the other. Whilst only one face of folly appears ridiculous, the other grows more solemn and deceiving.<sup>9</sup>

It is only by examining everything that the human mind can hope to gain a sound appreciation of truth - if truth exists at all for man to appreciate. Our critical reason must examine all our beliefs, reason being the only grounds for assessing their truth or falsity.\* What will happen, however, if after questioning all things in pursuit of rational certainty, no certainty is found? Only doubt will remain; and Shaftesbury will be dangerously close to the conclusions reached by scepticism. His sceptical questioning of all knowledge in his search for truth would conclude by denying the possibility of a known truth. Shaftesbury recognised this possibility

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\* It was upon this basis that Shaftesbury rejected the Pascalian bet concerning the existence of God (without any particular reference to Pascal): "... our reason, which knows the cheat, will never rest thoroughly satisfied on such a bottom, but turn us often adrift, and toss us in a sea of doubt and perplexity ...."  
Characteristics, I, 27.

and admitted that, ".... as in philosophy, so in politics, I am but few removes from mere scepticism."<sup>10</sup> But he was removed from scepticism, convinced that his method need not lead to this end however we may interpret this element in his writings. He tells his readers that he will ".... try what certain knowledge or assurance of things may be recovered," and thus avoid ".... an endless scepticism introduced."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Shaftesbury's attitudes towards scepticism\*, and the means whereby he thought he had avoided it, must be recognised as being important to our understanding of his moral ideas.

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\* Scepticism, as originated by Pyrrho, (360-290 B.C.) was an expression of weariness with philosophic speculation, in the place of which it advocated an attitude of total doubt. With reference to knowledge of the empirical world, man is shown to be incapable of escaping from the uncertainty of the senses. With reference to speculative interpretations of reality, and the moral recommendations which may be associated with them, the sceptics claimed that all affirmations may be confronted with an opposite which is equally valid. As a consequence of this attitude towards the doctrines of other schools the sceptic may advocate either continuous dialectical criticism (Diogenes Laertius, II, 487), or the suspension of judgement which produces ".... a condition of life, peaceable, temperate, and exempt from the agitations we receive by the pressure of opinion and knowledge that we think we have of things." (Montaigne, Essays II, 196. See also V. Brochard, Les Sceptiques Grecs, 33).

Shaftesbury had a great deal of sympathy for the constant criticism of the sceptics. In conjunction with his own rational orientation, he recognised as correct the sceptic's refusal to accept an unjustifiable truth:

To say truth, I have often wondered to find such a disturbance raised about the simple name of sceptic. 'Tis certain that, in its original and plain signification, the word imports no more than barely "that state or frame of mind in which every one remains on every subject of which he is not certain." -- He who is certain, or presumes to say he knows is in that particular, whether he be mistaken or in the right, a dogmatist.<sup>12</sup>

This is Shaftesbury speaking as a rationalist. Before we accept anything as certain there must be an examination of our beliefs according to the most stringent standards of rational criticism.\* This attitude of Shaftesbury towards what we think to be true was reinforced through his acquaintance with the arch-sceptic of his day, Pierre Bayle, with whom Shaftesbury

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\* According to the definition of Shaftesbury's rationalism provided above, the questions which the rationalist will ask about his beliefs will be - What evidence have I for this belief? Is it rationally self-evident? Is it logically derived from that which is rationally self-evident? If a positive answer can not be given in relation to one of the latter two questions it can not be said to be rationally justifiable.



maintained a correspondence after meeting him during his stay in Holland 1698/99. Of Bayle's scepticism Shaftesbury wrote,

And if that philosophy, whatever it be, which keeping in bounds of decency, examines things after this manner, be esteemed injurious to religion or mankind, and be accordingly banished from the world, I can foresee nothing but darkness and ignorance that must follow.<sup>13</sup>

Shaftesbury looked to Bayle's scepticism as a legitimate means of preventing the continuance of unjustifiable beliefs - the "darkness and ignorance" mentioned above. However, unlike the sceptics, Shaftesbury did not deny the possibility of a known truth. His aim, as we saw above, was to rescue his philosophy from "an endless scepticism introduced." Although he says that Bayle's scepticism is a guard against "darkness and ignorance", when Shaftesbury considers classical scepticism, "that mere sceptic, and new Academic", he says that "it had no certain precepts, and was an exercise or sophistry rather than philosophy."<sup>14</sup> He scorns the classical sceptics because, in his view, they rejected the possibility of a known truth. At the same time, he could admire the scepticism of his friend, Bayle, because it was "improving":

Whatever opinion of mine stood not the test of his [Bayle's] piercing reason, I learned by degrees either to discard as frivolous, or not to rely on them with that boldness

as before; but that which bore the trial I prized  
as purest gold.<sup>15</sup>

Scepticism was a testing ground, a means of distinguishing between the certain and the uncertain. But according to the arguments of scepticism, nothing can be certain (not even the holding of uncertainty). This being the case, we must go on to ask the following questions: How does Shaftesbury escape the conclusions of the sceptics (if he does) when he had so much sympathy for the rational procedures of scepticism? How and where does Shaftesbury discover the certainty which he pursued? Answering these questions will be the task of the next section of the present chapter.

### - III -

The argument of the present section will be that as a rationalist Shaftesbury was led towards sceptical conclusions in questions of epistemology. However, as a moralist, Shaftesbury was prepared to regard epistemological questions as irrelevant to his enquiries. He is prepared to recognise moral certainty in judgements concerning how we ought to feel and act, and he regards this certainty as unaffected by any

epistemological doubts that we might have.\*

Shaftesbury suggests that if we are to know anything with certainty, it is necessary to understand that part of us which thinks. It is necessary to know our minds, how they work, and how we can be sure that the mind's thoughts can be trusted. Without this prerequisite, we can never be said to know anything with certainty:

.... it must, in strictness, be yielded that all knowledge whatsoever depends upon this previous one "and that we can in reality be assured of nothing till we are first assured of what we are ourselves." For by this alone we can know what certainty and assurance is.<sup>16</sup>

Proceeding then to consider whether or not knowledge of the self is possible, Shaftesbury begins by accepting the existence of a self: "That there is something undoubtedly which thinks, our very doubt itself and scrupulous thought evinces." However although he does not allow sceptical questioning to deny the existence of the mind or self, Shaftesbury is less certain concerning what the mind is. Having accepted the existence of something which thinks, Shaftesbury continues,

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\* Like the sceptics, Shaftesbury recognised that our knowledge of the external (material) world has no rational certainty.



But in what subject that thought resides, and how that subject is continued one and the same, so as to answer constantly to the supposed train of thoughts or reflections which seem to run so harmoniously through a long course of life, with the same relation still to one single and self-same person, this is not a matter so easily or hastily decided....

The reason for his difficulty in the problem of identity is that although we know of the mind because we think, our thoughts are only memories (which may be false). "We may believe we have thought and reflected thus or thus; but we may be mistaken. We may be conscious of that as truth which perhaps was no more than dream." Consequently, we can be sure of nothing more than the fact that the mind exists. We cannot be sure of any of its thoughts, nor can we be sure that it is the same mind from one day to the next (or even from one moment to the next). This, Shaftesbury says,

is what metaphysicians mean when they say "that identity can be proved only by consciousness, but that consciousness, withal, may be as well false as real in respect of what is past."<sup>17</sup>

If this is true (and Shaftesbury accepts it) then we can have no certain knowledge (which depends upon knowledge of what we are ourselves). Thus, for Shaftesbury, epistemological enquiry provides no certain basis for knowledge. However, this does not lead him to the rejection of the possibility of moral

certainly. As we shall see, Shaftesbury rejects epistemology as unsatisfactory - an insufficient tool which does not take into consideration what for Shaftesbury was a central characteristic of the thinking process (viz. that men act upon the knowledge they have as if it were certain).

Such is Shaftesbury's antipathy towards epistemological enquiries - which, as we have seen, provide no certainty for him - that where he sees philosophy concentrating upon them, it is the "empty regions and shadows of philosophy". He states that if one wishes to "usefully philosophise" it is only necessary "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."<sup>18</sup> Having recognised this, one can go on to discover something which is "useful". Thus, although he accepts the inability of reason to decide the truth of our thoughts about the self, Shaftesbury continues,

To the force of this reasoning I confess I must so far submit as to declare that, for my own part, I take my being upon trust. Let others philosophise as they are able: I shall admire their strength when, upon this topic, they have refuted what able metaphysicians object and Pyrrhonists plead in their own behalf.

Meanwhile there is no impediment, hindrance, or suspension of action on account of these wonderfully

refined speculations. Argument and debate go on still. Conduct is settled. Rules and measures are given out and received. Nor do we scruple to act as resolutely upon the mere supposition that we are, as if we had effectually proved it a thousand times, to the full satisfaction of our metaphysical or Pyrrhonian antagonist.<sup>19</sup>

Here we see Shaftesbury abandoning any hope of absolute certainty for the ideas and opinions which we have in our minds (for he confesses that we cannot know enough about the mind itself). Consequently, if philosophy is understood to be the pursuit of certain knowledge concerning these ideas, philosophy is of no interest to Shaftesbury. Let others philosophise as they are able; but he will not participate. His reason for this lack of interest is that he does not think that such enquiries can ever be brought to a conclusion, and doubt will be left to prevail. On the other hand, if Shaftesbury is to be regarded as a philosopher - and he does feel that his writings are philosophical - then it must be within the context of his own definition of the true purpose of philosophy, which ".... raises and exalts our minds by subduing our Passions to the government of Reason and refining 'em by a nice and delicate Perception heighten'd by Reflection."<sup>20</sup> We see that when Shaftesbury directs us towards the activity of "usefully philosophising", he is concerned with the ethical problem of



controlling our desires and directing our actions. He is not primarily concerned with the epistemological problems of philosophy. In fact, he has declared them irrelevant; for meanwhile, as the philosophers argue about these problems, the rest of the world settle rules of conduct. As a "moralist" Shaftesbury wishes to understand this latter activity; and in contrast to philosophers who are concerned with the discovery of ultimate truths, Shaftesbury points to the rest of the world continuing to make practical decisions concerning how to act. People arrive at conclusions about practical concerns as if the philosophical problem of identity did not exist. Rather than becoming involved in what he thought to be useless philosophical (epistemological) debate, Shaftesbury turned his attention towards a study of the reasons why we act in one way rather than another. The title of his collected essays is, after all, The Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc. This is significant, for it points to the fact that Shaftesbury's intention was to examine that which characterises the thoughts and activities of all men, not just philosophers. All men consider what to do, and how to do it, even though the knowledge upon which they reach their

conclusions has no ultimate rational justification. Shaftesbury wished to examine this activity of practical reasoning.

The first characteristic of practical reasoning is that man assumes that he has an identity, or self. Within the self there are 1) desires or appetites, which Shaftesbury terms "affections", and 2) opinions concerning which appetites, when fulfilled, provide us with happiness. This, Shaftesbury feels, is all that is required to obtain that certainty which is evidently lacking in epistemological enquiry. "This to me appears sufficient ground for a moralist. Nor do I ask more when I undertake to prove the reality of virtue and morals."<sup>21</sup>

In order to demonstrate this Shaftesbury begins with the affections, which are emotional reactions to experience described as follows:

The affections of which I am conscious are either grief or joy, desire or aversion. For whatever mere sensation I may experience, if it amounts to neither of these, 'tis indifferent and no way affects me.<sup>22</sup>

The presence of some objects provides us with joy, and these we desire; that is, we wish to possess them. Others cause grief, as a consequence of which we have an aversion towards them. Like and dislike, desire and aversion, are the two

basic desires or affections. However, the satisfaction of desire does not necessarily guarantee happiness. For man has a multiplicity of affections towards various objects. Therefore, men must make choices between alternative courses of action; they must make choices between desires, and judge which affections will provide them with maximum happiness before they act. Therefore our opinion concerning which affections provide happiness becomes all important:

So that the affections of love and hatred, liking and dislike, on which the happiness or prosperity of the person so much depends, being influenced and governed by opinion, the highest good or happiness must depend on right opinion and the highest misery be derived from wrong.<sup>23</sup>

Because the choice of affections or desires may be based upon incorrect opinion, it is possible to like (expect joy from) that which is incapable of providing satisfaction, and happiness may not be achieved. For happiness can only be found when we have correct opinions concerning which affections will bring about the realisation of joy and avoidance of grief. Shaftesbury's intention is to show where correct opinion lies (i.e. which affections towards which objects will provide us with happiness). In so doing, he also presents us with the claim



that those opinions which make us happy are moral opinions, and that the affections chosen by right opinion are moral affections; that is, to be happy we must be moral.

In order to show where correct opinion lies, Shaftesbury first considers the view that happiness lies in externals, and the preference which would be given in this case to desires for "plate, jewels, apartments, coronets, patents of honour, titles, or precedencies." This, Shaftesbury tells us, cannot be the basis of happiness. For when we act upon desires for these objects, there will always be something beyond our reach even though we desire it. Unfulfilled desire will then mean dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Also, if our satisfaction lies in fulfilling our desires towards external objects, we will be constantly plagued by the fear of losing that which we have already attained. Shaftesbury asks,

.... if the passion raised on this opinion (call it avarice, pride, vanity, or ambition) be indeed incapable of any real satisfaction, even under the most successful course of fortune; and then too, attended with perpetual fears of disappointment and loss, how can the mind be other than miserable when possessed by it?<sup>24</sup>

From this it is possible to conclude that Shaftesbury thinks that we can not be happy when our desires are directed towards



external things.

To be happy Shaftesbury says that we must desire something which we can be sure of attaining. This will be something within our control at all times. That which is within our control is the affections and opinions towards externals. It is these that must be controlled by a higher opinion and a higher affection.\* Shaftesbury tells us that we are able to distinguish between moral and non-moral desires, as a consequence of which we can say whether or not the opinions which advocate the fulfilment of certain desires are right or wrong. If our opinion is that we should choose between moral and non-moral desires, it is possible to do so. This is the higher opinion. The higher affection is the placing of our satisfaction in this choice; that is, that we desire to act morally, and satisfy this desire when we control those opinions and affections which refer to sensual and other external objects:

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\* "In a creature capable of forming general notions of things, not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense are the objects of affection, but the very actions themselves, and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude, and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects. So that, by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt, and are now become the subject of a new liking or dislike."  
Characteristics I, 251.

The method, therefore, required in this my inward economy, is to make those fancies themselves the objects of my aversion which justly deserve it, by being the cause of a wrong estimation and measure of good and ill, and consequently the cause of my unhappiness and disturbance.<sup>25</sup>

Happiness becomes for Shaftesbury the possession of a particular type of personality or character, achieved by "placing worth or excellence .... in the affections or sentiments, in the governing part and inward character ...."<sup>26</sup> We must now ask, what makes some desires or affections moral, and others non-moral?

Assuming the individual can isolate himself from the affections and opinions which determine how we act, Shaftesbury tells us (in his Soliloquy) that the individual can "apostrophise" them. The individual becomes an observer, through introspection, of his own make-up:

.... by a certain powerful figure of inward rhetoric the mind apostrophises its own fancies, raises them in their proper shapes and personages, and addresses them familiarly, without the least ceremony or respect. By this means it will soon happen that two formed parties will erect themselves within.<sup>27</sup>

As a neutral observer man can study his opinions (fancies) concerning his happiness. He will see that these opinions are supported by one of two factors (two formed parties) -

Appetite and Reason. If they are supported by our appetite they will be concerned only with externals. Our opinion will be that we should pursue the objects of our immediate desires, and "we are necessarily exposed to endless vexation and calamity."<sup>28</sup> However, if our opinions are supported by our reason, they will be moral. Reason, therefore, becomes the deciding factor concerning whether our opinion (and the affection to which it relates) should be supported by the higher opinion and higher affection. How our reason distinguishes the moral from the non-moral is never made clear by Shaftesbury.\* In relation to this introspective morality which recommends that we should place our satisfaction in the possession of moral opinion, it seems that reason is capable of recognising moral truth in an opinion or desire because it is self-evident. We can "see" the truth when it is placed under the critical light of our reason. There can be no doubt, however, that Shaftesbury believed that when we allow reason to take control, we will be happy:

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\* It might even be suggested that it is not reason at all that distinguishes between good and evil. As we shall see in Section IV of this Chapter, and in Chapter Five, Shaftesbury also refers us to a non-rational moral sense which is seen to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil.



.... if I join the opinion of good to the possessions of the mind, if it be in the affections themselves that I place my highest joy, and in those objects, whatever they are, of inward worth and beauty (such as honesty, faith, integrity, friendship, honour), 'tis evident I can never possibly, in this respect, rejoice amiss or indulge myself too far in the enjoyment.<sup>29</sup>

If, as Shaftesbury says, such noble things as beauty and goodness can only be enjoyed "by the help of what is noblest [in man], his mind and reason,"<sup>30</sup> then the emergence of "my highest joy" is dependent upon reason.\* The opinions and desires that we decide to retain will be rational and moral; for reason will point out that we should not approve of those opinions "which justly deserve it, by being the cause of a wrong estimation and measure of good and ill, and consequently the cause of my unhappiness and disturbance."<sup>31</sup>

Shaftesbury felt that he had found a means of obtaining moral certainty as a by-product of the pursuit of happiness.\*\* We are told that we will find happiness in the successful pursuit of attainable goals (i.e. the control of opinions and

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\* It should be added that when Shaftesbury uses the concept of "beauty" he is normally referring to something which is appreciated by other means than reason. - See Section IV of this chapter. However, Shaftesbury is by no means consistent in this.

\*\* Concerning Shaftesbury's attitudes towards happiness as the product of morality, see Chapter Five below.



affections). In pursuing these goals we will know that we are being virtuous. His final answer to the epistemological arguments of scepticism is as follows:

..... let us carry scepticism ever so far, let us doubt, if we can, of everything about us, we cannot doubt of what passes within ourselves. Our passions and affections are known to us. They are certain, whatever the objects may be on which they are employed. Nor is it of any concern to our argument how these exterior objects stand: whether they are realities or mere illusions; whether we wake or dream. For ill dreams will be equally disturbing; and a good dream (if life be nothing else) will be easily and happily passed. In this dream of life, therefore, our demonstrations have the same force; our balance and economy hold good, and our obligation to virtue is in every respect the same.<sup>32</sup>

When Shaftesbury here states that we cannot doubt of what passes within ourselves, he is talking about the knowledge we have of our opinions and affections. However, as we have already seen above, "we may believe we have thought and reflected thus or thus; but we may be mistaken." Knowledge of our opinions and affections is not accepted upon rational grounds, but on grounds of necessity. It is a necessary presupposition which all men make when they consider what to do. Being is taken "upon trust". Given this, Shaftesbury tells us that we can become both moral and happy by making a choice between good and bad opinion and desire. These choices are certain and in making

them we become virtuous. The uncertainty of our knowledge of the external world is irrelevant. Firstly, because we refuse to allow the external world to be relevant to our satisfaction. Secondly, because virtue, the choice of beliefs and affections in the certain knowledge that they are moral, lies in the intention rather than the consequences of our actions.\* It lies in correct opinion concerning what is to be loved or hated, not in the success we have in performing moral actions:

For if we will suppose a man who, being sound and entire both in his reason and affection, has nevertheless so depraved a constitution or frame of body that the natural objects are, through his organs of sense, as through ill glasses, falsely conveyed and misrepresented, 'twill be soon observed, in such a person's case, that since his failure is not in his principal or leading part, he cannot in himself be esteemed iniquitous or unjust.<sup>33</sup>

Whether our knowledge of the external world is correct or not, we can still achieve moral certainty through our ability to

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\* "For wrong is not such action as is barely the cause of harm (since at this rate a dutiful son aiming at an enemy, but by mistake or ill chance happening to kill his father, would do a wrong), but when anything is done through insufficient or unequal affection (as when a son shows no concern for the safety of a father; or, where there is need of succour, prefers an indifferent person to him) this is of the nature of wrong." Characteristics, I, 253.

distinguish between good or bad intention within ourselves.

- III -

A modern critic of Shaftesbury's philosophy has stated that "Shaftesbury's lack of interest in the technical issues of epistemology .... is to be explained in part by a strong strain of skepticism," and that "the problem that primarily concerns him is not the reality but the nature of the self."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Sidgwick wrote that, "The appearance of Shaftesbury's Characteristics marks a turning point in the history of English ethical thought. .... the consideration of abstract rational principles falls into the background, and its place is taken by an introspective study of the human mind ...."<sup>35</sup> Shaftesbury's reason for taking this approach lies in his recognition of a practical (or moral) reasoning as characteristic to the thinking processes of all men:

It will be acknowledged that a creature such as man, who from several degrees of reflection has risen to that capacity which we call reason and understanding, must in the very use of this his reasoning faculty be forced to receive reflections back into his mind of what passes in itself, as well as in the affections or will; in short, of whatsoever relates to his character, conduct, or behaviour amidst his fellow-creatures in society.<sup>36</sup>



When men do this, the self (the mind and its contents) is presupposed; this being a necessary presupposition which is either consciously or unconsciously made by us all: "So far are we from being able to be sure when we have a mind [or knowledge]; that indeed we can never be thoroughly sure, but then only when we can't help it, and find of necessity we must be so, whether we will or not."<sup>37</sup> Upon the basis of the necessary presupposition that we have an identity, Shaftesbury attempted to outline an introspective moral method by means of which we can become both virtuous and happy.

By pointing to the necessary acceptance of the self as a basis for formulating a theory of moral certainty, Shaftesbury thought that he had met the epistemological arguments of scepticism.

'Tis therefore to satisfy such rigid inquirers as these [Pyrrhonists], that we have been necessitated to proceed by the inward way; and .... have built only on such foundations as are taken from our very perceptions, fancies, appearances, affections and opinions themselves, without regard to anything of an exterior world, and even on the supposition that there is no such world in being.<sup>38</sup>

However, this having been done, Shaftesbury leaves us in no doubt that there is more to his moral enquiries than the introspective moral theory outlined in Section II above. He



regards his defence of morality against sceptical arguments to have been a "dry task", and considers it easier perhaps "to make brick without straw .... than to prove morals without a world." In fact, it is ridiculous to think about morality, about how we ought to act, without considering the environment within which our actions take place. Just as men necessarily accept the reality of the mind and its contents when they think about how to act, they also accept the reality of their environment; and Shaftesbury is prepared to do the same: "We are henceforward to trust our eyes and take for real the whole creation, and the fair forms which lie before us."<sup>39</sup> When he does this, Shaftesbury opens to himself a whole new field for moral enquiry.

If we accept the external world (Nature), then it is possible, Shaftesbury tells us, to "inquire what is truly natural to each creature." For, "To deny there is anything properly natural (after the concessions already made) would be undoubtedly very preposterous and absurd."<sup>40</sup> Each species of animal may therefore be seen to have a certain "inward disposition" which directs it towards certain forms of activity which are natural to it. This "inward disposition" is the

presence of certain affections or desires which direct the creature towards its natural ends. These ends are, according to Shaftesbury, social ends. When a person acts socially he is acting naturally:

The social or natural affections, which our author considers as essential to the health, wholeness, or integrity of the particular creature, are such as contribute to the welfare and prosperity of that whole or species, to which he is by Nature joined. All the affections of this kind our author comprehends in that single name of natural.<sup>41</sup>

When a creature acts naturally, it is acting according to the precepts of reason. For there is a rational purpose which exists within and controls the whole of Nature: ".... the nature of the universe is intelligent, and therefore there is a universal intelligent and provident principle."<sup>42</sup> Being controlled by reason, "all it [Nature] produces is to its own advantage and good, the good of all in general; and what is for the good of all in general is just and good."<sup>43</sup> Man, because he possesses reason, can also be moral. He can, as we saw in the last section, distinguish between moral and non-moral affections.

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\* See below, Chapters Two, Three and Four, for a discussion of the reasons why Shaftesbury accepted this interpretation of Nature, and for an analysis of the implications of this belief.

However, moral desires or affections can now be termed natural affections. Man can also look beyond himself to the external world, and attempt to discover there the rational purposes of nature. By studying the external world it is possible to see that man's nature is to be a social being, and to conclude from this that, "If the affection be equal, sound, and good, and the subject of the affection such as may with advantage to society be ever in the same manner prosecuted or affected, this must necessarily constitute what we call equity and right in any action."<sup>44</sup> Affections are good when they pursue the "advantage of society" because this is what Nature intended for man. Man can appreciate this when he accepts the evidence of the senses and studies what is natural to the human species.

We can now see that as well as moralising independently of externals (Sect. II) Shaftesbury also claims that it is possible to discover our purpose in the external world by studying the human species. Consequently, it is possible to contrast in Shaftesbury an introspective orientation with one that concentrates upon externals. It might be argued that the two are brought together within Shaftesbury's use of "reason". Reason, being a product of the general mind, can recognise the moral (natural) affections in two ways:



- 1) by introspection reason "sees" the moral affections. As far as we can tell, when Shaftesbury refers to reason in this context, its truths are self-evident.

and

- 2) by the study of externals. Reason can recognise (self-evidently it seems) that the moral end of man lies in pursuing the good of the species. From this, we can logically derive that the natural affections are those which pursue this end.

However, Shaftesbury is by no means consistent in this. In discussing the concept of "reason" as it is found in Shaftesbury in Section I above, mention was made in a footnote that Shaftesbury's means of distinguishing the truth is sometimes based upon a non-rational "sense". It is this important contrast between the "rational" and "non-rational" elements in Shaftesbury's thought which will be discussed in the next section.

#### - IV -

Sir Leslie Stephen wrote that Shaftesbury's philosophy is based upon an appeal to "common sense". English sobriety, and the Englishman's fear of making a fool of himself, has checked the nation's philosophical ambition - this was Stephen's opinion. As a consequence of this,

.... in England, attempts at a priori philosophy have taken the form of an appeal to common sense. We cannot be exposed to ridicule when we are ostensibly



endeavouring to confirm everybody's opinion ....  
 This thoroughly English conviction, which thus tries  
 to convert the vox populi into the vox Dei, seems  
 to have been first made popular in the eighteenth  
 century by Shaftesbury.<sup>45</sup>

According to Stephen, Shaftesbury was writing for an audience  
 whom he hoped would appreciate his ideas because they could  
 be confirmed by the readers' experience. This is undoubtedly  
 true. Within this context his acceptance of both his identity  
 and the reality of the external world as appreciated through  
 the senses (despite the rational arguments of sceptical epis-  
 temology) might be said to be based upon common sense. How-  
 ever, the vox populi is not for Shaftesbury a basis of moral  
 truth, if mere popular assent is all that it refers to. This  
 can be seen if we look at the following statement from his  
Sensus Communis:

If by the word sense we were to understand opinion  
 and judgement, and by the word common the generality  
 of any considerable part of mankind, 'twould be hard  
 .... to discover where the subject of common sense  
 could lie. For that which was according to the  
 sense of one part of mankind, was against the sense  
 of another. And if the majority were to determine  
 common sense, it would change as often as men  
 changed. That which was according to common sense  
 to-day, would be contrary to-morrow, or soon after.<sup>46</sup>

If we accept this definition of common sense (i.e. as the

majority opinion or vox populi), then it can not be taken as a foundation of moral truth - unless truth in the moral sphere can mean different things from one day to the next. For Shaftesbury, moral truth is something which has permanent validity. Consequently, when Shaftesbury says that a person who is "good and honest" is acting according to "common sense"<sup>47</sup>, the term is not being used as the equivalent of majority opinion.

Common sense is taken by Shaftesbury to be a "sense of public weal, and of the common interest; love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness, or that sort of civility which rises from a just sense of the common rights of mankind, and the natural equality there is among those of the same species."<sup>48</sup> Common sense is, therefore, an emotional attraction towards the "common interest". It can function as a moral instrument because it is able to recognise those affections which direct us towards this common interest. As such it may also be described as the moral sense\*,

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\* Although Shaftesbury did not use either of these terms (common sense or moral sense) more than a few times in the whole of his writings, as his editor Robertson points out, the expression, moral sense, "appears to have been first introduced into ethics by Shaftesbury," (Characteristics, I, 262, footnote); and Shaftesbury's disciple, Hutcheson, made the idea of a moral sense central to his own ethical writings.

providing us with an attraction towards the moral opinions and affections, and aversion towards the non-moral.\* It is not rational, but emotional (distinguishing between good and evil by attraction or aversion). That it is possessed by all men, is not a rational faculty, and provides us with a means of distinguishing between the moral and non-moral, is evident from the following statement:

.... a common honest man, whilst left to himself, and undisturbed by philosophy and subtle reasonings about his interest, gives no other answer to the thought of villainy than that he cannot possibly find in his heart to set about it, or conquer the natural aversion he has to it. And this is natural and just.<sup>49</sup>

This is Shaftesbury's description of the moral or common sense in action; and it is this "sense" which often appears to replace reason when Shaftesbury uses the introspective method discussed in Section II above - termed by him, "soliloquy", or discussion with oneself. Therefore, it is not necessarily reason which distinguishes between right and wrong opinion,

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\* "That which being present can never leave the mind at rest, but must of necessity cause aversion, is its ill." Characteristics, II, 276.



but may be an innate\* attraction towards that which is moral. Consequently, we must conclude that Shaftesbury does not take a consistent approach when attempting to justify the possibility of introspective moral choices.

When Shaftesbury approaches the problem of making moral choices in an emotional manner, he has a tendency to use aesthetic concepts in an attempt to explain how the moral sense functions. We are told that we can distinguish between the moral and the immoral because of the beauty and harmony which are evident in moral opinions and affections. This aspect of Shaftesbury's thought will be discussed in Chapter Five below. However, at this point it is possible to say that Shaftesbury's use of aesthetic concepts in a theory of morals does not relate to the use of reason. Appreciation of beauty is a non-rational means of distinguishing between moral and non-moral. Because of this, there is a tension in Shaftesbury's philosophy between the claims of the rational and the claims of the non-

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\* I use the term "innate" at this point because Shaftesbury gives no explanation concerning the source of the moral sense. In Chapter Five we shall see that Shaftesbury did think of our attraction towards morality as innate, although he preferred the term, "connatural".



rational, and it is possible to conclude that in Shaftesbury's writings we find not one, but two theories of morality. The first claims to be rational. Reason can distinguish between right and wrong opinion even without reference to the material world. Also, if we refer to the external world, reason can distinguish between natural and unnatural actions. The second is a non-rational theory which refers to what may be called common sense, or moral sense, or aesthetic sense. (The last of these terms was never used by Shaftesbury himself, but conveys his meaning well). The moral sense distinguishes between good and bad affections because we have an attraction to the beautiful (i.e. the moral) and an aversion to the ugly (i.e. the immoral). In the external world the moral sense distinguishes between beautiful and ugly actions. The difficulty with Shaftesbury is that he himself does not make a distinction between rational and non-rational approaches. He frequently alternates between the two without warning the reader, and the rational and the non-rational become irretrievably intermixed. We can suggest two possible reasons for this. Firstly, Shaftesbury was possessed with a desire to make his writings acceptable to his readers. For this reason he attempts to avoid being either systematic or dogmatic, derides

the idea of a philosophical "system"\*, and tries to avoid a strict method (See Chapter Six).\*\* In this manner he hoped to take moral enquiry out of the philosopher's study and into the gentleman's drawing room. Secondly, Shaftesbury's writings may be regarded as a prolonged attack upon that form of philosophy which saw in egoism the best explanation of human action.<sup>+</sup> Consequently, he draws together as many arguments as possible in support of his claim that man fulfils his nature when he pursues social ends. Thus, we note that the moral or common sense is defined as that which directs mankind towards the social welfare. Therefore, actions directed by the moral sense

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- \* "Men indeed may, in a serious way, be so wrought on and confounded, by different modes of opinion, different systems and schemes imposed by authority that they may wholly lose all notion or comprehension of truth." Characteristics, I, 65.
- \*\* ".... if rational discourses (especially those of deeper speculation) have lost their credit, and are in disgrace because of their formality; there is reason for more allowance in the way of humour and gaiety. An easier method of treating these subjects will make them more agreeable and familiar." Characteristics, I, 54.
- + That Shaftesbury does not entirely escape from this orientation can be seen from the fact that he associates morality with the pursuit of happiness. In Section II of the present Chapter we saw that Shaftesbury presents morality as the means of achieving personal happiness. In Chapter Four it will be seen that Shaftesbury refers to happiness as a basis for moral obligation.

pursue the same ends as those which are recommended by his rational theory. The difficulty in understanding Shaftesbury is that he refers to both without distinction.

- V -

In addition to condemning Shaftesbury for his lack of consistency in appealing to rational and non-rational principles of morality, it is also possible to claim that, despite his proclaimed intention to question all things, he is a dogmatic thinker. In the first place, he disregards epistemological problems rather than solving them; and dogmatically states that we are to accept both personal identity and externals. Secondly, the moral sense (which is itself non-rational) does not appear to have any justification other than the fact that Shaftesbury asserts that it exists (although he no doubt expects us to confirm its existence by discovering it within ourselves). Thirdly, he develops an intricate metaphysics concerning the harmony of the cosmos even though he rejects philosophical "systems".\*

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\* In Chapter Two the theological basis of Shaftesbury's cosmological theories will be discussed in the context of his relationship to the Cambridge Platonists. In Chapter Three the "rational" aspects of the perfectly organised cosmos are analysed.



Shaftesbury himself recognised these difficulties, but accepted them rather than attempt to resolve them. In the Miscellaneous Reflections we find Shaftesbury criticising himself in the following manner:

Notwithstanding the high airs of scepticism which our author assumes in the first piece [A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm], I cannot, after all, but imagine that even there he proves himself at the bottom a real dogmatist, and shows plainly that he has his private opinion, belief, or faith, as strong as any devotee or religionist of them all. Though he affects perhaps to strike at other hypotheses and schemes, he has something of his own still in reserve, and holds a certain plan or system peculiar to himself, or such at least in which he has at present but few companions or followers.<sup>50</sup>

However, in spite of his recognition of dogmatism in his own theories, Shaftesbury felt himself justified because he was keeping his assumptions down to a necessary minimum: "... and though I may hold some principles perhaps tenaciously, they are, however, so very few, plain, and simple that they serve to little purpose towards the great speculations in fashion in the world."<sup>51</sup> Shaftesbury is saying that he is dogmatic, but not as dogmatic as most philosophers. For the few, plain, and simple principles that he accepts are only those which are necessary to the formation of a moral outlook - a task undertaken by all men. They are the assumptions of practical reason - assumptions



which must be made before we can think about how we ought to act. These may be listed as follows:

- 1) acceptance of the self (identity).
- 2) acceptance of the external world as appreciated through the senses.
- 3) the assumption that we have within us a means of distinguishing between the moral and the non-moral.

The third of these assumptions has both rational and non-rational aspects in Shaftesbury's thought, for which reason it is possible to divide his philosophy into two parts. Common to both these orientations is the dual approach towards discovering grounds for moral action:

- 1) examination of internal ideas and desires (opinions and affections).
- 2) examination of the external world, conceived as an organised whole.

It is possible to consider these as two separate approaches to morality. Why are they found together in Shaftesbury's philosophy? Who were Shaftesbury's intellectual mentors? In an attempt to answer these questions, the next chapter will consider Shaftesbury as a product of post-Renaissance Platonic thought.

SUMMARY:

Beginning with Shaftesbury's "unquestioning faith in reason" (Greene) the present chapter has tried to discover how Shaftesbury attempted to obtain certain knowledge of moral truth. Convinced that many of our ideas are unjustifiable, Shaftesbury advocated a constant questioning, criticism, and doubt which by his own admission at times appears to lead him towards scepticism. However, Shaftesbury was not prepared to accept the epistemological conclusions of scepticism in so far as they fail to help men solve their moral problems. Thus, despite the fact that he can not find epistemological grounds for certain knowledge (for all is but memory, and memory may be false) Shaftesbury accepts as certain the thinking self. There is no epistemological justification for this. But epistemology is not considered by Shaftesbury to be relevant. For all men accept the self when they consider how they are going to act. In this sphere of what I have termed practical reasoning, Shaftesbury thought that it was possible to discover how we ought to act. It is possible, he tells us, to distinguish between good and bad opinions and affections when we examine the sources of action inside our minds. By doing this, and choosing the good against the bad,

we become virtuous and happy. When we find morality in this way, knowledge of the external environment is irrelevant because, a) virtue is found in the right choice of opinion concerning what is moral, in the intention rather than the consequences of action; and b) our happiness is made to depend upon moral choice within, as a consequence of which externals are irrelevant.

However, just as the practical reasoner accepts the self, Shaftesbury informs us that he accepts the evidence of the senses concerning the external world. Shaftesbury does the same; and having accepted Nature looks to see what is natural as a basis for moral action. Shaftesbury's belief that the natural is the moral is based upon his belief that the cosmos is a rationally organised whole, and that this rational whole is moral. To pursue our end as parts of this whole is to be moral.

Thus we have a dual basis for morality, internal and external. The ends of both approaches are the same - the common good of society. However, there are also "rational" and "non-rational" elements in Shaftesbury's thought. In his concept of the moral or common sense Shaftesbury introduces



into his thought a non-rational means of distinguishing between the moral and the non-moral. We are presented with a second philosophy in Shaftesbury, and this stands in contrast to the one which is based upon reason. Although these two theories will be dealt with separately in the present work, it is recognised that Shaftesbury never clearly distinguished between the two in his own writings.

Finally, the present chapter has pointed to the fact that Shaftesbury recognised that he was being dogmatic when he makes the assumptions upon which he formulates his theory of morality. But his dogmatism is only dogmatism when looked at from the standpoint of the epistemologist. However, as has been stressed, Shaftesbury was not interested in epistemology. He was not concerned with the question, "What is true, and how can we know it?". For Shaftesbury, the question is, "How can we become virtuous?". To answer this Shaftesbury looks at men as they decide how to act. He sees that all men make certain conscious or unconscious assumptions in this practical activity. Personal identity, the external world, and the ability to distinguish between moral and non-moral, are seen by him to be assumptions that are made by all men as they reason practically about how



they ought to act. These assumptions are also made by Shaftesbury, who uses them as a basis upon which to build his own moral theories.

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CHAPTER TWOSHAFTESBURY AND THE CAMBRIDGE PLATONISTS

## - I -

Platonism, which concentrates upon what may be discovered by means of introspection, produced the belief that Nature is necessarily a perfect whole. This occurred when the Christian intellect renewed its interest in Platonic writings during the fifteenth century and after. In the present chapter Shaftesbury's writings will be considered in the light of this post-Renaissance Platonic tradition.

However, we must begin by remembering that Platonism was not the first classical philosophy to capture the imagination of Christian writers after the Christian doctrine had been developed under the influence of Augustine. During the thirteenth century an attempt was made by Aquinas to introduce the philosophy of Aristotle into the body of Christian thought. It is as a consequence of the writings of Aquinas that we find in the late medieval period two distinct attitudes concerning man's ability to distinguish moral rules of conduct by means of his reason. The first finds its source in the philosophy of Augustine, the second in the philosophy of Aquinas. We shall

see below that, in spite of Augustine's admiration of Plato's thought, when Platonism renewed its influence in the fifteenth century (with the rediscovery of Plato's own writings), the new Platonists arrived at ethical conclusions which agree more with Aquinas than with the founding father of the Christian doctrine.

In the writings of Augustine we find expressed the view that man's corruption by original sin renders him incapable of rationally appreciating moral rules of conduct. The recommendation is made that we voluntarily\* accept both God and his will as revealed in the Scriptures. This emphasis upon obedience to the will of God, and the refusal to accept reason as a guide to moral values, is maintained in the late Middle Ages by the Nominalists. For men like Duns Scotus and William of Occam, the source of moral law is the will of God, existing only "because God so wills."<sup>1</sup>

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\* The term "voluntarism" is used in this chapter to describe the uncritical acceptance of religious and ethical beliefs upon the basis of faith alone. Because these beliefs are based upon faith, they are not open to rational criticism; for reason belongs to a separate sphere of human activity. Upon faith alone one voluntarily places oneself into unquestioning subjugation to the commands of God. (See also next footnote.)



In contrast to the "voluntarist" ethics of the Nominalists, Aquinas (under the influence of "the philosopher") introduces into his philosophy the "fundamental intellectualism of Greek thought."\* Human reason is seen by him to be the means whereby man can appreciate "natural law" (which is that part of God's "eternal law" that can be appreciated by human reason). God is regarded as supremely rational, as a consequence of which man can appreciate some of His wishes by means of his own reason:

Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence .... Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.<sup>2</sup>

According to this view moral law is brought within the scope of the human intellect. In the mind of man there can be found

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\* "The ethical systems developed by the Greek thinkers, Socrates and Democritus, Plato and Aristotle, Stoics and Epicureans, have a common feature. They are all expressions of one and the same fundamental intellectualism of Greek thought. It is by rational thought that we are to find the standards of moral conduct, and it is reason, and reason alone, that can give them their authority. In contrast with this Greek intellectualism prophetic religion is characterised by its deep and resolute voluntarism. God is a person - and that means a will.... It is from God himself, from the revelation of his will, not from dialectic, that man has to learn good and evil." Cassirer, The Myth of the State, 81/2.

the "general principles" of natural law which can be used as assumptions from which we can deduce maxims concerning moral conduct.\*

Although it has been claimed that by the fifteenth century "the monks and the Schoolmen had ceased to be a vital intellectual force,"<sup>3</sup> the debate between the "voluntarist" and the "intellectual" approaches to morality continued. The "notion of the moral law as the expression of the divine will passed over from the Nominalists to the Reformers - to Wycliff, and later on to Luther and Calvin."<sup>4</sup> Also, the idea that "will" rather than "reason" is the source of common standards finds a secular expression in the writings of Hobbes. Hobbes has been called "the nominalist of Occam's school,"<sup>5</sup> insofar as "his conception of law is a Nominalist conception."<sup>6</sup> On the other

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\* "The natural law is promulgated by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known by him naturally." Summa Theologica, I, 995 (II, i - Question 90, Art. 4): "... as on the part of speculative reason .... so too, on the part of practical reason, man has a natural participation of the eternal law, according to certain general principles, but not as regards the particular determinations of individual cases .... Hence the need for human reason to proceed further to sanction them by [human] law. Ibid., I, 998 (II, i - Question 91, Art. 3).

hand, in the persons of Hooker and Grotius we find a restatement of man's independent ability to find rational moral truths in natural law: "... the revival of natural law which takes place towards the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is essentially a rejection of the 'Nominalist' or 'voluntarist' theory of law."<sup>7</sup>

Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, Shaftesbury can also be seen taking an antithetical position to the post-Renaissance Nominalism. However, his form of intellectualism finds its source in Platonism. From the fifteenth century Platonism became an increasingly important intellectual force in Europe, offering an alternative form of Greek "intellectualism" for those thinkers who were opposed to Nominalism in either its theological or secular forms. With the Cambridge men in England we find an attempt to free Protestant thought from the limitations of voluntarist ethics that can be compared with the attempt made by Aquinas to qualify the voluntarism involved in the teachings of Augustine. Like Aquinas the Platonists pointed to what reason could discover within the self of the principles which a rational God has implanted



into human nature.\*

In spite of the difference between Plato and Aristotle, when the Christian mind came under their influence, each gave rise to a similar interpretation of the nature of the finite or temporal world and the role of man within it. This interpretation involves a qualification (if not a rejection) of Augustine's doctrine of original sin. According to Augustine, the finite world, with man, is corrupted. Human reason, whilst in the civitas terrena, cannot hope to discover anything of moral significance - unless it is by negative example. In contrast to this, when Christian thought comes under the influence of either Plato or Aristotle, God's will comes to be regarded as a necessarily rational will - to which man is related by his own possession of reason which allows him to appreciate moral truths. Those thinkers who take this "intellectual" approach can not accept the nominalist claim

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\* It could be suggested that in Shaftesbury's conception of the "connatural idea" we have an idea that is similar to the "general principles" of Aquinas. This will be brought to the reader's attention in Chapter Five below. However, at the moment we are concerned with the differences between voluntarism and intellectualism, not with similarities that might exist between Aquinas and Shaftesbury.

(made by Occam) that God might have willed the opposite to what he did and it would still be moral (See also Sections II and III below). In addition to this, that man is allowed to reason his way towards an understanding of moral rules suggests that the temporal environment is not as deeply entrenched in corruption as Augustine claimed. It might even be suggested that the finite realm is not corrupt, but is governed by God's eternal (rational) law. We certainly find this suggestion in Aquinas (although Aquinas rejects neither original sin nor the need for faith which is complementary to, and above, reason):

.... all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves.... Hence, corruption and defects in natural things are said to be contrary to some particular nature; yet they are in keeping with the plan of universal nature; inasmuch as the defect in one thing yields to the good of another, or even to the universal good: .... Since God, then, provides universally for all being, it belongs to His providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered, for if all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe.<sup>8</sup>

This belief that God organises Nature according to his "rational" will, as a consequence of which the cosmos evidences perfection rather than corruption, can also be found in the writings of the Platonists of the post-Renaissance period. Because of

this, Shaftesbury can attempt to interpret the parts of Nature according to their purpose without contradicting the introspective morality advocated by the Platonists. In so doing, Shaftesbury places himself in close affinity to the advocates of a natural law theory of morality, a relationship perhaps best shown by his numerous references to the writings of the Stoics - in whose philosophy it is possible to discover the origins of the ideas of natural law.<sup>9</sup> It should be remembered, however, that Shaftesbury never used the term "natural law" in his own writings.

Finally, it should be noted that the adaptation of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle to Christian theology resulted in an emphasis upon the importance of the individual. Emphasis is placed upon the individual firstly because, through the possession of reason, each person is made responsible for the discovery of those ethical truths in accordance with which he should conduct his life. Secondly, by emphasising the rationality of both man and God, Christian intellectualism (even if the doctrine of original sin was not denied) encouraged the view that the individual could achieve salvation independently of the dogma and organisation of a particular church. (This



might be said to be more true of Platonism than Aristotelianism to the extent that the latter had been adapted to Catholic doctrine under the influence of the Thomists). The tendency towards doctrinal independence can be seen in the De Docta Ignorantia of Nicolas of Cusa (c. 1400-1464). Nicolas never denied the doctrine of original sin, but stressed at the same time that man should use his reason in his search for an appreciation of God. His reason for this is as follows: Concerning the relationship between God and man he tells us that "there is no graduation from infinite [God] to finite [man]." <sup>10</sup> As a result, we can never successfully comprehend God, for human logic and human symbolism only have reference to the finite. Since no finite mind is capable of fully comprehending the divine, all explanations of God are inadequate. Consequently, there is no reason why the individual should necessarily accept the teachings of the Church which is only part of the finite environment. Each person must discover his own relationship with God through the use of his own faculties. It would be wrong to say that Cusanus drew out these conclusions himself. However, they are implicit to the "intellectualism" that is found in his writings. As Ernst Cassirer said:

Although Cusanus never doubted the doctrine of original sin, it seems to have lost for him the power that it had exerted on the whole of medieval thought and on its sense of life. The Pelagian spirit is awakening now, that spirit so bitterly fought by Augustine, whose polemics became the basis of medieval religious doctrine. Cusanus sharply emphasises the doctrine of man's freedom ....]]

When we consider the Cambridge Platonists the spiritual independence of the rational Christian from the limitations of temporal religious institutions must also be recognised as characteristic of their thought. They were not dissenters, but they advocated toleration. Theirs was a personal brand of religion which stressed the rational potential of man in both morals and religion. Combined with this is the belief, outlined above, that Nature is structured in conformity with both the reason and the will of God. In the remainder of the chapter the discussion will be directed towards an analysis of the doctrines of the Cambridge men in relation to their influence upon the ideas of Shaftesbury.

## - II -

It is not within the scope of this work to undertake a detailed analysis of the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists,\*

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\* The leading members of the school were Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), John Smith (1616-1652), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1685), Nathanael Culverwel (c. 1618-1651), and Henry More (1614-1687).

or the differences between the particular members of the school. However, they deserve a place in the discussion because they are a major source of influence upon the writings of Shaftesbury: "This much at least we can assert without qualification, that Shaftesbury was fundamentally a Cambridge Platonist."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Shaftesbury's first literary venture was to edit and provide the preface for Whichcote's Select Sermons (1698), and throughout his own writings Shaftesbury remains always under the influence of the school of which Whichcote is regarded as the founder. In the judgement of Ernst Cassirer, "It is principally Shaftesbury who saves the Cambridge School from the fate of learned curiosity and makes it a philosophic force in the centuries to come."<sup>13</sup> What Shaftesbury preserved of the Cambridge Platonist's philosophy may be generally stated as:

- 1) The Platonic belief that moral truth may be discovered by means of introspective analysis.
- 2) The acceptance of the cosmos as a rationally organised whole (created by God) in which all the parts are directed towards their particular ends in accordance with the universal design. To be moral, we must discover our natural ends, and pursue them.

Whether he is talking as a rationalist or not, Shaftesbury



maintains this dual approach to moral questions which is found in the Cambridge School. The present section will consider the first of these, the next section the latter.

In the words of Pawson, "In England the study of Greek humanism had arrived just in time to give the Reformation a surer basis than the matrimonial caprices of Henry VIII."<sup>14</sup> According to W.R. Inge, Platonism provided a theoretical basis for that independent attitude of mind which rejected the pre-suppositions,

- 1) that Christ wished to found a hierarchical corporation, with a divinely guaranteed monopoly of certain spiritual benefits.
- 2) that this corporation was intended to be a universal Caesarean empire embracing the whole world.<sup>15</sup>

In opposition to this the sanctity of individual reason is pronounced. Man is to be allowed to search for spiritual satisfaction of his own accord, by means of his reason, not the acceptance of the dogma of a particular school or sect. In the sixteenth century this intellectual independence is posited against papal dogma. However, the new vitality is above all dogma. English Platonism as it developed in the Cambridge School during the seventeenth century was aloof from the

sectarian disputes of that period. The Platonists "did not form a party, but a school of thought and a rule of life. Its adherents kindled no fires at Smithfield, and were seldom sent to suffer upon them."<sup>16\*</sup>

The rational potential ascribed to the individual, which allows him to discover moral truth within himself, is summed up in the following words of Benjamin Whichcote:

By Mind, and Undertaking, and Will, he [i.e. the individual] hath intercourse and communion with God, and things invisible; and by these he is fitted to improving all the lower Objects to Heavenly Ends and Purposes. .... by Sense, Imagination and brutish Affection, we can only maintain Acquaintance with this outward and lower World. By this Principle of Reason and Understanding, we are made capable of Religion. So that Man's peculiar Object and proper Business, is in things of the Mind; and therefore he ought to use those high Faculties of his Soul, to enquire after God, and find out Truth, and the Reason of Things; and consequently

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\* The Cambridge Platonists ".... felt that the life of the spirit was perishing in the spent air of polemic. Their aim was not to destroy, but to conserve and reinforce from within what they felt to be vital in the religious tradition.... They .... illustrate .... the tendency of advanced Protestant thought, after passing through its dogmatic post-Reformation phase, to reveal once again its rationalizing temper, and to fall thus into line with the general movement of the century." Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, 123/25.

after such enquiry, to determine himself in this Resolution and Choice, to Things according to their intrinsick worth and value.<sup>17</sup>

And John Smith, in his Discourse Concerning the Existence and Nature of God writes similarly,

.... He which reflects upon himself, reflects upon his own Originall, and finds the clearest Impression of some Eternall Nature and Perfect Being stamp'd upon his Soul. And therefore Plato seems sometimes to reprove the ruder sort of men in his times for their contrivance of Pictures and Images to put themselves in mind of the .... Angelicall Beings, and exhorts them to look into their own souls, which are the fairest Images not onely of the Lower divine Natures, but of the Deity it self ....<sup>18</sup>

From these two statements we see that the frame of mind of the Cambridge Platonists is a continuation of Platonic intellectualism. By means of an isolation of the spirit from matter, man is to use his reason introspectively in order to find truth within the self. Whichcote tells us that man's proper business is in things of the mind. We must reflect upon our own souls says Smith. For the human soul, when left to itself, will always exhibit rational activity,\* which is to pursue knowledge of both morality and God: "We alwaies find a restless

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\* See Phaedo 66C, 67A, 83, 94E; Republic X, 611; Cratylus 403E; Politicus 272E; Timaeus 42AB, 86, 88AB.



appetite within our selves which craves for some Supreme and Chief Good, and will not be satisfied with anything less than Infinity it self."<sup>19</sup>

In a similar manner, Shaftesbury writes that his concern is with "truth, reason, and right within self; and how to maintain this."<sup>20</sup> By thus concentrating upon the inner self we will be able to discover moral truth. We will be able to "solve the phenomena in a true sense: not the phenomena of the skies or meteors: not those in mathematics, mechanics, physics; not those which, by solving or unfolding ever so skilfully, one is neither better, nor happier, nor wiser, nor more a man of sense or worth ...."<sup>21</sup> Thus, to discover how to act morally, one must "Learn to be with self, to talk with self. Commune with thy own heart; be that thy companion."<sup>22</sup> Introspection will allow the individual to discover that "sense of right and wrong" which "being a first principle in our constitution and make, there is no speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it."<sup>23</sup> The essence of human kind - whether it be considered as mind, heart, or soul, or any combination of these - has within it the ability to recognise within itself standards by means of

which we can gauge the conduct of our lives.

In order to justify the discovery of truth within the self, the Cambridge Platonists revived the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis. Advocating the use of reason upon the divine part within the self - the soul - the Cambridge Platonists tell us that we may see the reflection of God and discover his moral (and rational) laws. This is their basis for rejecting the ethical theories of Hobbes,\* against which ".... Whichcote, Smith, More, and Cudworth all take up the same line of defence - the belief that there are 'innate ideas'\*\* of right and wrong, primary and ineradicable."<sup>24</sup> God has imprinted certain truths upon our souls which our reason is capable of discovering. Divine reason discovers the divine law within. At times the Cambridge men even suggest that man is capable of attaining comprehension of God himself. Smith stated that the soul is capable of flying upwards "till it be beyond all orbe of Finite Being, swallowed up in the boundless Abysss of Divinity."<sup>25</sup> (Smith). This, however, is not general. The reason of man is

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\* For Shaftesbury's antipathy towards the ideas of Hobbes see also Section III of this Chapter and Chapter Three below.

\*\* I will have more to say about the place of "innate ideas" in Shaftesbury's philosophy in Chapter Five below.

merely the "candle of the Lord", too weak to enable the individual to transcend his own consciousness and comprehend God. Man is only finite and, as such, can never fully comprehend the infinite. The reflected light of reason is unable to shine as strongly as its source, which is God, and is therefore unable to appreciate God in his entirety. Even so, by accepting as much as they did in relation to the power of reason, the Cambridge men become exponents of the intellectual autonomy of the individual in spiritual and moral affairs.

The principles of the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis are also applied by Shaftesbury, and he even goes so far as to compare the teacher of moral philosophy with a midwife. In The Moralists Shaftesbury says (through the mouth of Theocles),

You do well .... to give me the midwife's part only; for the mind conceiving of itself, can only be, as you say, assisted in the birth. Its pregnancy is from its nature. Nor could it ever have been thus impregnated by any other mind than that which formed it at the beginning ....<sup>26</sup> (Compare with the Theaetetus 150 CD).

Knowledge of morality exists within man as a potential which can be brought to light by introspection. By studying the contents of our minds we will be able to discern the principles of good and evil. Actions will be made according to knowledge



which is found within the self, and which is independent of all other considerations.

This expression of confidence in the ability of the rational individual to discover moral truth implies for both Shaftesbury and the Cambridge men a rejection of "command" in relation to moral activity. We are not moral just by doing as we are told - even if it is God who is doing the telling. According to Shaftesbury, any man who "cannot reflect on what he himself does, or sees others do, so as to take notice of what is worthy or honest .... has not the character of being virtuous."<sup>27</sup> The onus is on the individual to recognise "what is good or ill in the species or society. For of the reality of such a good and ill, no rational creature can possibly be insensible."<sup>28</sup> It is not God's command which makes something good, but its moral character. In this the Cambridge Platonists are in full agreement. Ralph Cudworth had written,

For wisdom in it self hath the nature of a rule and measure, it being a most determinate and inflexible thing; .... to make wisdom, knowledge and truth, to be arbitrarily determined by will, and to be regulated by such a plumbean and flexible rule as that is, is quite to destroy the nature of it."<sup>29\*</sup>

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\* The quotation here is taken from Cudworth's Treatise  
(Continued overleaf)

Reason is inflexible and must always operate in the same way. Therefore, if morality is rational (which is what the Cambridge Platonists assume), it must be unchanging and not dependent upon the fickle movements of a will: "... the natures of justice and injustice cannot be arbitrary things, that may be applicable by will indifferently to any actions or dispositions whatsoever."<sup>30</sup> (Cudworth). Morality is not based upon the will and command of God, but upon rationality. God's law is moral because God always acts rationally. Shaftesbury writes that, "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."<sup>31</sup> Virtue is not to be found in obedience to commands of the "supreme will", but in comprehension and acceptance of moral truth. In The Moralists Shaftesbury refers to his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit and says that in the latter work he was trying to show

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Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, written before 1688, but only published in 1731, eighteen years after Shaftesbury's death. However, as representative of the stream of Cambridge thought, I think that reference to this work is legitimate in the present context.

.... that it [i.e. virtue] 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.<sup>32</sup>

Even the Almighty is governed by moral law; and for the individual living within the finite realm, the existence of a rational ethics would appear to have more significance than the existence of God. Moral insight is even seen to be available to those who do not recognise the existence of God. Any creature with a "reflecting faculty" is capable of achieving moral knowledge and virtue.\* However, it should be noted that, as with the Cambridge Platonists, religion and morality

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\* "That it is possible for a creature capable of using reflection to have a liking or dislike of moral actions, and consequently a sense of right and wrong, before such time as he may have any settled notion of a God, is what will hardly be questioned; it being a thing not expected, or any way possible, that a creature such as man, arising from his childhood slowly and gradually to several degrees of reason and reflection, should at the very first be taken up with those speculations or more refined sort of reflections, about the subject of God's existence.

.... Before the time, therefore, that a creature can have any plain or positive notion one way or other concerning the subject of a God, he may be supposed to have an apprehension or sense of right and wrong, and be possessed of virtue and vice in different degrees .... Characteristics I, 266.



tend to be two sides of the same coin for Shaftesbury.\*

We do not become virtuous by obeying the commands of God. Virtue depends upon our distinguishing between the moral and non-moral ideas we have within by means of our reason - (for Shaftesbury, as we saw in the last chapter, the moral method is sometimes non-rational). Also, just as we do not act morally in obedience to God, we do not act morally through fear of Him. Shaftesbury writes in his "Preface" to the 1698 edition of Whichcote's sermons:

.... it is strange to conceive, how Men who pretend a Notion and Belief of a Supream Power acting with the greatest Goodness, and without any Inducement but that of Love and Good-will; would think it unsuitable to a Rational Creature, derived from Him, to act after His example; and to find Pleasure and Contentment in Works of Goodness and Bounty, without other Prospect. But, what is yet more unaccountable, is, that Men who profess a Religion where Love is chiefly enjoin'd .... should combine, to degrade the principle of Good-nature, and refer all to Reward; which being made the only motive in Men's Actions, must exclude all worthy and generous Disposition....33

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\* "But this is certain, that it can be no great strengthening to the moral affection, no great support to the pure love of goodness and virtue, to suppose there is neither goodness nor beauty in the Whole itself; nor any example or precedent of good affection in any superior Being." Characteristics I, 276.

Hope of reward, or fear of punishment, distributed by the divine hand of God either before or after death, are not for Shaftesbury the source of virtuous action.\* Virtue is dependent upon recognising the good within ourselves and acting upon it without hope of reward.

By postulating a relationship through reason between God and man the Cambridge Platonists allowed personal "intercourse and communion with God." However, they did not use this as a basis for a mystical rejection of the material world. They believed that knowledge of moral truth, which can be discovered within, went hand in hand with moral action. Hence, when Whichcote and his followers advocate the use of reason in an attempt to appreciate God, it is so that man may "determine himself in his Resolution and Choice, to Things according to their intrinsick worth and value," by means of which "he is fitted to improving all the lower Objects to Heavenly Ends and Purposes." (Whichcote - quoted above). The Cambridge Platonists do not

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\* "There is no more rectitude, piety, or sanctity in a creature thus reformed, than there is meekness or gentleness in a tiger strongly chained, or innocence and sobriety in a monkey under discipline of the whip." Characteristics I, 267.

recommend that contemplative indifference to the material world which overtook Aquinas towards the end of his life. Reason, which is "the Divine Governor of Man's Life; .... the very Voice of God,"<sup>34</sup> (Whichcote) enables us to discover practical moral rules within ourselves. "To be religious means that we live our lives according to the moral truths which we find within. "Religion," writes Whichcote, ".... is not a Notion; but the Frame and Temper of our Minds, and the Rule of our Lives."<sup>35</sup> The Cambridge men turn their attention away from heavenly things towards the world of men, and define religion as the pursuit of those activities which are defined as moral by the divine part, reason, within us. Also, moral knowledge that reason discovers is seen to necessitate moral action in the Socratic sense.\*

That Shaftesbury was concerned with practical knowledge which will help us to conduct our lives along moral lines was

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\* "For us, being able to define 'courage' or 'justice' is not even essentially connected with being courageous or just, so that intellectual clearness would bring men necessarily to the practice of virtue. For Socrates, however, these two things were essentially linked with one another." C. de Vogel, "Who Was Socrates?", Journal of the History of Philosophy (1963), 147.



outlined in Chapter One of this work. In so far as Shaftesbury is a theological writer, he also emphasises this point and insists that religion must be concerned with man's discovery, and the putting into practice, of moral truth. In the "Preface" to Whichcote's sermons (1698) Shaftesbury discusses the relationship between the moral character of man ("Good-nature") and religion. These, he says, can never be opposed:

As if Good-nature; and Religion, were Enemies: A Thing, indeed, so unthought of, amongst the Heathens; that PIETY (which was their best Word to signifie Religion) had more than half its Sence, in Natural and Good Affection; and stood not only for the Adoration and Worship of God; but for the Natural Affections of Parents to their Children, and of Children to their Parents; of Men to their Native Country; and, indeed, of all Men in their several Relations one to another.<sup>36</sup>

With Shaftesbury, the natural affections are those which are distinguished by reason (or, alternatively, by the "moral sense") as moral.\* In this quotation he is saying that religion must not deny man the possibility of discovering these affections within himself. Also, as with the Cambridge Platonists,

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\* More will be said about Shaftesbury's categorisation of the affections in Chapter Three below.

Shaftesbury believed that the possibility of moral knowledge implied the necessity of a consequent moral action. Immoral action is seen to be the result of a lack of knowledge: ".... every immorality and enormity of life can only happen from a partial and narrow view of happiness and good."<sup>37</sup> For ".... worth and virtue depend on a knowledge of right and wrong, and on a use of reason, sufficient to secure a right application of the affections."<sup>38</sup> Knowledge allows us to apply our affections and so act, in a moral way.

Thus we see that Shaftesbury's ideas correspond closely to those of the Cambridge Platonists concerning the ability of man to find moral truth within, the moral independence (from God) which reason gives to man, and the belief that reason must be used to direct our actions towards moral ends in the temporal environment. In the next section we will look at the belief that the temporal world is rationally organised, and that when we behave morally we are contributing to that rational organisation.

### - III -

According to the acknowledged founder of the Cambridge school, morality does not depend upon the will of God: "The

Laws of God are not Impositions of Will or Power and Pleasure; but the Resolutions of Truth, Reason and Justice."<sup>39</sup> (Whichcote). As a consequence of this, as we saw in the last section, the concept of God as the supreme Will is qualified; the essence of God being rationality, he comes to be seen as the supreme rational will. Man is allowed to meet God half-way because of his ability to seek and find God's laws through his own rational capacity. Moral law discovered after this fashion is still God's law, but as rational law it may be said to be natural to all rational beings. Consequently, man may be said to behave morally when he follows the dictates of his nature: "Vice is contrary to the Nature of Man, as Man; for it is contrary to the order of Reason, the peculiar and highest Principle in Man."<sup>40</sup> (Whichcote). Therefore, when man behaves naturally he behaves morally, and to do otherwise is against both reason and God.

Shaftesbury accepts this theory of man's nature, and describes Whichcote as a "truly Christian Philosopher; whom, for his appearing thus in Defence of Natural Goodness, we may call the Preacher of Good-nature."<sup>41</sup> In contrast to this praise for the Cambridge man is Shaftesbury's criticism of Hobbes.



Concerning Hobbes, "however other parts of Philosophy may be obliged to him, Ethicks will appear to have no great share in this Obligation." (Shaftesbury). For Hobbes did not allow to man the unselfish, moral opinions and affections:

This is He who reckoning up the Passions, or Affections, by which Men are held together in Society, live in Peace, or have any Correspondence one with another, forgot to mention Kindness, Friendship, Sociableness, Love of Company and Converse, Natural Affection, or any thing of this kind; I say Forgot, because I can scarcely think so ill of any Man, as that he has not by experience found any of these Affections in himself, and consequently, that he believes none of them to be in others.<sup>42</sup>

If we will but study ourselves we will find morality within us. This was what Hobbes "forgot" - that man has within his nature the principles of moral action.

According to the Cambridge Platonists, because God always acts rationally, our own reason can distinguish the moral law within. However, from the belief that God always acts rationally, and is incapable of doing otherwise, one may also conclude that the Creation must also be based upon principles of reason. This, at least, would appear to be the implication of the following statement:

For as God cannot know himself to be any thing other than what indeed he is; so neither can he will

himself to be any thing else then what he is, or that any thing else should swerve from those Laws which his own Eternall Nature prescribes to it.<sup>43</sup> (Smith).

As a result of this (viz., the ability of God to will only that which is like himself), the universe must be conceived of as a rational whole, the Creation being an act of the supremely rational God. As such, the universe or macrocosm is the reflection of the divine. It is because of this that Platonism (which is an introspective philosophy) turns its eyes towards the material world when the Christian minds of the Cambridge men adopt the pagan philosophy as a basis for a rational theology. As a reflection of the divine the material world is significant in two ways. Firstly, the cosmos becomes the highest intelligible concept by means of which we may be objectively conscious of the Creator. The finite whole provides the best available means whereby the finite concepts of man can appreciate the infinity of God.\* Secondly, not only

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\* Concerning the "perfection of the one common and universal system" Shaftesbury writes, ".... if what he [i.e. Shaftesbury] advances in this respect be real, or at least the most probable by far of any scheme or representation which can be made of the universal nature and Cause of things; it will follow 'that since man has been so constituted, by means of his rational part, as to be conscious of this his more  
(continued overleaf)

will the individual be able to perform right action, but he will be able to comprehend himself as part of a larger movement which encompasses the whole species. Knowing that Nature is rationally organised he will be able to study mankind's role, and from the knowledge he gains from this study make his own ends complement the end of the species. Consequently, although the cosmos provides us with knowledge concerning God, that cosmos replaces God. For Nature provides the justification for moral prescription, not God who cannot be comprehended by the finite mind. God is now relegated to the unknown and replaced by dependence upon Nature:

.... if the interest of nature call, I forsake everything else and follow nature, without murmuring, without complaint. In what way, therefore, shall I

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\* (Continued from previous page)  
 immediate relation to the universal system and principle of order and intelligence; he is not only by Nature sociable within the limits of his own species or kind, but in a yet more generous and extensive manner. He is not only born to virtue, friendship, honesty, and faith; but to religion, piety, adoration, and a generous surrender of his mind to whatever happens from that Supreme Cause or order of things, which he [Shaftesbury] acknowledges entirely just and perfect." Characteristics, II, 294/5. In this passage we see Shaftesbury acknowledging the order of the cosmos as a basis for appreciation of both moral and religious truths. The acceptance of "whatever happens" as for the best will be discussed in Chapter Four.



love my children or relations? As strongly and affectionately as is possible for me to love them, but so as that nature may be accused; so as that, whatever happens, I may still adhere to nature and accept and embrace whatsoever nature sends. This is the foundation. This is all. Consider this, and it will be easy to find the true measure of all affection, and what discipline and rules must be followed to reduce our affection to nature and to affect as becomes a rational creature.<sup>44</sup>

To "follow nature" as Shaftesbury here recommends involves the control of our affections by reason after distinguishing human ends by the study of man in his relation to his environment and fellow beings. This approach to morality stands in contrast to the introspective method discussed in the last section.

Both the Cambridge men and Shaftesbury agree that all species of animals are directed towards ends that are dictated by their particular natures. In this manner Nature subordinates her parts to the structure of the whole and ensures that the whole is perfect. This theory of the cosmos in which the whole is seen to be prior to the parts can be found in the writings of Ralph Cudworth. In his True Intellectual System Cudworth develops the concept of an incorporeal "Plastick Nature" which is a vital energy directing all things towards their natural purpose: ". Plastic Nature is "an Energetical and Effectual

Principle, constituted by the Deity, for the bringing of things decreed to pass," and "may be said to be the True and Proper Fate of Matter, or Corporeal World."<sup>45</sup> There is, in other words, a movement of matter towards "that Apt Coherent Frame and Harmony of the whole Universe."<sup>46</sup> Plastic Nature ensures that the rational will of God is fulfilled, acting "Regularly and Artificially, according to the direction of Mind and Understanding, Reason and Wisdom, for Ends, or in Order to Good .... operating Fatally and Sympathetically, according to Laws and Commands, prescribed to it by a Perfect Intellect ...."<sup>47</sup> The will of God, which is Reason, is working itself out in the world by means of Plastic Nature. Within the human species, the Plastic Nature of the individual (the "natural affections" for Shaftesbury) directs him towards his natural end as a social being.\*

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\* "A human infant is of all the most helpless, weak, senseless, and longest continues so. And wherefore should it not have been thus ordered? .... Does not this refer man yet more strongly to society, and force him to own that he is purposely and not by accident made rational and sociable, and cannot otherwise increase or subsist but in and by society? Is not conjugal affection, natural affection to parents, duty to magistrates, love of a common city, community, or country, with the other duties and social parts of life, deduced from hence and founded in these very wants?" Rand (ed.) Life, Letters, and Philosophical Regimen, 188 (Nature).

When we make a conscious effort to understand this purpose, and rationally control our affections and actions, then we become moral.

For Shaftesbury, as for the Cambridge Platonists, man is by Nature a social being; and by his nature a social and moral being. In the former case he conforms (consciously or otherwise) to the rational movement of the overall design of the cosmos through Plastic Nature. In the latter case his reason distinguishes the moral affections (with or without reference to the external world) and he is governed by certain rules of conduct in relation to his fellow beings. However, as was pointed out in Chapter One, Shaftesbury's writings also exhibit non-rational aspects that can be said to stand in contrast to the rational dependence of the Cambridge men. To point to this difference between them is in most cases justified. The concept of the "moral sense" in Shaftesbury, which is the non-rational attraction or aversion towards the moral and the immoral which we are all supposed to feel, is usually thought to be Shaftesbury's original contribution to moral theory. However, if we turn to the Divine Dialogues of the Platonist, Henry More, we can find there a reference to something which appears to be



similar to that which Shaftesbury conceptualises as the common or moral sense. In Chapter XVIII of the second dialogue, the philosopher Hylobares discusses the "Animal Functions and Passions." The dialogue runs as follows:

Hylobares: That there is no Poison or harm in any of the Animal Functions and Passions, I easily grant .... For I was before convinced by Philotheus that there is nothing substantially evil in the World. But .... the exercise of the Animal Functions and Passions, though good in themselves, yet if they be either set too high, or exercised upon undue Objects or in unfitting circumstances, become very nauseously evil.

To demonstrate his point he goes on to ask,

.... how do you like this Instance of the exercise of the Animal Functions, That Men and Women should stale and dung .... in any Room or Company they came into?

When we consider this prospect we feel an immediate aversion towards it, so "stinkingly naught" is it. This aversion is not rational.. It is the result of our sense of smell. Hylobares continues:

And were that quicker sense revived in us whereby we discern Moral good and evil; Adultery, Drunkenness, Murther, Fraud, Extortion, Perfidiousnous, and the like, all these would have infinitely a worse Scent, than this which you say is so stinkingly evil can have to our Noses.

There is a non-rational rejection of evil desires and actions, which results from our immediate sense of right and wrong (which

is compared with our ability to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant smells). Thus, Sophron replies to Hylobares as follows:

Excellently well argued, Hylobares! and it was as seasonably intimated at first, That there is a sense in a Man, if it were awakened, to which these moral incongruities are as harsh and displeasing as any incongruous Object, be it never so nauseous, is to the outward Senses.<sup>48</sup>

Here is the non-rational element which Shaftesbury was to develop in his own philosophy and of which more will be said in Chapter Five. It has been introduced at this point to show that even the Cambridge Platonist, More, was not beyond introducing an element into his philosophy which stands in contrast to the general rational orientation of the Cambridge school; and also to strengthen the argument of the present chapter that Shaftesbury derived many of his ideas from the writings of the Cambridge Platonists. Also, it is worth mentioning at this point that More's Divine Dialogues bridge a further gap between Shaftesbury and the Cambridge men; that is, in relation to style. As will be shown in Chapter Six, Shaftesbury's philosophy is one that advocated both ridicule and good humour as legitimate tools for moral enquiry, and he attempted to present his own

ideas in a light-hearted manner. The theological writings of the Cambridge men are much more serious and systematic in their manner and form. However, in More's dialogues (a form of presentation which Shaftesbury admired) the style is lighter (although he does not recommend ridicule) and comes closer to that which was favoured by Shaftesbury.\*

However, the writings of the Cambridge Platonists usually refer to reason as the basis of morality, and their writings are presented in a more serious manner than those of Shaftesbury. But when we have taken this into account, it is still evident that the rational theology of the Cambridge school did much to influence Shaftesbury's thought. In so far as Shaftesbury is a rational thinker, the Cambridge men were his immediate

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\* Concerning literary style, we find Shaftesbury praising the style of the "ancients", the Greeks and the Romans, saying that "The manner indeed in which they treated the very gravest subjects was somewhat different from that of our days. Their treatises were generally in free and familiar style. They chose to give us the representation of real discourse and converse, by treating their subjects in the way of dialogue and free debate. The scene was commonly laid at table, or in the public walks or meeting-places; and the usual wit and humour of their real discourses appeared in those of their own composing. And this was fair. For without wit and humour, reason can hardly have its proof or be distinguished." Characteristics, I, 51/2.



intellectual forbears. In their writings, reason is seen to provide knowledge of morality because it is the uniting link between God, the cosmos, and the individual. Shaftesbury accepted this theory; and as a consequence of this it is not surprising to discover that Shaftesbury was also drawn towards the ethical theories of the Stoics. This will be seen in the next chapter when Shaftesbury's theory of nature will be discussed in more detail.

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#### SUMMARY:

The aim of the present chapter has been to demonstrate Shaftesbury's relationship and intellectual debt to the rational theology of the Cambridge Platonists. In order to do this, a description of the influence of Greek thought upon Christianity was provided in Section I. There we see:

1. that Greek philosophy (Aristotelian) provided the basis for an "intellectual" morality (in Aquinas) that stood in opposition to the "voluntarism" of Augustine and the Nominalists.
2. that in taking a standpoint in the debate between "nominalism" and "intellectualism" that continued during the Renaissance and after, Shaftesbury supported the latter.
3. that the Christian-Aristotelianism of Aquinas, and the Christian-Platonism of the Cambridge men and Shaftesbury, both saw the universe as the rational creation of the rational God.

4. that the "intellectualism" of both the Aristotelians and Platonists stresses the independence of the individual:
  - a) in his ability to find moral truths through "reason" rather than through blind obedience to the will of God.
  - b) in his ability to find his own salvation independently of the doctrines of an institutionalised church.

Having outlined the orientation that Platonism and Aristotelianism gave to Christianity, Sections II and III proceed to discuss the similarities between the rational theology of the Cambridge Platonists and the philosophy of Shaftesbury. These are divided into

1. those ideas that relate to their common belief that moral truths can be discovered by examining that which we can find within the self.
2. those ideas that relate to their common belief that the cosmos is rationally organised, and that all the parts of the cosmos are directed towards their natural ends as part of the universal design.

Section II considers the following points in relation to their common attempt to derive morality from a study of the self:

1. that both say that moral truth can be found within the self.
2. that both look to innate factors which can be discovered by reason; and in so doing revive the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis.

3. that both relate the discoverable moral truth to reason rather than to the will or commands of God.
4. that as a consequence of the rational basis of morality, Shaftesbury believed that virtue can not be found if we only obey the rational laws of God because we fear Him, and hope for rewards from Him.
5. that both see religious activity as necessarily involving moral activity within the temporal situation, and that this activity is implied whenever we have knowledge of morality.

Section III then turns to consider the concept of "nature" of the Platonists and Shaftesbury. It is noted there,

1. that because the nature of man is rational, and rational man is moral, both the Cambridge men and Shaftesbury conclude that the nature of man is to be a moral being.
2. that this interpretation of man places Shaftesbury in a position from which he can criticise the Hobbesian belief that men are by nature egoistic.
3. that for both the Cambridge men and Shaftesbury the cosmos or whole of Nature is ordered according to principles of reason, is a reflection of the divine, and a source of moral knowledge for those who wish to study its parts.
4. that for both the Cambridge men and Shaftesbury each species in Nature has a natural end to which it is drawn by its own particular nature.

Finally, the present chapter points to the fact that although the Cambridge Platonists typically refer only to reason as a basis of moral knowledge, in More's Divine Dialogues we find



reference to a concept which is similar to Shaftesbury's non-rational moral sense. However, it is as rationalists that the Cambridge men have been considered in this Chapter; and when Shaftesbury refers to reason as the basis of truth, the ideas of this school must always be considered as relevant to Shaftesbury's meaning.

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### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS PURPOSE WITHIN THE RATIONAL COSMOS

##### - I -

In the last chapter we considered Shaftesbury's ideas in relation to Cambridge Platonism, and saw that his belief that reason can discover moral truth either by studying the mind itself, or by studying Nature, finds precedent in the writings of the Cambridge men. However, although the writings of the Cambridge men are of significance to Shaftesbury, and although this school may be regarded as part of an intellectual tradition to which Shaftesbury belonged, when Shaftesbury acknowledges sources for his inspiration, these sources are usually classical. According to Ernst Cassirer, Shaftesbury was antipathetic to the "problems affecting his own era." We are told that,

Shaftesbury .... did not pattern his philosophy after any models which he could find immediately in his own age .... He feels no kinship with contemporary philosophy but seeks other intellectual and historical models. It is only necessary to open Shaftesbury's philosophical diary [i.e. the Philosophical Regimen edited by Benjamin Rand and published in 1900] to become aware of this aloofness to his own time. There is scarcely an echo here of the problems affecting his era, or of the intellectual and practical decisions with which this era is confronted. 1\*

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\* From this statement it should not be thought that Cassirer  
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In line with this judgement, in a letter to Locke written in 1698, Shaftesbury wrote, "I hope the time is not long ere I shall change the unprofitable and ungrateful study of these moderns of ours for a hearty application to the ancients...."<sup>2</sup> Eleven years later in a letter to General (later Earl) Stanhope, he aimed his polemic "even against my old tutor and governor, whose name is so established in the world," and suggested that Locke would have been a better philosopher if "he had known but ever so little of antiquity, or been tolerably learned in the state of philosophy with the ancients."<sup>3\*</sup>

However, this preference for the ancients by no means necessitates an "aloofness to his own time," as Cassirer suggests, except in the most limited sense. For Shaftesbury thought that certain trends of thought had emerged during the seventeenth century which had given rise to social and ethical principles which were destructive of all morality. The arch-demon of this

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(continued from previous page) ignores the significance of the Cambridge Platonists for Shaftesbury. In The Platonic Renaissance in England Shaftesbury is treated by Cassirer as part of the Cambridge movement.

\* The reasons why Shaftesbury condemned Locke's ideas as contained in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding will be discussed in Chapter Five below.



process he saw as Hobbes, and it was in order to deny the relevance of the Hobbesian type of philosophy that Shaftesbury turned to the philosophy of the ancients. Thus, it can be said that it was in order to deal with what he considered to be important contemporary problems, not to become aloof from them, that Shaftesbury turned away from contemporary modes of thought.

Where in classical philosophy did Shaftesbury discover the ideas that he required? We can discover this if we look at a two-fold classification which he gives us in a letter written to Pierre Coste in 1706. In this letter he distinguishes classical philosophies into two major groups. The first is derived from Socrates, "passing into the Academic, the Peripatetic, and Stoic." The second is "derived in reality from Democritus, and passing into Cyrenaic and Epicurean." Of these two groups,

The first .... recommended action, concernment in civil affairs, religion. The second derided all, and advised inaction and retreat, and with good reason. For the first maintained that society, right, and wrong was founded in Nature, and that Nature had a meaning, and was herself, that is to say in her wits, well governed and administered by one simple and perfect intelligence. The second again derided this, and made Providence and Dame Nature not so sensible as a doting old woman.<sup>4</sup>

The validity of this analysis may well be doubted, and it is made

"for distinction sake" alone. Nevertheless, we are presented with two opposed theories of Nature - the social (as evidenced by Stoicism)\* and the anti-social (as evidenced by Epicureanism). Having made this distinction, Shaftesbury places himself firmly within the Stoic camp. Epicureanism was considered by him to be the classical parallel to Hobbes's philosophy - to which he bore a consistent antipathy.

In Stoicism Shaftesbury found that combination of faith in reason and belief in the perfect structure of the cosmos that we have seen Christian thought adopt under the influence of classical thought. In Epicureanism Shaftesbury saw a classical expression of the moral arguments of Hobbes, to which he was opposed. How Shaftesbury opposed Epicureanism by consciously appealing to Stoic ideas will become clear as this chapter progresses. However, before entering upon this task, let us clear the ground of unsophisticated hedonism, that maximisation of sensual pleasure which Epicureanism is capable of

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\* "The Mind of the universe is social. At all events, it has created the lower forms to serve the higher, and then linked together the higher in a mutual dependence on each other. Observe how some are subjected, others are connected, each and all are given their just due, and the more eminent among them are combined in mutual accord." Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, V, xxx.

prescribing when approached by the sensualist. Not only does this contradict those ends to which the natural affections lead us (see below), but it is also contradictory even to our immediate happiness; for "the palls or nauseatings which continually intervene are of the worst and most hateful kind of sensation," and "....'tis easy to conclude 'that luxury, riot, and debauch are contrary to real interest, and to the true enjoyment of life.'"<sup>5</sup> That this is true would not be denied by any person living according to the true spirit of Epicureanism, as we can see from the following words of Epicurus himself:

.... it is not continuous drinkings and revellings, nor the satisfaction of lusts .... which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.<sup>6</sup>

This was recognised by Shaftesbury when he wrote that, ".... even Epicurus himself, made that favourable report of temperance, so different from his modern disciples ...."<sup>7</sup> What then are the differences between Shaftesbury's ideas and the ideas of the Epicureans? These differences, which were considered by Shaftesbury to be of great importance, become evident when we consider their respective positions in relation to a) metaphysics,



b) morality, and c) the basis of political society. A comparison between their beliefs in these three fields will be the object of the next three sections of this chapter, during the course of which Shaftesbury's rejection of Hobbes's philosophy will become equally evident.

- II -

If we consider the respective metaphysical beliefs of the Epicureans and of Shaftesbury we begin to see the difference between the two. The Epicureans believe that the structure of the cosmos is atomic. In the words of Lucretius,

.... our world has been made by nature through the spontaneous and casual collision and the multifarious, accidental, random and purposeless congregation and coalescence of atoms ....<sup>8</sup>

Shaftesbury, who looked towards Nature as a source of moral guidance, found this interpretation impossible to accept. If everything in Nature is "accidental" then Nature lacks a rational purpose that we can look to as a standard of right. "Nothing," says Shaftesbury, "can be more melancholy than the thought of living in a distracted universe." Such a belief, he adds, "may by degrees embitter the temper, and not only make the love of virtue to be less felt, but help to impair and ruin

the very principle of virtue, viz. natural and kind affection."<sup>9</sup>

In opposition to the atomistic metaphysics, Shaftesbury puts forward the idea of a perfectly harmonious cosmos in the tradition of classical Roman Stoicism.\* For the Stoic, the cosmos is an "organism", with a general mind, in which the subordinate parts are only significant in so far as they complement the end of the whole.\*\* At times, especially in his Philosophical Regimen (in which there is constant reference to the writings of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus), Shaftesbury appears to accept the organic concept. He says that, "A body of the whole there is, and to this body an order, and to this order a mind: a general mind of this general body."<sup>10</sup> At other times, Shaftesbury talks about a "design" or a "universal system", in which all the parts are directed towards a universal rational end. However, in either case, Shaftesbury regards each part of Nature as subordinate to the whole, believes that each part of Nature

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\* "Matter in the universe is supple and compliant, and the Reason which controls it has no motive for ill-doing." Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, VI, i.

\*\* "Always think of the universe as one living organism, with a single substance and a single soul; and observe how all things are submitted to the single perceptivity of this one whole ...." Ibid., IV, xl.

has a purpose which is rational and which is dictated by the universal telos, and considers the rational structure of the whole as just. It is this aspect of Stoic thought that Shaftesbury considered to be necessary to the formulation of ethical maxims. Consequently, when we talk of a Stoic element in Shaftesbury's writings we are discussing the doctrine after its simplification under the Roman Empire and its development from an elitist intellectualism into a philosophy of universal appeal; it is Stoicism as an essentially moral philosophy which no longer finds the Chrysippean Logic and Physics of any significance; it is the doctrine after its metamorphosis from the discipline of a school to something approaching a religious dogma: - a dogma that considers Nature to be a perfect whole which has given to each of its subordinate parts a role which is rational, just, and necessary. Shaftesbury reiterated the basic assumption of this dogma when he wrote:

.... whatsoever happens in the economy of the whole is necessary for the happiness, perfection, and establishment of the whole; that it should have been; and to have annulled this (if it had been possible) must have been to have annulled and made void that economy of the whole by which its happiness and perfection are maintained.]]

The natural is good, and man must use his reason to appreciate



the ends which Nature has given to man if he wishes to become virtuous. Man can do this because his mind is part of the general mind which controls the overall design of the cosmos:

Consider, then, what am I? what is the self? a part of this general mind, governing a part of this general body, itself and body both, governed by the universal governing mind, which, if it willing be, it is the same as to govern with it. It is one with it, partakes of it, and is in the highest sense related to it.<sup>12</sup>

How the mind governs both itself and the body will be seen below.

However, at this point we may consider how Shaftesbury justifies his belief in a rationally organised Nature. In the last chapter we saw that the belief in a harmonious cosmos can be based upon faith in a God whose every act is rational. Shaftesbury takes this line when he says that, "all is faith, and without faith all must be Atheism."<sup>13</sup> He defines an atheist as a person who does not regard the cosmos as a rational whole,\* the acceptance of which is necessary to all who believe in a God:

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\* "To believe therefore that everything is governed, ordered, or regulated for the best, by a designing principle or mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect Theist.

To believe nothing of a designing principle or mind, nor any cause, measure, or rule of things, but chance, so that in Nature neither the interest of the whole nor of any particulars can be said to be in the least designed, pursued, or aimed at, is to be a perfect Atheist." Characteristics I, 240.

If there be Deity, there is no chance or contrary ill design. If all be from one wise and good design, then all is one and the same end, and nothing is supernumerary or unnecessary ....

If there be a supreme reason of the whole, then everything happens according to that reason.<sup>14</sup>

However, the use of human reason in recognising the order of the cosmos is not to be ignored. We are told by Shaftesbury to "Imagine these two [faith and philosophy], not as separate but going together; and this latter as a confirmation of the former."<sup>15</sup> Shaftesbury tells us to look at the interdependence between things in Nature and we will be able to see that "All things in this world are united, for as the branch is united and is as one with the tree, so is the tree with the earth, air, and water which feed it, and with the flies, worms, and insects which it feeds."<sup>16</sup> Also, if we look at the "innumerable parts of creation" we can see perfection in the parts. We can, for instance, admire the spider's ability to weave the web so necessary if it is to catch the flies which it needs for sustenance. Such perfection must have a source. "Can you induce yourself ever to believe or think," wrote Shaftesbury, "that .... where inferior and private natures are often found so perfect, the universal one should want perfection....?"<sup>17</sup> Thus,

the source of particular harmony which reason sees (self-evidently one assumes), is the harmony of the whole (logically derived). Finally, this recognition by reason of order in the finite world is taken by Shaftesbury as evidence of the existence of God:

To whom therefore the laws of this universe and its government appear just and uniform, to him they speak the government of one Just One; to him they reveal and witness a God ....18

Faith in God justifies belief in a rationally organised Nature; and our recognition of an organised Nature justifies belief in God. The Epicurean's belief that the world is a product of chance, and that there is no such thing as a natural "purpose", is rejected.\*

Shaftesbury accepts a teleological interpretation of Nature, accepts the cry, "Follow Nature!", in the belief that both the

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\* "In fact, nothing in our bodies was born in order that we might be able to use it, but the thing creates the use. .... you must banish the belief that they could have been created for the purpose of performing particular functions." Lucretius, The Nature of the Universe, 156/7. In contrast to this, Shaftesbury wrote, ".... to what end the many proportions and various shapes of parts in many creatures actually serve, we are able, by the help of study and observation, to demonstrate with great exactness." Characteristics I, 243.



parts and the whole are organised for the best. Man is seen to be a subordinate part of the ordered whole. His purpose as a rational being is to pursue ends of Nature as they are discovered in the workings of the cosmos and in the natural affections within himself. This will be discussed in the next section. However, before progressing to discuss Shaftesbury's moral theories in their Stoic, anti-Epicurean context, we must consider Shaftesbury's metaphysical beliefs in relation to his rejection of metaphysical enquiries.

In Chapter One we saw that Shaftesbury disregarded epistemological enquiries, considering them to be of no relevance to the discovery of moral truths. He held the same opinion in relation to metaphysical enquiries. What Shaftesbury means when he uses the term "metaphysics" is never explained by himself. He does not regard himself as a metaphysician, and uses the term in a derogatory way. This is because metaphysics does not help us improve ourselves in a moral way. This is because - and here I think we discover what Shaftesbury meant by the term - metaphysics is concerned with speculations concerning the physical nature of reality, and the place of man and the other animals and things within it. It looks at structures

without seeing purpose. This, for Shaftesbury, is not philosophy, the known province of which is

to teach us ourselves, keep us the self-same persons, and so regulate our governing fancies, passions, and humours, as to make us comprehensible to ourselves, and knowable by other features than those of bare countenance.<sup>19</sup>

This quotation is taken from the Soliloquy, where Shaftesbury presents us with his most clear exposition of the limitations of metaphysics. Having described the purpose of philosophy as the pursuit of moral control over our affections, he says of metaphysics:

As for metaphysics .... I shall willingly allow it to pass for philosophy when by any real effects it is proved capable to refine our spirits, improve our understandings, or mend our manners. 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 natures, I shall be apt to suspect such a study as the more delusive and infatuating on account of its magnificent pretension.<sup>20</sup>

Shaftesbury dislikes descriptions of nature because they attempt to explain everything within a "system", and "The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system." Shaftesbury dislikes the "pretended knowledge of the machine of this world" because he can not see "to what purpose such a philosophy can serve,

except only to shut the door against better knowledge ....<sup>21</sup>

Shaftesbury decides that he must confront "this super-speculative philosophy with a more practical sort, which relates chiefly to our acquaintance, friendship, and good correspondence with ourselves."<sup>22</sup> He demands, "Philosopher, let me hear concerning what is of some moment to me."<sup>23</sup> And that which is of some moment to him is, that which will provide him with what he considers to be a real insight into the problems of morality, and allow him to answer "practical" problems. He does not think that metaphysics, as he understands it, can do this. Consequently, in an advisory letter to the student, Michael Ainsworth (written in 1709), Shaftesbury can be found condemning metaphysical systems in general:

.... for alas! all that we call improvement of our minds, in dry and empty speculation; all learning or whatever else, either in theology or other science, which has not a direct tendency to render us honest, milder, juster, and better, is far from being justly so call'd. And even all that philosophy, which is built on the comparison and compounding of ideas, complex, implex, reflex, and all that din and noise of metaphysics; all that pretended study and science of nature call'd natural philosophy, Aristotelean, Cartesian, or whatever else it be; all those high contemplations of stars and spheres and planets; and all the other inquisitive curious parts of learning, are so far from being necessary improvements of the mind, that without the utmost care they serve only to blow it up in conceit and folly, and render men more stiff in their ignorance and vices.<sup>24</sup>



Where then does Shaftesbury's acceptance of the Stoic idea of the rationally organised cosmos stand in relation to this attitude?

Firstly, we must recognise that for Shaftesbury "metaphysics" is concerned with the description of Nature and its parts in terms of a relationship of "material and immaterial substances". Metaphysics, by Shaftesbury's definition, does not attempt to discover purpose. Both Epicurus's description of atomic structures and Descartes' description of the mechanical structures of animals<sup>25</sup> can be condemned as metaphysics by Shaftesbury upon this basis. To describe man's position in the world in such a manner is like understanding how a watch works yet not knowing that its purpose is to tell the time.<sup>26</sup> Stoicism does not do this. Stoicism gives to man a moral purpose. Consequently, it does not fall within the field of metaphysics as it is defined by Shaftesbury, even though Stoicism does have a theory of the nature of reality, and man's place within it.

Secondly, Shaftesbury's own theory of nature can be seen not as an actual description of reality, but as a necessary belief for the practical reasoner. We saw in Chapter One, Shaftesbury was interested in what characterises the moral activity of man.

We saw him dismiss epistemological enquiry as irrelevant to this activity in so far as all men make certain assumptions which have no ultimate rational justification. Despite his attempts to justify the existence of a cosmos which is rationally organised for moral ends, it is possible to place this belief in the same light. There is no doubt that Shaftesbury considered the idea of a moral and rationally organised Nature as a necessary belief for a moral being - for to live in a world which has only structure and no purpose is, as was stated above, to "help to impair and ruin the very principle of virtue." That it is also a belief that can not be rationally proven will now be shown.

Seeing it as a characteristic of man that he will consider his position in relation to the whole, Shaftesbury presents us with a choice: "Either atoms or Deity. No medium. That multiplicity or this simplicity. No compromise - anarchy, or monarchy."<sup>27</sup> The moral man will accept the idea of a God, and the belief that the world is organised for moral ends. This is a necessary concomitant to morality, assumed for the purpose of making practical decisions about how we ought to act. It is a conviction, which we can find within us but for which we have

no absolute proof.\* It is a matter of faith for which we can find no rational justification, for which there is no logical certainty.\*\* We can see this if we look at Shaftesbury's idea of the role of faith in our belief in God (a belief, as we have seen, that always implies the idea of a rationally organised cosmos with moral ends):

Faith in Deity, and justly so called. For is it not indeed faith? implicit faith? implicit belief? .... How else adhere to anything? how else constant, stable, self-consistent, but by this faith? Strive, however, to need it the least that is possible; preserving the chain of thought and affections uninterrupted.<sup>28</sup>

As far as we can rationally know, the structure of the cosmos may not have a moral purpose - "sophistry of wit" may even demonstrate

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\* "No matter whether the universe is a confusion of atoms or a natural growth, let my first conviction be that I am part of a Whole which is under Nature's governance; and my second, that a bond of kinship exists between myself and all other similar parts." Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, X, vi.

\*\* "... my conviction is not logical, but moral certainty; and since it rests on subjective grounds (of the moral sentiment), I must not even say: It is morally certain that there is a God, &c., but: I am morally certain, that is, my belief in God .... is so interwoven with my moral nature, that I am under as little apprehension of having the former torn from me as of losing the latter." Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 502.



an alternative. However, we believe in God (and, by implication, the organised cosmos) in order to be "self-consistent" in moral questions. With such a belief it does not even matter whether the ordered cosmos really exists or not. As long as we act as if this were the case, we will be moral - it will be an ideal towards which we can direct our activities, and which will soothe us in times of distress. In this case, the Stoic metaphysics of Shaftesbury need not be an attempt at describing the true nature of reality, but the provision of a necessary presupposition for moral thought and activity.\* However, Shaftesbury was concerned that ideas of God and a perfect Creation do not dominate the thoughts of man. Man must not forget that he is concerned with the practical activity of controlling his affections. Shaftesbury therefore bids us refer to the idea of faith as little as possible, and concentrate upon a continuous control of our affections, thus "preserving the chain of thought and affections

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\* "Now if the subject and ground of this divine passion [i.e. our desire to believe in 'the order of the world'] 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...." Characteristics, I, 279.

uninterrupted." How he does this within the context of his Stoic beliefs will be the next subject of discussion.

- III -

As we saw in Chapter One, morality for Shaftesbury is concerned with the choice of natural affections.\* These natural affections must be distinguished from other types of affection, as we see most clearly in An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit, where Shaftesbury developed a threefold categorisation of the affections that can be found in man:

The affections or passions which must influence and govern the animal are either -

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- \* It is possible to find in the Discourses of Epictetus the idea that natural action is based upon a synthesis of affection and reason.  
Epictetus presents us with the following dialogue:
- "Doth affection seem to you to be a right and a natural thing?  
How should it be otherwise?  
Well; and is affection natural and right, and reason not so?  
By no means.  
Is there any opposition, then, between reason and affection?  
I think not.  
If there was, of two opposites if one be natural, the other must necessarily be unnatural, must it not?  
It must.  
What we find, then, at once affectionate and reasonable, that we may safely pronounce to be right and good."  
Epictetus, Discourses, I, xi, 2.

1. The natural affections, which lead to the good of the public.
2. Or the self affections, which lead only to the good of the private.
3. Or such as are neither of these, nor tending either to any good of the public or private, but contrary-wise; and which may therefore be justly styled unnatural affections.<sup>29</sup>

As we have already seen, the natural affections are for Shaftesbury the moral affections. These are directed towards the welfare of a higher system to which the individual belongs\* (i.e. the species), and ultimately to the good of the whole cosmos. A person is "supposed good when the good or ill of the system to which he has relation is the immediate object of some passion or affection moving him."<sup>30</sup> However, an individual cannot stay moral if he does not stay alive. Consequently he must also have self-affections; but these must not be so strong as to prevent the full application of the natural affections. Each man must strike a balance between the natural and self

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\* "... should there be anywhere in nature a system of which this living creature was to be considered as a part, then could he nowise be allowed good; whilst he plainly appeared to be such a part as made rather to the harm than good of that system or whole in which he was included."  
Characteristics, I, 244.



affections, whilst at the same time eliminating the unnatural affections.\* When he does this, he will be virtuous. In order to do this he must use his reason:

Thus is virtue shared in different degrees by rational creatures, such at least as are called rational, but who come short of that sound and well-established reason which alone can constitute a just affection, a uniform and steady will and resolution.<sup>31</sup>

Not all men are virtuous. But if they will use their reason they can be; for reason allows them to follow the ends given to man by Nature.

It was because he thought that men can discover universal moral truths in Nature that Shaftesbury condemned both the Epicureans and Hobbes. For the Epicurean, good and bad are expressions of pain and pleasure caused in the human frame by the collision of atoms. To seek good is to pursue the absence of pain and fear.\*\* Justice for the Epicurean is equated with

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\* The idea of balance in the affections will be discussed in Chapter Four below.

\*\* "Do you not see that nature is clamouring for two things only, a body free from pain, a mind released from worry and fear for the enjoyment of pleasurable sensations?" Lucretius, Op. cit., 60.

the agreements which individuals make with each other in order to achieve security from pain and fear.\* For Hobbes also, good and evil are not definitions of universal moral truth, but names which the individual gives to his affections\*\* and their objects.+ As with the Epicureans, Hobbes's concept of justice relates to the equilibrium which men succeed in creating amongst themselves in their search for security++ from pain and death.\*

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\* "Justice never is anything in itself, but in the dealings of men with one another in any place whatever and at any time it is a kind of compact not to harm or be harmed." Epicurus, Extant Remains (ed., Bailey), 103.

\*\* "Good, and evil, are names that signify our appetites, and aversions; which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men, are different." Hobbes, Leviathan, 104 (ed. Oakeshott).

+ "But whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good: and the object of his hate and aversion, evil ...." Ibid., 32.

++ "For where no covenant hath preceded, there hath no right been transferred, and every man has right to every thing; and consequently, no action can be unjust. But when a covenant is made, then to break it is unjust: and the definition of INJUSTICE, is no other than the not performance of covenant." Ibid., 94.

\* In his attitude to death Hobbes differed from the Epicureans. For Hobbes, man's lot was to constantly fear and attempt to avoid this inevitable event, whereas the Epicureans taught that man could dispel his fears through wisdom. The Epicurean, although he takes action to avoid death, will not fear death in itself. With an understanding of the atomic

(Continued overleaf)

Shaftesbury regarded Hobbes as a "reviver" of the "narrow-minded" philosophy of the Epicureans.<sup>32</sup> Hobbes represents that form of philosophy which

would have vice itself appear as natural as virtue, and from the worst examples would represent to us "that all actions are naturally indifferent; that they have no note or character of good or ill in themselves; but are distinguished by mere fashion, law, or arbitrary decree." Wonderful philosophy! raised from the dregs of an illiterate mean kind, which was ever despised among the great ancients and rejected by all men of action or sound erudition.<sup>33</sup>

Morality for Shaftesbury is not the avoidance of that which gives us private discomfort. Moral names are more than definitions of the varying likes of different men in different situations at different times. When Shaftesbury calls something good he wants it to have universal application without respect to individual, time, or place. In order to do this he turns to the concept of a rationally organised, moral Nature within which we can find moral purpose. In place of the descriptive philosophy of the materialists - who, essentially, were only attempting to describe what they thought were the physical causes of particular human

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(Continued from previous page)

functioning of the universe, the wise man will cease to be concerned. For, after death, he knows that there is no pain, and, therefore, there is no reason to be concerned.



actions and modes of conduct - Shaftesbury attempted to provide a prescriptive morality, based upon the acceptance of immanent ethical ends, assumed to be present in the whole and in the parts which constitute the whole. In man, these ends are determined by the natural affections. The individual can be good according to universal principles if he follows the natural affections, and does not allow them to lose their force because of the increasing influence of the self and unnatural affections.

Although Epicureanism has been called a descriptive theory in the last paragraph, it does make certain recommendations for the ordering of our lives. Taking as their guiding principle the doctrine of necessary pleasure,\* the Epicureans recommend that we avoid political activity \*\* and avoid unnecessary social obligations.† For Shaftesbury, this is to avoid our nature as

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\* "Of desires, all that do not lead to a sense of pain, if they are not satisfied, are not necessary, but involve a craving which is easily dispelled ...." Epicurus, Op. Cit., 101.

\*\* "We must release ourselves from the prison of affairs and politics." Ibid., 115.

† "As many as possess the power to procure complete immunity from their neighbours, these also live most pleasantly with one another, since they have the most certain pledge of security ...." Ibid., 105.

men by failing to recognise that we have natural affections which direct us towards social ends. He says of Epicureanism that, "There was no way to be truly a disciple of this philosophy, but to leave family, friends, country, and society ...."<sup>34</sup>

According to Shaftesbury, we can recognise natural activity not here, in selfishness and the avoiding of human relationships,\* but in the pursuit of the welfare of higher ends than the self. This is to follow the natural affections, which allow us to fulfil the role which has been given to us by Nature. The natural affections, as was seen in Chapter One, "are such as contribute to the welfare and prosperity of that whole or species, to which he is by Nature joined."<sup>35</sup> The nature of man being social,

.... we may with justice surely place it as a principle, "That if anything be natural, in any creature, or any kind, 'tis that which is preservative of the kind itself, and conducing to its welfare and support."<sup>36</sup>

The natural affections, which all of us have within us to some

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\* Despite Shaftesbury's interpretation, which may be logically derived from Epicurean principles, we should remember that Epicurus stated that, "Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship."  
Ibid., 101.

degree,\* involve him in a host of unselfish human relationships.

When we follow the natural affections, we behave naturally, rationally, and morally. These public affections are evident in all virtuous persons. What of the other affections listed at the beginning of the present section? We see their role when we consider Shaftesbury's definition of "vice" as existing,

1. "When either the public affections are weak or deficient.
2. "Or the private and self affections too strong.
3. "Or that such affections arise as are neither of these, nor in any degree tending to the support either of the public or private system."<sup>37</sup>\*\*

To avoid falling into vice it is necessary to eliminate from

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\* "So strong and unconquerable a thing is human nature! .... It is impossible .... for a human creature entirely to lose human affections. But even those who have undergone a mutilation cannot have their inclinations also mutilated: and so Epicurus, when he had mutilated all the offices of a man, of a master of a family, of a citizen, and of a friend, did not mutilate the inclinations of humanity, for he could not, any more than the idle Academics [i.e. the Sceptics] can throw away, or blind their own senses, though this be, of all others, the point they labour most." Epictetus, Op. cit., II, xx, 3.

\*\* In addition to this, Shaftesbury also suggests that to have natural affection "beyond a certain degree .... is undoubtedly vicious. For thus over-great tenderness destroys the effect of love; and excessive pity renders us incapable of giving succour" Characteristics, I, 250.



within ourselves all desires which do not conform with our natural end as social individuals. In doing this the significance of the self affections, in so far as they contribute to our moral nature, is that they allow us to better pursue the common good. The common good of society is the constant standard, and the natural affections are always primary.

And thus if there be found in any creature a more than ordinary self-concernment or regard to private good, which is inconsistent with the interest of the species or public, this must in every respect be esteemed an ill and vicious affection.<sup>38</sup>

A good creature is such a one as by the natural temper or bent of his affections is carried primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to good and against ill.<sup>39</sup>

The natural affections are for Shaftesbury always superior, and it is necessary for them to dominate in all circumstances if the individual is to be continuously virtuous. The self affections are only necessary in so far as they complement the social or natural affections. Natural affections are directed towards family, friends, and community. The self affections\*

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\* The self affections "relate to the private interest or separate economy of the creature, such as love of life; resentment of injury; pleasure, or appetite towards nourishment and the means of generation; interest, or desire of those conveniences by which we are well provided for and maintained; emulation, or love of praise and honour; indolence, or love of ease and rest. These are the affections which relate to the private system and constitute whatever we call interestedness or self-love." Characteristics, I, 317.

are to be allowed only in so far as they allow social action (based upon the natural affections) to be more effective. For example, a self affection by Shaftesbury's definition (see footnote) is the desire for food in order that we should not die of malnutrition. Now since it is necessary for the community to prosper that there should be a population which is healthy in both body and mind, this self affection complements the good of the community. If the self affection becomes extreme (e.g. one eats too much) then not only will it cease to be for our welfare as we open ourselves to the dangers of coronary thrombosis, but it also ceases to be advantageous to the community. An unhealthy person cannot fulfil his obligations to the community. In this manner, the self affections for Shaftesbury are only acceptable when they complement the good of the community. Whenever the self affections oppose the natural affections, opposing man's end as a social being, they are unacceptable and it is possible to regard them as unnatural.

However, Shaftesbury does not apply the term "unnatural" to any affections but those which ought not to be present in any degree whatsoever. An unnatural passion is evil as it always contradicts the social ends of man. As examples of these

unnatural affections he refers us to sadism, destructiveness, malice, envy, hatred of mankind, inhumanity resulting from superstition, all-consuming ambition, and ingratitude.<sup>40</sup>

If we remove these from within ourselves, and prevent the self affections from becoming too strong, opposition will be removed to the natural affections which will then pursue the common good.

Having categorised the various sorts of affections, it is possible to bring them into order according to the principle of the common good. If we do this we will always act virtuously, which is to act according to the ends of man in Nature. The measure is the social good:

If the affection be equal, sound, and good, and the subject of the affection such as may with advantage to society be ever in the same manner prosecuted or affected, this must necessarily constitute what we call equity and right in any action.<sup>41</sup>

We are virtuous if the intentions of our actions (and the affections upon which they are based) are towards the public good.

However, reference to the public good is by no means essential to the rational creature. Because his mind is part of the general mind, he can recognise the intentions of the latter as they refer to himself without considering the higher



system of the species or the whole of Nature. Shaftesbury suggests that our reason can immediately recognise as self-evident (i.e. an intuitive recognition) the right and the wrong. Within the Stoic context, it is possible to refer to Epictetus, who stated

.... it is the very nature of the understanding to agree to truth, to be dissatisfied with falsehood, and to suspend its belief in doubtful cases.<sup>42</sup>

Without referring to purpose we can distinguish between the good and the bad. In Shaftesbury's words:

Some moral and philosophical truths there are withal so evident in themselves, that 'twould be easier to imagine half mankind to have run mad, and joined precisely in one and the same species of folly, than to admit anything as truth which should be advanced against such natural knowledge, fundamental reason, and common sense.<sup>43</sup>

Here we see that ambiguity, present in much of Shaftesbury's writings, which was discussed in Chapter One. There, the term "common sense" was pointed to as a non-rational means whereby man can distinguish between moral and non-moral. It can also be interpreted, as we see here, as human reason making such a distinction. By so doing, Shaftesbury agrees with the definition of common

sense presented by Epictetus within the rational framework of Stoic philosophy:

As that may be called a common ear which distinguishes only sounds, but that which distinguishes notes an artificial one; so there are some things which men not totally perverted discern by their common natural powers; and such a disposition is called common sense.<sup>44</sup>

If common sense is understood as rational intuition, then reason for Shaftesbury can distinguish the natural affections of its own accord. (But Shaftesbury is rarely unambiguous in his use of the term "reason". In the present context he appears to be adapting a popular idea - i.e. that truth is rational - to his own ideas, which often seem to be appealing to something which is not rational. That non-rational element will be discussed in Chapter Five below.)

As a rationalist, appealing to reason as a means of discovering moral truths, Shaftesbury is closely aligned with the Stoics. We are told that it is in the nature of all "rational" beings to recognise and accept the natural affections which can be found within the self. "Reason" can recognise the natural (moral) affections for our family, our community, our country,

and finally for all human beings - "as a citizen of the world."

This is to be a man. This the nature of man signifies."<sup>45\*</sup>

"Reason" presents us with moral aims without necessary reference to natural purposes. However, if we recognise natural purposes, then reason can use natural ends as a measure against which to plan and judge actions. We can judge those affections which fulfil higher ends than those of the mere self. In a rationally organised and moral cosmos, the highest end is that of the whole world. This "remote philosophical object .... falls not easily under the eye."<sup>46</sup> However, we should attempt to pursue the welfare of as high a proportion of mankind as possible. Consciously pursuing the ends of the species we become involved in

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\* This claim that man has by nature an affiliation with the whole species, and is thereby a citizen of the world, finds its source in the Stoic doctrine of the universal brotherhood of men through their possession of reason. It is egalitarian, in that all men possess reason: ".... rational creatures .... alone are qualified to partake of a communication with the deity, being connected with him by reason: why may not such a one call himself a citizen of the world?" Epictetus, Op. cit., I, ix, 1. It is ethical in that reason enables man to appreciate his natural (and therefore moral) end: "He does not forget the brotherhood of all rational beings, nor that a concern for every man is proper to humanity." Marcus Aurelius, Op. cit., III, iv.



a higher purpose, and the intentions of our actions are more general - thus coming closer to the general moral end of the whole. "When in general all the affections or passions are suited to the public good, or good of the species, .... then is the natural temper entirely good."<sup>47</sup> Those affections which are "the most truly natural, generous and noble are those which tend towards public service and the interest of the society at large."<sup>48</sup> Whether he be citizen or statesman, the aim of the moral being must be to serve that portion of humanity over which he has influence.

By looking at the affections within ourselves we can distinguish between the moral and the non-moral by use of reason. By looking at men in their relationship with others, we can distinguish a moral purpose which is dictated and controlled by the general mind of Nature. Thus, upon a difference in interpretation of the nature of man, both as a person with rationally distinguishable moral affections and as a member of a species whose moral end he should pursue if he wishes to be moral,\*

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\* Concerning Shaftesbury's attitude towards the human obligation towards moral action, see Chapter Four below.

Shaftesbury and the materialist philosophies of the Epicureans and Hobbes come into conflict. The one presents us with a philosophy of universal moral standards; the other with a physical description of the structure of man, an explanation of moral terminology in terms of pain and pleasure, and (with the Epicureans) recommendations concerning how we can maximise pleasure and minimise pain.

Taking his belief that all men have within them natural affections, which direct them towards their ends as part of a universal design, Shaftesbury went on to criticise the ideas of the Epicureans and Hobbes concerning the origins of political society. In so doing, he formulated his own theory of society, which will be outlined in the next section.

#### - IV -

In his Leviathan Hobbes presents us with the idea of a "state of nature" in which equal, selfish individuals pursue security from pain and death. Men formulate laws of nature in an attempt to protect themselves from each other, but will not obey them unless they are compelled to do so.\* The basis of

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\* "For the laws of nature, as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others, as we would be done to, of themselves, without the terror of some power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions ...."  
Leviathan, 109.

political society is the provision of compulsion in the person of a sovereign power. The possibility of men living together, according to fixed modes of conduct, is dependent upon this artifact, the basis of which is fear.

Taking the state of nature as though it were a real historical condition,\* Lucretius states that there was a time when men had "no notion of the mutual restraint of morals and laws."<sup>49</sup> Men made mutual alliances in an attempt to protect themselves from violence. However, the situation was insecure, and remained so until,

Mankind, worn out by a life of violence and enfeebled by feuds, was the more ready to submit of its own free will to the bondage of laws and institutions .... Ever since then the enjoyment of life's prizes has been tempered by the fear of punishment."<sup>50</sup>

The logical steps of Hobbes are thus found historically conceived in the writings of Lucretius. Both conclude that mankind is incapable of living sociably together without the impetus provided by a constant fear of punishment.

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\* In this he differs from Hobbes who wrote, "It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places, where they live so now." Ibid., 83.



As we have seen, Shaftesbury is opposed to the idea that the natural bent of man is one of anti-social egoism. Because Nature is for Shaftesbury an organised whole, the individual can not be considered in isolation from the rest of his species. For man's purpose is to pursue the common good, which is to act upon the impetus of the social or natural affections. In The Moralists we find Shaftesbury saying (through the mouth of Theocles),

even on the supposal "that there was ever such a condition or state of men, when as yet they were unassociated, unacquainted, and consequently without any language or form of art" .... "that it was their natural state to live thus separately," can never without absurdity be allowed. .... So might you call the human egg or embryo the man. The bug which breeds the butterfly is more properly a fly, though without wings, than this imaginary creature is a man. For though his outward shape were human, his passions, appetites, and organs must be wholly different. His whole inward make must be reversed, to fit him for such a recluse economy and separate subsistence.<sup>51</sup>

Natural man is social man, in possession of natural affections which Hobbes had denied. It is because of this attitude that Shaftesbury could reject the theory that the existence of a stable social situation is based upon expediential agreements which are enforced by fear of punishment. Each part of the cosmos is regarded as contributing to the harmony of the whole,

as a result of which we accept that mankind has a telos. This telos is, according to Shaftesbury, both social and moral:

The end or design of nature in man is society. ....  
Now, if the ultimate design and end of nature in the constitution of man be, that he be framed and fitted for society, and if it be the perfection of human nature to be thus fitted, how should not this, which is the end and perfection of human nature, be also the good of man?<sup>52</sup>

Because Shaftesbury believes that man is naturally social and good, the logical basis of society is not selfishness, but sociability. We have evidence of this when we look at how our natural affections bring us into union with our fellow men in an attempt to support the species.\* Consequently, as an alternative to the contract theory, Shaftesbury presents us with the independent emergence of society as a necessary consequence of the human condition:

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\* "Is it natural for a parent to love the offspring, or for a creature of any kind to affect more particularly his own species or kind? If this be called natural, what else is understood but that the preservation and support of such a certain species is designed by nature, and after this manner, and by these means? This therefore is the design and will of nature, that by the natural and good affection of creatures towards their own species the species should be preserved and be prosperous." Rand (ed.) Life, Letters, and Philosophical Regimen, 3.

If any appetite or sense be natural, the sense of fellowship is the same. If there be anything of nature in that affection which is between the sexes, the affection is certainly as natural towards the consequent offspring; and so again between the offspring themselves, as kindred and companions, bred under the same discipline and economy. And thus a clan or tribe is gradually formed; a public is recognised ....

How the wit of man should so puzzle this cause as to make civil government and society appear a kind of invention and creature of art, I know not.<sup>53</sup>

Just as the birds fly south for winter; just as the acorn grows into the oak tree, man's natural drive is to exist socially within human communities. Society implies a government and laws which aid the citizens in the organisation of their lives. Government is not Hobbes's sovereign power, restraining selfishness (although this is part of its task); but the means of providing a situation in which the natural affections find greater scope for development (See Chapters Seven and Eight).

Nature directs man towards the fulfilment of his potential as a member of society. When deciding upon the course of his actions the individual, if he is to be moral, should consider himself as partaking in this process. He will, as a consequence, pursue the good of the community, thereby giving moral significance to his actions. There may be



individuals who do not attain this ethical condition, and who live their lives according to Hobbesian precepts. In this case, Shaftesbury would draw our attention to the following statement by Benjamin Whichcote: "We must seek the laws of Nature only amongst those that live according to Nature."<sup>54</sup> For Shaftesbury, the natural man is one who creates a more meaningful ethical medium than the merely individual consciousness. Natural man is seen to be part of the higher natural end of society within which he finds himself, and to which he is directed by his natural affections.

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#### SUMMARY:

The present chapter begins by recognising Shaftesbury's attraction to classical writings, especially those of Stoicism. In Stoicism Shaftesbury found elaboration of similar ideas to those which he found attractive in the writings of the Cambridge Platonists. He found there the belief that man has morality within his nature, which can be discovered by reason. He found there the belief that the cosmos is rationally organised, that man has a moral purpose within the cosmos, and that man can find evidence of his purpose by recognising the "natural" actions

of himself and others. The concept of an organised cosmos, and his idea of a natural, social man, were used by Shaftesbury to contradict the philosophy of Epicurus (opposed also by the Stoics) and of Hobbes, both of whom were thought by Shaftesbury to have made the same mistaken assumptions. Referring frequently to parallel ideas between Shaftesbury and those of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus (to whom Shaftesbury often refers himself), the differences between Shaftesbury and the ideas of the Epicureans and Hobbes are outlined. These are discussed under the categories of metaphysics, morality, and the origins of political society. In so doing that element in Shaftesbury's writings which may be termed "rational" also finds further elaboration, complementing what has already been stated in Chapters One and Two.

Section II, which is concerned with the category, "metaphysics", shows:

1. that in opposition to the atomic metaphysics of the Epicureans, Shaftesbury accepts the idea of an organised cosmos within which all the parts have a predetermined moral purpose.
2. that Shaftesbury uses both faith and reason to justify the rationally organised cosmos and its source, which is God.
3. that Shaftesbury has an antipathy towards "metaphysical" enquiries, by which he understands descriptions of the physical structure of man and the world which do not refer to natural purposes.

4. that by this definition, Stoic hypotheses concerning man and his role in Nature are not "metaphysical" speculations.
5. that Shaftesbury's concept of Nature need not be regarded as a true description of reality, but can be seen as a necessary idea which is produced by the mind in its pursuit of moral truth - without reference to any truth that can be absolutely proved.
6. that the real nature of philosophy is to teach us to control the affections, and that we should not take up our time in useless speculations about the nature of God or the universe - advice which Shaftesbury does not always follow himself.

In Section III, which has as its basis the differences between Shaftesbury's theory of morality and that of Hobbes and the Epicureans, we are introduced to Shaftesbury's classification of the affections as provided in his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit. These are the natural affections, the self affections, and the unnatural affections. In relation to this classification it is noted:

1. that all men are capable of appreciating the same moral code by using reason to distinguish between, change the degree of, or eliminate from within ourselves, the various affections.
2. that in opposition to Hobbes and Epicurus, for whom moral terminology refers only to that which provides pain or pleasure to an entirely selfish mankind (and may consequently vary in meaning according to individual, time, or place), Shaftesbury looks to a universal moral standard.



3. that this moral standard is provided by the natural or social affections - the existence of which are denied by the Epicureans and Hobbes - which direct man towards that purpose given to him by Nature.
4. that the natural affections direct man towards the unselfish pursuit of the "welfare and prosperity of that whole or species, to which he is by Nature joined."
5. that, using the common good of society as the measure of good affection or action, the self affections are only acceptable in so far as they allow us to contribute to this end (i.e. make us more capable of fulfilling our social role).
6. that the unnatural affections must be completely eliminated in so far as they provide nothing which contributes either to personal welfare or to the welfare of society.
7. that Shaftesbury believed it was possible to distinguish between good and bad affections by reason alone, without reference to the common good.
8. that when he does this we can never be sure whether he is referring to a rational or non-rational capacity in man. In the Stoic sense it must be regarded as the divine rational spark which all men share with God and/or the general mind of Nature.

Section IV, which deals with Shaftesbury's attitude concerning the origins of political society begins with a brief description of the similarities between the ideas of Hobbes and those of the Epicurean poet, Lucretius. Shaftesbury, because

he accepts the Stoic belief that the nature of man leads him to pursue the welfare of the species, cannot accept the claims

1. that it is the insecurity created by universal selfishness that necessitates political society,
2. that political society is an artifact, and
3. that men can only live together peaceably under the threat of violence.

In opposition to this, Shaftesbury says that because natural man possesses social affections, he is a social being.

Shaftesbury presents us with an evolutionary theory of society, developing from the family, as part of which men must find their natural (moral) fulfilment.

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CHAPTER FOURNECESSITY, FREEDOM, AND MORAL OBLIGATION

- I -

A recurring theme in Shaftesbury's philosophy is the idea that Nature is a system in which all the parts are controlled and related by a rational power which, after the manner of the Stoics, Shaftesbury terms the general mind. This idea of a "system of the whole" was first discussed in Chapter One of the present work in relation to Shaftesbury's belief that the natural and the moral are equivalent terms. In Chapter Two we saw that the idea finds justification in Shaftesbury's belief in a consistently rational and moral Deity; and in the last chapter we saw how Shaftesbury consciously used the idea in opposition to the ideas of both Hobbes and the Epicureans as a basis for the acceptance of a universal system of values.

If, as Shaftesbury believed, the organisation of the cosmos is both rational and for the best, then whatever occurs is for the good of the whole. If all things are guided by the general mind, human misfortune should be accepted without complaint because it must be in conformity with moral purposes which are superior to any claims that the individual may make with regard



to himself. To be moral is to accept all that Providence has to offer us as being necessary to the harmony of Nature.

However, in addition to accepting the inevitable, Shaftesbury wants us to be satisfied with it. Man is part of a greater whole which, when its larger ends are achieved, ensures that man (either as an individual or a race) also fulfils his natural purpose - whether the individual realises it or not. Consequently, there is no such thing as absolute misfortune. Misfortune only exists because of a relative interpretation of the facts by the human mind. If we are to consider the whole, that which appears to be ill always has a higher purpose. In this knowledge we should rest content, and in order that the individual may do so Shaftesbury begs him to remember three things:

- (1) How vain and ridiculous the thing is itself, considering the vastness of time and substance ....

Individuals and particulars are insignificant when compared with the whole universe - "the vastness of .... substance"; the human life span is insignificant when compared with the "vastness of time".

- (2) That this was necessary, from causes necessary, and (whether Providence or atoms) could be thus only, and could not have been otherwise.

Whatever occurs must occur from necessity and is therefore unavoidable. Whether we believe in a moral end towards which all movement and change is directed, or a completely unconscious necessity which is dependent only upon physical causation - "whether Providence or atoms" - the individual is incapable of changing the course of events.

(3) That this is not only what was necessary, but what was best, since the mind or reason of the universe cannot act against itself; and what is best for itself, itself surely best knows. What I know and am assured of, is, that if it be best for the whole, it is what should have been, and is perfect, just and good ....]

Here Shaftesbury can be seen opting for a moral determinism. It is because that which happens is "best for the whole" and "should have been" that the individual should accept his lot with humility, and be happy in the knowledge that his situation, pleasant or otherwise, contributes to the universal harmony which is governed by the general mind. To do this is to support one's own best interests as well as to conform with Nature:

If there be an order and economy for the good of the whole, then nothing can happen to me except from that economy which provided for me in particular the best that was possible, and had respect to my good. If I am convinced of this, I must naturally love whatever happens to me from that economy.<sup>2</sup>

Man will find tranquillity by thus accepting his part in the universal design and, whatever appearances may be, realising that whatever fortune cares to offer is essential to the necessarily perfect whole.\*

To be satisfied with whatever happens to us, regarding it as necessary and good, involves a particular attitude which the individual must take towards his body. According to Shaftesbury, the mind or soul, and the body, are to be treated as completely discrete objects.\*\* In this distinction, it is the

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\* This agrees with the Stoic writings of Marcus Aurelius who wrote that because "mutual integration is a universal principle .... a myriad causes combine into the single Cause which is destiny. .... Let us accept such things, then, as we accept the prescriptions of an Aesculapius." Meditations V, viii. Shaftesbury merely repeats these sentiments when he says, "I .... will join my applause to what God has for the best decreed. For to will against that which is best, and to will what is impossible, what else were this but to be wicked and miserable." Rand (ed.), Life, Letters, and Philosophical Regimen, 91/2 (Necessity)

\*\* Neither the Stoics nor Shaftesbury ever systematised their ideas concerning the separation and relationship of a mind and a soul as two separate things within the individual. The means by which either of them appreciate moral truths appears to be immediate and intuitive, and they often appear to be concepts which refer to the same thing. The important distinction is between the mind (or soul) and the body, which are regarded by Shaftesbury as having contradictory satisfactions:

(Continued overleaf)



former concept which Shaftesbury considers to be relevant to moral theory. The latter, with its associated pains and pleasures, is irrelevant. Man must find his satisfaction in things of the mind (see below), and the "truly wise man thinks his body no part of himself nor belonging to him even whilst in it."<sup>3</sup> When we face life with this belief, then it will be easier to accept that every misfortune is a necessary contribution to the welfare of a higher system of ends (i.e. of the society, the species, or the whole of Nature). Physical pain and pleasure will be regarded as irrelevant - (thus conceiving a human attitude which stands in contrast to the Epicurean and Hobbesian descriptions of men and their reasons for action) - and whatever fortune may offer us we will be content in the

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".... as the activity of the mind and operations of the soul are the causes of the sensual pleasures being less felt, .... on the other side, is sensuality the obstruction of this good which is in a mind. .... Therefore, if the highest degree of this sort of good (viz., of a mind), be not attainable but by the loss of the other, then that other, as the meaner good must be sacrificed to this greater, and the only true and real good is the enjoyment of a soul and mind freed from the incitements, commotions, and disorders of sense."

Ibid., 57/8 (Good and Ill)

knowledge that it was willed by the general mind and is therefore for the best: "When I think I am hurt by any of these accidents that happen to a carcase, or to anything without my mind and real self, I am then out of my reason, and am not myself."<sup>4</sup> When we can thus ignore physical pain, we can wish for that which is, and be content in the knowledge that our desires are being satisfied. This can be done if we create for ourselves, within ourselves, the Stoic character which sees sensual factors as irrelevant in the knowledge that everything occurs according to the rational principles which pervade a Nature controlled by the general mind.

Nature is governed by reason and everything happens for the best. We can be content with this if we ignore our bodies and seek satisfaction in things of the mind (see above Chapter One). By desiring a moral character we can find total satisfaction; for we will desire to conform with Nature, whose general mind arranges all things for the best. When we find contentment in what is, whether our actions succeed or fail in their intent can make no difference to our satisfaction with the turn of events. For if, as Shaftesbury stated, ".... whatsoever happens in the economy of the whole is necessary

for the happiness, perfection, and establishment of the whole, that it should have been,"<sup>5</sup> evil is merely a figment of the imagination, the human mind misreading reality. Unable to consider things in relation to the whole, such a mind might not see that goodness and evil must be considered in larger terms than the individual, or the species, or anything less than the whole universe. In relation to the whole, there is no such thing as evil.

However, to accept that evil is a concept which has no meaning in reality is to destroy the need for any moral philosophy; yet the need for the reform of both the self and society is central to Shaftesbury's writings. According to him, the individual may become possessed by unnatural affections, which by contradicting Nature are evil both in themselves and in the consequential actions which are based upon such desires. Thus, as we saw in Chapter Three above, Shaftesbury wished us to remove these unnatural and evil affections from our characters or personalities. Also, it is only imperfect men who make the laws which govern human society (however natural society itself may be thought). Consequently, laws and customs may exist which contradict the end given to man by the general mind of the cosmos.



"So that 'tis hard to find in any region a human society which has human laws. No wonder if in such societies 'tis so hard to find a man who lives naturally and as a man."<sup>6</sup> The perfect world with which we have been presented by Shaftesbury rapidly disintegrates when he begins to stress the need for moral reform. There are three points that can be made in relation to this presence of evil within what Shaftesbury has told us is a perfect whole.

Firstly, as was stated above, evil can be seen as a concept created by men to explain those things which affect them adversely, but which, when considered from the viewpoint of a higher system, are seen to be necessary to a more general good. "Therefore if any being be wholly and really ill, it must be ill with respect to the universal system; .... But if the ill of one private system be the good of others .... then is the ill of that private system no real ill in itself ...."<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, Shaftesbury was not writing to explain the world's structure. As we saw in Chapter Three he had an aversion to metaphysical enquiry. Shaftesbury's aim was to impress upon his readers the fact that life upon this earth is not a game of chance to be played out without reference to a higher truth.

Life for Shaftesbury had a meaning which he thought would be denied if we accept the mechanical or atomistic theories of Nature. Where there is merely matter in motion, where there is no general mind, ".... it must be confessed there can nothing happen in the course of things to deserve either our admiration and love or our anger and abhorrence."<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Epicureanism was rejected by him as an explanation of the world merely in terms of material structure, which made morality efficacious to the well-being of the body rather than something that conforms with permanent standards of thought and action. In order to obtain a moral theory that will have universal applicability, Shaftesbury postulates a general mind within a harmonious whole. As we saw in Section II of Chapter Three, this is regarded by Shaftesbury as a concept necessary to moral thought which need not necessarily apply to empirical reality. As such, it might also be seen as a pragmatic hypothesis which persuades men to pursue the common good as a moral end. This would appear to be the case when Shaftesbury discusses the "hypothesis" of "perfect theism" (the belief in a rationally organised whole) in his Inquiry Concerning Virtue Or Merit:

For whatsoever is the occasion or means of more affectionately uniting a rational creature to his

part in society, and causes him to prosecute the public good or interest of his species with more zeal and affection than ordinary, is undoubtedly the cause of more than ordinary virtue in such a person.<sup>9</sup>

Evil may still exist in the world, but the individual can gain moral strength from the belief that the world is controlled by a general mind and that he is not dominated by the forces of evil or indifference.

The third point to be made in relation to the existence of evil within a rationally organised cosmos, like the second, involves a rejection of the idea of a perfect whole as applicable to empirical reality. If we now consider the universal telos not as a necessary coordination of all the particular parts in a preordained design, but as an overall tendency which need not necessarily be fulfilled, the contradiction which was at first apparent (between the perfect cosmos and the existence of evil) disappears. Alternative conditions, which deviate from perfection, are offered. The source of this deviation will lie in the activities of men which contradict Nature; and evil will be seen as the product of those activities. Thus, even though Nature's end is that man should be a social being and pursue the common welfare of the species, this need not necessarily be



the case. This is implied by Shaftesbury when he states that "... whatever the order of the world produces, is in the main both just and good."<sup>10</sup> This is the tendency which men sometimes contradict. How this contradiction occurs will be discussed in the next section in relation to the idea of "freedom" in Shaftesbury's ethical writings.

## - II -

Putting aside the idea of the perfect cosmos as a moral concept which need not apply to empirical reality, and leaving that interpretation of Nature which sees tendency rather than necessity in human development, we must ask ourselves the question - How can freedom exist within a world in which all things occur according to the will of the general mind? The will of the individual can mean little when his decision can in no way affect his environment. Yet Shaftesbury claims that the individual becomes free when he is moral.

When Shaftesbury refers to freedom within the context of a totally controlled Nature he is not referring to freedom to act in such a way that the course of events is changed. Everything that happens is for the best, and the freedom which results from morality exists only for those who accept this theory.

Freedom for Shaftesbury appears to be freedom from disturbance caused to the mind by the body and its desires. Man is always in a condition of "either the mind working upon the fancies, or fancies governing the work of the mind ...."<sup>11</sup> It is only when the mind governs the irrational impulse, the animal desires, that true freedom is attained. We can then be free from physical considerations when we attempt to formulate principles of action, and free from disappointment if the results of action lead to discomfort. We can be happy in the knowledge that we attempted to act according to Nature, and that that which occurs is necessarily according to Nature. Epictetus had stated that by discounting the body "you have in this topic a choice incapable of being restrained or compelled or hindered."<sup>12</sup> That choice is to act rationally or otherwise. We are free to follow nature by controlling our affections and using reason to direct our actions. Similarly, Shaftesbury wrote,

In the determinations of life, and in the choice and government of actions he alone is free who has within himself no hindrance or control in acting what he himself, by his best judgement and most deliberate choice, approves. ....Reason and virtue alone can bestow liberty. Vice is unworthy, and unhappy on this account only, "that it is slavish and debasing."<sup>13</sup>

In this statement the words "within self" are of primary

importance. By isolating the inner self, freedom of will is acquired whereby one may always act morally (which is to act rationally) despite the disadvantages of the environment within which the body may find itself. Freedom becomes control of our attitude towards the body and its environment in the knowledge that everything which occurs is desirable (because it comes from the rational will of the general mind) - before the event if we successfully comprehend the course of Nature; after the event if not. Whatever the case, Shaftesbury, like the Stoics before him, was determined never to be disappointed.

By leaving the concept of a rationally organised cosmos in which all things are necessarily directed towards their ends, and turning to the concept of Nature as either a potentiality or a non-empirical hypothesis (see above), we find an expansion of the concept of freedom. If man stops being part of an inevitable sequence of events he can stop feeling that all his actions must come up against the determinism of the cosmological design. The individual becomes a free agent in the sense that he can make rational choices between alternative courses of action and produce results which would not have occurred if he had not taken that action. Emphasis is switched from the creativity of the



general mind to the creativity of the individual mind.

When the universal design is regarded as a potentiality rather than a necessity, Shaftesbury presents us with a picture of man in whom there is an ever-present tendency to natural (social) action because of the presence within him of natural affections. However, as we saw in the last chapter, self and unnatural affections are also present in the human character. Whether or not the natural affections are given primacy (within the context outlined in Section III of the last chapter) depends upon his interpretation of the affections, and the rational choice between good (social) or bad (anti-social) affections. Some individuals may succeed better than others in this task. "And thus vice and virtue are found variously mixed, and alternatively prevalent in the several characters of mankind."<sup>14</sup> In the context of the present discussion, moral freedom can be reinterpreted as the freedom which is possessed by the rational individual to be either good or evil - the choice is his. The rational individual can examine his affections and organise them according to moral principles if he so desires. Shaftesbury hoped that he could create this desire within his readers - the desire to discover moral truth within themselves, to eliminate evil from

their characters, and direct their energies towards an application of their social affections in their dealings with others. But to do this, Shaftesbury had to provide his readers with a reason for acting morally. He must answer the question, What obliges me to act morally (i.e. to use my reason to choose the natural affections in preference to others)?

- III -

If we were to accept Shaftesbury's statements that Nature is controlled by a general mind which arranges everything for the best, it would be possible to recommend moral indifference; for the result must necessarily be the same according to this hypothesis whether we act according to moral precepts or not. In opposition to this, Shaftesbury claims that it is characteristic of man that he pursue moral rules, that it is this activity which distinguishes man from the animals (i.e. the rational pursuit of moral purpose), and that he only fulfils his purpose in Nature when he consciously attempts to act in accordance with Nature:

Providence has given me means .... to know both it and myself, and to be conscious for what and to what I was born. If I use these I am a man, and as such Providence will use me. If I use them not I am a mere animal (let my shape be ever so much of a man), and as an animal Providence will use me, even as we

men use other animals, making them willingly or unwillingly serve our purposes.<sup>15\*</sup>

Shaftesbury is here saying that even if every occurrence is predetermined, we must still attempt to be good by following our natural affections. The obligation lies in the individual's responsibility to himself as a rational being who recognises that he has a role to play in Nature's design. In Chapter One we saw Shaftesbury saying that it is characteristic of men that they think about how to act. In Chapter Two we saw that Shaftesbury believed the Socratic claim that moral knowledge implied moral action. Now we see that Shaftesbury thought that even if we believe that we cannot change the course of events, we must not declare these two propositions irrelevant. For virtue lies in the intentions rather than the results of any action (see Chapter One) and man should still attempt to fulfil his moral potential if he wishes to be more than a mere functioning mass of flesh, skin, and bone. What of the claim that our

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\* "... God hath introduced man as a spectator of himself and his works; and not only as a spectator, but an interpreter of them. It is therefore shameful that man should begin and end where irrational creatures do. He is indeed rather to begin there, but to end where nature itself hath fixed our end; and that is in contemplation and understanding, and in a scheme of life conformable to nature." Epictetus, Op. cit., I, vi, 4.



very thoughts themselves will be subject to the "necessity" that governs all things, and therefore beyond our control? It would be possible to answer that, because man's mind is part of the general mind, its thoughts may be regarded as independent of the necessity that is seen by Shaftesbury to be characteristic of the rest of Nature.

However, Shaftesbury does not appear to have been satisfied with this explanation of why we ought to attempt to act morally. Indeed, it is not an explanation of obligation so much as a statement to the effect that "rational beings do think about right and wrong, and should act upon their conclusions." Thus, all we know about Shaftesbury's theory of moral obligation so far is that he thought that obligation to act morally was relevant to a situation in which the individual could not possibly alter the course of events.\* To discover why he should do this we

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\* Within the context of an optimistic interpretation of the universe, this means that we must attempt to act in conformity with Nature, but always be satisfied with what occurs as being inevitable and for the best. However, if evil is given existence within the world (as it is by Shaftesbury) then this insistence upon moral action even when there is no apparent hope of changing things leads to a moral attitude in which personal considerations are subordinated to the pursuit of right. This is made easier if the body is disregarded as insignificant (see earlier in this chapter) and satisfaction is sought for in the mental pleasures (see this section).

must look at Shaftesbury's views on happiness. In Part II of his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit Shaftesbury undertakes to demonstrate our obligation to virtue, and does so by showing that we maximise our happiness by being virtuous (acting upon the impulse of those affections which allow us to fulfil our natural end as social beings). In the last analysis, happiness is the basis of all moral obligation in Shaftesbury's ethical theories.

Shaftesbury wrote that "... in this we should all agree, that happiness was to be pursued, and in fact was always sought after ...."<sup>16</sup> However, happiness is to be found only if we are moral. In order to show this, Shaftesbury sets out to prove three things concerning the affections that can be found in men. These are,

1. "That to have the natural, kindly, or generous affections strong and powerful towards the good of the public, is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment"; and "that to want them, is certain misery and ill."
2. "That to have the private or self affections too strong, or beyond their degree of subordination to the kindly and natural, is also miserable."
3. And "that to have the unnatural affections (viz. such as are neither founded on the interest of the kind or public, nor of the private person or creature himself) is to be miserable in the highest degree."<sup>17</sup>

In attempting to demonstrate the first proposition Shaftesbury begins by stating that all pleasures are "either of the body or of the mind." Further, the "satisfactions" which relate to the mind are superior to those of the body. We can see that this is so by the example of those persons who "embrace any manner of hardship, and defy torments and death"<sup>18</sup> for their ideals. They would rather possess the mental object (which is a moral principle according to which they condition their actions) than forsake principle in favour of physical security.

If the mental enjoyments are superior to the sensual, then that which creates them should be pursued if we wish to be happy. That which will make us happy in this way is the natural affections, the relation of which to mental pleasure is as follows:

Now the mental enjoyments are either actually the very natural affections themselves in their immediate operation, or they wholly in a manner proceed from them, and are no other than their effects.<sup>19</sup>

That the natural affections are mental pleasure Shaftesbury feels there is "little need of proving .... to any one of human kind who has ever known the condition of the mind under a lively affection of love, gratitude, bounty, generosity, pity, succour, or whatever else is of a social or friendly sort."<sup>20</sup> The warm



feeling which is traditionally felt by the person who performs a kind action is the enjoyment of "the natural affections themselves in their immediate operation." Further mental pleasures proceed from the natural affections "as their natural effects." This can be seen if we consider the pleasure which we gain from friendship, which is "an enjoyment of good by communication," and "a pleasing consciousness of the actual love, merited esteem, or approbation of others."<sup>21</sup> All men, we are told, aim at friendship,\* but only those who follow the natural affections ever achieve it or the mental pleasures associated with it. The individual who does not accept his moral purpose, and ignores the natural affections in favour of the pursuit of money, power, or sensual pleasure, may or may not enjoy a sort of friendship. However

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\* "'Tis to this soothing hope and expectation of friendship that almost all our actions have some reference. 'Tis this which goes through our whole lives, and mixes itself even with most of our vices. .... were pleasure to be computed in the same way as other things commonly are, it might properly be said, that out of these two branches (viz. community or participation in the pleasures of others, and belief of meriting well from others) would arise more than nine-tenths of whatever is enjoyed in life."  
Characteristics, I, 299.

friendship not based on the natural affections will be unsatisfactory, and will not provide the pleasure upon which our happiness depends. Friendship which results from actions not based on the natural affections will be recognised as either hypocritical or unmerited. The individual would be informed by his conscience that his actions are not moral, as a result of which he will be miserable. For "every reasoning or reflecting creature is by his nature forced to endure the review of his own mind and actions,"<sup>22</sup> as a result of which, "no creature can maliciously and intentionally do ill without being sensible at the same time that he deserves ill. And in this respect, every sensible creature may be said to have conscience."<sup>23</sup> Because of the conscience, only the individual who follows the natural affections can avoid guilt and misery, and enjoy his friendship to the full.

It is interesting to note that the mental pleasures derived from performing moral actions are regarded by Shaftesbury as superior to the pleasure derived from contemplation alone. As we saw in Chapter One, Shaftesbury is concerned with how to "usefully philosophise" by using what I termed there "practical reason". This form of reason involves action. As for that

philosophy which is not concerned with practical activity, the pleasure we derive from it can never be as satisfying:

But this speculative pleasure, however considerable and valuable it may be, or however superior to any motion of mere sense, must yet be far surpassed by virtuous motion, and the exercise of benignity and goodness, where, together with the most delightful affection of the soul, there is joined a pleasing assent and approbation of the mind to what is acted in this good disposition and honest bent.<sup>24</sup>

The highest mental pleasure is obtained from the presence and application of the natural affections.

The second part of Shaftesbury's attempt to persuade us to act according to the moral knowledge which we can discover by the use of our reason concerns the self affections. The self affections, \* if "too intense or strong, .... become cowardice, revengefulness, luxury, avarice, vanity and ambition,

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\* Those "home-affections" which Shaftesbury deals with in the Inquiry, and which lead to the "vicious and ill" affections, are, ".... love of life; resentment of injury; pleasure, or appetite towards nourishment and the means of generation; interest, or desire of those conveniences by which we are well provided for and maintained; emulation, or love of praise and honour; indolence, or love of ease and rest." Characteristics, I, 317. If held "in an extreme degree", these affections lead to vice (i.e. contradict the common good), and make us unhappy.



sloth; and as such are owned vicious and ill with respect to human society."<sup>25</sup> However, in addition to being anti-social, these perverted affections also make us unhappy - a condition that can be amended only by reducing the intensity of these affections. How the presence of over-strong self affections makes us unhappy is described by Shaftesbury as follows:

a) Cowardice is an over-strong presence of love of life. It fails to make us happy because it is both ineffective (fear destroying the ability to protect ourselves effectively) and makes us hate ourselves when we reflect upon our actions.

Shaftesbury says that "there is no one surely so disingenuous as not to allow that life in this case becomes a sorry purchase, and is passed with little freedom or satisfaction."<sup>26</sup>

b) Revengefulness is an over-strong presence of resentment of injury. Shaftesbury sees the presence of the latter passion as a deterrent to those who would injure us. However, as revenge it becomes self-destructive making us ignore danger to ourselves in pursuit of its end. Also, the satisfaction of revenge is no real pleasure, being nothing more than the ceasing of pain felt by deep resentment towards other persons. Revenge is dependent

upon "our preceding anguish and incumbent pain" which can be negated by the act of vengeance; and the greater the pain has been, the greater the pleasure obtained by the act. Therefore, to achieve happiness we must pursue a prior pain; and "to be subject to such a passion .... is in reality to be very unhappy," because it is "only a perpetual assuaging of anger perpetually renewed" within an "envenomed malignant disposition acting at its liberty."<sup>27</sup>

c) Luxury is pursued when there is an over-strong presence of the "appetite towards nourishment and means of generation", the proper end of which Shaftesbury terms "pleasure". Concerning food and drink, over-indulgence destroys the ability to appreciate either. "'Tis plain," writes Shaftesbury, "that by urging Nature, forcing the appetite, and inciting sense, the keenness of the natural sensations is lost."<sup>28</sup> Also, the result of unrestrained desire in this sphere leads to disease, the sacrifice of honour and fortune, and the destruction of our physical health. Similarly, the other side of "pleasure", which is a product of sexual desire, destroys both our ability to enjoy the activity and the health of our mind and body (when over-

indulged).\*

d) Avarice is an over-strong presence of "interest" ("desire of those conveniences by which we are well provided for and maintained"). If not too strong,

The public as well as private system is advanced by the industry which this affection excites. But if it grows at length into a real passion, the injury and mischief it does the public is not greater than that which it creates to the person himself. Such a one is in reality a self-oppressor, and lies heavier on himself than he can ever do on mankind.<sup>29</sup>

When interest (self-interest) becomes avarice men will place their advantage in external objects in which they can never find satisfaction, for they will always desire some further object which is beyond their reach, and fear for the loss of what is already possessed. (See Chapter One above.)

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\* Concerning the enjoyment appreciated by persons with either a normal or an excessive presence of the desire for the culinary and sexual delights, Shaftesbury writes that, "were both these sensations to be experimentally compared; that of a virtuous course which belonged to one who lived a natural and regular life, and that of a vicious course which belonged to one who was relaxed and dissolute; there is no question but judgement would be given in favour of the former.... As to the consequences of this vice [i.e. over-indulgence], with respect to the health and vigour of the body, there is no need to mention anything. The injury it does to the mind, though less noticed, is yet greater. The hindrance of all improvement, the wretched waste of time, .... the disorder and looseness of a thousand passions through such a relaxation and enervating of the mind, are all of them effects sufficiently apparent when reflected on." Characteristics, I, 325.



e) Similarly, when emulation becomes vanity and ambition, one lives in fear of losing what has been gained. A man should wish to be "fitted to every station in society" not for personal glory, but as a moral being. If positions of influence are pursued for their own sake, and not for the common good, "all rest and security as to what is future, and all peace, contentedness, and ease as to what is present, is forfeited by the aspiring passions of this emulous kind ...."<sup>30</sup>

f) Indolence is an over-strong love of ease, in itself necessary to keep our bodies healthy. Over-indulgence in this affection leads to destruction of health in both the mind and the body through lack of exercise. In the body we become uncomfortable. In the mind there is discomfort because of an imbalance of the affections described by Shaftesbury as follows:

.... in a soul or mind unexercised, and which languishes for want of proper action and employment, the thoughts and affections being obstructed in their due course, and deprived of their natural energy, raise disquiet, and foment a rancorous eagerness and tormenting irritation.<sup>31</sup>

In this manner, laziness not only makes us incapable of acting for the common good, but makes us also incapable of enjoying the pleasures of the mind which, as we saw above, are found in

the proper application of the natural affections.

In the six cases outlined here, Shaftesbury attempts to show how the self affections, if too strong, make us unhappy. At the same time, if we are over-indulgent in this manner, we weaken the natural affections.

Upon these terms we must of course endeavour to silence and suppress our natural and good affections, since they are such as would carry us to the good of society against what we fondly conceive to be our private good and interest ....<sup>32</sup>

By thus denying the natural affections we will deny ourselves the mental pleasures associated with them (and outlined above). In this way Shaftesbury persuades us that we should keep our self affections within the bounds of morality dictated to us by reason in its choice of the natural affections.

Finally, in his enquiry into "what obligation there is to virtue, or what reason to embrace it,"<sup>33</sup> Shaftesbury turns to a consideration of the misery which is caused by the presence of unnatural affections (outlined in Chapter Three above). These affections are a product of the natural affections being weakened by an over-strong presence of the self affections:

....'tis evident "that they [the self affections when they are too strong] must be the certain means

of losing us the chief enjoyment of life, and raising in us those horrid and unnatural passions, and that savageness of temper, which makes the greatest of miseries and the most wretched state of life ...." <sup>34</sup>

There will be misery if we are dominated by these affections because of the absence of the pleasures of the natural affections, and fear of all mankind towards whom the individual will feel only alienation, "divided from everything, and at defiance and war with the rest of Nature." <sup>35</sup> Indeed, the man who is under the domination of the unnatural affections is the sort of person whom Shaftesbury regarded as the Hobbesian natural man. Although disagreeing with Hobbes in that he saw this as the most unnatural condition, he would have agreed that life under these conditions would be nasty, brutish, and very miserable.

This, then, is Shaftesbury's own professed theory of moral obligation, which can be summed up in the words, a moral character and moral actions will make you happy. Preserving the eudaemonistic outlook of antiquity (present also in his intellectual forbears, the Stoics\*) Shaftesbury states that

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\* ".... you were not born to be depressed and unhappy along with others, but to be happy along with them. And if any one is unhappy, remember that he is so for himself; for God made all men to enjoy felicity and a settled good condition."  
Epictetus, Op. cit., III, xxiv, 1.



".... there is a necessity for the preservation of virtue, that it should be thought to have no quarrel with true interest and self enjoyment."<sup>36</sup> Because of this, we are faced with a paradox in Shaftesbury's ethical theories in that he justifies obligation towards an unselfish pursuit of the common good by appealing to each individual's selfish desire to be happy. How does this differ from the selfish motivation to morality which sees obligation in fear of God and hopes of rewards from the Almighty? - which, as we saw in Chapter Two above, was condemned by Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury introduces rewards into his theories when he tells us that we should be moral so that we can be happy, for happiness itself may be regarded as a reward.\* Shaftesbury nowhere solves this contradiction. On the other hand, Shaftesbury did not suggest that we pursue happiness as good in itself. We are not to pursue happiness, but universal moral rules. Happiness is merely a by-product of the pursuit of virtue; and a highly intellectual form of happiness at that, denying as it does the relevance of physical pleasures in the face of superior

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\* ".... notwithstanding the injury which the principle of virtue may possibly suffer by the increase of the selfish passion .... 'tis certain, on the other side, that the principle of fear of future punishment, and hope of future reward, how mercenary or servile soever it may be accounted, is yet in many circumstances a great advantage, security, and support to virtue." Characteristics I, 270.

mental enjoyments. As a consequence of this, the reader cannot help but feel that Shaftesbury's attempt to formulate a theory of moral obligation which is based upon the attainment of happiness is merely sugar on the pill of a theory that forbids us to consider personal welfare in our pursuit of higher social purposes.

Thus the wisdom of what rules, and is first and chief in Nature, has made it to be according to the private interest and good of every one to work towards the general good, which if a creature ceases to promote, he is actually so far wanting to himself, and ceases to promote his own happiness and welfare. He is on this account directly his own enemy, nor can he any otherwise be good or useful to himself than as he continues good to society, and to that whole of which he is himself a part.<sup>37</sup>

Here, in the Conclusion to the Inquiry, we are left in no doubt that in Shaftesbury's scale of values, the individual (and his happiness) can only have significance in the context of his pursuit of the public interest, in relation to which his private interests are always secondary.

Finally, in relation to Shaftesbury's theory of moral obligation as outlined in this section, we may note that Shaftesbury has been accused of not taking into account the authority of "conscience" when outlining the reasons as to why men ought

to follow the moral road. We find this criticism in the preface to Butler's Fifteen Sermons, where Butler's belief that "the very constitution of our nature requires, that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty...."<sup>38</sup> is contrasted with the following interpretation of Shaftesbury:

The not taking into consideration this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation, seems a material deficiency or omission in Lord Shaftesbury's Inquiry concerning Virtue. He has shown beyond all contradiction, that virtue is naturally the interest or happiness, and vice the misery of such a creature as man, placed in the circumstances which we are in this world. But suppose there are particular exceptions; a case which this author was unwilling to put, and yet surely it is to be put: or suppose a case which he has put and determined, that of a sceptic not convinced of this happy tendency of virtue, or being of a contrary opinion. His determination is, that it would be without remedy. One may say more explicitly, that leaving out the authority of reflex approbation or disapprobation, such an one would be under an obligation to act viciously; since interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation.<sup>39</sup>

Butler is saying that conscience should be used as a means of directing us towards moral action even if we think our happiness lies in another direction; and he condemns Shaftesbury for not stressing this function of conscience, and the possibility of the formation of a moral character which is independent of eudaemonistic considerations.



Butler's comments should not be taken to mean that Shaftesbury ignores human conscience. Shaftesbury writes that

.... no creature can maliciously and intentionally do ill without being sensible at the same time that he deserves ill. And in this respect, every sensible creature may be said to have conscience.<sup>40</sup>

When Shaftesbury discusses conscience, it is in terms of the moral obligation that it creates in us because of its relationship to happiness. Conscience, the "natural sense of the odiousness of crime and injustice," is possessed by all rational creatures.<sup>41</sup> It both distinguishes good from bad, and makes the presence of good in ourselves pleasurable (and of bad, uncomfortable). However, it is not required as an independent moral authority\* insofar as reason can distinguish between the affections in man's pursuit of that happiness that is the product of a virtuous life. In contrast to this, Butler was less optimistic than Shaftesbury concerning human reason, and stressed the need for a moral authority that is above our rational pursuit

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\* Butler's "reflex approbation or disapprobation", which is the conscience, might be said to have been taken into account by Shaftesbury in his concept of the moral sense. This is because the moral sense and the conscience have similar functions for Shaftesbury.

of happiness.\* Butler sees conscience as a moral guide and authority which solves the problem of "particular exceptions" to Shaftesbury's scheme, such as the possibility of our believing that our happiness is best served by acting in a non-moral way. That Shaftesbury does not consider "particular exceptions" suggests that for him such exceptions do not exist. What of the person who believes that his happiness is best pursued through immorality? - Such a person will remain unhappy until he applies his reason to the control of his affections towards natural ends. Therefore, the situation will not be "without remedy". Made unhappy by his conscience, the individual will attempt to amend his ethical failings by using his reason to direct his actions towards moral ends.

- IV -

To pursue the natural affections, keeping the self affections within their proper limits, and eliminating the unnatural affections, will allow us to be happy in the pursuit

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\* "... one of these principles of action, conscience .... plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims the absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification."  
Butler, Fifteen Sermons. "Preface". See Raphael (ed.) British Moralists, I, 330.

of virtuous ends. Given this, the final question which this chapter will seek to answer is, What is the relationship between the various affections within a person who successfully controls his affections, follows Nature's purpose, and attains happiness?

When Shaftesbury discusses the relationship between the affections he refers to a "balance". Thus, when he discusses the "united structure and fabric of the mind" he says that

in this constitution the impairing of any part must instantly tend to the disorder and ruin of other parts, and of the whole itself, through the necessary connection and balance of the affections ....42

The term balance here means nothing more than the ratio of the affections which may vary from person to person. However, given a balance within a particular person, Shaftesbury claims that the strength of one affection cannot be changed without affecting the strength of the others. A weakening of the natural affections will make the self affections both relatively and quantitatively stronger within the mind of any individual. This is their "necessary connection and balance."

The correct balance of the affections within any person may be said to exist when his actions (which are a product of



his passions or affections\*) are directed towards the moral goals which are dictated by Nature. This will be a balance between the natural or social affections and the self affections; the unnatural affections being absent (see above Chapter Three).

Whatever the strength of the self and natural affections in any person, the correct balance for any individual will be when his actions are directed towards the common good of society. Thus, the strength of any affection must be determined by looking at man's higher end as a social being. Because this is the measure, even the natural affections may have to be limited; for they must not be allowed to weaken the individual's ability to pursue the public good, "as when pity is so overcoming as to destroy its own end, and prevent the succour and relief required ...."<sup>48</sup> However, as was stated in the last chapter, the natural affections are always superior within a moral individual because their immediate end is the system of society, which is a higher end than that of the individual alone. Also, as we have seen in the present chapter, to be happy we must pursue the

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\* "Whatsoever therefore is done or acted by any animal as such, is done only through some affection or passion, as of fear, love, or hatred moving him."  
Characteristics, I, 285.

mental pleasures which are derived from the natural affections. Because of the "necessary connection and balance of the affections", to be thus happy involves a conscious effort to make the self affections serve our social (natural) purpose.\* In the pursuit of our self-interest (if defined as our happiness) we must pursue the public interest. By pursuing the one, we automatically pursue the other, if we are successful in our pursuit of either.

Concerning the relationship between self-interest and public interest Stanley Grean has written,

The problem is not one of either self-interest or public interest, but rather of self-interest and public interest. Since, in Shaftesbury's system, men have diverse interests and a variety of motivations, it is his conviction that it is always possible to work out effectual and satisfying combinations of private and public interest. In the kind of universe he believed in this is not only the ethical ideal, it is the ideal possibility.<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen above, Grean is correct when he says that for

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\* "And thus the affections towards private good become necessary and essential to goodness. .... since it is impossible that the public good or good of the system can be preserved without them, it follows that a creature really wanting in them is in reality wanting in some degree to goodness and natural rectitude...."  
Characteristics, I, 288.

Shaftesbury the problem (of moral choice) is one of self-interest and public interest. In Shaftesbury's philosophy the one does not contradict the other.\* However, because Shaftesbury talks in terms of a balance between the self and social affections, this does not mean he was searching for a satisfactory balance or combination of the self and public interests. There is no necessary relationship between self affections and self interest, and between social affections and public interest (as Grean appears to assume) in Shaftesbury's philosophy. Self-interest is not solely a product of the self affections, but a product of a combination of self and social affections. This combination of affections also pursues the public interest. Thus, self-interest and public interest are not opposed in the same way that self affections and public affections may be,\* they are not attained by separate modes of thought and action, and it is

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\* It must be remembered that "self-interest" and "public interest" are for Shaftesbury pejorative terms which refer to the products of the affections of that individual in whom there is a correct, moral balance between the self and natural affections. Thus, when Shaftesbury uses the term "self-interest" he is referring to our "real" self-interest as opposed to mistaken ideas concerning where our interest lies.



not necessary to make a choice between them.\* Both self and social or public interests are the simultaneous product of the same balance of affections and the consequent actions. The individual who recognises himself as a person who should follow those affections which contribute to the overall design of Nature, is the person in whom this connection of interests will find realisation.

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SUMMARY:

Beginning with a recognition of the central role that the idea of an ordered cosmos plays in Shaftesbury's philosophy, the first two sections of this chapter are concerned with some of

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\* "If there can possibly be supposed in a creature such an affection towards self-good as is actually, in its natural degree, conducing to his private interest, and at the same time inconsistent with the public good, this may indeed be called still a vicious affection; and on this supposition a creature cannot really be good and natural in respect of his society or public, without being ill and unnatural towards himself." Shaftesbury cannot accept this hypothesis. Distinguishing between self-interest and selfishness he writes, "And thus if there be found in any creature a more than ordinary self-concernment or regard to private good, which is inconsistent with the interest of the species or public, this must in every respect be esteemed an ill and vicious affection." It is this which makes us immoral and unhappy (see above) and "this is what we commonly call selfishness, and disapprove so much in whatever creature we happen to discover it." Characteristics, I, 247-8.

the implications of this concept. Section I directs our attention to the following points in relation to Shaftesbury's writings:

- 1) That the optimistic interpretation involves an acceptance of all misfortune as necessary to the welfare of the whole.
- 2) That misfortune is only thought to exist when we misinterpret events. Shaftesbury recommends that we be content with all that occurs in the recognition that the general mind pursues our own best interest as well as that of the whole.
- 3) That to help us maintain this attitude recommended in 2), we should always remember that the body, with its pains and pleasures, has no moral significance.
- 4) That just as there is no misfortune, there is no evil in the universe.

However, in relation to the last point here, it is recognised that Shaftesbury also, contradictorily, recognises the existence of evil in the world when he advocates moral reform.

Three explanations of this contradiction are:

- 1) That evil, even when recognised by Shaftesbury, remains a human, relative concept with no absolute validity.
- 2) That the perfect cosmos is a "hypothesis", not necessarily true, which serves to encourage men in their pursuit of virtue and the rejection of evil.
- 3) That the perfection of Nature, in which all things are directed towards natural ends, is a



tendency rather than a necessity. Evil may exist when men choose to contradict Nature.

Given these possibilities in Shaftesbury's thought, when in Section II we turn to a consideration of moral freedom in his writings, we see two possibilities in formulating a definition:

1) If there is no evil and all things are necessarily perfect, then freedom is the freedom of the mind from all physical considerations in its attempt to conform with the will of Nature's general mind. This is the freedom to choose between following Nature willingly or being forced to conform with Nature's plan against one's will.

2) Within the context of a cosmos in which there is evil, the individual is free to choose between alternative actions which will affect the environmental situation. The individual is granted a freedom to create not only a moral character, but a moral environment where none would otherwise have existed.

Given the possibility of an individual both knowing and pursuing moral ends, Section III considers the question of why man should attempt to act morally; that is, we look at Shaftesbury's explanation of moral obligation.\* Shaftesbury stresses that

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\* Two points relevant to moral obligation in Shaftesbury's philosophy were made earlier in Chapter Two. Firstly, we should not pursue virtue through fear of God. Secondly, because moral knowledge implies moral action, the question of obligation to moral action need not arise. We will automatically be virtuous in our actions if we perceive moral truth. However, that Shaftesbury was not entirely satisfied with this second explanation is demonstrated by the elaborate explanation of happiness as a product of virtuous thoughts and actions as outlined in the present chapter.



even if we accept all things as predetermined in a perfect whole, we must still pursue moral action. This is because of our sense of responsibility as rational beings. However, this is not Shaftesbury's explanation of obligation which, as outlined in the Inquiry, is based upon the individual's pursuit of happiness. Referring to the affections, Shaftesbury attempts to show that,

- 1) The mental pleasures of the natural affections provides us with our greatest happiness.
- 2) Over-indulgence in the self affections creates unhappiness.
- 3) Any presence of the unnatural affections creates unhappiness.

Upon these conclusions Shaftesbury recommends that we follow the natural affections, which direct us towards moral ends. It is a recommendation which is made on grounds of self-interest. If we are to realise our self-interest (i.e. our happiness) we must also realise the common good. It is noted that, as a consequence of this proclaimed unity between happiness (self-interest) and morality, Shaftesbury was condemned by Butler for denying the authority of the conscience - which would come into effect if our happiness were seen by us to involve immorality.

Section IV considers Shaftesbury's belief that when we pursue our self-interest, the balance created between the affections will be such as will effect a pursuit of the public interest. The point is stressed that, for Shaftesbury, the self and public interests are not alternatives, nor are they achieved by different sorts of action. The pursuit of either interest involves the satisfaction of both, although, as is stated in Section III, for Shaftesbury the public interest appears to be of greater significance and the private interest (personal happiness) subordinate to it.

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CHAPTER FIVEBEAUTY AND MORALITY IN SHAFTESBURY'S THOUGHT- I -

In Chapter One of this work it was recognised that Shaftesbury's philosophy contains a non-rational element which stands in contrast to his references to reason as the means whereby we can recognise moral truth. However, with the exception of occasional references to the non-rational "moral sense", Chapters Two, Three and Four have discussed Shaftesbury's ideas within a context of his "rationalism". In so doing, that which has often been considered the central aspect of Shaftesbury's thought has been put on one side; that is, the element in Shaftesbury's writings which "brought into prominence the significance of immediate feeling, determined by instinct, for ethical judgements ...."<sup>1</sup>

That Shaftesbury consciously opposed rationalism may be doubted, for there is a repeated appeal to reason in his works. However, that "Shaftesbury ....gave a decided stimulus to emotionalism ...."<sup>2</sup> seems to be accepted. Consequently, there is a contrast between reason and emotion in Shaftesbury's writings, and it is this that has often led to criticism of his



ideas. It has been said of him that his "analysis of the act of moral approbation .... does not discriminate with sufficient precision between the rational and emotional elements in our moral judgements ...."<sup>3</sup> The aim of the present chapter is to draw together those elements in Shaftesbury's writings that make up the emotional theory of morality.

The basis of the emotional theory of morality is what Shaftesbury believes to be an attraction, found in all men, towards beauty:

Nothing surely is more strongly imprinted on our minds, or more closely interwoven with our souls, than the idea or sense of order and proportion .... What a difference there is between harmony and discord! cadency and convulsion! What a difference between composed and orderly motion, and that which is ungoverned and accidental! between the regular and uniform pile of some noble architect, and a heap of sand or stones! between an organised body, and a mist or cloud driven by the wind!<sup>4</sup>

This difference between the beautiful and the non-beautiful is perceived by a "plain internal sensation" which is non-rational. This we may term the moral or aesthetic sense which can appreciate beauty in all its forms. Thus, if we consider beauty as it is found in Nature or in the creation of an artist or virtuoso, our recognition of it (i.e. beauty) will depend on this

non-rational element within us all.\*

However, beauty is not only to be appreciated in the external object, but can also be found as a quality of mind. That is, Shaftesbury conceives an internal beauty as well as an external beauty; there is beauty in the affections as well as beauty in a work of art. This inner beauty involves the same principle as external beauty; and the appreciation of this beauty is by means of the same aesthetic sense. This is made clear by Shaftesbury in the following statement:

The case is the same in the mental or moral subjects as in the ordinary bodies or common subjects of sense. The shapes, motions, colours, and proportions of these latter being presented to our eye, there necessarily results a beauty or deformity, according to the different measure, arrangement, and disposition of their several parts. So in behaviour and actions, when presented to our understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent difference, according to the regularity or irregularity of the subjects.

The mind, which is spectator or auditor of other minds, cannot be without its eye and ear, so as to discern proportion, distinguish sound, and scan each sentiment or thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its censure. It feels the soft and harsh, the

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\* "Every one is a virtuoso of a higher or lower degree. Every one pursues a Grace and courts a Venus of one kind or another. The venustum, the honestum, the decorum of things will force its way." Characteristics, I, 92.

agreeable and disagreeable in the affections; and finds a foul and fair, a harmonious and a dissonant, as really and truly here as in any musical numbers or in the outward forms or representations of sensible things. Nor can it withhold its admiration and ecstasy, its aversion and scorn, any more in what relates to one than to the other of these subjects. So that to deny the common and natural sense of a sublime and beautiful in things, will appear an affectation merely, to any one who considers duly of this affair.<sup>5</sup>

This being the case, it must be recognised that the activities of artists, of creators of beauties external to the mind, are directed by a moral 'sense', and appeal to that sense when they present us with works of art. Thus, concerning his "frequent recourse to the rules of common artists, to the masters of exercise, to the academies of painters, statuaries, and to the rest of the virtuoso tribe," Shaftesbury says,

I am persuaded that to be a virtuoso (so far as befits a gentleman) is a higher step towards the becoming a man of virtue and good sense than the being what in this age we call a scholar.<sup>6</sup>

By following beauty in external things we prepare ourselves for the pursuit of beauty in the affections. The balance and order which is sought for in outward things will be applied to the balance between the affections. When the balance is correct it will be beautiful, and our characters will be moral. Instead



of our discovering the correct balance of the affections by reason, the affections will now be judged and arranged according to their beauty.

The aesthetic sense in Shaftesbury's writings provides us with a means of distinguishing between moral good and evil in affections and actions.\* Also, in the concept of the moral or aesthetic sense is found a further means for resolving the problem of obligation to moral action which was discussed in the last chapter. This is because the moral sense not only distinguishes between good and bad, but is also a passion or desire which attracts us towards beauty. It is this "passion" which inspires the artist. It is "the love of numbers, decency and proportion."<sup>7</sup> Shaftesbury also terms the passion for beauty "enthusiasm", which is the moral sense as it can be seen functioning. As Philocles says to Theocles in the discussion of

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\* "No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged. No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than straight an inward eye distinguishes, and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious, or the despicable." Characteristics, II, 137.

"beauty" that can be found in The Moralists:

If there be any seeming extravagance in the case I must comfort myself the best I can, and consider that all sound love and admiration is enthusiasm: "The transports of poets, the sublime of orators, the rapture of musicians, the high strains of the virtuosi - all mere enthusiasm!...."

And I, replied Theocles, am content that you should call this love of ours enthusiasm, allowing it the privilege of its fellow-passions.<sup>8</sup>

Enthusiasm in this context\*forms the link between appreciation of beauty and creation of beautiful works by artists. In the moral context it is the link between the ability to distinguish the beautiful, and the creation within of a beautiful character. The moral sense involves the desire to possess beauty, which involves the obligation to create a beautiful (moral) balance of the affections - which will form the basis for beautiful (moral) actions.

Shaftesbury argues "that there is a power in numbers, harmony, proportion, and beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the heart, and raises the imagination to an opinion

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\* As will be seen below, Chapter Six, Shaftesbury condemned certain forms of enthusiasm.

or conceit of something majestic and divine." Without this relationship to the beautiful, men would not be able to raise themselves beyond the desire to satisfy sensual ends. Without it

The animal functions might in their course be carried on; but nothing further sought for or regarded. The gallant sentiments, the elegant fancies, the belles passions which have, all of them, this beauty in view, would be set aside, and leave us probably no other employment than that of satisfying our coarsest appetites at the cheapest rate, in order to the attainment of a supine state of indolence and inactivity.<sup>9</sup>

But man does more than satisfy his immediate desires. He also has creative abilities. Man is creative in the arts, in morals, and in human society (which partakes of the other two - see below and Chapter Eight). Man is presented with a Nature (external and internal, environmental and psychological), which is capable of being changed and developed by him. How is this possible? Because man possesses a non-rational desire for the beautiful in all its manifestations. It is this that Shaftesbury calls "divine enthusiasm". By acting upon this enthusiasm, which is also termed a "divine passion", all men try to possess beauty. In this activity, they also attempt to create beautiful things. In so doing they change their environment, and develop



both the arts and society. Men also attempt to create beauty of the affections (their psychological or internal nature). This creativity, which places man above the animals as a creature who develops both his environment and personality, is the product of "divine enthusiasm", the desire to possess beauty.

Before the desire for the beautiful can be effective as a force for moral and aesthetic development, man must have the ability to recognise beauty, to know beauty when he sees it. This ability, as we have seen, is provided by the moral or aesthetic sense. The moral sense and enthusiasm thus become parts of the same process of human creativity. It is difficult to distinguish between them as they appear in Shaftesbury's writings. Perhaps the best way of describing them is to say that the moral sense is made functional by means of enthusiasm. In this way the one becomes dependent upon the other. The moral sense needs enthusiasm before it can become effective. Enthusiasm can not be given direction without guidance from the moral sense. However, it should be remembered that very often they appear to be the same thing - another example of Shaftesbury's lack of clarity in his use of major concepts.

## - II -

According to Shaftesbury if we follow "divine enthusiasm" we will progress beyond the sphere of external beauties to the beauties of the mind and the affections. The beauties that are to be found within the mind are superior to those which exist in the external world. "Look! see! - What? where? - I can look into my mind and see finer things by much."<sup>10</sup> "Therefore, remember ever the garden and groves within. There build, there erect what statues, what virtues, what ornaments or orders of architecture thou thinkest noblest."<sup>11</sup>

Others may pursue different forms and fix their eye on different species (as all men do on one or other) [of beauty]. The real honest man, however plain or simple he appears, has the highest species, honesty itself, in view; and instead of outward forms or symmetries, is struck with that of inward character, the harmony and numbers of the heart and beauty of the affections, which form the manners and conduct of a truly social life.<sup>12</sup>

Our morality depends upon the recognition of beauty in the affections by the enthusiastic aesthetic sense. If beauty is not found there, then our desire for beauty which the aesthetic sense involves will attempt to create it. Consequently, virtue in the non-rational context of Shaftesbury's philosophy is "no other than a noble enthusiasm justly directed and regulated by

that high standard which he supposes in the nature of things."<sup>13</sup>

However, the enthusiasm for beauty which directs us towards the creation of a moral character looks beyond the self towards even higher expressions of beauty. Shaftesbury claims that "beauty of every kind .... raises the imagination to an opinion or conceit of something majestic and divine."<sup>14</sup> That "something" is an ordered cosmos, a beautiful whole. Experience with beauty impresses men with the idea that their attempts to create beauty for themselves, in either their character or in a work of art, have reference to something which is of higher significance than their subjective desires and satisfactions.\* Enthusiasm therefore encourages men to look beyond themselves towards the beauty of Nature. Maintaining his belief in the general mind of Nature, Shaftesbury sees this mind as having made the whole beautiful by imparting a harmonious design into it.

Accepting that the whole is beautiful, Shaftesbury presents his readers with a natural hierarchy of beauty in relation to which the individual may attempt to progress towards full

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\* Compare with what was stated above, Chapter Three, towards the end of Section II, concerning the "necessary" emergence of the idea of an ordered cosmos.



comprehension of the object of his "divine passion" or enthusiasm. This is presented in The Moralists as follows:

- 1) At the lowest level there is physical beauty, "the lineaments of a fair face, or the well-drawn proportions of a human body ...."
- 2) Above this there is the beauty of the mind of a moral individual.
- 3) Looking further, the "aspiring soul" sees the beauty of human relationships which result from the social actions of moral individuals; the "harmony of particular minds" which forms a "commonweal".
- 4) Looking beyond a particular community, the enthusiastic love of beauty "frames itself a nobler object, and with enlarged affection seeks the good of mankind." Beauty is now sought in "Laws, constitutions, civil and religious rites; whatever civilises or polishes rude mankind; the sciences and arts, philosophy, morals, virtue; the flourishing state of human affairs, and the perfection of human nature ...."<sup>15</sup>

All these first four orders of beauty are the sphere within which the virtuoso finds his purpose. Depending upon the degree of progress made by the individual in his appreciation of beauty, he will be "a virtuoso of a higher or lower degree." All men fit somewhere within the scale. "They who refuse to give it [the force of beauty] scope in the nobler subjects of a rational and moral kind will find its prevalency elsewhere in an inferior order of things."<sup>16</sup> When, however, we progress

beyond the fourth order of beauty outlined above, we enter the realm of philosophy. The virtuoso learns "whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts; and the sum of philosophy is, to learn what is just in society and beautiful in Nature and the order of the world."<sup>17</sup> The final two orders of beauty become,

5) The beauty of the cosmos in relation to which the beauties created and encouraged in (4) are complementary but subordinate. Love of beauty "rests not .... nor satisfies itself with the beauty of a part, but, extending further its communicative bounty, seeks the good of all, and affects the interest and prosperity of the whole."

6) Finally, the idea expressed in (5), that the whole is perfect, is seen by Shaftesbury to necessarily involve the idea of a ruling mind, and this is seen to be the "supreme beauty": "And since all hope of this [a perfect whole] were vain and idle if no universal mind presided .... 'tis here the generous mind labours to discover that healing cause by which the interest of the whole is securely established, the beauty of things and the universal order happily sustained."<sup>18</sup>

This is Shaftesbury's expression of a harmonious cosmos, beautiful as a result of being ruled by the general mind. However, these final two elements in Nature's hierarchy of beauty, having been stated, recede into the background. In Shaftesbury's philosophy they are the basic principles of his system, central

to his understanding of the role of beauty in man's moral and social condition, but principles of faith rather than something which can be seen and appreciated by man. Shaftesbury's subject-matter remains within the first four orders as he provides explanation and advice to the virtuoso. What this involves within the context of what has been outlined in the present section will be discussed below.

- III -

When Shaftesbury directs our attention to the beauty of the whole,\* he states that

.... having recognised this uniform consistent fabric, and owned the universal system, we must of consequence acknowledge a universal mind.... For can it be supposed of any one in the world, that being in some desert far from men, and hearing there a

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\* Although Shaftesbury says that by looking at Nature "you will be obliged to own the universal system and coherent scheme of things to be established on abundant proof, capable of convincing any fair and just contemplator of the works of Nature," the belief appears to precede the demonstration of order. "Think of the many parts of the vast machine in which we have so little insight, and of which it is impossible we should know the ends and uses, when instead of seeing to the highest pendants, we see only some lower deck, and are in this dark case of flesh, confined even to the hold and meanest station of the vessel."  
Characteristics, II, 65/66.



perfect symphony of music, or seeing an exact pile of regular architecture arising gradually from the earth in all its orders and proportions, he should be persuaded that at the bottom there was no design accompanying this, no secret spring of thought, no active mind?<sup>19</sup>

The significance of this statement within our discussion of beauty is that Shaftesbury could not consider beauty as something which occurs by accident. Beauty involves a creative act by a being which has intelligence. This being implants design into the material with which it is working. The musician implants beauty into sound; the sculptor into his clay; the architect into his bricks and mortar; the general mind into the material content of the universe. Because he thinks in this way Shaftesbury sees beauty as something which is distinct from that in which it is expressed. What then is beauty? Shaftesbury's reasoning appears to take the following line:

- 1) Beauty becomes evident when an artist creates something; but beauty cannot be equated with the thing in which it is found.
- 2) Therefore, beauty must be something which is added to an artist's material, but which is distinct from it.
- 3) That which is added must be taken from the artist.

4) That which is taken from the artist is his art.

A definition of beauty becomes a definition of the art of the creator of beauty. The created object is regarded as nothing more than a vehicle for the expression of the activity, the art. This is what Shaftesbury means when he affirms that

.... the art is that which beautifies .... So that the beautifying, not the beautified, is the really beautiful .... For that which is beautified, is beautiful only by the accession of something beautifying, and by the recess or withdrawing of the same, it ceases to be beautiful ....<sup>20</sup>

However, in outlining what the concept of "beauty" involves Shaftesbury does not halt at this point. For behind the "art" or creative ability of the artist there lies the directing influence of the artist's mind. It is the mind which "regulates and orders" and which is the "principle of beauty".<sup>21</sup> The mind provides the design which the art enables to be placed within a specific object. It is the mind which, through art, introduces beauty into its various modes of expression (i.e. into the creations of an artist). Because this is the case, Shaftesbury directs our attention to the mind. We must look to

our non-material conceptions of the beautiful if we are to understand what beauty involves.

When Shaftesbury refers us to intellectual ideas of the beautiful the concept of "form" becomes relevant. Form, which is that which when added to the artist's material makes beautiful objects, music, buildings, paintings etc., is seen by Shaftesbury to find its source in the mind. Beauty can be understood as an intellectual form, unadulterated by sensual factors. When the artist appreciates this "innate idea" of the beautiful (see below) he can transfer form, through art, into externals. If we are to fully appreciate a beautiful work of art, Shaftesbury tells us that we must appreciate this process, and recognise the intellectual characteristics of the created thing:

"... the beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter, but in the art and design; never in body itself, but in the form or forming power." Does not the beautiful form confess this, and speak the beauty of the design whenever it strikes you? What is it but the design which strikes? What is it you admire but mind, or the effect of mind? 'Tis mind alone which forms. All which is void of mind is horrid, and matter formless is deformity itself.<sup>22</sup>

Beauty for Shaftesbury involves both the creative process



(the art), and the intellectual conception of beauty (the form) which precedes the creative act. When we call an external object beautiful, it is to this dual characteristic which we should really be referring. Similarly, if we return to the first extract from Shaftesbury's writings to be found in this section, we see that Shaftesbury is saying that when we recognise the beauty of the whole, we should have in mind not the material facade but the form and forming power, which is the design that has been imposed upon the matter by the general mind of the universe.

Beauty for Shaftesbury implies an art, form, and mind; and Shaftesbury says that when he refers to beauty he is referring to one or more of these things. This can not be said to be a precise definition of what beauty is. For instance, he says that beauty is in "the form or forming power"; but whether it is one or both is never clarified. Nor is it made clear whether a distinction between these various aspects of beauty is possible. However, it should be remembered that Shaftesbury was not concerned with dividing the idea of "beauty" into its component parts. His main concern was to persuade us that we all have, in our feeling for beauty, a moral potential - that

is, beauty has an ethical as well as an aesthetic significance. As he says towards the end of the Characteristics,

It has been the main scope and principle of these volumes, "to assert the reality of a beauty and charm in moral as well as natural subjects ...." <sup>23</sup>

That the ethical standards which he believes to exist shall be of universal significance, Shaftesbury looks to permanent standards of beauty which are to be found within the minds of all individuals. For this reason he directs our attention away from material objects and the beauty which may be thought to exist therein. We are told that we must look for beauty within the mind, and in discovering it, discover there permanent principles of ethics. Shaftesbury's claim "that the beautifying, not the beautified, is the really beautiful" must be seen therefore as a means of making us look beyond the sensual evidence of beauty and consider the intellectual principle of beauty which can be found in an innate form within all our minds (see below). We must attempt to discover within ourselves the moral and aesthetic principles that move the artist to create his works of art (see below). It is, therefore, possible to see Shaftesbury's definition of beauty that has been described in this section as a rhetorical piece rather than as a scientific

description of what beauty consists of. Shaftesbury wants us to recognise that mind is a pre-requisite of beauty, that beauty is a measure of the good, and that insofar as we all possess a mind we are capable of creating beauty for ourselves - we are all virtuosos. Finally, as well as appreciating beauty we will be able to contribute to the total amount of beauty (as evidenced by the sensual creations of an artist) which is present in the world. What this involves for Shaftesbury will now be considered.

- IV -

Shaftesbury's claim that all men have a non-rational aesthetic sense is tied to the idea that the individual is able to participate in the ruling principle of the cosmos. In The Moralists, a work in which we find a greater emphasis upon the emotional and aesthetic than the rational element in man, Shaftesbury informs us through Theocles that our "real self" is "... drawn out and copied from another principal and original self (the Great One of the world)...."<sup>24</sup> Within this relationship, "the particular mind should seek its happiness in conformity with the general one ...."<sup>25</sup> "Conformity" is not attained by reason but by the emotional activity of the aesthetic



sense; and it is because of this that A.O. Aldridge was able to write that "Shaftesbury's esthetic [sic] concepts are .... the logical extension of the stoic and classical training which dominated his tastes and conduct throughout his life."<sup>26</sup> The attraction towards beauty which all men possess finds its source in the ruling principle or general mind of the universe. Within the context of this belief Shaftesbury makes two assertions:

1. That beauty always contributes to the purposes of Nature, serving the latter's moral design.
2. That knowledge of beauty, and attraction to those things in which beauty is evinced, is "innate".

Each of these claims will be examined in turn in the present section.

In relation to the first assertion, that all beauty contributes to the moral design of Nature, let us examine the obscure statement made by Shaftesbury in his Sensus Communis, that "all beauty is truth."<sup>27</sup> Truth here means for Shaftesbury the good of the whole\* which is produced by the activity of a universal

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\* "The truth which is his beauty is the oneness and rightness of the universe, for the good of which all the parts, including man, exist. There are two aspects to this truth. The first .... is the essential nature of things perceived by man. The second relates to man's own function .... The beauty, or the virtue, to be achieved by man is the management  
(Continued overleaf)

ruling principle. Ernst Cassirer has written that, for Shaftesbury

.... "truth" signifies .... the inner intellectual structure of the universe .... which can only be immediately experienced and intuitively understood. This form of experience and of intuitive understanding is available in the phenomenon of the beautiful. Here the barrier between the world within and the world without disappears; both worlds are governed by the same all-inclusive law, which each expresses in its own manner. .... It is this kind of "reflection" purified of all logically derived elements and showing the inner and outer worlds as indissolubly woven together, which we enjoy in the contemplation of the beautiful.<sup>28</sup>

Within this all-inclusive concept of the beautiful we see the controlling force of the universe. All beauty is seen to embody the general mind, and therefore is part of the moral design of Nature. When we say that something possesses beauty we are saying that it is in its natural state, and "acknowledging that the proportionate and regular state is the truly prosperous and natural in every subject." According to Shaftesbury, "the study and love of symmetry and order, on which

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of his life for the good of the whole (as shown particularly in the Inquiry) by developing whatever affections and activities make for the good of the whole, and eliminating whatever of them make against it." Esther Tiffany, "Shaftesbury as Stoic", P.M.L.A., XXXVIII, 659.

beauty depends," involves recognition of the fact that "beauty and truth are plainly joined with the notion of utility and convenience."<sup>29</sup> A thing which possesses beauty, whether animate or inanimate, has been given direction and performs its function - the function given to it by Nature. In man, that function is to perform the duties of a social being, which occurs when he has a beautiful balance of the affections.

When man performs his function he is both beautiful himself and a creator of beauty. His aesthetic sense allows him to create beauty. We create beauty by means of a moral art (i.e. controlling the affections) because our own minds (and aesthetic sense) are part of the general mind which is the origin of all beauty. Beauty is given to human relationships, beauty is instilled in the products of artistic activity, and beauty can be found in laws which encourage either of these activities - even the statesman is involved in contributing to the beauty in the world. These aspects of man's contribution to the beautiful direction of the human race will be discussed below. At this juncture, what should be recognised is that insofar as we can participate in the realisation of beauty we are contributing to the design of Nature as determined by the general mind. As was



stated above, we are presented by Shaftesbury with a combination of aesthetics and stoicism. In the words of Cassirer:

"Shaftesbury takes from ethics the Stoic demand for 'life according to nature' and applies it to aesthetics. The purest harmony between man and the world is attainable only through the medium of the beautiful .... The truth of the universe speaks, as it were, through the phenomenon of beauty ...."<sup>30</sup>

Turning to the second assertion listed above (i.e. that our knowledge of beauty is innate) we can begin by considering a criticism of Locke's use of the innate which was made by Shaftesbury in a letter to Michael Ainsworth in 1709 (which can be found complete in Appendix B of this work). In this letter Shaftesbury condemns Locke because he is seen to have continued in the path of Hobbes and denied the moral and social nature of man.

'Twas Mr. LOCKE, that struck the home blow: for  
Mr. HOBBS's character and base slavish principles  
in government took off the poyson of his philosophy.  
'Twas Mr. LOCKE that struck at all fundamentals,  
threw all order and virtue out of the world, and  
made the very ideas of these .... unnatural, and  
without foundation in our minds. 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 came out of the other: but whether the constitution of man be such, that being adult and grown up, at such or such a time, sooner or later (no matter when) the idea and sense of order, administration, .... inevitably, necessarily spring up in him.<sup>31</sup>

That Locke, his father's physician and childhood tutor to himself, the respected philosopher with whom Shaftesbury maintained a correspondence until Locke's death, should be tarred with the same brush as Hobbes is surprising. Two years prior to the above statement, Shaftesbury had written to Ainsworth in praise of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding.<sup>\*</sup> Yet, it is the very epistemology of the Essay which Shaftesbury is

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\* ".... I am not sorry, that I lent you Mr. LOCK's essay of humane understanding; which may as well qualify for business and the world, as for the sciences and a university. No one has done more towards the recalling of philosophy from barbarity, into use and practice of the world, and into the company of the better and politer sort; who might well be ashamed of it in its other dress. No one has opened a better or clearer way to reasoning. And above all, I wonder to hear him censured so much by any church of ENGLAND-men, for advancing reason; and bringing the use of it so much into religion; when it is by this only that we fight against the enthusiasts, and repel the great enemies of our church."  
Letters (1746), 2. (Letter I, to Michael Ainsworth, February 24th, 1706-7).

condemning in the later letter. The reason for this condemnation lies in Shaftesbury's belief, common at the time, that in his Essay Locke had "destroyed" innate ideas.\* In so doing, Locke was seen by Shaftesbury to be encouraging the Hobbesian idea that right and wrong depend upon personal reactions to external stimuli, as a consequence of which the ethical concepts come to have only a relative validity. It is as a consequence of this interpretation of Locke's epistemology that Shaftesbury accuses him of making "virtue and honesty" depend upon "fashion and opinion", and condemns him with the following analogy in a letter to General Stanhope (1709):

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

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\* That Locke was popularly thought to have renounced any innate contribution to knowledge can be seen in the following statement by Voltaire: "MR. LOCKE after having destroyed innate ideas; after having fully renounced the vanity of believing that we think always; after having laid down, from the most solid principles, that ideas enter the mind through the senses; having examined our simple and complex ideas; having traced the human mind through its several operations; having shewed that all languages in the world are imperfect, and the great abuse that is made of words at every moment, he at last comes to consider the extent or rather the narrow limits of human knowledge." Letters Concerning the English Nation, 64.



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 philosophised 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. So is architecture and its beauty the same, and founded in nature, let men's fancy be ever so Gothic .... 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.<sup>32</sup>

The aesthetic analogy is no accident. Because he was pursuing universal standards, Shaftesbury thought that man should have a common measure. This measure, in the aesthetic context of Shaftesbury's thought, is the innate idea of order and proportion which manifests itself in the workings of the aesthetic sense independently of the particular experiences which any person may have. No matter how much he may admire Locke's rationalism, when Shaftesbury attempts to discover the non-rational source of ethical truth he rejects what he considers to be the ethical limitations of Locke's epistemological method.

Shaftesbury will not allow that man has no innate ideas. However, as we have seen above in the extract from the letter to Michael Ainsworth, Shaftesbury prefers the term "connatural" to "innate". This is because Shaftesbury is not concerned with

the origin of the idea of beauty, but with stressing the necessary presence of it within the minds of all men. In this way he re-emphasises his lack of concern with epistemological enquiry, resting satisfied with his conviction that man's moral and social nature is inherent to his species rather than something which depends upon external influences.\* In the letter to Stanhope that has been quoted above, Shaftesbury writes that it is

Not whether the very philosophical propositions about right and wrong were innate; but whether the passion or affection towards society was such: that is to say, whether it was natural and came of itself, or was taught by art, and was the product of a lucky hit of some first man who inspired and delivered down the prejudice.<sup>33</sup>

We see here that Shaftesbury is not concerned with human knowledge when he refers to the innate or the connatural, but with human instinct. The innate idea for Shaftesbury is not a rationally identifiable intellectual object, but an emotional

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\* This does not prevent Shaftesbury from emphasising the importance of certain forms of political environment for encouraging the emergence of the idea as the controlling factor in making practical decisions (see below Chapters Seven and Eight).



tendency or desire which he thought must necessarily arise in all men.\* When he says that, "if you dislike the word innate,

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\* It was suggested in Chapter Two (in a footnote in Section I) that the innate or connatural idea of Shaftesbury is similar to the general principles of natural law of Aquinas. This can be seen if we compare what has been said in the present section concerning Shaftesbury with the following interpretation of Aquinas's philosophy that has been made by Jacques Maritain: "... let us stress that human reason [in the philosophy of Aquinas] does not discover the regulations of natural law in an abstract and theoretical manner, as a series of geometrical theorems. Nay more, it does not discover them through the conceptual exercise of the intellect, or by way of rational knowledge. .... When he [Aquinas] says that human reason discovers the regulations of natural law through the guidance of the inclinations of human nature, he means that the very mode or manner in which human reason knows natural law is not rational knowledge, but knowledge through inclination. That kind of knowledge is not clear knowledge through concepts and conceptual judgements; it is obscure, unsystematic, vital knowledge by connaturality or congeniality, in which the intellect, in order to bear judgement, consults and listens to the inner melody that the vibrating strings of abiding tendencies make present in the subject." Man and the State, 91/2.

See also Eric d'Arcy's analysis of Aquinas's "synderesis" (the method of appreciating the general principles of natural law): "For Aquinas .... the first moral principles are like the axioms only in their logical primacy - not in the way they are self-evident. They are not analytic propositions, seen to be true simply by studying the meaning of their subject and predicate. In St. Thomas' theory, the clue to the evidence of the ethical 'axioms' lies in natural inclination." Conscience and Its Right to Freedom, 60.



let us change it, if you will, for instinct, and call instinct that which Nature teaches, exclusive of art, culture, or discipline,"<sup>34</sup> he is referring to an emotional or instinctive attraction towards certain things. Within the aesthetic context of the present chapter Shaftesbury can be seen emphasising the attraction towards beauty which is found in all of us. The innate idea for Shaftesbury must therefore be seen as the equivalent of the aesthetic or moral sense which allows us to make an emotional distinction between the good and the bad, and which (under the influence of enthusiasm) prefers the former. It is a sense which exists from Nature. It may be developed, in which case it becomes the source of artistic creation (see below). Without development it is a means whereby we can, and do, serve Nature's purpose by being moral. Shaftesbury even goes so far as to say that, in moral questions, "Men's first thoughts in this matter are generally better than their second: their natural notions better than those refined by study or consultation with casuists."<sup>35</sup> However, Shaftesbury also thought it necessary to develop a taste, which involves the development of the aesthetic sense rather than the acceptance of spontaneity as our guide in moral questions (see below).

The denial of innate ideas was, therefore, seen by Shaftesbury to be the denial of the possibility of universal moral standards, and the denial of man's necessary attraction towards those sorts of actions which bring him into an ethical relationship with his fellow beings. This is because the supposed presence within all men of an aesthetic sense is regarded by Shaftesbury as an innate idea. However, we should note that Shaftesbury's lack of concern with epistemological questions results in a failure to distinguish between knowledge and emotion, principles and feelings, ideas and instincts. We can never be sure whether he is referring to "beauty" as an intellectual form or as a creative force, as a category or as a function. Within the context of his aesthetic writings, where the appeal is to emotion or instinct more often than to reason, the functional use of the concept is more likely to be involved. The innate idea of the beautiful, termed also the connatural idea, instinct, or the moral sense, as Ernst Cassirer noted, "is not a content gained from experience or an idea present in the mind from the first as a stamped coin; it is rather a specific basic direction, a pure energy, and an original function of the spirit."<sup>36</sup> This function involves the ability

to recognise the desire to apply aesthetic criteria (order, harmony, and proportion) to all human activities. In this process we act as artists or virtuosi, a role which is seen by Shaftesbury to be of equal importance to the role of the statesman in society. For both the artist and the statesman create things which rank in the fourth order of beauty in his conceived hierarchy - see above. Why this importance is given to the artist will be discussed in the next section.

- V -

In order to understand the moral role of the artist or virtuoso in Shaftesbury's thought, we must look at his development of the concept of "form" (first introduced into the discussion in Section III above). Shaftesbury distinguishes between "three degrees or orders of beauty,"<sup>37</sup> which are described by him as three types of form. These are,

- 1) Dead forms
- 2) Forms which form
- 3) Forms which form other creative forms

By "dead forms" Shaftesbury appears to mean the material objects in which beauty is found. He is referring to the "beautified" - such things as "the palaces, the coins, the brazen or the marble



figures of men."<sup>38</sup> Those things, in fact, that in Section III above we saw him deny as belonging to the beautiful genre in his attempt to direct our attentions towards the origin and creative process involved in the creation of beautiful things. Dead forms, regarded now as the lowest level of beauty, "are formed, whether by man or Nature, but have no forming power, no action, or intelligence."<sup>39</sup> This form of beauty is found at the lowest level in the hierarchy of beauty described in Section II.

Forms which form, "that is, which have intelligence, action, and operation,"<sup>40</sup> are the minds of men as they create both dead forms and a balance of affections within the self.

It is when we consider the third type of beauty, "which forms not only such as we call forms but even the forms which form," that we find explanations of why Shaftesbury held the activity of painters and writers in such high esteem, why he placed the activities and creations of such virtuosi above the moral activity of an individual who creates within himself a moral character, and what he considered to be the aim and the measure of artistic accomplishment. For it was Shaftesbury's claim that an artist, if his work is to be declared successful,

should encourage the creation of a moral character within those persons who take pleasure in looking at or listening to his creation. The creation should stimulate the aesthetic sense of the person who is appreciating it, so that appreciation promotes the prerequisite conditions for the creation of a moral character within the individual. In other words, the form, the "architecture, music, and all of which is of human invention,"<sup>41</sup> creates the appropriate mentality in man, which in turn, will create a beautiful balance of the affections (i.e. a form which forms). When art succeeds in this task it must be considered on the same level as good laws, which encourage the innate moral elements in the citizens over which they rule - see below Chapters Seven and Eight.

Artistic creations lead to an emergence of the innate idea of beauty within ourselves and the use of it to balance our affections. This is the automatic effect of true art:

Who can admire the outward beauties and not recur instantly to the inward, which are the most real and essential, the most naturally affecting, and of the highest pleasure, as well as profit and advantage?<sup>42</sup>

Art therefore encourages men to follow their natures, fulfil their purposes, and be happy because of the predominance of the

natural affections in the balance of affections which is attained - see above, Chapter Four. The question that now must be answered is, What will be the content of those artistic creations that encourage this reaction in the spectator? What does Shaftesbury think this moral propaganda, which delimits the legitimate sphere of artistic activity, will involve? We can see Shaftesbury's answer to these questions in the Notion that was published after his death. He concludes in this essay that the painter should direct his energies towards the creation of a work that contains the following characteristics:

Firstly, each part of the work should contribute to the creation of a uniform whole - in the same way that Nature must be regarded as a whole:

And thus it is, that in general, thro' all the plastick Arts, or Works of Imitation, "Whatsoever is drawn from Nature, with the intention of raising in us the Imagination of natural Species or Object, according to real Beauty and Truth, shou'd be compriz'd in certain compleat Portions, or Districts, which represent the Correspondency or Union of each part of Nature, with intire NATURE her-self." 43

Secondly, a painting should represent the moral purpose of the object that is being painted - that is, the moral purpose given to it by Nature. Thus, in addition to "the Knowledge of a Whole



and Parts, "Shaftesbury adds that ".... 'twere to be wish'd that the Artist .... wou'd afterwards apply himself to the Study of moral and poetick Truth."44

Consequently, there are both structural and ethical norms which the painter must conform to. If these norms are applied then the painting will exhibit "simplicity". In the essay entitled "Simplicity" that can be found in the Philosophical Regimen we are told that

.... where proportion and exactness are wanting, there it is that there is a need of additions, ornaments; but, where order is preserved and perfection of art are attained, the rest only does prejudice and is an eyesore.45

If the artistic creation exhibits this simplicity, there will be no barrier to the recognition of the moral message which lies within the work. The true artist is concerned with the effect that his work has on the mind of those who view his work, not with the immediate sensual satisfaction that his work may give rise to:

For of this imitative Art we may justly say; "That tho It borrows help indeed from Colours, and uses them, as means, to execute its Designs; It has nothing, however, more wide of its real Aim, or more remote from its Intention, than to make a shew of Colours, or from their mixture, to raise a separate and flattering Pleasure to the SENSE."46

The artist's materials must always remain subservient to his moral design, to which end he must pursue simplicity rather than extravagance in his work.

According to Shaftesbury, the painter should attempt to make his paintings exhibit a) a unity, b) morality, c) simplicity. If he succeeds in this task it will mean that he is moral himself, instils morality into his paintings, and encourages the morality of others. These are the ends of artistic activity and can be used to measure the success of other arts than painting. The material with which the artist works is not important as long as the ethical message is communicated. If he is successful, by following the aesthetic sense within himself he partakes of the creative force of Nature.\* At the microcosmic

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\* Cassirer writes of Shaftesbury's theory of artistic creativity; "In the contemplation of the beautiful, man turns from the world of created things to the world of the creative process, from the universe as a receptacle of the objectively real to the operative forces which have shaped this universe and constitute its inner coherence. .... The true significance of the creation of man in God's image does not appear so long as man still remains in the sphere of created things, of the empirically real, and tries to copy the order and outline of this world; it is revealed only in that original inspiration which precedes every genuine work of art." E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, 316.

level he creates in miniature a moral whole that involves beauty, encourages beauty, and reflects his own beautiful character - which necessarily conforms with Nature insofar as it is controlled by the aesthetic sense. When this is done, the artist is seen by Shaftesbury to be a "just Prometheus under Jove" as he directs himself, his works, and others towards moral ends:

In his Soliloquy, Shaftesbury writes of the successful poet:

Such a poet is indeed a second Maker; a just Prometheus under Jove. Like that sovereign artist or universal plastic nature, he forms a whole, coherent and proportioned in itself, with due subjection and subordinacy of constituent parts. He notes the boundaries of the passions, and knows their exact tones and measures; by which he justly represents them, marks the sublime of sentiments and action; and distinguishes the beautiful from the deformed, the amiable from the odious. The moral artist who can thus imitate the Creator, and is thus knowing in the inward form and structure of his fellow-creature, will hardly, I presume, be found unknowing in himself, or at a loss in those numbers which make the harmony of a mind.<sup>47</sup>

This true artist represents for Shaftesbury the potential of all mankind. He is a person who uses the beauty which he finds within himself as a moral tool, which allows him to transmit his moral message to others through the medium of his art. The connection which the spectator makes with this artist is found in the



emotional attraction to the beautiful which we all possess. In this way there is a sympathy created between the character of the artist and the character of the spectator, both of whom will be in sympathy with the purposes of Nature which are expressed in the work of art.

- VI -

That the appreciation of beauty, which is an appreciation of moral truth, is based upon a non-rational emotional element in men, has led to the suggestions that Shaftesbury removes the possibility of our discovering universal moral truths because he leaves morality to the fluctuating standards of uncontrolled emotion. The American literary critic, Irving Babbitt, claimed that Shaftesbury undertook a "transformation of conscience from an inner check to an expansive emotion."<sup>48</sup> By this he means that Shaftesbury made ethical judgement depend upon personal whim, the feelings of the moment, which should be controlled by reason rather than followed without question. Similarly, W.E. Alderman wrote of Shaftesbury's doctrine of the moral sense that

.... the theory if applied in full would tend to make the ethical norm a variable rather than a constant standard; for individuals differ from each

other, and likewise, have within themselves, at various times, moods that are widely dissimilar. Were morality made wholly to depend upon passing intuitions, conscience would no longer be the rational force that we conceive it to be. If we accept the doctrine that an instinctive reaction is as infallible as a studied judgement, we hereby deny the need of any rational restraint and struggle.<sup>49</sup>

To regard Shaftesbury's theories as a deliberate attempt to base morality upon an emotionalism that has no other than a subjective reference is to misinterpret Shaftesbury - if this is the suggestion of the above criticisms. For although Shaftesbury wished for the individual to discover moral norms for himself rather than have them imposed by external influences, everything that we have seen of Shaftesbury's morality in this work points to the fact that he wished those norms to have universal validity, and therefore be held in common by all men. In conformity with this aim, the major factor of the moral or aesthetic sense is that it is believed by Shaftesbury to be a common measure, and consequently the source of moral norms with which all men can agree. Hence, Shaftesbury writes,

For harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of music. So is symmetry and proportion founded still in nature, let men's fancy prove ever so barbarous, or their fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, sculpture, or whatever

other designing art. 'Tis the same case where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony, and proportion will have place in morals, and are discoverable in the characters and affections of mankind; in which are laid the just foundations of an art and science superior to every other of human practice and comprehension.<sup>50</sup>

The "superior" art may be seen as the art involved in creating artistic works that encourage others to think and act morally. What this involves we have seen in the last section. What it is necessary to remember in the present context is that the moral character created by the aesthetic sense conforms with Nature, the general mind of which is seen to be the origin of all that we call beautiful, and the universal measure of beauty and morality. Therefore, to declare Shaftesbury a thinker who would create a variable ethical standard involves either failing to take this into account (i.e. Shaftesbury's declaration of a universal measure of moral truth and beauty), or declaring it invalid. To declare it invalid is to take a stand against Shaftesbury on the a priori principle, which is either implicit or explicit in everything that Shaftesbury wrote concerning morality, that all men stand in a similar intellectual relationship to the optimistically conceived cosmos. To deny this



other designing art. 'Tis the same case where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony, and proportion will have place in morals, and are discoverable in the characters and affections of mankind; in which are laid the just foundations of an art and science superior to every other of human practice and comprehension.<sup>50</sup>

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principle, and to say that Shaftesbury's emotionalism leads to a variable morality, is to take a pessimistic view of man's ethical potentiality which Shaftesbury would never have accepted.

However, although Shaftesbury advocates a universal morality, and believes that it is possible, he does recognise that it is not automatic. We are not born with it, and need not necessarily attain it. The reason for this would appear to be the existence of corrupting forms of religion and government (See below, Chapters Seven and Eight). Consequently, men can be found having differing views on moral and aesthetic subjects - involving the logical necessity of at least some of these views falling short of truth. Men may judge "ridiculously" and have a "barbarous" fancy. Despite this, Shaftesbury is convinced "That in the very nature of things there must of necessity be the foundation of a right and wrong taste ...." And it is this concept of a "taste" that becomes important to Shaftesbury's non-rational theory of ethical truth when the possibility of differing moral opinions is admitted.\* By using this concept Shaftesbury

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\* It has been suggested by one critic that the concept of "taste" forms part of the rational element in Shaftesbury's  
(Continued overleaf)

can say that when opinions concerning art or morals differ, then one of the opinions will be qualitatively superior to others. The superior opinion will belong to the person with the better taste, which is described by Shaftesbury as a product of experience:

Now a taste or judgment, 'tis supposed, can hardly come ready formed with us into the world. Whatever principles or materials of this kind we may possibly bring with us, whatever good faculties, senses, or anticipating sensations and imaginations may be of Nature's growth, and arise properly of themselves, without our art, promotion, or assistance, the general idea which is formed of all this management and the clear notion we attain of what is preferable and principal in all these subjects of choice and estimation will not, as I imagine, by any person be taken for innate. Use, practice, and culture must precede the understanding and wit of such an advanced size and growth as this. A legitimate and just taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived, or produced without the antecedent labour and pains of criticism.<sup>51</sup>

We see here that although the aesthetic sense is innate, a

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(Continued from previous page)

philosophy - see below, Chapter Six, Section I. Although this cannot be denied, if for no other reason than the fact that the rational and the non-rational are inextricably intermingled in Shaftesbury's writings, this is by no means the only possible interpretation. In this chapter "taste" is dealt with as a non-rational product of aesthetic experience - something which emerges as a consequence of long use of the aesthetic sense in both the moral and artistic spheres.



taste can only be obtained by some prior activity on the part of the individual. Exactly what this activity is, and how the right taste emerges as a consequence is never made clear by Shaftesbury. It is possible to interpret it as a product of rational criticism (see below, Chapter Six). It is also possible to regard taste as a particular type of aesthetic sense, which has been refined by "use" and "practice". That is, the aesthetic sense becomes a more efficient moral tool as we allow it both scope and activity over a long period of time, and it experiences many evidences of the beautiful. In this process, "culture" has a role to play in that it provides an environment that will either encourage or discourage an improvement of ourselves (see Chapters Seven and Eight). Given a satisfactory environment and a determination to develop our taste, we will learn to recognise the qualitatively superior forms of art, and develop qualitatively superior moral characters within ourselves. The artistic taste and the moral taste are, as we have seen above, necessarily connected. As we improve our characters we improve our ability to judge the artist's work, and vice-versa; and the prerequisite for the creation of a "legitimate piece"<sup>52</sup> is the existence within the

virtuoso of a well-developed aesthetic sense that creates taste in both morals and art. "And thus the sense of inward numbers, the knowledge and practice of the social virtues, and the familiarity and favour of the moral graces, are essential to the character of a deserving artist and just favourite of the Muses."<sup>53</sup>

In his concept of "taste" Shaftesbury is again insisting, as we saw him insist against the doctrines of the Epicureans and Hobbes (see Chapter Three above), that if we are to talk about moral norms, then we must be discussing something that has both permanence and universal application. Suggestions that Shaftesbury's theory makes moral judgements both temporary and personal must be rejected - this is only true if we ignore part of his theory. The aesthetic sense is seen to exist in all men as a common measure and universal principle. This aesthetic sense is the form of beauty within ourselves, which allows us to appreciate the form of beauty as it exists within an artistic piece, where it has been instilled by the virtuoso. It is this aesthetic sense that Shaftesbury calls the innate or connatural idea of beauty. It is this aesthetic sense that creates a unity between aesthetic and moral subjects

and, when developed, allows us to judge correctly on all occasions in both ethical and aesthetic spheres of experience - both of which are implied by the presence of either one. Thus, in the concept of "taste", we find Shaftesbury's statement of a universal non-rational method of appreciating and following the purposes of Nature in all our decisions and actions.

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#### SUMMARY:

In this chapter the non-rational element that can be found in Shaftesbury's writings is considered as an alternative moral theory, standing in contrast to the rationalism of Shaftesbury that has been discussed in previous chapters.

In Section I it is noted,

1. that Shaftesbury recognises in man an ability to immediately perceive the beautiful.
2. that beauty is regarded by Shaftesbury as the standard of excellence in both aesthetic and moral subjects.
3. that as a consequence of this, art and morality are necessarily connected.
4. that by developing our artistic creativity, our virtuosity, we improve our moral character.
5. that the aesthetic sense, which distinguishes beauty, also involves an enthusiastic desire



to possess beauty, and thus resolves the problem of moral obligation by eliminating it.

6. that the enthusiasm for beauty, seen by Shaftesbury to be the stimulus for all noble actions by men, is the means whereby the "moral sense" can function.

Having recognised the significance of the enthusiasm for beauty, Section II considers the metaphysical significance of the concept of beauty in Shaftesbury's still optimistically conceived cosmos. We see here

1. that Shaftesbury regards the beauty which is found in the mind of a moral person superior to the beauty which is seen in the material world.
2. that enthusiasm directs us towards the idea of an ordered cosmos, a beautiful whole, as the source of the beauty that can be found in the parts.
3. that the beautiful whole is seen by Shaftesbury to involve a hierarchy of beauty, a natural hierarchy at the top of which is found the general mind of Nature.

Section III enquires into Shaftesbury's concern to emphasise the non-accidental character of all beauty (and, therefore, of morality). In this exercise, Shaftesbury is seen to direct our attention away from the object in which we find beauty (and which we might call "beautiful") towards the mind and art of the artist. The concept of "form" is seen to be relevant.

Mind, form, and art are all emphasised because they all exist prior to a work of art which is dependent upon them. Although Shaftesbury neither provided thorough definitions, nor distinguished clearly between the three, it is noted that Shaftesbury intended us to understand them, either singly or together, as both the origin and definition of the beautiful. Beauty thus becomes for Shaftesbury a mental rather than a material quality, and he insists that when we consider a material object the beauty we find there must be regarded as an intellectual characteristic that refers us back to the mind of the creator.

Section IV discusses the following two claims that are made by Shaftesbury:

1. The claim that beauty, as it is found at all the levels of Nature's hierarchy (see Section II) always contributes to Nature's purpose(s). The statement that "all beauty is truth" is examined in this context. Also, the human enthusiasm for and pursuit of beauty is seen as the source, for Shaftesbury, of the human contribution to the universal design.
2. The claim that knowledge of, and attraction towards, beauty is innate to all human beings. In discussing this claim the following things are noted:
  - that Shaftesbury criticises John Locke's epistemology because he believed that it had rejected innate ideas and thereby destroyed the possibility of universal moral criteria.
  - that Shaftesbury prefers the term "connatural" to "innate" because he is not concerned with

developing a sophisticated epistemology after the manner of Locke. He is concerned with stressing the inevitable presence of the innate idea of beauty in the human adult, not with how or when it gets there.

- that the innate idea for Shaftesbury is also defined as the moral or aesthetic sense; and it is noted that Shaftesbury failed to distinguish clearly between knowledge and instinct.

Section V considers the role of artistic creativity in Shaftesbury's non-rational moral theory. The following points are made:

1. that there are three forms of beauty to which the artist may apply his creativity.
2. that the highest form of beauty is found in that work of art which encourages the creation of a moral character in the spectator.
3. that the work of art should contain unity, morality, and simplicity if it hopes to attain this end.
4. that artistic activity becomes for Shaftesbury an ethical tool whereby the moral man can direct others towards Nature's purposes as they are expressed in his work and appreciated by others through the common possession of an aesthetic sense.

Finally, Section VI is concerned with dispelling any suggestion that Shaftesbury's theories, as conceived by himself, were intended to have anything less than universal applicability and the creation of a common moral standard for all men. The



emotionalism of the aesthetic sense is not seen to involve moral subjectivity because of the relationship of the human mind to the general mind of the cosmos, and because of Shaftesbury's stressing of the need to develop a correct "taste". In the need for us all to develop a taste, Shaftesbury

- posits the possibility of universal norms of conduct

- insists that our character must be developed before it can be called moral.

It is also admitted, however, that Shaftesbury's use of the concept of "taste" has both rational and non-rational aspects, which again points to the fact that Shaftesbury's non-rational theories as outlined in this chapter find no independent expression in his own writings, where they appear with, and undifferentiated from appeals to rationalism.

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CHAPTER SIXSHAFTESBURY'S DOCTRINE OF RIDICULE AND GOOD HUMOUR

- I -

In regarding Shaftesbury's aesthetic doctrines as involving a mode of thought which stands in contrast to his appeals to reason, we have seen how there can be extracted from Shaftesbury's writings a moral doctrine which may be understood independently of the rational morality outlined in earlier chapters. However, when Shaftesbury refers us to aesthetic modes of thought, we find that this non-rational doctrine directs us towards the same ends as his rational ethics. The emphasis is still upon the individual to control his affections and direct them towards Nature's purpose - which remains a social purpose in so far as it relates to man. That this is the case provides us with no help when we attempt to interpret the various roles of reason and emotion (i.e. the instinctual recognition and attraction of the aesthetic sense towards beauty) in Shaftesbury's writings; and the fact that he fails to distinguish between these two logically distinct approaches to morality has led to contradictory descriptions concerning the basic tenets of Shaftesbury's thought. Some interpreters state that "Shaftesbury's aim was

evidently the noble one of maintaining the supremacy of reason and conscience,"<sup>1</sup> and claim that Shaftesbury's moral sense should be understood as part of the rational potential of man: "The immutable distinction between right and wrong is discernable by reason, by moral conscience, or, to use Shaftesbury's phrase, the moral sense."<sup>2</sup> On the other side of the coin, Robert B. Voitle insists that the only way to understand Shaftesbury's concept of the moral sense is to look upon it as an emotional quality. Shaftesbury is seen to have made a conscious rejection of reason: He sees Shaftesbury's moral theories in the emotional context of the following opposition between reason and emotion:

Reason as a simple logical process might well perform wonders with the data available to it. Hedonistic, utilitarian, and naturalistic moral theories were well served by such a faculty; [but] for the moral absolutist, such a concept of reason had no more authority than a calculating machine; and he had either to eschew empirical psychology completely or, as most did, search more deeply in the springs of human behavior for some morally authoritative impulse, usually emotional.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, there are grounds for making both of these claims, but both must be rejected in that they ignore the evidence in Shaftesbury which supports the contrary view. For



both emotional and rational elements are certainly evident in Shaftesbury.

Seeing the presence of two explanations of the source of ethical knowledge in Shaftesbury's writings, A.O. Aldridge has pointed to the ambiguity surrounding Shaftesbury's concept of the moral sense. Although he accepts (as does the present writer) that Shaftesbury's moral sense is usually to be understood as a non-rational concept, Aldridge also points out that

In some sections of the Characteristics it is not to be distinguished from reason, and in others it is almost equivalent to innate ideas. It represents variously knowledge and motivation to action.<sup>4</sup>

This lack of clarity has been pointed to in earlier chapters of the present work. Unlike the present author, however, Aldridge considers Shaftesbury's idea of "taste" as something which is a product of reason. Taste occurs when reason is applied to the aesthetic sense according to Aldridge. Thus, he writes,

Taste and moral sense are not, as they may seem to be, similar ideas, but almost opposite, the latter based on affection, the former on reason. The qualifications attached to the theory of innate sense which are found in the last two treatises of the Characteristics [the Inquiry and The Moralists] convert Shaftesbury's esthetics from a system of simple intuitive perception to a system of complex intellectual perception based upon the development of a right taste for a fixed standard of beauty.<sup>5</sup>

There are grounds for accepting this distinction, for in his concept of taste, as in all his ideas, Shaftesbury confuses both rational and non-rational elements. The advocate of a "rational" taste might point to Shaftesbury's statement that the individual who wishes to attain a right taste, "should set afoot the powerfulllest faculties of his mind, and assemble the best forces of his wit and judgement, in order to make a formal descent on the territories of the heart ...."<sup>6</sup> However, this statement is by no means a final solution of the problem; for the "mind" may refer to the aesthetic sense, and the "heart" to the affections which must be controlled by the aesthetic sense. Perhaps the clearest statement to give support to the rational interpretation of "taste" can be found in a statement where Shaftesbury does not use the concept himself. In The Moralists, in a discussion concerning our appreciation of harmony and discord, Shaftesbury writes,

.... as this difference is immediately perceived by a plain internal sensation, so there is withal in reason this account of it, that whatever things have order, the same have unity of design, and concur in one; are parts constituent of one whole or are, in themselves, entire systems.<sup>7</sup>

It could be suggested that a rational appreciation of that

which the moral or aesthetic sense immediately recognises (i.e. what Shaftesbury is discussing in this quotation) is what is involved in the formation of a right taste. For the scope of the Characteristics is to demonstrate, according to Shaftesbury, "the reasonableness of a proportionate taste and determinate choice in life and manners."<sup>8</sup> And when he is telling us how taste is to be formed, Shaftesbury writes,

'Tis we ourselves create and form our taste. ....  
 Who is so just to himself as to recall his fancy  
 from the power of fashion and education to that of  
 reason? Could we .... be thus courageous, we should  
 soon settle in ourselves such an opinion of good as  
 would secure to us an invariable, agreeable, and  
 just taste in life and manners.<sup>9</sup>

However, because Shaftesbury did not make a clear distinction between rational and non-rational elements in his writings, the opinion of Aldridge concerning taste must be seen as an alternative to the placing of taste within the aesthetic and emotional context of Chapter Five of the present work.

The lack of distinction between rational and non-rational elements in Shaftesbury's ideas was recognised by Thomas Fowler in the nineteenth century and roundly condemned "because it assigns a disproportionate share to the emotional element at



the expense of the rational element."<sup>10</sup> His explanation of Shaftesbury's lack of clarity is that

His main aim appears to have been to represent virtue in an acceptable and attractive form to the men of taste and fashion, and hence he is far more concerned in drawing an analogy between art and morals .... than in attempting to determine accurately the moral criterion or to analyze with precision the moral sentiments.<sup>11</sup>

However, whatever Shaftesbury's reasons for it, rational and non-rational are confused by him. We must not therefore opt for one or the other when interpreting Shaftesbury's philosophy, but attempt to recognise the significance of each; for the former approach involves ignoring part of what Shaftesbury had to say, and failing to appreciate part of his philosophy. A recognition of this can be found in the interpretation by Charles Vereker who, whilst pointing to the absence of a precise logical system of thought in the Characteristics, directs our attention towards the variety of guides to virtue that can be found therein:

First, but not perhaps pre-eminent, a direct, intuitive apprehension of beauty and order; then, the use of reason, different from that sponsored by the rationalists proper only in being less insisted upon; thirdly, the experience of happiness to be used as a general criterion; and, the supreme test, the interests of the whole system,

of the whole of which lesser entities are properly parts, a kind of public good. Where the other criteria were lacking, the universal good, whether of the species or of the entire natural order, remained a sure and dependable guide to behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the present work has taken as its basis the distinction between the rational and aesthetic or emotional approaches to morality which can be found in Shaftesbury's writings, and elaborated each in separation from the other. The end product of both approaches was seen by Shaftesbury to be the common welfare of a whole - either the species or the cosmos; the end product of both will be the happiness of the moral individual. However, it must always be remembered that Shaftesbury himself did not distinguish between separate guides to virtue, and was apparently unconscious of the difficulty of regarding his theories as a coherent and logical whole.

However, it should also be appreciated that in distinguishing between the separate approaches that Shaftesbury takes, and attempting to present each in a logically coherent form, we are being unfair to the spirit that pervades all of Shaftesbury's writings. For Shaftesbury was not a systematic writer. Before the republication of his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit in the first edition of the Characteristics (after its publication

in 1699 without either his knowledge or permission), he took the unusual step of redrafting it in order to make it more consistent with the more casual style of the other essays. The overall impression created by the Characteristics has been described as follows: "Every reader knows that it is not based upon any model and that it does not constitute an integrated whole."<sup>13</sup> "...even the least disorderly of his random writings yields no precise or logical system of thought."<sup>14</sup>

Shaftesbury's reason for this quite deliberate avoidance of a systematic approach can be seen if we remember his recognition of the strength of sceptical reasoning. As a result of this he studiously avoided placing himself in a position where he could be accused of being dogmatic. This involved the rejection of that method of presentation in which philosophical truth is expressed in the form of a number of logically related, systematically presented ideas. Despite the necessity of making certain assumptions if he was to have a philosophy at all, he was not prepared to develop a system and present it as a final explanation of all that is truth. This would be equivalent to adopting a position which Shaftesbury never failed to condemn - an enthusiastic, uncritical acceptance of one set of beliefs to



the exclusion of all others. Shaftesbury did not want his readers to look upon his writings as a new moral creed which was to be either accepted or rejected outright. He wanted to inculcate that attitude of mind which would oppose this sort of approach, this tendency towards enthusiasm,\* so that each individual might discover within himself those principles which Shaftesbury was convinced were present in all thinking beings.

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- \* A.O. Aldridge has pointed out that Shaftesbury's ideas concerning enthusiasm were borrowed from Henry More's Enthusiasmus Triumphatus. In his Miscellaneous Reflections, II, ii, Shaftesbury acknowledges borrowing More's ideas concerning,
- a) The principle of an affinity between atheism and enthusiasm. Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, Sects. I, XLVII, LXVI.
  - b) The distinction between inspiration and enthusiasm. Ibid., II.
  - c) The influence of melancholy on enthusiasm. Ibid., XV.
  - d) The spurious imitations of virtue that melancholy or enthusiasm produces. Ibid., XXXVI.
  - e) The salutary nature of devotional enthusiasm as seen in such noble minds as Plato and Plotinus. Ibid., LXIII.

However, "Instead of adopting More's threefold remedy .... of temperance, humility, and reason, Shaftesbury offers the simpler and all-embracing cure, good humour, the obvious balance .... to ill-humour." Aldridge, Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto, 317. Aldridge might also have added that Shaftesbury recommended a particular form of social and political environment in order to develop that frame of mind in the individual which would reject enthusiasm (i.e. one that is based upon principles of freedom - see Chapters Seven and Eight).

He was recommending a method whereby we can discover moral truth rather than revealing to us that moral truth in all its detail.

- II -

In Chapter Five we saw Shaftesbury accepting enthusiasm as the source of man's aesthetic and moral creativity. However, the "enthusiasm" that Shaftesbury accepts is "divine" enthusiasm; an enthusiasm which is directed by the moral sense. If the desire for beauty, which is enthusiasm, is not controlled, it must be condemned:

.... as all affections have their excess, and require judgement and discretion to moderate and govern them, so this high and noble affection, which raises man to action and is his guide in business as well as pleasure, requires a steady rein and strict hand over it.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, it is necessary to control enthusiasm. If this is not done, then "in religious concerns particularly" enthusiasm is liable to make us dogmatic and superstitious. For without a real measure of beauty and moral truth (be the measure reason or the moral sense), then enthusiasm is liable to accept an unjustifiable measure of truth in the form of a religious dogma,<sup>16</sup> and pursue this with the fanaticism of a zealot.

In his attempt to avoid enthusiasm Shaftesbury recommends that we should refer to ridicule and good humour. The reason for this recommendation can be seen if we consider the effect that Shaftesbury thought enthusiasm had upon the mind of the individual:

..... above all other enslaving vices and restrainers of reason and just thought, the most evidently ruinous and fatal to the understanding is that of superstition, bigotry, and vulgar enthusiasm. This passion, not contented like other vices to deceive and tacitly supplant our reason, professes open war, holds up the intended chains and fetters, and declares its resolution to enslave.<sup>17</sup>

Here we see that Shaftesbury thought that enthusiasm stands opposed to reason, claiming independence from reason. Consequently, enthusiasts will not reject their beliefs as a result of reasoned argument. However, if enthusiastic belief is faced with ridicule it will lose the respect of potential adherents and cease to be a menace to the pursuit of moral truth along the lines which Shaftesbury expounded in his own moral theories. The freedom of criticism and the toleration of all religions, which was advocated by Shaftesbury,\* involves a freedom of ridicule and a toleration of raillery against all things. For,

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\* See below Chapter Eight for Shaftesbury's views concerning freedom and toleration.



Truth, 'tis supposed, may bear all lights; and one of those principal lights, or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed, in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery in any subject.<sup>18</sup>

Such statements as this have led certain of Shaftesbury's critics to claim that he posited ridicule as a test of truth which is independent of rational enquiry.\* However, if we look at the statement quoted above, it is possible to see that this was not so. Ridicule is not merely the act of making something look ridiculous. It is an art of distinguishing what is a suitable subject for ridicule as well as the application; "... we discern whatever is liable to just raillery ...." In order to do this, reason must also be used. Thus, ridicule is not opposed to reason, but is complementary to it. This was stated by Charles Bulkley in defence of Shaftesbury against John Brown as follows:

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\* This was done by John Brown in 1751 in his Essays on the Characteristics (see the first essay), and later by J. Hunt who stated that with reference to the Characteristics, "we may fairly reduce the subjects to three - (1) that ridicule is the test of truth; (2) that man possesses a moral sense; (3) that everything is for the best." J. Hunt, "Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury", Contemporary Review, VIII, 534. (1868).

Look back, reader, look .... and see whether his Lordship has ever once opposed ridicule to reason, or considered them as two different mediums of discovering truth, as this author [Brown] .... intimates .... Or whether, on the contrary, it does not most evidently and undeniably appear, that his sole aim was to inculcate a particular method of reasoning, which he thought best fitted for the investigation of truth .... This is so far from opposing ridicule to reason, which is what the noble author is charged with, that it is on the contrary, directly and in the most express manner, making it subservient to it.<sup>19</sup>

Ridicule is not the opponent of reason, but the tool of reason.

Reason judges the justness of its application: "For what ridicule can lie against reason? or how can any one of the least justness of thought endure a ridicule wrong placed? Nothing is more ridiculous than this itself."<sup>20</sup>

Ridicule is, therefore, the action of a rational individual, and is applicable only to the ridiculous. However, to be able to apply ridicule at all assumes a certain predisposition which Shaftesbury calls, "good humour." For to be in good humour is to be in that frame of mind which stands in opposition to enthusiasm. Whereas enthusiasm will not consider any other belief than that which is accepted by itself, good humour is willing to consider all shades of opinion without prejudice. Whereas enthusiasm produces the fanatic whose only concern is

the extension of his creed by any means, good humour is a less serious frame of mind that rejects the need to impose one's opinions upon others. These differences exist because of a distinction between the ways in which the enthusiast and the man in good humour regard their respective beliefs. With the enthusiast, the ideology that he accepts dominates his personality. The individual loses his independence of thought to the greater glory of his political or religious creed. His belief is so complete that all further argument is rejected, and his personality has no significance except in relation to the specific dogma which he accepts. With the man in good humour, the ideology is always considered to be subordinate to the critical faculties of the individual. The individual is in control of his beliefs, which he manipulates in an attempt to make them conform to new considerations and experiences. The man in good humour does not accept final truth. He merely pursues truth, without requiring knowledge of an all-embracing explanation of the nature of things which all men must necessarily accept whether they like it or not; and Shaftesbury can see no reason why this pastime or pursuit, which is philosophy, should not be a source of pleasure to the individual:



.... if rational discourses (especially those of a deeper speculation) have lost their credit, and are in disgrace because of their formality; there is reason for more allowance in the way of humour and gaiety. An easier method of treating these subjects will make them more agreeable and familiar. To dispute about them, will be the same as about other matters. They need not spoil good company, or take from the ease or pleasure of a polite conversation .... We shall grow better reasoners, by reasoning pleasantly, and at our ease; taking up or laying down these subjects as we fancy.<sup>21</sup>

Here we see that good humour is that frame of mind which is recommended for the individual who has rejected that mode of philosophical enquiry which is associated with "systems". By this means we will be able to avoid having to give our allegiance to one rigid set of beliefs or another.

It might be suggested at this point in the discussion that that non-rational element in Shaftesbury's philosophy which has been discussed in Chapter Five above, would fall under the attack of ridicule by the good-humoured individual who seeks "rational truths". If this were so, one part of Shaftesbury's philosophy would not only stand in contrast to another, but would direct itself towards the destruction of the other. Good-humoured rationalism would direct itself toward the destruction of the emotional aspect represented by the moral or aesthetic sense. But Shaftesbury says that "divine enthusiasm" is "in itself

a very natural honest passion, and has properly nothing for its object but what is good and honest."<sup>22</sup> Divine enthusiasm, which is for Shaftesbury a descriptive term embodying the non-rational elements of his philosophy, is not condemned from the standpoint of ridicule. The enthusiasm that Shaftesbury condemns lacks the disciplinary element of the moral sense to guide it, and leaves the individual "no longer self-governed, but set adrift to the wide sea of passion."<sup>23</sup> It is against this form of enthusiasm (the uncontrolled) that Shaftesbury directs his polemic, suggesting that we should adopt good humour in defence.

How will "divine enthusiasm" avoid the criticisms and ridicule of the good-humoured critic? The rational element in ridicule will not stop the critic, for all enthusiasm is non-rational. The answer to the question is that criticism is not to be avoided. All beliefs must bear the brunt of criticism whether it is in the form of rational argument or of ridicule. By the means of a dialectic, truth, Shaftesbury assumes, will emerge. As for the misuse of ridicule - this will not occur if we also take into account the presence of our "moral sense" and "taste". Our common, moral sense will not allow us to ridicule the evidently moral, whilst ridicule lacks efficiency - is in

bad "taste" and will be ignored - when directed against an undeserving subject. The good-humoured thinker will in this way never misuse ridicule, nor will he be impressed by the misapplication of ridicule by others.

Consequently, we see that ridicule can be directed by the moral sense as well as reason. It would not, therefore, be wrong to say that there are two types of ridicule in Shaftesbury's thought, one of which does stand in contrast to reason. This is never explained by Shaftesbury himself but is, as we have seen, implied by the non-rational moral theory that his writings contain. Consequently, those critics (see above) who condemned Shaftesbury for opposing reason to ridicule are not necessarily wrong. Neither are those who support Shaftesbury's use of a rational ridicule necessarily correct. Shaftesbury's own failure to distinguish between these alternatives himself is again the cause of confusion in interpreting his thought.

Whether he is talking rationally or non-rationally, Shaftesbury advocates good humour (and, therefore, the use of ridicule) as the most desirable frame of mind for the study of moral subjects. Given this, it was Shaftesbury's belief that men would recognise those same natural affections whose existence he



postulated in his own philosophy. Given good humoured tolerance, and all that it implies, the rest would follow. Shaftesbury's faith in the potential morality of mankind, if only it were given the opportunity to reveal itself in conditions of speculative freedom, was unfailing. Only the restrictive atmosphere of dogmatism and intolerant enthusiasm is capable of stultifying the free and natural development of virtue in man. As he stated himself,

A mannerly wit can hurt no cause or interest for which I am in the least concerned; and philosophical speculations, politely managed, can never surely render mankind more unsociable or uncivilised. This is not the quarter from whence I can possibly expect an inroad of savageness and barbarity. And by the best of my observation I have learnt that virtue is never such a sufferer, by being contested, as by being betrayed. My fear is not so much from its witty antagonists, who give it exercise, and put it on its defence, as from its tender nurses, who are apt to overlay it, and kill it with excess of care and cherishing.<sup>24</sup>

Such is the moral nature of man that freedom of discussion and a respect for the ideas of everyone is seen to be the best means of realising virtue in society. It is possible to regard the immediate aims of all Shaftesbury's writings as an attempt to elaborate this theme. Man must not be confined to one set of beliefs as this can only serve to stultify his intellect.

Because of this Shaftesbury is also concerned with political questions. He is concerned that the social and political environment be arranged so as to guarantee the emergence of moral individuals in any human community. The discussion in the next two chapters will be directed towards elaborating the views of Shaftesbury concerning the organisation and ends of human communities so that individuals might achieve their natural ends as moral beings.

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#### SUMMARY:

Chapter Six begins by recognising that Shaftesbury's moral philosophy is a confusion of rational and non-rational elements, and that this has led to opposing interpretations of his philosophy. It is noted

1. that Shaftesbury's philosophy may be open to contradictory interpretations that are equally valid. As an example of this, we see that Shaftesbury's concept of "taste" can be understood as both rational and non-rational.
2. that rather than recognising one guide to virtue in Shaftesbury's philosophy, we can find many.
3. that Shaftesbury made no effort to distinguish between opposing approaches to moral approbation.
4. that Shaftesbury made a conscious effort to avoid being either dogmatic or systematic.

5. that the reason for this was Shaftesbury's desire to avoid being "enthusiastic".

Section II considers Shaftesbury's rejection of enthusiasm, and his advocacy of ridicule and good humour as an approach to philosophical enquiry that will save us from falling into enthusiasm. We see here

1. that uncontrolled enthusiasm tends to take on a religious form and become fanaticism.
2. that enthusiasm is best opposed by ridicule insofar as the enthusiast denies the need for rational argument, and denies the legitimacy of reason.
3. that ridicule is an instrument of reason.
4. that ridicule is an instrument that is used by the person who is in "good humour", which is the opposite frame of mind to enthusiasm.
5. that good-humour is non-dogmatic, non-systematic, does not wish to impose one's ideas upon others, and finds pleasure in philosophical disagreement.
6. that "divine enthusiasm" must be prepared to accept good-humoured criticism.\*
7. that the moral sense will prevent the misuse of ridicule. This means that ridicule is guided by the moral sense as well as by reason (as stated in 3), thereby making the concept "ridicule" ambiguous - for Shaftesbury does not distinguish between types of ridicule as they are directed by reason or the moral sense.

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\* Concerning "divine enthusiasm", see above Chapter Five.



Finally, it is noted that freedom of criticism is a necessary pre-requisite to both good humour and the emergence of moral truth. This involves certain political arrangements. Shaftesbury's political theories become the subject of discussion in Chapters Seven and Eight.

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CHAPTER SEVENSHAFTESBURY'S THEORIES OF GOVERNMENT

- I -

Shaftesbury saw political enquiries as the logical consequence of ethical thought. He thought that once we have an understanding of the ethical characteristics that each man possesses in common with the rest of the species, not only are we able to realise morality within ourselves, but we are able also to gain insight into the situation that ought to exist within human communities:

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.]

In studying Shaftesbury's ethical theories in the previous chapters of this work, we have seen what Shaftesbury thought about "man in particular". When we consider Shaftesbury's ideas concerning man "as he is interested in the State", the most important "particular" ethical characteristic is the possession, by all men, of a telos or end that can be reached only through participation in a human community, in pursuit of the common good of that community. Because he believes this, Shaftesbury

refuses to consider the idea of a non-social (or pre-social) human being as a useful philosophical concept when discussing the moral and social condition of man. It was from this standpoint that Shaftesbury condemned the contractual political theories of both Lucretius and Hobbes; for these theories treat the determining characteristic of man as the self-oriented pursuit of private satisfactions without reference to the welfare of a social group. Men are depicted as competitors, natural enemies, who make expediential arrangements to protect themselves from each other; and the sphere of politics is the sphere of activity that enables men to have satisfactory private existences. In contrast to this view of man, Shaftesbury sees man's public existence to be an end in itself, and an end which has priority over all other private considerations that may stand in opposition to it. Man's social existence can never be ignored, for society is an immediate implication for all men. There was never historically a pre-social state of nature; nor can society be logically described or justified in terms of expediential arrangements which provide for the satisfaction of private ends. "In short," he writes in The Moralists,

.... if generation be natural, if natural affection  
and the care and nurture of the offspring be natural,



things standing as they do with man, and the creature being of that form and constitution he now is, it follows "that society must be also natural to him," and "that out of society and community he never did, nor ever can, subsist."<sup>2</sup>

Shaftesbury's vision of man is as a participator in a group - not as an individualist. When Shaftesbury talks of the "nature" of man in a descriptive sense, it is to this that he is referring. When he uses the term "nature" prescriptively, and tells us to follow Nature, he is saying that we should pursue the welfare of the group by following the natural affections that we may find within ourselves. To be natural involves pursuing the welfare of the community within which we find ourselves. If we accept this, then it is Shaftesbury's opinion that neither the historical nor the logical basis of political society need further elaboration.\*

It should be added that, whilst denying the Hobbesian interpretation of human nature, Shaftesbury is not prepared to use

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\* When Shaftesbury does discuss the origin of political society (which is rare) he merely provides us with a brief outline in which he describes society as growing out of the family. See Characteristics II, 82/3. See also Chapter Three, Section IV of this work where Shaftesbury's criticism of the contractual theory of society of both the Epicureans and Hobbes is discussed.

his conception of a naturally sociable humanity as grounds for looking back to a "golden age" when no government was needed to enforce peace between men by imposing common norms. Shaftesbury never questions the need for government to direct the moral energies of men towards recognisable social goals. The nobility of stature that Shaftesbury grants to man requires a community, which for Shaftesbury involves a political (i.e. governmental) aspect. Shaftesbury looks neither backward nor forward to a golden age of uncorrupted humanity to find a model against which he can measure the social and political realities of his own time. Shaftesbury says that he would rather have us accept the Hobbesian theory of "this imaginary state of nature" than dream of returning to an ideal "state of nature". If we must continue to talk about a state of nature, the more unattractive our idea of it is, the more utility it will have in making us accept the social and political condition as an alternative. Therefore,

Let it be a state of war, rapine, and injustice.  
 .... Let it, at least, be looked on as many degrees worse than the worst government in being. The greater dread we have of anarchy, 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.<sup>3</sup>

If we must prattle on about hypothetical conditions which, in Shaftesbury's opinion, have no basis in fact, then it is better for us to accept that interpretation which persuades us most easily to accept the social orientation of Shaftesbury's own theories.

For Shaftesbury, moral action implies a socio-political framework within which it can take effect. Virtue is described by him as follows\*:

Virtue is truly and properly all those qualities, and no one else besides, which being made habitual and growing natural to us, in every respect suit us and make us fit for civil society, and render us deserving partners in the benefits of it. And as for what is more than this, that which may be called virtue in a higher degree is merely such of those qualities that make us not only capable of living inoffensively and in the execution of all that is the immediate duty of a single member; but such as enable us to improve the whole society and cause us to give an additional prosperity to it (if success attends us) and to advance or on any occasion preserve the interest and happiness of a whole community."<sup>4</sup>

Man, in his nature as a social being, follows Nature when he

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\* This quotation is taken from a manuscript that can be found in the Public Records Office in London. The spelling has been modernised here.



consciously performs such actions as benefit the whole community - providing security, prosperity, and "improvement" for all members of the community. "Particular" moral actions will have social implications; as a result of which all moral action may be regarded as social, and all moral thought as having both social and political aspects. To accept a conception of man that does not take this into account is, according to Shaftesbury, to be mistaken.

- II -

When Shaftesbury considers the actual societies that men have formed, his apparent optimism concerning the moral and social potential of man is soon qualified. It is evident to Shaftesbury that men are not always moral, and that the societies in which they live do not escape corruption:

.... man, notwithstanding the assistance of religion and the direction of laws, is often found to live in less conformity with Nature, and by means of religion itself is often rendered the more barbarous and inhuman. Marks are set on men; distinctions formed; opinions decreed under the severest penalties; antipathies instilled, and aversions raised in men against the generality of their own species. So that 'tis hard to find in any region a human society which has human laws.<sup>5</sup>

We are told here that most human communities are in fact corrupt.

Yet we have seen that Shaftesbury's view of man is one of a moral being who fulfils his nature by pursuing the common good. To explain the latter within the context of recognisable human evil in society means that we must regard the idea of "a human society which has human laws" as part of the human potential that Shaftesbury would like to see realised in practice, but which must be distinguished from what actually happens in practice.\*

In examining the distinction between reality and potentiality in Shaftesbury's thought, and discovering his explanation of man's corruption, it will be useful to recognise a distinction between the social and political elements in the group existence of men. The former may be said to refer to a spontaneous and uncoerced social life; the latter to man in his relationship with the institutional arrangements, supported by coercion, that define and enforce the values of a human group or community through the application of laws. In the writings of Augustine

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\* See Chapter Four, Sections I and II, where Shaftesbury's acceptance of evil within the world is discussed in relation to his belief that the cosmos is a perfectly organised whole.

we find the political sphere described as being willed by God as a means of providing peace to the unstable social situation of a corrupt humanity. In Hobbes we find a similar denial of the possibility of uncoerced peace between men because of universal selfishness, necessitating a compact and the vesting of coercive power in a "sovereign". In both these cases politics is regarded as a cure for the anti-social nature of a mankind that is incapable of combining stability with spontaneity. When we consider Shaftesbury's philosophy we find that the distinction can again be made; but here we find that where men are incapable of living peacefully together without coercion, where men are selfish and anti-social in their affections, the cause is to be found in what Augustine and Hobbes saw to be the cure (if only a partial cure in the case of Augustine) of human failings in the social sphere. For it is in political and religious institutions that Shaftesbury finds the source of moral insufficiency in man's social life. In the present section the governmental (political) sources of moral weakness as outlined by Shaftesbury will be the topic of discussion.\* The

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\* As will be seen in Chapter Eight below, moral weakness may also be generated by the self independently of the environment, reinforcing the political factors that work against "human nature".



subject of Section III will be Shaftesbury's ideas concerning the religious origin of man's failure to recognise and pursue his purpose in the common welfare of the community within which he finds himself.

In introducing into the present discussion the distinction between society (characterised by spontaneity) and government (characterised by its use of coercion in the enforcement of legal norms), it should again be stressed that Shaftesbury never denies the need for the political sphere. As we saw in Section I of this Chapter, Shaftesbury considered the political institutions in any society as a necessary factor. He does not give us any reasons why this should be the case.\* It is merely a characteristic of human existence. However, although government is for him an intrinsic part of the human condition, there are suggestions at various points in Shaftesbury's writings that certain forms of government may function in such a way as to prevent the ethical development of the individuals that make up the society over which they rule. Government can prevent the fulfilment of the individual as a being who finds his satisfaction as an uncoerced participator in the community

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\* Although not using the argument himself, it is possible to regard "voluntary" corruption as necessitating government. See footnote in Chapter Eight towards the end of Section II.

considered as a whole. The distinction between man's relationship to government (the persons and institutions that administer norms through control of the coercive power) and his social life become significant for Shaftesbury when such a situation occurs. This is the case when Shaftesbury considers the control of society by a single individual in the person of an absolute monarch.

If society is ruled by an individual whose will is unquestionable, the laws which are made by that ruler cannot be derived from an appreciation of moral truth. The reason for this lack of moral consciousness in the ruler (which implies a lack of desire to pursue the common good) is as follows:-

"A public spirit can come only from a social feeling or sense of partnership with human kind. Now there are none so far from being partners in this sense, or sharers in this common affection, as they who scarcely know an equal, nor consider themselves as subject to any law of fellowship or community."<sup>6</sup>

To acquire the sociable character which is the end of ethical thought Shaftesbury considered it to be necessary for men to regard themselves as equal partners (despite his rejections of the social contract) in an activity which has as its end the welfare of all persons in the community. To develop this mutual

respect between men, it is necessary that they know equals - from which relationship one can develop the ability to act for the good of some other person or persons upon a basis of affection or love, rather than as a consequence of a command (and learn to recognise in others the same sort of action.).

If the possibility of unselfish action for the benefit of others is dependent upon each person's experience of a mutual respect between men who regard themselves as equals, the master-subject relationship will prevent the realisation of such an ethical personality in both the ruler and the ruled. Never having known equality, the ruler will have no knowledge of the common good which is based upon a love of all men as they work together for social ends. An absolute king, whose word is law, will know no other end for his actions than his personal satisfaction, attained through application of the self rather than the social or natural affections. Under an absolute monarchy, the political arrangements stand in opposition to the formation of what Shaftesbury calls a "people". For Shaftesbury, a "people" is a community whose existence is dependent upon an unforced unity of interests - what we have called above "society" in contrast to "government":



A multitude held together by force, though under one and the same head, is not properly united. Nor does such a body make a people. 'Tis the social league, confederacy, and mutual consent, founded in some common good or interest, which joins the members of a community and makes a people one. Absolute power annuls the public.<sup>7</sup>

The necessary prerequisites for the existence of a natural society are a sense of affiliation with one's neighbours, and a common desire to pursue the good of that community to which we feel affiliated. When this occurs we have a "people". The trouble with an absolute monarchy is that the monarch cannot share in a common will because he is unassociated with it. He is therefore isolated from the society over which he rules, offers nothing positive to the development of society, and exists in contradiction to the moral end of society.

By standing in contradiction to the pursuit of the common good, the monarch also destroys the possibility of the formation of an ethical character in his subjects. As Shaftesbury himself says, "Absolute power annuls the public", by which he should be taken to mean that the social affections which create a bond between the individual and the community cease to be effective when society is ruled over by an absolute monarchy. Because right action for the subject is never more than conformity with

the ever changing will of the sovereign, the subject ceases to think that justice has more than transitory validity. Men cease to be able to make moral judgements, lose their moral principles, and "have scarce a notion of what is good or just, other than as mere will and power have determined."<sup>8</sup> As a result of this corruption of their ability to distinguish the natural affections within themselves, those who live under an absolute government grow to love their otherwise unenviable position. This "... personal love they bear their prince, however severe towards them, may show how natural an affection there is towards government and order among mankind."<sup>9</sup> But it must be interpreted as a misapplication of the natural affections resulting from a corruption of the human personality under absolute government.

According to Shaftesbury, some form of government is natural to mankind; but despotism definitely is not that form. The reason for this we have seen to be the fact that it is implicit within the rule of society by a single person, whose position places him beyond any controls, that he should contradict in his actions the social end of man, and through his influence on his subjects destroy their ethical potential.

Shaftesbury is not without sympathy for those who live in such communities: "I make allowances for that part of mankind who have their education under tyranny, and know no other law than absolute will."<sup>10</sup> But it was a situation which he could never condone.

As an example of the form of society that is produced by the influence of absolutism, Shaftesbury never hesitated to point to his contemporary France: "I never yet knew one single French man a free man.\* Nor do I think it in nature possible, if they have early sucked that air, or been bred .... amongst people and books of their own kind."<sup>11</sup> It was in this context that he condemned his own friend, Pierre Coste, who was a Protestant emigré from Louis XIV's France. Coste appears to have been opposed to Shaftesbury's own political beliefs, in relation to which Shaftesbury wrote a scathing criticism of all Frenchmen from his Neapolitan sick-bed in 1712. In a letter to Thomas Mickelthwayt, Shaftesbury wrote,

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\* By "free" Shaftesbury would appear to be referring to moral freedom, understood as the ability to distinguish between our affections and choose a course of action that bears no reference to "externals", but aims only at the common good by following the natural affections.



The judgement you make of his [Coste's] character . . . . is very just. It is in so far innocent on his side as that no one of his nation in the same circumstance as himself would talk or act other-wise in politics than as he has done, and does.

It is in vain for them to aim at principles. They have none, and never can have any, in government . . . . not a Tory in England, not even an Oxford or a Christ Church College proselyte, but in effect, and in real practice, when matters come to an issue, and things press, would be found more true by far to liberty and property and a national constitution than either poor C---- or the best that ever was born and bred a Frenchman. This I know, and can pronounce, by good experience of mankind.<sup>12</sup>

Of Shaftesbury's attitudes to constitutionalism, the Tories, and the High Church (signified by his reference to Oxford University) I will have more to say below. Here I wish only to draw attention to the importance, for Shaftesbury, of absolute monarchy as a primary cause for man's apparent inability to create either a moral character or societies which direct themselves towards the attainment of the common welfare.\*

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\* See below, Chapter Eight, for a possible explanation of the original source of "tyranny" in both church and government. There we see that even under environmental conditions that promote the emergence of an ethical character, human failure to take advantage of the situation will lead to moral degeneration and the physical and mental domination of the citizen.

## - III -

The second major reason why man's orientation towards the common good may remain unrealised is that man's religious temperament may lead to the domination of both his mind and his body by an organised priesthood. In order to demonstrate this aspect of Shaftesbury's thought we need only look to his description of the development of the religious institutions of ancient Egypt.

In his discussion on the Egyptian religious institutions Shaftesbury draws attention to that fact that man's uncritical "enthusiasm" in religious matters may lead him to forsake his natural affections. Enthusiasm, Shaftesbury tells us, "disjoins the natural frame and relaxes the ordinary tone or tenor of the mind;"<sup>13</sup> whilst in religious concerns, "the habit of admiration and contemplative delight would, by over-indulgence, too easily mount into high fanaticism or degenerate into abject superstition."<sup>14</sup> In Egypt, Shaftesbury saw the priesthood as having used man's tendency towards irrational zeal as a means of gaining influence over the population and entrenching its position in society. Once established the priesthood had become a vested interest concerned with preventing the population from

freeing itself from a "pusillanimous, frivolous, and mean kind of superstition."<sup>15</sup> It was pusillanimous because its end was the enrichment of the clergy; frivolous because the clergy were not concerned with religious truth, but with the continuation of irrational zeal; and mean because it replaced the common good of society with the good of the established church(es).

Given the human basis for the possible rise of a priesthood which was able to dominate the Egyptian society, Shaftesbury goes on to explain how that priesthood became the dominant power in Egypt. The reason for this lies in the fact that by becoming a priest one entered into a most influential profession:

No wonder if such a profession was apt to multiply, especially when we consider the easy living and security of the professors, their exemption from all labour and hazard, the supposed sacredness of their character, and their free possession of wealth, grandeur, estates, and women.<sup>16</sup>

Because of this attraction of the profession, the numbers and influence of the priests grew, and the superstitious zeal of the people was maintained as the source of priestly power. In this process the priesthood were able "to establish themselves a plentiful and growing fund or religious land-bank,"<sup>17</sup> until at last "the property and power of the Egyptian priesthood in



ancient days arrived to such a height as in a manner to have swallowed up the state and monarchy."<sup>18</sup>

Shaftesbury saw the presence of a powerful and prosperous priesthood in Egypt as not only the basis for the spiritual corruption of the people, but also as a danger to the temporal power of the government. After domination of the minds of the people there followed the domination of their bodies through the capture of the political power in society. But what is more important for us here to note, is the fact that Shaftesbury converted his analysis of the ancient Egyptian situation into a general theory. Following a statement of the belief that, "dominion must naturally follow property," Shaftesbury continues with:

Nor is it possible, as I conceive, for any state or monarchy to withstand the encroachments of a growing hierarchy, founded on the model of these Egyptian .... priesthoods. No superstition will ever be wanting among the ignorant and vulgar whilst the able and crafty have a power to gain inheritances and possessions by working on this human weakness.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, any state which wants to ensure itself against the ever increasing encroachments of the clergy must be careful to limit both the numbers of that class and the amount of property that is possessed by it.

In the case of the Egyptian priesthood, however, its corrupting influence cannot be said to have reached its limits at the point where it entirely dominated the Egyptian state. Its religious domination spread to all those tribes which were dependent upon Egypt for either food or protection. Wherever Egypt had influence, men lost their moral ability and the freedom to formulate, by their natural capacities, the natural and social attitudes which are implicit to all human existence. This expansion of influence continued until, "when destitute of other capture [i.e. potential disciples] and confined within too narrow limits," in order to maintain expansion, the representatives of different gods had to attempt to gain new disciples from other sects. At the same time it was necessary to heighten the irrational zeal of their own adherents in order to prevent dissension within their own ranks - because of the competition from other sects. "Thus provinces and nations were divided by the most contrary rites and customs, which could be devised in order to create the strongest aversion possible between creatures of a like species,"<sup>20</sup> the end result of which was religious massacre and social chaos amongst mankind.

Through his analysis of the religious character of ancient

Egypt, Shaftesbury presented us with an historical example to justify his theory of the religious origins of social conflict. This theory claims that a combination of spiritual influence and property will always lead to a domination of a community's political structure. When this has been achieved, combining both religious enthusiasm and the coercive power of the government, the tendency of all churches will be to undertake a religious crusade, not in order to save men's souls, but in order to extend the temporal power and wealth of the priesthood. The situation thereby created is the reverse of what mankind both can and ought to be like.. In accepting the anti-social leadership of the priests, the religious enthusiast lays the cornerstone for the eventual destruction of all those qualities which mark him out as human; and priests who hold sway over the human mind must be seen as the second reason why Shaftesbury thought that "... 'tis hard to find in any region a human society which has human laws."

#### - IV -

Beginning with Shaftesbury's distrust of the priest as a potential exploiter of human failings in the spiritual sphere, let us now look at his interpretation of the state of the



Christian religion at the time he was writing. As a supporter of the "Glorious Revolution" and the Protestant succession, Shaftesbury made an absolute distinction between the Roman Catholic and Protestant elements in the Christian Church. He condemned the former and gave qualified support to the latter. When we consider his reasons for these attitudes we find that they are political rather than theological. Consequently, his attitudes to these two forms of Christianity are relevant to our present discussion.

Shaftesbury's reasons for opposing the Church of Rome were fundamentally the same as his reasons for condemning the religious institutions of ancient Egypt. This becomes evident if we look at Shaftesbury's summary of the early history of the Christian Church, and his description concerning how universal Christian orthodoxy was pursued by the early church. The early Christian Church, we are told, came into existence when, under the tyranny of the Roman Empire, mankind had lost its ability to appreciate and control the natural affections. At the same time, "Superstition .... could not but naturally prevail, as misery and ignorance increased." With this increase in superstition, the heathen priesthood had grown in power and influence; and it

was this power and influence which was eventually inherited by the Christian Church when Christianity became the official religion of Rome under Constantine:

And when the season came, that by means of a convert-emperor the heathen churchlands, with an increase of power, became transferred to the Christian clergy, 'twas no wonder if by such riches and authority they were in no small measure influenced and corrupted

....21

Inherited power corrupted the still youthful church. The form this corruption took was the organisation of the believers for the purpose of creating and enforcing religious conformity, thereby increasing the power and influence of the now established Church. In order to discipline their flock the hierarchy hardened the borders of religion, creating thereby the impersonal dogmas of a strict orthodoxy: "That which was naturally the subject of profound speculation and inquiry was made the necessary subject of a strict and absolute assent."<sup>22</sup> By means of this regimentation of their adherents into a united front of enthusiastic bigots, "the Roman-Christian and once catholic church .... proceeded in the establishment of their growing hierarchy."<sup>23</sup> The price that was paid for final unity was the destruction of all opportunity for men to discover their natural

affections, and the domination of mankind by a hierarchy which is equated by Shaftesbury with the rule of an absolute temporal power. "These," he wrote, referring to the Catholic priesthood, "are the spiritual conquerors, who, like the first Caesars, from small beginnings established the foundations of an almost universal monarchy."<sup>24</sup> Although "the exercise of power, however arbitrary or despotic, seems less intolerable under such a spiritual sovereignty"<sup>25</sup> as the Church of Rome, it must be equally condemned. This was Shaftesbury's final word in relation to the Roman church. Its influence upon mankind must always be corrupting and the source of human misery.

We turn now to Shaftesbury's attitude towards Protestantism. Shaftesbury does not describe for us the tenets of the Protestant church(es) as he understands them. His concern is that there should be religious freedom (see Chapter Eight below). However, as an avid supporter of the 1688 Revolution which had cast a Catholic king from the throne of England, he tended to associate non-absolute government with the Protestant cause in general; a feeling strengthened by the fact that Britain's main ally in the wars against France in Shaftesbury's time, was republican



Holland - also largely Protestant. In a letter to Mr. Furley, an English merchant residing in Rotterdam, Shaftesbury stated that,

.... notwithstanding our late pullbacks, the good prospect of the age and the security of the Protestant Religion, and libertyes of mankind on a happy foundation of good correspondence between the two nations of Brittain and Holland, the conductors of this great work, all this, I say, is a just subject for you to rejoice with yourself ....<sup>26</sup>

Protestantism was associated with the non-absolute form of government that would allow man the freedom to develop a socially oriented moral personality.

When we consider Shaftesbury's attitude towards the established Church of England, however, we find that this support for the Protestant form of Christianity was qualified. For Shaftesbury regarded any established church as a potential danger to the moral and political freedom of the individual insofar as the ambition of the priesthood might, as with the Egyptian and Catholic hierarchies, lead to the establishment of theocracy. He saw good reason for distrusting the Anglican clergy - as he tells us in a letter to Michael Ainsworth in 1710:

.... honesty, good principles, moderation, and true Christianity.... are now set at nought, and at

defiance, by the far greater part and numbers of that body of clergy call'd the church of ENGLAND; who no more esteem themselves a Protestant church, or in union with those of Protestant communion; tho' they pretend to the name of Christian, and would have us judge of the spirit of Christianity from theirs: which GOD prevent! ....

.... you have been brought into the world, and come into orders, in the worst time for insolence, riot, pride, and presumption of clergy-men, that I ever knew, or have read of ...." 27

The Church of England was betraying what Shaftesbury considered to be the true principles of Christianity. His reasons for coming to this conclusion were; firstly, the Sacheverell sermon, preached in St. Paul's on November 5th, 1709, denouncing toleration and sounding the war-cry of "the Church in danger;" and secondly, the association of the clergy with the Tories, whom Shaftesbury was never able to consider as anything other than reactionary and absolutist.\* In opposition to this active

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\* The relationship of the clergy to the Tories, and their interference in party politics was as follows:-

"The clergy .... were divided into Latitudinarians, and High Churchmen. The former, who were mainly Whigs, held most of the bishoprics; the latter, who were almost exclusively Tory, composed the vast majority of the clergy as a whole .... The influence of the Established clergy at elections was specially noticeable, for the sermon was at once more popular, a more important, and a more widely diffused vehicle of propaganda than any pamphlet or news-sheet could be. When

(Continued overleaf)

participation by the Church in affairs of state, Shaftesbury held that the Church was only useful "in so far as it tied the hands of priests and fanatics, and acted as a gag instead of a trumpet; it would be pernicious if it could be made an engine of priestly power ...."<sup>28</sup> (Leslie Stephen).

Given this attitude towards the established Church, it is to be expected that Shaftesbury should insist upon the subordination of the Church to the civil government; for if the government provides a sound basis for the social development of that portion of mankind over which it rules, it would be foolish to endanger this by allowing the priesthood any large degree of influence. Therefore, "'tis to be hoped that in a more civilised age, such as at present we have the good fortune to live in, they [the priesthood] will not attempt to strain their privileges to the same height as formerly."<sup>29</sup> "And remember," Shaftesbury

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the High Church clergy proceeded to inflame the minds of their parishioners against the Whigs, their influence penetrated to villages reached by no literature save the monthly newsletter, and to men who could not read Defoe and would not have understood Addison. All these elements of unrest were focused into one by an explosive sermon delivered in St. Paul's on .... November 5, 1709."

H.W.V. Temperley, Party Government under Queen Anne. The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. V, 467/8. C.U.P., 1934.



says in a letter to Ainsworth, "that HE, whom you own to be your Master and legislator, made no laws relating to civil power, or interfering with it." In this statement we can see not only a rejection of the theory of divine right, but a rejection also of clerical participation in public affairs. Shaftesbury believed, with Hobbes, that in matters relating to the organisation of society, the clergy should obey the civil government, "all other pretensions of priests being Jewish and Heathenish, and in our state seditious, disloyal, and factious ...."30\*

Although Shaftesbury is in agreement with Hobbes in saying that the civil power must be superior to the religious power in the state, the two thinkers differ in their views concerning the relationship between Church and State. Hobbes demanded a combination of Church and State in the sovereign power, which was to be both the civil and the religious controller of the

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\* For Hobbes, the power of the priest is the power to teach, not to command. ".... Christ hath not left to his ministers in this world, unless they be also endued with civil authority, any authority to command other men." Leviathan 326/27. Christian ministers ".... shall do wisely, to expect the coming of Christ hereafter, in patience and faith, with obedience to their present magistrates." Ibid., 330.

community.\* Shaftesbury fears such a powerful combination of means for influencing the lives of men. The situation would differ little from that of the rule of the priesthood in Egypt - physical and psychological control of the people would be combined in the hands of a single individual or group whose tyranny over the population would corrupt man's natural orientation towards moral and social relationships with his fellows. And even if the civil power were not absolute, affiliation with the religious power would introduce the danger of it becoming so. Of priestly power Shaftesbury was always suspicious. Therefore, not only must the Church remain subordinate to the state, but it must also remain separate from it - an aspect of Shaftesbury's thought that is amply illustrated in Appendix A to this enquiry. Only if this is the case will mankind be safe from

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\* Where the sovereign power professes Christianity, it is Hobbes's opinion that it should be spiritual leader of the community:

"A private man has always the liberty, because thought is free, to believe or not believe in his heart those acts that have been given out for miracles .... But when it comes to confession of that faith, the private reason must submit to the public; that is to say, to God's lieutenant." (Leviathan, 291.) For Hobbes, God's lieutenant, the chief pastor and head of the national church, was the sovereign power created by the social contract.

moral and political authoritarianism and able to fulfil its moral and social purposes.

Like Hobbes\*, Shaftesbury accepted the inability of the finite mind to formulate truths concerning the infinite matters of religion\*\*. But unlike Hobbes, this was not grounds for prescribing the adoption of a unified national church. On the contrary, it was seen by Shaftesbury as grounds for toleration in religious matters; for where there is no certain truth one

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\* "Whatsoever we imagine is finite. Therefore there is no idea, or conception of any thing we call infinite. .... When we say any thing is infinite, we signify only, that we are not able to conceive the ends, and bounds of the things named .... And therefore the name of God is used, not to make us conceive him, for he is incomprehensible ...."  
Leviathan, 17.

\*\* Shaftesbury's recognition of this distinction is, to my mind, demonstrated by the fact that he condemns the combination of philosophy and religion in the early Christian church. ".... their sophistic teachers became ecclesiastical instructors, the unnatural union of religion and philosophy was completed, and the monstrous product of this match appeared soon in the world." By reducing religion to a finite descriptive art the essential mysticism of the infinite was destroyed, to be replaced by dogmatism: "The allegorical, mythological account of sacred things was wholly inverted; liberty of judgement and exposition taken away; no ground left for inquiry, search, or meditation ...."  
Characteristics, II 206/7.



might as well leave each person to that form of religious worship or belief that he prefers. Although "'tis necessary a people should have a public leading in religion," it is pure vanity and ignorance to suppose that we can or ought "to prescribe bounds to fancy and speculation [in order] to regulate men's apprehensions and religious beliefs or fears ...."<sup>31</sup>

Shaftesbury demands toleration in order to allow the free development of the individual, in harmony with himself and with the complex of individuals that make up society. This leads

A.O. Aldridge to discuss Shaftesbury within the same context of the free thinker, Tindal, when he writes,

Tindal and Shaftesbury together with moderates and latitudinarians in the Church go along with Hobbes in denying that the ecclesiastical body has any authority independent of the civil body, but deny that there is any one sole-commissioned church or ecclesiastical authority. They advocate the free exercise of religion and oppose the use of religion as a servant of the magistrate, and the magistrate as a servant of religion.<sup>32</sup>

- V -

Shaftesbury condemned those political situations that do not allow the individual sufficient opportunity for the realisation of moral action and, its consequence, the welfare of society as a whole. In order for there to exist the

possibility of an ethical society that which had to be evident was "liberty". In the next chapter we shall examine the full implications that this concept had for Shaftesbury. For the moment, the following passage from a letter written in 1705 to Arent Furley will give some idea of his position.

'Tis liberty, indeed, that can only polish and refine the spirit and soul as well as wit of man.  
'Tis liberty that exalts him to manhood, and makes him differ from the slave, than the slave differs from the beast; and when he has felt and is conscious of this advantage, he will know this difference, not before ..... 33

Only those forms of political organisation which exhibited what Shaftesbury considered to be a sufficient degree of liberty (for the maintenance of the moral and social consciousness of both the governors and the governed) could hope to find justification for their existence in his writings.

In discussing the institutional framework of what he considered to be a free political environment, Shaftesbury does not present us with any utopian models of the perfect state. However, both in the Characteristics and in his letters Shaftesbury leaves us in no doubt that he was well-satisfied with the British constitution of the post-Revolutionary period (post-1688).

In the Characteristics we find him saying:

As for us Britons, thank Heaven, we .... have the notion of a public, and a constitution; how a legislative and how an executive is modelled. .... Our increasing knowledge shows us every day, more and more, what common sense is in politics; and this must of necessity lead us to understand a like sense in morals, which is the foundation.<sup>34</sup>

And,

'Tis scarce a quarter of an age since such a happy balance of power was settled between our prince and people as has firmly secured our hitherto precarious liberties, and removed from us the fear of civil commotions ....<sup>35</sup>

However, such statements as these say little; and it is to Shaftesbury's opinions concerning the particulars of his contemporary political scene that we must look if we are to find anything more than platitudinous generalisations. If we consider the contents of a letter written to Mr. Fowler in February, 1701, certain implications concerning Shaftesbury's precise attitude towards the "happy balance of power" may become evident. He was writing just after the election of a new House of Commons under a Whig majority - the House having been dissolved in the previous December after the King had asked the Tories to form a ministry. Of the circumstances of this



election he wrote as follows:

And now pray see the vertue that is still left in this nation, were we under an Administration to exert it. Here was a Parlemt. dissolv'd .... and a new one call'd under a new ministry in the most fatal conjuncture imaginable, .... [the new ministry] with all its arts and corruptions set on foot to ruine us, and gain a Parlemt. for this treacherouse ministry, friends to France and King James; the King himself not awak'd; but still managing with the same Ministers who openly side with France and favour the Jacobite interest; yet notwithstanding this, wee have strength enough in the Parlemt. to carry every question against the Toryes ....., against the Ministry ....., against the Court, and even against the King himself, whilst he is thus against himself. Never Parlemt. was more ready to do for him to the utmost, and if he be resolv'd to do for himself, and put himself out of French hands, he has all England with him, but what he intends God knows; who alone truly knows the hearts of Princes.<sup>36</sup>

The "fatal conjuncture" here mentioned by Shaftesbury was the danger of a Tory majority in the House of Commons. For the Tories, already in control of the executive power in the state, "are good servants, but ill masters; and, as by principles they are slaves, so they are only serviceable when they are kept so ...."<sup>37</sup> This being their sole potential, the Tories were placed by Shaftesbury in opposition to the true interests of the nation as represented by the newly elected majority of Whigs. The elective House of Commons, a product of "the

vertue that is still left in this nation," was seen by Shaftesbury to be the sole protection against the absolutist moves of a Tory ministry which had been chosen by a king who was "against himself" (so described because of the Jacobite sympathies of the Tories). In considering the opposition between the administrative agents of society and the wishes of the people (or its representatives), Shaftesbury unhesitatingly places his support on the side of the people. If a free people, uninfluenced by enthusiasm, have influence in the government, there will be no danger of an elitist group obtaining power in the state for its own ends against the welfare of the community. In relation to the English situation, he is saying that the legislature should be superior to the executive power, which includes the chief executive agent, the king.

In the above letter to Furley, Shaftesbury also says that the king was "himself not awak'd," implying that the king was blind to the real interests of both himself and the nation. Also, the exasperated statement that it is God alone who knows what goes on in the minds of princes complements what appears to be a general attitude of anti-monarchism. Just as an established Church always contains a potential theocratic tyranny, so it

would seem: does the presence of a monarch in the political system. For,

.... no sooner has a Prince done great things for his country, but he has the sovereign power in a manner devolved upon him, and by the foolish zeal of the people is made absolute, almost whether he will or no. For, to go no higher than our own times, what think you had become of our English Constitution, had King Charles the Second not been a prodigal, King James a bigot, or had King William been victorise ....?38

There is a constant danger of absolutism developing from the royal establishment not only because of ambitions of the monarch, but also as a result of the thoughtless actions of the people.

From these opinions concerning the governmental institutions of Britain, it would have been quite logical for him to take up a revolutionary stance and advocate the abolition of the monarchy in favour of a republic. However, there is a strong conservative element in Shaftesbury's writings which demands that we respect the customary governmental institutions in any society. As a consequence of this he does not advocate revolutionary change and provides no organisational blue-prints. He limits his recommendations to the need to prevent uncontrolled absolutism. In order to attain this it would appear to be necessary for the rulers of society to have their power balanced



by the active political participation of the people (or at least a segment of the population that can represent the interests of the people). Given this, as it exists in England, then changes in the political arrangements should be discouraged.

Shaftesbury discourages political change in all societies because he believes that tampering with customary arrangements will lead to tyranny\* - the emergence of a single ruler who follows the self rather than the social affections:

.... to vary on every turn the rule and measure of government, without respect to any ancient constitutions or establishments, or to the stated and fixed rules of equity and justice, is as certain slavery as it is violence, distraction, and misery, such as in the issue must prove the establishment of an irretrievable state of tyranny and absolute dominion.<sup>39</sup>

For the same reason rebellion must also be rejected:

.... such respect ought ever to be borne by all good people towards every Government that stands upon the foundation of laws, and has any thing that may be called a constitution;- that, however unjustly things may for a while, or on some particular occasion be administer'd, they will bear with patience those infirmities and occasional corruptions and mismanagements which are

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\* It should be noted that Shaftesbury does not make the traditional distinction (found in Aristotle) between monarchy and tyranny. The absolute monarch, because his power is uncompromised, must become a tyrant (an individual who gratifies only his selfish pleasures). See Section II of this chapter.

incident to all Governments, and are natural to men as men, rather than by a sudden zeal or animosity in their own or friend's case (when unhappily injur'd or ill dealt with) attempt to unhinge the Government itself, and stirr up the minds of the people against their magistracy and settled form, which fails not to end in cruelty and tyranny. For so the best Commonwealths have been converted into the most absolute tyrannys.<sup>40</sup>

Although Shaftesbury does not provide us with a detailed explanation of how he reached this conclusion, a possible explanation may be found in his belief that both society and some governments are natural to the condition of man. If this be the case, then in the customs and laws of society we find the necessary norms for man's natural condition. It is this environment that may be seen as educating man to an equality with the historical development of the human race from barbarism to civility. Society and government take the child from which will develop the social being. The man realises his inner potential, becoming more natural through contact with, and sympathy towards, the moral and cultural norms of the society that are found in the institutions and traditions; and to oppose that to which we owe our development is to negate our morality and sociability. Therefore, just as he had considered the ability of an absolute monarch to alter the laws at will as destructive of man's moral

consciousness, Shaftesbury also thought that the radical change of customs and laws, whatever the source of that change, would have the same effect. By the acceptance of change men lose the ability to appreciate the possibility of permanent standards of action. For the established institutions and laws are primary to the formation of a moral consciousness in the citizen, and to question or change the former is to question the latter. The result of change would be the destruction of our faith in either of them, and they would be made incapable of providing an effective opposition to the claims and ambitions of the potential tyrant. The only exception that he is prepared to make to the unquestioning obedience to the laws of the country as enforced by the magistrates is if the individual judges that the state faces "impending ruin".\* What such a situation would involve is the loss of liberty; an appeal to the people against the magistrates only being the greatest injury that can be offered

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\* "... as a friend of y<sup>e</sup> people, I ever was and must be y<sup>e</sup> greatest enemy to those who, on any acc<sup>t</sup> less than immediate impending ruin of their state, shall dare appeal to their tumults, and invite them by their riotouse assemblys to intimidate their Magistrates." J. Forster (ed.), Original Letters, 260. Letter to Mr. Furley, Reygate, May 22nd, 1710.



a free government. The pre-1688 condition in Britain appears to have satisfied this pre-requisite for revolt, for "Late England, since the Revolution," was thought by him to be "better still than Old England by many a degree, and .... in the main we make somewhat a better figure in Europe than we did a few reigns before."<sup>41</sup>

Shaftesbury also thought that if radical change was necessary it must not take the form of a complete destruction of all the trammels of the old government. The edifice of the state, however unnatural, always contains the essence of what a state ought to be. What is necessary is reform - the cutting away of a canker in order to leave the essential core of the state in its natural, healthy condition. This attitude becomes evident if we consider Shaftesbury's opinions concerning the organisation of the Egyptian state under the priesthood or Magi. He was the first to admit that some sort of change was necessary in this situation. However, when considering the form that that change should have taken, he tells us that even the most evil rule will not extinguish all moral principle. Certain laws and customs will conform with man's true moral nature. Even though one "might have resolved not to leave so much as their houses standing," it is necessary to remember that to totally destroy

all the laws and customs would be to make man even worse than he had become under the theocracy. Shaftesbury asks,

Should we have flown at every religious and moral principle, denied every natural and social affection, and rendered men as much wolves as was possible to one another, whilst we described them such; and endeavoured to make them see themselves by far more monstrous and corrupt than with the worst intentions it was ever possible for the worst of them to become?<sup>47</sup>

To destroy everything is to destroy the natural with the unnatural, the good with the bad. To do so would have created in Egypt a nation of Hobbesian archetypes. For the socio-political environment is a product of mankind's moral and cultural history, and to this the individual owes what moral ideas he may possess no matter how inadequate they are. To destroy the whole legal framework of a state would be to negate any progress that its members had made towards the fulfilment of their natures as moral beings.

#### - VI -

In spite of Shaftesbury's failure to provide us with a model outlining the features of a perfect society, and in spite of his apparent satisfaction with the prevailing governmental forms in his contemporary Britain, Shaftesbury does make two

recommendations concerning the most natural means of organising society. The first is concerned with the formation of political parties and interest groups; the second with the maximum size to which any state can grow without the emergence of conflict between its members.

According to Shaftesbury, man's natural sociability is not only the cause of man's moral maturity and personal happiness, but also, "methinks, this herding principle, and associating inclination, is seen so natural and strong in most men, that one might readily affirm 'twas even from the violence of this passion that so much disorder arose in the general society of mankind." The source of this disorder is the fact that man's "sense of fellowship" ought, ideally, to stretch to the whole of mankind. However, "the interest of the world in general, is a kind of remote philosophical object. That greater community falls not easily under the eye." This also applies to the nation as a whole. It is only in the smaller social group that we can feel a common interest which we attempt to pursue. For, "In less parties, men may be intimately conversant and acquainted with one another. They can there better taste society, and enjoy the common good and interest of a more contracted public."<sup>43</sup>



Most men are willing to rest satisfied in their local community, pursuing the good of that in which they can see the immediate results of their actions.

However, those individuals who have a more expansive nature, "they who are of the sprightliest and most active faculties,"<sup>44</sup> cannot rest satisfied in pursuing the common good on such a small scale. In an attempt to pursue the welfare of the whole community, the socially conscious individual may affiliate with others and form a political party. It was Shaftesbury's belief that when this occurred there was formed an interest opposed to the common good. It is an "abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is natural to mankind."<sup>45</sup> As a member of the Commons in 1695 he showed evidence of placing his conception of the general good above the quarrels of party politics. In a letter to one Thomas Stringer concerning a Bill which was then before the Commons,\* and which had both his

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\* "We have got a bill to be engrossed, which lays an incapacity on the elector .... in case of corruption, meat, drink, &c., and which obliges the Knights of the shire to have £500 a year, or the inheritance of it, as freehold within the county, and a Burgess £200 a year somewhere at least in England on the same terms."  
 Rand (ed.) Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen, 300.

support and his vote, he wrote of himself:

..... your poor friend that now writes to you has sentence (and bitter sentence too) every day passing upon him for going, as you may be sure he goes, and ever will go, on such occasions as these, whatever party it be that is in or out at Court .....46

Having recognised a distinction between the common good and the ends of factional sub-groups, Shaftesbury strove to pursue the former in opposition to the latter.

It was Shaftesbury's opinion that political factions or parties are formed when men find that they can not relate themselves immediately to the common purpose and interest of their community. His fears of the divisive effects of such groups are sufficient to lead him to recommend a limitation on the size of political organisations. For Shaftesbury, the most desirable size for a community is the size at which each person in that community is capable of associating himself with the interests of the whole. This will be an upper limit beyond which the community cannot grow without factions occurring and destroying its common aim. If expansion occurs and takes the size beyond this upper limit, new societies will be formed within the old as men attempt to gain that common sense of fellowship which has been lost:

Thus we have wheels within wheels. And in some national constitutions (not withstanding the absurdity in politics) we have one empire within another. Nothing is so delightful as to incorporate. Distinctions of many kinds are invented. Religious societies are formed. Orders are erected, and their interests espoused and served with the utmost zeal and passion .... And the associating genius of man is never better proved than in those very societies, which are formed in opposition to the general one of mankind, and to the real interest of the State.<sup>47</sup>

In large states, conflict is caused because of the desire of human beings to "incorporate" their interests with others. Shaftesbury calls sedition "a kind of cantonising"- the product of a state growing too large for the existence of a common interest and good which can be shared by all. The cure for this, says Shaftesbury, has been the emigration of groups from the home country to form colonies abroad - by which he means politically independent communities formed by emigrants from the home country. Shaftesbury approves of this sort of action, and "empires" are always faced with Shaftesbury's condemnation through their incapacity to provide any common goals because of a lack of unity:

Vast empires are in many respects unnatural; but particularly in this, that be they ever so well constituted, the affairs of many must, in such governments, turn upon a very few, and the relation be less sensible, and in a manner lost, between the magistrate and people, in a body so unwieldy



in its limbs, and whose members lie so remote from one another and distant from the head.<sup>48</sup>

If the state grows too large, the government will find it impossible to share in any common sympathy which may be possessed by the whole population. The size of the population over which it rules makes the recognition of any such common element impossible. Even if the government is unanimous, its aims will remain particular insofar as the government will only form a part of, a faction within, the whole society.

However, Shaftesbury's preference for a state that was limited in size was tempered by a recognition of the impossibility of ever achieving such a limitation in the de facto situation of his own time. This qualification was expressed by Shaftesbury when he was discussing what he calls "the balance of power in the world." Starting from the self-evident principle that "there should be a balance of power in the world" - this being "one of the plain principles which the world (thank God) is pretty well possessed of in this rising age" - he continues with a statement of his belief that "the balance should for the good of mankind be composed not of a few, but as many powers as is possible ...." Expanding on this, he

states that he would,

..... bring these smaller powers or sovereignties within the limits of cities, and those too of no enormous bulk of widely extended territory. Such powers as these, united by confederacy, or standing league (as of old the Grecian cities by the Achaian, and at this day the German circles, Swiss cantons, and Dutch states), are doubtless the most perfect and according to nature ....<sup>49</sup>

However, at this point his hesitancy to recommend any radical change again becomes evident. Despite his belief that an increase in the number and dispersion of politically independent communities would be preferable to the larger political communities that he sees around him, he feels that this would lead to a domination of mankind by "unnatural sovereignties", by which he means absolute monarchies. Therefore, he qualifies the above statement, saying that smaller political units would be "ineffectual to preserve a general balance against greater and more unnatural sovereignties when such appear in the world, [as] history and reason will in good measure show us."<sup>49</sup> In this we again can recognise Shaftesbury's refusal to be carried away by utopian dreams, despite his belief that the contemporary political structure of the world was far from perfect.

## - VII -

The present chapter has been largely concerned with man as a subordinate unit in the community at large. We have been concerned with how Shaftesbury thought the state should be organised in order to achieve the common good. As a consequence of this we have, in a sense, lost sight of the individual in so far as he is subordinated to the common good of the whole community. For by postulating a higher moral end than the individual himself, yet to which the individual belongs, the individual is in danger of losing all significance. There is a tendency to avoid the placing of the individual in opposition to the government, especially if that government is believed to facilitate the attainment of the common good. At the same time we have seen that Shaftesbury regarded government and religion to be sources of moral corruption in man - as a result of which he recommends that certain forms of political and religious institutions should be opposed. The reason for the radical element is that one of the norms that he feels all political societies should possess is the opportunity for the individual to develop his moral consciousness. Because of this, despite a tendency to recommend support of the laws and the magistrates,



when he feels that freedom is denied Shaftesbury will condemn political structures and hope for their reform. When he does this he is asserting the moral significance of the individual against the corrupting influence of the state; his writings take on a libertarian view which is not found when he stresses the need for the individual to subordinate himself to the common ends of the whole community. Individual autonomy loses almost all its significance, however, when the natural development of man towards his social condition is equated with his existence in a particular form of political organisation - such as the British constitution.

We are faced in Shaftesbury's philosophy with an opposition between the moral need of men for freedom, and the moral responsibility of men to subordinate themselves to social goals. These two elements may conflict, and Shaftesbury does not give a clear explanation of how we can decide when to support, or when to oppose, the government - which defines and supports the social goals. There is no definition of a sphere of individual activity, nor a statement of human rights, that the government may not legitimately interfere with. As a consequence of this, the problem of political obligation remains unsolved. However,

we must recognise that Shaftesbury never set out to solve such a problem. His main interest in those writings which have political significance is to demonstrate that freedom leads to moral and cultural development. He set out to demonstrate the results of freedom, not to justify any particular method for bringing it about, or to justify revolution in a situation where freedom was lacking. He was, after all, living in a society which he believed was already free.

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#### SUMMARY:

This chapter begins by recognising that political enquiries are a necessary extension of Shaftesbury's moral thought. Shaftesbury regards the human purpose to be found only in the life of a political community. It is because of this that he refuses to consider man as being able to exist in a pre-social "state of nature", whether that condition be regarded as pleasant or otherwise. He rejects the presence of knowledge of a "golden age" when no government was needed, sees government and society as necessarily implying each other, and sees "virtue" as consisting in the welfare of the community within which Nature has placed us.

However, Shaftesbury was prepared to recognise that man does not usually fulfil his ethical potential. The reason for this is to be found, according to Shaftesbury, in the corruption of man's ethical potential by political and religious institutions. Section II considers the "political" sources of corruption and notes that for Shaftesbury,

1. an absolute monarch can have no knowledge of the common good
2. an absolute monarch prevents the emergence of moral standards within the community over which he rules
3. his contemporary France was regarded as an example of a society corrupted by absolutism.

Section III considers the religious sources of the human failure to achieve the ethical status that Nature has given to men. It is seen that as a consequence of "enthusiasm" men become religious fanatics and can be dominated by a priesthood. Using ancient Egypt as an example to demonstrate what for him is a general theory concerning the religious origins of man's failure to realize an ethical existence, Shaftesbury attempts to show,

1. that a priesthood can always be found to take advantage of an enthusiastic population
2. that the priesthood has a vested material interest in encouraging enthusiastic superstition



3. that by acquiring property the priesthood will gain political power and dominate the population in a manner like that of an absolute monarchy
4. that having gained political power in a state the established church will then attempt to extend its influence by encouraging religious war.

Turning to consider Shaftesbury's attitude towards the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church of England, Section IV notes that for him,

1. the Roman Catholic Church was characterised by its corruption and the exploitation of its members by the priesthood as in ancient Egypt - that is, the Roman Church was regarded by Shaftesbury as a source of moral corruption
2. the "Protestant Religion" was seen to be related to freedom from domination
3. the established Church of England was regarded as a potential danger to morality and freedom
4. it is noted that Shaftesbury believed that the Church should be both separate from and subordinate to the political arrangements of a society.

Section V recognises that "liberty" is regarded by Shaftesbury as the basis for moral development. We see here that Shaftesbury regards the British constitution as an example of a government which provides men with freedom, and approves of the power of the House of Commons, thinking that it should be the superior branch of government. In spite of anti-monarchical

elements in his writings, Shaftesbury is seen to refuse to take a revolutionary stance. He is conservative, refusing to provide utopian schemes of government, because

1. he thought that radical change will lead to the establishment of an absolute government - which for him is necessarily a tyranny
2. no society is entirely corrupt, and in making changes one should attempt to preserve the natural elements that are present in any society.

In spite of his refusal to provide us with an organisational blue-print of the perfect society, we see in Section VI that Shaftesbury recommends

1. the avoidance of parties or factions whose interest will stand in opposition to the public good.
2. that no political community should grow so large as to necessitate the development of factions.

However, because of the presence of "unnatural sovereignties" Shaftesbury is not prepared to encourage the splitting up of states into smaller units even though such action is morally desirable. We see Shaftesbury's conservatism reasserting itself.

Finally, Section VII notes that Shaftesbury failed to solve the problem of political obligation because he failed to define a sphere within which the individual may legitimately act without being limited by the state. The needs of the community and

the needs of the individual are constantly in danger of conflict whenever the political aspects of Shaftesbury's writings are considered. However, that there should be a sphere of individual freedom in any community must not be doubted, as will become evident when we consider the moral and cultural consequences of freedom in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER EIGHTTHE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF FREEDOM

- I -

Shaftesbury recognised that the political arrangements in society have important effects upon the individuals who are controlled by them. These effects are psychological. The norms imposed by a government determine the way that the members of a community think. We have seen in the last chapter that Shaftesbury thought that the individual would be alienated from his true nature if the rulers of society dominate his personality in order to achieve their own selfish ends. In this event the individual would lose his ability to recognise moral truth and accept instead the norms dictated to society by the government. Consequently, in his analysis of different forms of political organisation, Shaftesbury rejected those organisations which to his mind prevented the individual from attaining moral comprehension, and advocated a constitutional arrangement which would leave the individual with sufficient opportunity to appreciate the natural affections. The essential characteristic of those political arrangements of which he approved was the presence of a degree of freedom. Although never precisely outlining

what degree of freedom, it would appear to involve at least the following two elements:

1. some degree of popular participation in government.  
 "For no people in a civil state can possibly be free, when they are otherwise governed than by such laws as they themselves have constituted, or to which they have freely given consent."<sup>1</sup>
2. critical freedom, which is the provision of the opportunity to discuss and criticise the beliefs of both ourselves and others in all spheres of human activity.

If these two elements are present then we shall also be able to appreciate moral truth as a consequence of the opportunity to exercise either our reason or our moral sense. In this manner we shall be able to attain

3. moral freedom, which involves the conscious choice of moral action without reference to externals (see above Chapter Four).

To call a person "free" involves all those forms of freedom described here - the political, the critical, and the moral. The first two are necessary for the third to come into effect.

For Shaftesbury, if truth exists it must be something that can be appreciated by the human mind. As a result of this, all claims relating to knowledge of the truth must be open to questioning by the human intellect. In this way only can truth emerge, and each individual appreciate it for himself. In this way only

can each person become morally "free". "Reason and virtue alone can bestow liberty."<sup>2</sup>

However, it should be remembered that in Shaftesbury's moral philosophy moral truth may be appreciated either by reason or by the non-rational moral sense. Recognition of this aspect of Shaftesbury's thought is necessary if we are to appreciate his attitudes towards liberty and its desirable effects. At the outset we can present his argument in a dual form, stated simply as follows: Government organisation and laws should always encourage freedom of enquiry and of all human creativity, because the product of such liberty will be

1. the emergence of truth in all areas (including morality) where reason is regarded as the measure of truth, and
2. the emergence of aesthetic truth and a national culture as a consequence of the citizens' freedom to develop their "taste".\*

This chapter will attempt to analyse these theories concerning the desirable consequences of freedom according to this distinction. In the next section we shall consider Shaftesbury's views concerning the necessary interdependence of political freedom, critical freedom and morality as they are outlined in

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\* For a discussion of the moral implications of Shaftesbury's aesthetic theories, see above Chapter Five.



his "rational" theory.

- II -

According to Shaftesbury, if a person is to become moral he must not be dominated by the will of another person. He must be given the opportunity to study his affections and create within himself a balance of the affections. In a tyranny, as we saw in Chapter Seven, the acceptance of those norms which are dictated to society by the ruling individual or group\* leads to the belief that this is the only measure of right and wrong. The tyrant limits freedom of enquiry and produces an environment in which his word is the only known law that governs our actions. Without freedom of enquiry, there can be no morality. On the other hand, it is also Shaftesbury's claim that without freedom of enquiry (critical freedom) there must be tyranny, and that if men voluntarily forsake their pursuit of morality, tyranny will necessarily result. Taking the standpoint of a "rationalist" Shaftesbury tells us that the only thing that raises men "above the degree of brutes," is "freedom of reason in the learned world, and good government and liberty in the civil world.

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\* Shaftesbury made no categorisation of governments into different types. He does not make the traditional distinction between the selfish rule of an individual (tyranny) and the selfish rule of a group (oligarchy).

Tyranny in one is ever accompanied, or soon followed, by tyranny in the other."<sup>3</sup> In addition to tyranny destroying criticism and morality, if men do not have the opportunity to develop their "freedom of reason", or do not take advantage of such opportunities, society will not be able to escape from tyrannical control.

Because all our actions are guided by our opinions concerning what is proper or right, it is necessary for us to form correct opinions concerning the proper way to act in any situation (if we wish to be moral). This involves for Shaftesbury the use of reason or the moral sense in an effort to distinguish between good and bad affections. When Shaftesbury places his faith in human reason, however, he is faced with the problem that, "'Tis the habit alone of reasoning which can make a reasoner."<sup>4\*</sup> From here Shaftesbury's reasoning appears to take the following line:

1. If we are to be practised in reasoning we must desire to participate in discussion with others so that we can develop our reasoning faculties.

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\* In the aesthetic approach to morality it might also be claimed that we must be practised in the use of the moral sense before we can form a "taste". See above Chapter Five, Section VI.

2. For us to desire discussion and argument with others, that form of social intercourse must be an accepted activity in our community.
3. If the exercise of our wits is a social norm, by reasoning with others the individual will learn to reason with himself and distinguish between the affections (that is, he will learn the art of soliloquy).

In this manner Shaftesbury concludes that the best preparation for an analysis of our affections is an intellectual free-for-all, which will sharpen our wits and enable us to understand and appreciate truth when we come across it. It is as a result of this "critical freedom" that we can become moral.

The problem arises, however, that even though there may be no social or legal barriers to unhindered discussion and criticism, and the necessary training ground is thereby provided for rational development, it does not necessarily follow that the individual will take full advantage of the situation.

There is good reason to suppose that, however equably framed or near alike the race of mankind may appear in other respects, they are not always equal thinkers, or of a like ability in the management of this natural talent which we call thought.<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence of this, even in an environment that does not limit our moral creativity, certain types of individual fail to realise their moral potential. They may just not think -



that is, they may be "unthinking". Also, they may be either "half-thinkers" or "under-thinkers".

Those who are afraid to think, who consider it "too high and dangerous, too aspiring and presumptive" because of the influence of some theological or philosophical authority, are the "half-thinkers". In their willing acceptance of authority - for no-one can prevent contemplation if the rational being desires this pursuit - they reject that moral freedom that is achieved through the recognition and acceptance of rationally formulated moral prescriptions which are discovered within the self. At the same time, the acceptance of an external authority, such as church dogma, will result in an abandonment of the desire to be independently critical, and we will be prepared to accept the conclusions of others.\* Of this type of personality Shaftesbury asks

Is there much difference between this case and that of the obedient beasts of burden, who stop precisely at their appointed inn, or at whatever point the charioteer or governor of the reins thinks fit to give the signal for a halt?<sub>6</sub>

Those who refuse intellectual independence in this manner become

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\* It should be added that we will also lose our "good humour", the importance of which (for Shaftesbury) has been explained above in Chapter Six.

the same as beasts and deserve only our scorn.

In addition to the intellectual cowards there are those who cannot be bothered to think. They are too lazy to undertake an analysis of the affections and rest contented with the external satisfactions of life. In so doing they "under-think". Resting satisfied with something less than their true interest, which is moral enlightenment, such individuals tend to pursue "public distinction, fame, power, an estate or title," and overlook "the chief enjoyments of life, which are founded in honesty and a good mind."<sup>7</sup> They cease to care about the pleasures of social discourse, lose any ability to orientate their affections towards the good, and are completely dominated by inferior ends.

In the case of both the "half-thinker" and the "under-thinker", freedom of moral enquiry and self-examination are rejected in favour of a substitute. Our defenses against the moral domination of others are broken. Unable to guide ourselves we will be prepared to accept the guidance of others. This voluntary acceptance of inward of mental slavery prepares us for the acceptance of external domination. In a letter to Michael Ainsworth, written in 1708, this is described as follows:

In some, who are horridly degenerate, this submission is wholly voluntary. Self-interest leads them; whether

it be a private one of their own; or in society and confederacy with some faction or party, to the support of temporal ends. In this case it carries a specious shew of publick good; whether it be in CHURCH, or STATE. And thus it is often the occasion of an open denial of reason, and of a bare-fac'd opposition to the glorious search of TRUTH.<sup>g</sup>

The voluntary rejection of critical freedom leads to the pursuit of self instead of moral interests.\* We find two types of external domination resulting from this:

1. the domination by a Church of the individual who hopes to gain his reward in Heaven by obeying a particular theological orthodoxy.
2. the domination by a political party of the individual who joins a group in an attempt to achieve external satisfaction (e.g. honours and titles) by sharing in the processes of power.

In both cases the individual rejects critical thought, dismisses his moral potentiality in favour of a spurious self-interest. It is true that the individual may come to accept the group with which he associates himself as a higher moral entity than the individual, and work unselfishly for the common welfare of the group. However, the ends of any faction which finds its origins in selfishness, must remain unrelated to the universal truths of morality. In the case of a Church it will give rise to a priesthood, as in Egypt and in the Roman Church, who are able to exploit

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\* By self-interests Shaftesbury now seems to mean the ends pursued by the self affections, not our self-interest or happiness as defined in Chapter Four above.



the worshipper for their own material ends. The moral welfare of the individual and the common good of society will be ignored. In the case of a political party, the common good of society will not be represented by the ends of the party.\* Through the acceptance of the limited ends of the party, the members will stand in opposition to the unhindered pursuit of the common good by all the rational individuals in society. As with certain churches, a creed is accepted without question, criticism within the group is thought heretical, and criticism by others, misguided. Consequently, any political party that attempts to enforce conformity amongst its members must come to stand in opposition to "the glorious search of TRUTH," and through its opposition to critical freedom endanger the development of moral enlightenment in society. In this situation the leaders of the party would come to stand in the same relation to the party members as an organised priesthood does to its believers. They would exploit the faith of the adherents to their own advantage.

In addition to those who accept domination through voluntary enslavement, there are those who desire domination. This sort

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\* For Shaftesbury's attitude towards political parties (factions) see above Chapter Seven, Section VI.

of person, and the way his inward slavery leads to this desire, are also explained in the letter to Michael Ainsworth cited above. This person will be "unthinking" insofar as reason has no role to play in the ordering of his life. Sensualism will characterise this individual. If the general outlook in society is one that is dominated by sensual pursuits (the product of "sloth and laziness"), reason can have no significance. For sensual pleasures stand in opposition to the rational pursuit of ethical ends. As a result of this opposition reason will be rejected:

For when reason, as an antagonist to vice, is become an inward enemy, and has once lost her interest with the soul, by opposing every favourite passion; she will then be soon expell'd another province, and lie under suspicion for every attempt she makes upon the mind. She is presently miscall'd and abus'd. She is thought notional in the understanding, whimsical in company, seditious in the state, heretical in the church.<sup>9</sup>

The people who live in a condition of sensual slavery reject reason. At the same time they cannot abide a freedom of criticism of which they would become the target. To escape this criticism they prefer a political system which will reject criticism. This is a system of political tyranny, the macrocosmic expression of their own microcosmic condition. In this case,

.... 'tis mere sloth and lazyness, or sordid appetite and lust, which bringing them under the power of sin and ignorance, fits them for political servitude by moral prostitution. .... Vice and intemperance is but an inward persecution. 'Tis here, the violence begins. Here truth is first held in unrighteousness, and .... reason, the knowable, the divine part is persecuted and imprison'd. Those, who submit to this tyranny, in time, not only come to like it, but plead for it, and think the law of virtue tyrannical and against nature.<sup>10</sup>

When men accept tyranny within as natural, and consider virtue and reason to be unnatural, they will be prepared to accept political tyranny:

So in the absolute governments of the world: nations, that submit to arbitrary rule, love even their form of government; if one may call that a form, which is without any, and, like vice it self, knows neither law nor order.<sup>11</sup>

If the individuals in society are under the tyranny of the passions and see no further than the gratification of their sensual appetites, they are a community with a slave personality and will receive the government appropriate to their outlook. Just as the individual is ruled by his irrational appetites, so society will be ruled by the irrational whims of its ruler(s). In the same way as there is no self-criticism within the individual, there will be no freedom of enquiry and criticism in society. From the moral point of view the society will be completely



stagnant.

As to the ruler of this morally stagnant society, there can be no hope of him being an enlightening influence. The reason for this is "that great truth, that tyranny can never be exercis'd, but by one, who is already a slave."<sup>12</sup> The tyrant, a product of a corrupt society, will be the slave of his vices, and it is the attempt to satisfy those vices which will have been the driving force in his acquisition of power. Shaftesbury described the emergence of the tyrant as follows:

'Tis pretty visible indeed, that the original of all is in those sordid vices of sloth, lazyness, and intemperance. This makes way for ambition: for how should these be so illustriously maintained and vindicated, without large temporal power, and the umbrage of authority?<sup>13</sup>

If society has become corrupt enough to allow this slave personality to come to power there will be an intensification of that fear of reason and criticism which allowed him to gain power. Criticism will be denied his subjects, for a rational analysis of his actions would lead to condemnation upon grounds of morality. The practice of rational enquiry and criticism being denied, the population will accept the actions of the ruler as the only measure of justice. All sight will be lost of a genuine morality which is based upon an appreciation of the

natural affections.

We see, therefore, that when those who do not think enough and those who do not think at all reject freedom of enquiry they lose their political freedom\* at the same time as they forsake morality. However, in the last paragraph it also becomes apparent that the analysis has gone the full circle and we have returned to the social implications of despotism that were discussed in the last chapter. For Shaftesbury there is an interaction between corrupting forces from below (from unthinking individuals) and the corrupting forces from above (from absolutist forces) in any society which loses its zest for freedom of enquiry. All possibility of moral individuals pursuing the common good

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\* The conclusions reached in Chapter Seven, Sections II and III concerning the institutional sources of moral corruption in man must now be considered in conjunction with the fact that these forms of social organisation are often encouraged by the already corrupt nature of man. This recognition that man can be anti-social in himself without corruption by the environment might suggest that herein lies the reason why, as we saw in Chapter Seven, Shaftesbury refused to consider the possibility of social order in the absence of governmental authority. However, Shaftesbury does not take this line, directing his argument towards a denial of the Hobbesian "natural" man without recognising the possibly anti-governmental character of his interpretation of human nature (an interpretation that seems to have undergone change in Shaftesbury's explanation of the origin of tyranny that has been discussed in the present section).

within a politically stable situation, will be destroyed.

- III -

Firmly believing in a correspondence between the degree of freedom and the degree of morality in society, Shaftesbury thought it was necessary to allow a complete freedom of discourse and criticism. As a result of this freedom a large proportion of the members of society will be able to appreciate moral truths, producing thereby a community which is oriented towards the pursuit of the common good. It was the belief that this would occur, that moral truth would be seen and appreciated, that led Shaftesbury to advocate:

1. public participation in government in order to counter-act the absolutist tendencies of monarchy.
2. a political programme of non-interference in the religious and intellectual lives of the citizens.

The first of these prescriptions was a result of Shaftesbury's belief that, unless the people were allowed to have some say in the government of their society, absolutism would lead to a decline in the moral condition of the community. This may be called Shaftesbury's doctrine of political freedom, without which freedom of criticism would be denied. The second prescription relates to Shaftesbury's belief that freedom of enquiry



and criticism is necessary if men are to remain politically free. Without criticism, political tyranny is likely to develop under the conditions outlined in the last section. Both prescriptions centre on the necessity of a free use of our rational faculties, the full implications of which will now be considered.

Shaftesbury saw that a complete freedom of enquiry and criticism might give rise to attitudes and opinions with which he disagreed. However, even though "liberty of thought and writing will produce a sort of libertinism in philosophy," this is something "which we must bear with."<sup>14</sup> For only through liberty of enquiry can we hope to gain complete insight into the truth available to the human mind. Consequently, the magistrates must remain uninvolved in all theological or philosophical disputes:

For I am against all .... appeals thither, both in religion and philosophy, thinking it a kind of cowardice and mistrust of our cause to call for other help, or do anything which looks like a beginning of delivering over to the secular arm. 15

If we wish to destroy the attitudes of others - such as adherence to the Roman Church or belief in hedonism - we must do it by reason, not persecution. Similarly, the atheist is to be reasoned with, not eliminated. All religions must be tolerated

in the belief that the just and true religion will succeed through its moral and rational superiority to other modes of belief and worship. Both the orthodox and the heterodox must join in a free intellectual contest by means of which truth will be given the maximum opportunity of presenting itself to the minds of men.

Freedom of criticism does not apply only to the realm of ideas. It should also be applied to the character of particular individuals, whatever their position might be within the society or government:

For where jealousy of state, or the ill lives of the great people, or any other cause, is powerful enough to restrain the freedom of censure in any part, it in effect destroys the benefit of it in the whole.<sup>16</sup>

If freedom of criticism is to achieve its end, it must be total. If a person or institution is exempt from criticism, no criticism will be entirely impartial; for the exemption must always be present in people's minds, which, through the necessity of even a minor external conformity, will be prevented from taking the completely unbiassed attitude that is necessary to the search for truth. Therefore, in answer to those who oppose freedom of criticism because it may give rise to scurrilous and

unwarranted attacks upon the things they hold dear (reputation, institution, or belief), Shaftesbury wrote,

'Tis true, this liberty may seem to run too far. We may perhaps be said to make ill use of it. So every one will say, when he himself is touched, and his opinion freely examined. But who shall be judge of what may be freely examined and what may not? Where liberty may be used and where it may not? What remedy shall we prescribe to this in general? .... Let but the search go freely on, and the right measure of everything will soon be found.<sup>17</sup>

No single person is able to judge absolutely that which is right or wrong for everyone else in the community. What is necessary is the interaction of opinion and the free use of criticism. In this way, that degree of truth which is available to the human mind will gradually disseminate itself through society as a result of personal experience of the truth. Men will be practised in the art of distinguishing between right and wrong, their rational capacities refined by constant usage.

This approach to "truth" was the same in religion as in other matters; and when Shaftesbury advocates "free-thinking" he is contributing to what was, by the time he wrote, an old theme. During the seventeenth century numerous writers in England had advocated religious toleration based upon a faith in reason. The Cambridge Platonists who greatly influenced



Shaftesbury\* were advocates of religious toleration.

William Chillingworth (1602-1644) had advocated both rationalism and toleration in religious matters.\*\* Two other seventeenth-century thinkers that are worth mentioning in relation to Shaftesbury's thought are Bishop Jeremy Taylor and Archbishop Tillotson. Both these thinkers are quoted at length by Shaftesbury (towards the end of the Characteristics) in favour of "free-thinking" in religion.<sup>+</sup> Also, there are the writings of John Locke, whose Letters Concerning Toleration (1689-1693) popularised both rationalism and religious toleration perhaps more than the writings of any other thinker. Shaftesbury's ideas concerning religious toleration often seem to be taken directly from Locke.

What were Shaftesbury's thoughts on religious toleration? His first principle seems to be taken from Locke who stated that, "A religion that is of God wants not the assistance of

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\* See Chapter Two above for a discussion of Shaftesbury's intellectual debt to the Cambridge Platonists.

\*\* Shaftesbury wrote to Ainsworth in 1709 saying "CHILLINGWORTH against Popery is sufficient reading for you, and will teach you the best manner of that polemick divinity." Letters (1746), 28. "Letters .... to a Student", Letter VII.

+ See Characteristics II, 353/363.

human authority to make it prevail." (Locke)<sup>18</sup> "I am sure," writes Shaftesbury, "the only way to save men's sense, or preserve wit at all in the world, is to give liberty to wit."<sup>19</sup> Freedom of enquiry is considered by Shaftesbury to be the essential pre-requisite of truth - in this case, religious truth. Therefore, it is necessary to tolerate all of the various religious sects which may be found in society. Even if you became certain that religious truth had been discovered this would not justify the use of political power to obtain a conformity of everyone to that religious form; for coercion cannot create belief:

If perhaps by compulsion, or through any necessity or fear incumbent, a different carriage be at any time affected, or different maxims owned, the practice at the bottom will be still the same. If the countenance be composed, the heart, however, will not be changed.<sup>20</sup> \*

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\* A similar statement can be found in Locke's Third Letter for Toleration:

".... I tell you, by using force your way to bring men to the religion of the church of England, you mean only to bring them to an outward profession of that religion; .... force used your way, being applied only to dissenters, and ceasing as soon as they conform .... cannot be to bring men to any thing more than outward conformity."

Locke, Works, VI, 323.

Truth does not stand or fall by the power of the sword, but through the impression it makes upon our minds. Truth being the end of religious enquiry and discussion, and this being the only end which Shaftesbury considered to be relevant, religious persecution must be condemned for being the antithesis of this aim. Persecution does not even succeed in its own stated purpose, the persecuted remaining unconvinced even if outwardly they accept orthodoxy. At the same time, it will do positive harm by destroying the possibility of man ever discovering the truth if orthodoxy happens to be fallacious. Also, according to Shaftesbury's thesis (and the central point of his argument), by denying men the right to criticise the accepted opinion, and forbidding enquiry along original lines, all will lose the rational ability required for moral enlightenment. Consequently, intolerant action must always be condemned.

Rather than representative of a desire to save the souls of mankind (even against mankind's will), Shaftesbury regarded intolerance and persecution as representative of the baser instincts in mankind which find their root in selfishness. When discussing the basis of religious persecution, he tells us that the advocate of such methods,



.... being devoted to the interest of a party already in possession or expectation of the temporal advantages annexed to a particular belief, he fails not, as a zealous party-man, to look with jealousy on every uncomformable opinion, and is sure to justify those means which he thinks proper to prevent its growth. .... the passion he feels on this occasion is not from pure zeal, but private interest and worldly emulation.<sup>21</sup>

We see here that Shaftesbury regarded intolerance, if not based upon enthusiasm or zeal, as based upon selfish desires.

Avarice is therefore seen as the psychological basis for that form of religious intolerance which is not motivated by zeal, but which utilises zeal for the attainment of its ends.\*

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\* Shaftesbury is again in agreement with Locke who expressed the same attitude in the following succinct manner:

"The heads and leaders of the church, moved by avarice and insatiable desire, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves, by preaching unto them, contrary to the laws of the gospel, and to the precepts of charity, that schismatics and heretics are to be outed of their possessions, and destroyed."

Locke, Works, VI, 53 (A Letter Concerning Toleration).  
Locke here isolates the superstition of the masses and the non-spiritual materialistic desires of powerful institutions and individuals as the basis of intolerance and religious persecution. The anti-social and unnatural rejection of the charitable affections which Shaftesbury attributed to the superstitious enthusiasm of the populous under the encouragement of a selfish priesthood, has been discussed in Chapter Seven above.

Concerning the social results of religious intolerance, Shaftesbury believed that to legislate religious practice is to destroy stability and peace in society:

To be pursued by petty inquisitors; to be threatened with punishment or penal laws; to be marked out as dangerous and suspected; to be railed at in high places with all the studied wit and art of calumny, are indeed sufficient provocations to ill-humour, and may force people to divide who at first had never any such intention.<sup>22\*</sup>

To place a person's belief outside the law, and to persecute him, "may force people to divide," thereby creating antagonistic factions within society. Because of persecution, and the denial of freedom of enquiry and criticism, there will be a hardening

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\* This aspect of Shaftesbury's views upon religious persecution can also be found in Locke's theories.

".... how much greater will be the security of a government, where all good subjects, of whatsoever they be, without any distinction upon account of religion .... shall become the common support and guard of it; and where none will have any occasion to fear the severity of the laws, but those that do injuries to their neighbours, and offend against the civil peace."

Locke, Ibid., VI, 51 (A Letter Concerning Toleration).  
Locke is here saying that peace within the community will be the advantageous product of religious toleration.

of attitudes between different sects. Individuals will not be able to transcend their prejudices through reason. Consequently, civil strife is the logical result of persecution in so far as the legal situation demands a violent solution to what is essentially a rational problem. On the other hand, if there is religious toleration no-one will find it necessary to place their will against the government when pursuing their spiritual ends. With Shaftesbury, religious freedom must be seen not only as the pre-requisite of truth, but also the pre-requisite of civil peace.

Finally, we should note that the belief that persecution neither persuades nor has relevance to the truth, is a belief which does not apply merely to religious matters in the writings of Shaftesbury. For Shaftesbury, it was a general and predictable quality in all men, that if they are denied the right of freedom in their intellectual pursuits, they will react against that which is forbidden with a greater enthusiasm than ever before. He tells us that,

.... if we had a sort of inquisition, .... erected to restrain poetical licence, and in general to suppress that fancy and humour of versification; but in particular that most extravagant passion of love, as it is set out by poets, in its heathenish dress of Venuses



and Cupids: .... we might perhaps see a new Arcadia arising out of this heavy persecution: old people and young would be seized with a versifying spirit: .... forests would be filled with romantic shepherds and shepherdesses: and rocks resound with echoes of hymns and praises offered to the powers of love. We might indeed have a fair chance, by this management, to bring back the whole train of heathen gods, and set our cold northern island burning with as many altars to Venus and Apollo, as were formerly in Cyprus, Delos, or any of those warmer Grecian climates.<sup>23</sup>

As light-hearted as this statement is, it contains three important implications relating to Shaftesbury's theory of liberty. Firstly, it states that legal prohibition of a belief or attitude of mind is not a sufficient means for the destruction of it. Rather, the opposite applies; and the belief, true or false, will gain strength as a result of its illegality. At the same time the belief will become revolutionary in so far as it cannot exist within the unchanged framework of society. Secondly, if men's opinions are to be changed for the better, some other method than force must be found. As we have seen, this method is the encouragement of criticism in the rational pursuit of truth, whereby "the right measure of everything will soon be found." Thirdly, the use of an analogy which is cultural, rather than moral or religious, introduces for consideration in the present discussion, a major aspect of Shaftesbury's social

theories. This is his theory of cultural development.

- IV -

As freedom allows men to develop their rational faculties, so does it allow them to develop that non-rational aesthetic or moral sense that has been discussed in detail in Chapter Five above. We saw there that in order to form a "taste", men must be free to improve their aesthetic sense by "use and practice." We saw Shaftesbury taking the position that a "legitimate and just taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived, or produced without the antecedent labour and pains of criticism."\* If the appropriate political preconditions for the development of the moral sense towards a "just taste" exist in society, then the citizen body will be characterised by its high moral standards. It is for this reason that Shaftesbury points to laws and constitutions as a higher beauty than that which exists within the person of an ethical individual. These political arrangements are the highest type of "form", in that they form other forms that form when they contribute to the formation of ethical characters within the populous.\*\* The beauty of a *? populous*

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\* See Chapter Five, Section VI.

\*\* See above, Chapter Five, Section V concerning Shaftesbury's distinction between types of form.

government is seen to belong to the same category of beauty as that of the arts.\* Both political institutions and art "civilise and polish rude mankind", improving the ability of the aesthetic sense to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly in both art and morals. It is because of this that Shaftesbury sees the political environment as being directly related to the level of artistic achievement in any society. As freedom allows our moral judgement to improve, so it improves our aesthetic judgement - for according to Shaftesbury both sorts of judgement are the same:

All politeness is owing to liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring a rust upon mens understandings. 'Tis a destroying of civility, good breeding, and even charity itself, under pretence of maintaining it.<sup>24</sup>

The politeness referred to here is a sophistication in both art and morality. However, in so far as moral truth is realised by the same means as artistic truth, morality is also an art, and must be regarded as one aspect of a total cultural system. If

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\* See Chapter Five, Section II:



we understand the term "culture" as referring to the level of artistic ability - both critical and creative - that any community has attained, then it is Shaftesbury's claim that this culture has developed, and can be maintained, only by allowing its people and its artists (as individuals) the freedom to express their ideas in contrast to, and in criticism of, the ideas of others.

Only through freedom can the aesthetic sense in each person develop into a "taste" upon which culture is founded. This freedom is seen to involve certain political arrangements that will allow men to be free. In a letter to Lord Somers, written in 1712, Shaftesbury elaborated the relationship between political freedom and cultural development as follows:

Nothing is so improving, nothing so natural, so congenial to the liberal arts, as that reigning liberty and high spirit of a people, which from the habit of judging in the highest matters for themselves, makes 'em freely judg of other subjects, and enter thorowly into the characters as well of men and manners, as of the products or works of men, in art and science. So much, my lord, do we owe to the excellence of our national constitution, and legal monarchy; happily fitted for us, and which alone cou'd hold together so mighty a people; all sharers (tho at so far a distance from each other) in the government of themselves; and meeting under one head in one vast metropolis; ....25

Freedom of criticism, which is present only under a free

government of the type that Shaftesbury thought could be found in Britain, was regarded by him as the basis for the formation of a just taste. Having acquired taste, men can then provide positive criticism for the guidance of the artist, who himself will be given full opportunity to freely maximise his creative potential. From continuous argument, criticism, and experiment there will result an improvement in the quality of the artistic products of the nation.

In order to demonstrate the process whereby freedom of criticism gives rise to cultural development, Shaftesbury discussed the course which he considered literature to take in the development of human society from its earliest stages. "In the weaker and more imperfect societies of mankind," he informs us, "such as those composed of federate tribes, or mixed colonies, scarce settled in their new seats," the necessity of pursuing the means of mere existence forbids either the leisure or the disposition required for the development of language as an art form. However, when societies become "settled on an easy and secure foundation," individuals who choose to participate in the affairs of state find it in their interest to be able to persuade others of the correctness of their views. In order

to do this, "the most soft and inviting numbers, must have been employed to charm the public ear, and to incline the heart by the agreeableness of expression." Thus, the natural development of society gave rise to the art of persuasion, and it "may easily be perceived from hence that the goddess PERSUASION must have been in a manner the mother of poetry, rhetoric, music, and the other kindred arts."<sup>26</sup>

In the development of the art of language, either in the spoken or written word, Shaftesbury's assumption relating to the society which gives birth to this art form, is that the public has an influence upon the government and is allowed freedom of criticism. It is this which gives rise to the necessity of the leaders justifying their actions and policies in an attempt to gain the support of the people. This leads to the birth and development of both the literary and musical arts. If a primitive government was not free, and rule is "by the influence of awe and terror," there can be no such development:

Hence it is that those arts have been delivered to us in such perfection by free nations, who from the nature of their government, as from a proper soil, produced the generous plants; whilst the mightiest bodies and vastest empires, governed by force and a despotic power, could, after ages of peace and leisure, produce no other than what was deformed and barbarous of the kind.<sup>27</sup>



The seed of culture which exists in every man requires freedom before it can grow to its full maturity and give rise to beautiful works.

The literary and musical products of a society are what Shaftesbury would term first Characters. In the notes which he prepared before his death for a work entitled, Plastics, or the Original Power and Progress of Designatory Art, Shaftesbury distinguished between three types of artistic presentation. These types he termed Characters, which were as follows:

[First Characters:] Notes: Marks of sounds, syllables, words, speech, and of sentiments, senses, meanings by that medium, viz. of sounds and speech. Thus ciphers, shorthand, Cicero's invention.

[Second Characters:] Signs, Signa, Sigilla. Imitations of real forms and natural beings, plastically (convex or concave), or lineally and graphically by lines and colours, from the superficies and extremities of the bodies, according to optics.

[Third Characters:] A third and middle sort, emblematic. As when the latter signa are used as mediums (speech being passed over) to convey sentiments, senses, meanings, etc.<sup>28</sup>

In relation to the "first characters" we have already seen that Shaftesbury considered liberty to be a necessary basis for their development. Concerning the "second characters" the same necessarily applies:

.... politeness always holds proportion with laws and liberty. So that where the one is with a tolerable progress in the first species (viz. 1st Characters), the other (viz. 2d Characters) will soon prevail. And where it ceases and tyranny (such as the Eastern monarchies, ancient and modern) prevails, art and second Characters accordingly sink. See Japan! Mogul! China! Turk and Tartar! Show me amongst their infinite delicacy of other work - a single 2d Character, a form, even but a single figure, a perspective, a statue, coin, palace, architecture - that is not worse than Gothic. Show but so much as a vase! till in China taught by us and the Dutch.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, despite the apparent narrowness of Shaftesbury's own taste, is an expression of the belief that in communities which are ruled by tyrants, no progress in cultural ability - this time, sculpture and painting - can be found. This would appear to be because improvement in second Characters is a logical consequence of the establishment of first Characters - ".... where the one is with a tolerable progress in the first species .... the other .... will soon prevail." Freedom of criticism must lead to the establishment of the musical and literary arts, which in its turn gives rise to the frame of mind which is able to transfer the idea of harmony and proportion into material objects and paintings. Consequently, where first Characters decline as a result of tyranny, "art and second Characters accordingly sink." Where there is no liberty, there

can be no culture. Only the moral and artistic products of a free society may claim permanent validity, and all other cultures must be regarded as deviations from this norm. Freedom, art, and morality are the inseparable triad which must be present if any society is to gain our respect. Power, conquest, and longevity become insignificant when compared with these qualities which are always present in the truly natural and truly cultural society.

As a result of this indestructible union between freedom and culture, Shaftesbury can look back to former societies, real or hypothetical, and condemn them upon either moral grounds, or because they denied man's artistic potential. Both criticisms are equally valid; for one implies the other. His moral criticism of absolutism has been discussed in Chapter Seven. In relation to this criticism, we can now appreciate that by enslaving the individual, absolutism denies not only the realisation of moral truth, but also the possibility of artistic appreciation and creativity. Culture is destroyed in its entirety, and only freedom can retrieve the loss. Similarly, when Shaftesbury discussed Plato's Republic, he wrote as follows:



.... Plato and other philosophers and sages look wistfully towards the Egyptian laws .... admiring mystery, hiding secrets from the vulgar .... being frightened by the popular spirit, felt so severely in the person of their master Socrates ....

True indeed that by this ungenerous [rejection of music and poetry] and hierarchical polity the state of longer duration. For of what duration Egypt? But then what a state! What barbarity! Superstition! And when enervated once; how perpetual a slavery, from Mede and Persian, to Marmaluke and Turk.<sup>30</sup>

Referring, one assumes, to the non-participation of the masses in government, the rejection of certain forms of artistic exercise, and the use of myths to produce conformity in the populous, Shaftesbury claims that such ideas were adopted by Plato because of his admiration of the Egyptian situation. What Shaftesbury thought of the social situation in ancient Egypt has already been discussed at length in the last chapter. If Plato's social recommendations found their source in Egyptian example, as Shaftesbury thought, then they must be condemned because of their cultural results. These results will be cultural ineptitude, the moral and artistic barbarism which results from slavery and superstition and the denial of moral freedom and taste. For Shaftesbury, the power of such a political organisation becomes irrelevant. The size of a state, or the longevity of a state's existence,

means nothing without culture.

It was upon the basis of cultural insufficiency that Shaftesbury condemned the Roman empire. His analysis is as follows:- Prior to Caesar's rise to power and his institution as emperor, the Roman people were able to progress towards the formation of a real culture. However, just as the nation was losing its roughness and barbarity and beginning to develop its natural faculties, liberty was lost. In Shaftesbury's words, "'Twas the fate of Rome to have scarce an intermediate age, or a single period of time, between the rise of arts and fall of liberty."<sup>31</sup> Liberty fell with the formation of the empire under Caesar. With time it became irretrievable. Liberty being lost for good, Shaftesbury interprets the barbarian conquest of Rome in the following manner:

The fatal form of government was become too natural; and the world, which had bent under it, and was become slavish and dependent, had neither power nor will to help itself. The only deliverance it could expect was from the merciless hands of the barbarians, and a total dissolution of that enormous empire and despotic power, which the best hands could not preserve from being destructive to human nature. For even barbarity and Gothicism were already entered into arts ere the savages had made any impression on the empire.<sup>32</sup>

To condemn Caesar for destroying the liberty of the Roman

people was by no means original - Machiavelli had also criticised Caesar for this same reason (although his idea of what freedom involved was entirely different from Shaftesbury's). However, to say that barbarism was no worse than imperial Rome most certainly differs from the general trend of eighteenth century opinion, (and takes the criticism further than Machiavelli ever did). The fact that this attitude would appear to be most radical and original to his contemporaries could have been the very reason why Shaftesbury put it forward - thereby stressing his theory that political freedom is a necessary prerequisite to cultural development. Whether this was the case or not, this attitude towards Rome's decline is entirely consistent with Shaftesbury's theory of culture. Because of tyranny, the artistic talent of the Roman civilisation sank beneath even that of the barbarian hordes. With the entrenchment of absolutist government, "ignorance and darkness overspread the world, and fitted it for the chaos and ruin which ensued."<sup>33</sup> Where culture has died through the suppression of freedom of thought and criticism and where the population accepts without question the tyrannical situation, the destruction of that society cannot be regretted; for only through a change brought on by some power which is external to that society can there be any sort of cultural renovation.



The only deliverance which the Romans could expect was at the merciless hands of the barbarians. Consequently, despite the chaos and ruin which followed the invasions of Rome by the barbarians, Shaftesbury appears to have considered this as a necessary purgation before human nature could again discover that creativity upon which he believed all culture depends.

- V -

The conclusion which we have now reached could be expressed as follows:- The maximum amount of freedom must be allowed to mankind if the potential within man's nature is to be realised. Only by living in a free environment is the individual able to develop his rational and aesthetic potential.

Upon this basis it would be possible to argue that if we will but give men freedom to develop their faculties, they will develop a culture (including a moral outlook) that does not require the coercive force of government to assure the culture's norms. Complete freedom of action could be given to each individual in society in the knowledge that he will not contradict the inner law of morality. Consequently, it would be within the logic of Shaftesbury's interpretation of the nature and potential of the human personality to advocate the

establishment of certain institutional preconditions for the security and expansion of freedom - which could be anything from universal suffrage in a democratic republic to direct democracy in small communities, and which would form a basis for the ultimate limitation of the responsibilities of government to an absolute minimum. However, Shaftesbury never showed any signs of undertaking such a task,\* limiting his sights to the following goal:

.... should I have the good fortune to raise the masterly spirit of just criticism in my readers and exalt them ever so little above the lazy, timorous, over-modest, or resigned state in which the generality of them remain, though by this very spirit I myself might possibly meet my doom, I should .... be proud of having plumed the arrows of better wits, and furnished artillery or ammunition of any kind to those powers to which I myself had fallen a victim.<sup>34</sup>

His stated aim is to persuade men to think for themselves. There is no utopian dream for the creation of a society in which all men will act benevolently towards one another, no vision of a truly natural community. What are the reasons for this?

There are three reasons which arise from what has already been explained of Shaftesbury's philosophy in the foregoing

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\* Concerning Shaftesbury's refusal to provide an organisational blue-print of a perfect society see also Chapter Seven, Section V.

chapters. These are, firstly, Shaftesbury's optimistic hypothesis concerning the harmony of the cosmos. The belief that the cosmos is under the guidance of a general mind may form the basis for political inaction. It may be thought that everything which happens is for the best in relation to the overall structure of the universe. This is the attitude which Voltaire satirised in Candide after the doctrine had gained popularity in the eighteenth century. Secondly, it is evident from Shaftesbury's writings that he was satisfied with the workings of the British constitution. It appeared to him that Britain had already acquired the degree of freedom necessary for development of culture: "We are now in an age when Liberty is once again in its ascendant. And we are ourselves the happy nation who not only enjoy it at home, but by our greatness and power give life and vigour to it abroad ...."<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, as we saw in the last chapter Shaftesbury was of a conservative temperament when it came to the making of radical change in the institutions and laws of any society. Those who experience such change come to believe that there are no permanent standards of action either for the society as a whole, or for the individual to find within himself. The lack of permanence is, as we have seen, one of the



reasons why Shaftesbury condemned the rule of society by a non-constitutional monarchy or tyranny.

In addition to these reasons for Shaftesbury's indifference to utopian programmes of social reform, there is a further aspect of his thought which contradicts all such radical implications. This is the fact that Shaftesbury at times suggested that he was not half so confident in the moral potential of the generality of mankind as it would at first appear. He did hope that those who read his works would be persuaded to undertake the pursuit of truth. But there is also the further assumption that his readers were the intellectual aristocrats of his time, and there is a tendency to consider the "vulgar" as of no real significance. Although some moral truths are "so evident in themselves, that 'twould be easier to imagine half mankind to have run mad .... than to admit anything as truth which should be advanced against such natural knowledge,"<sup>36</sup> to accept majority opinion as a basis of truth would be ridiculous. Truth, both moral and artistic, does not depend upon majority opinion but upon eternal standards which men may or may not recognise. Consequently, we find the following criticism of democratic principles:

.... some modern zealots appear to have no better knowledge of truth, nor better manner of judging it,

than by counting noses. By this rule, if they can poll an indifferent number out of a mob; if they can produce a set of Lancashire noddles, remote provincial headpieces, or visionary assemblers, to attest a story of a witch upon a broomstick, and a flight in the air, they triumph in the solid proof of their new prodigy, and cry, magna est veritas et praevalebit! 37

The liberty which Shaftesbury was defending was not the liberty that is associated with some democratic form of government. He recognised that if truth there be, the majority decision cannot be a measure of it.\* In fact, from the tone of the last quotation, it would appear that to pay heed to the beliefs of the mass of the people is a sure method of denying the realisation of truth in any sphere. In the final analysis, Shaftesbury was a supporter of an intellectual aristocracy after the lines of Plato, even saying at one point that, "'Tis real humanity and kindness to hide strong truths from tender eyes."<sup>38</sup> Despite all his protestations concerning the necessity of having freedom of expression and criticism if culture were to improve, Shaftesbury can also be found accepting censorship as playing a legitimate role within a culturally advanced community. For example, he believed that censorship in ancient Athens had played such a

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\* Concerning Shaftesbury's refusal to regard the majority opinion as the measure of truth, see also Chapter One, Section IV.

role:

Instead of any abridgement, 'twas in reality an increase of liberty, an enlargement of the security of property, and an advancement of private ease and personal safety, to provide against what was injurious to the good name and reputation of every citizen.<sup>39</sup>

The hiding of strong truths from tender eyes, and the censorship of writing, both assume that there is present in society some group of individuals capable of judging what limitations of the freedom of expression are necessary to the common welfare. Shaftesbury never tells us who these people are or where we can find them in any society. However, that they are acknowledged to exist is sufficient to place severe limitations upon the free interaction of ideas that he advocates elsewhere.

Although Shaftesbury's writings often appear to advocate an extreme degree of freedom to all members of society, in fact he was writing for a sophisticated minority. This minority is assumed to be capable of appreciating moral truth and acting upon it. In opposition to them stand the mass of mankind who will often only act rightly through fear of punishment; ".... the mere vulgar of mankind often stand in need of such a rectifying object as the gallows before their eyes."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Shaftesbury says that "'tis necessary a people should have a



public leading in religion."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, when he is advocating freedom of criticism, Shaftesbury informs his reader that this freedom must have strict limitations; "... you are to remember, my friend, that I am writing to you in defence of the liberty of the club, and of that sort of freedom which is taken among gentlemen and friends who know one another perfectly well." He did not believe in the free use of criticism by all and sundry. It was the private privilege of gentlemen, who by this pursuit might hope to discover something of the eternal truths of morality and art. These sophisticated members of the community will always take care not to "offend the public ear," or cause a "scandal and disturbance."<sup>42</sup> The uncultured masses will accept the laws without criticism, and peace will be maintained amongst them. The educated and well-bred men, the men of taste, will pursue their criticisms and enquiries in the privacy of their clubs.

As we saw earlier in this Chapter, Shaftesbury thought that there were both thinking and non-thinking\* elements in mankind.

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\* See Section II above for a description of "half-thinking", "under-thinking", and "unthinking" personalities.

This being the case, it would be impossible for all men to develop their moral potential even if they were given freedom. Now it appears that those non-thinking individuals who are incapable of forming a taste, make up the bulk of mankind. Consequently, it is beyond the scope of his philosophy to examine the possibility of a political system which will allow all men to realise their benevolent affections and thereby establish a truly natural community.

However, the radical aspect of Shaftesbury's philosophy must not be discarded, for he was by no means consistently aristocratic. Nor was the aristocratic aspect of his writings necessarily appreciated by his contemporaries. In his Letter to a Deist (1726) John Balguy wrote in opposition to Shaftesbury in an attempt to justify the need of a belief in heavenly rewards and punishments as a source and stimulant of moral action. In attempting to contradict Shaftesbury's belief that virtuous action is inconsistent with the hope of reward or fear of punishment, Balguy provides us with the following insight concerning Shaftesbury's concept of taste:

Let it be observed then, in the first Place, how small a Proportion of Mankind are capable of discerning in any considerable Degree, the inward Beauty

and Excellence of Virtue. In the Characteristicks we find a good Taste required for this Purpose; and whether that Taste be derived from Nature or Education, there is little Reason to expect it should be found in the Bulk of Mankind.<sup>43</sup>

It would appear from the tone of this passage that Balguy did not appreciate that the human limitations referred to by him were also recognised by Shaftesbury. The fact that Shaftesbury's recognition of these limitations to his theory of individual creativity was hidden to Balguy is evidence of the limited place which they have in his writings considered as a whole. Even more modern critics have failed to see that Shaftesbury in places explicitly states his aristocratic principle in opposition to a radical interpretation of his theories. C.A. Moore, writing in 1916, stated that,

..... when the English perceived the revolutionary possibilities of sentimental benevolence, which had escaped Shaftesbury to be fully expounded by Rousseau and applied by the Revolutionists, their distrust extended to the comparatively innocuous doctrine of the Characteristicks. Between 1711 and 1790 it commanded eleven English editions; after 1790 no edition appeared for a century.<sup>44</sup>

To say, as Moore does here, that the revolutionary implications of his doctrine escaped Shaftesbury is to misinterpret him. It would be more correct to say that he recognised it and rejected



it. However, it only requires a faith in the possibility of universal (as opposed to partial) enlightenment to make Shaftesbury's assumptions relating to the nature of man the basis for a radical political programme. Such a programme would demand the removal of those environmental factors that prevent the emergence of a higher culture based upon the free interaction of ideas within a situation that respects and encourages the potentiality of all.

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#### SUMMARY:

Having considered Shaftesbury's institutional preferences in Chapter Seven, the present chapter considers Shaftesbury's views concerning a "free" environment. For Shaftesbury, freedom had "political", "critical" and "moral" elements. Following the rational-emotional dichotomy of Shaftesbury's thought that has been outlined in earlier chapters, the rational and the emotional (aesthetic) aspects of Shaftesbury's views on freedom are each considered in turn.

Section II looks at Shaftesbury's "rational" explanation of the interdependence between political freedom, critical freedom, and moral freedom. This we have seen in Chapter Seven

where immorality (loss of moral freedom) was regarded the consequence of tyranny (political or theological). In this section tyranny is seen to be a consequence of immorality.

Shaftesbury's argument is as follows:

1. Although moral truth can be discovered by reason, men must have practice in order to be capable of using their reason.
2. Even if no environmental factors prevent development of reason, the individual may not take advantage of the situation.
3. There are "half-thinkers" who accept a dogma because of their intellectual cowardice, and "under-thinkers" who pursue external goods. Both of these types are prepared to accept the domination by religious or political organisations in the mistaken belief that they can satisfy their interests in this way.
4. There are "unthinking" persons who follow only sensual desires, standing in opposition to reason and enquiry and only being satisfied with a political tyranny that corresponds to their inward slavery to their passions.
5. In this manner rejection of moral enquiry leads to tyranny in the same manner tyranny leads to loss of morality. Failure to reason and tyranny interact.

Enquiry being necessary to both enable morality and prevent tyranny, freedom of enquiry is regarded as essential by Shaftesbury. In Section III Shaftesbury's belief in "freedom of enquiry" is seen to involve

1. A denial of the right of government to interfere in either religion or philosophy.
2. An assertion of the right to criticise public persons and institutions.

Truth, it is thought, can stand the force of all criticism and emerge untarnished. Also, in the special field of religion, following the lead of other seventeenth-century thinkers, Shaftesbury advocates toleration by making the following points:

1. Only reason, not force, can persuade men to accept a truth, or one interpretation of truth in religion.
2. Intolerance, when not finding its source in zeal (i.e. enthusiasm), is only to be found in persons who can expect material benefit from acts of persecution.
3. Intolerance leads to civil disturbance as illegal sects continue in their heresy. Tolerance produces civil peace in a situation where each person can follow his conscience.
4. Intolerance leads to an intensification of the proscribed belief in the mind of the adherent. Therefore, intolerance is ineffective.

Having considered Shaftesbury's attitude towards "freedom of reason" (Sections II and III), the chapter turns to consider the emotional-aesthetic advantages of freedom of enquiry, criticism, and creativity. This freedom will allow the emergence of aesthetic truth and the development of culture. In Section IV



we see that

1. As freedom improves the moral judgement so it improves aesthetic judgement; for they are the same.
2. The development of a national culture depends upon the amount of freedom (political and critical) in the society.
3. Shaftesbury considers literature and music as having their basis in "persuasion". Persuasion is a political art that is needed by statesmen in free societies (i.e. societies where the people have a political influence). Therefore progress in these "first characters" is dependent upon freedom.
4. Paintings and sculpture ("second characters") grow out of "first characters". When the latter decline through loss of political freedom, so do the former.
5. Shaftesbury condemns Plato's recommended republic because of its lack of popular participation in government, and its artistic limitations.
6. Shaftesbury condemns the Roman Empire because of the cultural insufficiency resulting from Caesar's destruction of republican freedom.
7. Shaftesbury thought that the destruction of the Roman Empire by the barbarians should not be regretted.

In Section V it is recognised that in spite of the utopian implications of Shaftesbury's ideas concerning the need for freedom, he does not make any such prescriptions. Shaftesbury's optimistic metaphysics, his satisfaction with the British

constitution, and his belief that political change creates the impression that there are no permanent standards, are all seen as reasons for this. However, in addition to these, an aristocratic element is also seen to be present in Shaftesbury's thought. This is seen in his

1. distrust of the will of the majority.
2. his acceptance of censorship.
3. his belief in the need for the vulgar to be both threatened in law and guided in religion.
4. his advocacy of the liberty only of the club.

Consequently, those students and critics of Shaftesbury's writings who have suggested that Shaftesbury's writings were revolutionary in politics must be regarded as mistaken.

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CHAPTER NINEASSESSMENT

We have seen in this work that Shaftesbury was attempting to direct his readers towards the recognition of their own ability to distinguish between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. In addition to this, the last two chapters have shown that he thought that certain environmental conditions were necessary to the development of a "taste" in both morals and art in both the individual and the community as a whole. But it has also been noted that Shaftesbury's writings contain contradictions which may or may not find explanation within the framework of his own thought. Whilst remembering that he opposed a "systematic" approach to moral questions, we should note that as a consequence of this Shaftesbury is often as likely to confuse his readers as to enlighten them. Perhaps the most obvious example of a contradiction in Shaftesbury that may tend to confuse his readers is the presence in his thought of two approaches to morality. His indiscriminate reference to both "reason" and the "moral sense", logically distinct approaches to the discovery of moral truths, was introduced in Chapter One of this work, and must always be borne in mind if Shaftesbury is to be understood. Other



difficulties that have been noted in the course of this work include,

- his acceptance of sceptical reasoning whilst refusing to accept the ethical conclusions of scepticism (Chapter One),
- his condemnation of metaphysical enquiry whilst accepting the Stoic metaphysics of optimism (Chapter Three),
- his acceptance of the possibility of evil within a perfect cosmos (Chapter Four),
- his acceptance of the possibility of freedom where everything is necessarily arranged for the best (Chapter Four),
- his failure to explain whether taste is a product of reason or emotion (Chapter Five),
- his rejection of enthusiasm although he accepts "divine enthusiasm" (Chapters Five and Six),
- his failure to explain whether ridicule is rational or non-rational (Chapter Six),
- his advocacy of certain organisational needs for a moral society is combined with a refusal to consider them as practically possible (Chapter Seven), and
- his belief in the need for freedom if men are to develop their moral and aesthetic potential is combined with an aristocratic element which seeks to prevent such a possibility (Chapter Eight).

advocacy/

An attempt has been made in this work to explain these difficulties - where an explanation is possible within the framework of Shaftesbury's own thought. However, Shaftesbury never attempted to

resolve them himself, apparently being unaware of their existence. As a consequence of this it is possible to say that his philosophy fails to provide a coherent explanation of man's moral and political experience.

Yet, as we noted in the Preface to this work, Shaftesbury's writings were regarded in high esteem by some of the major philosophers of eighteenth-century Europe.\* Why should this be so if his writings are so lacking in consistency? To answer this question we must remember firstly that Shaftesbury's ideas were not the accidental product of his own particular contemplations.

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- \* Stanley Grean has provided us with the following statement of Shaftesbury's influence in his "Introduction" to the Characteristics: "As founder of the 'moral sense' school in ethics, his ideas were extensively used and developed by Francis Hutcheson, Bishop Butler, Adam Smith, and Hume. He played an important role in the Deistic movement, particularly influencing John Toland and Anthony Collins. In the sphere of literature, his effect can be traced in the writings of Addison, James Thomson, Mark Akenside, and Henry Fielding. On the continent, his thought had an impact on Jean Le Clerc, Voltaire and Diderot. .... Shaftesbury's effect may have been even greater on German thought, especially on Lessing, Mendelssohn, Wieland, Herder, Kant, Goethe, and Schiller. .... Shaftesbury's optimistic metaphysics, as well as his concepts of moral sense and humor, remained at the centre of controversy through the third quarter of the eighteenth century. His influence on the arts was at least as great as that on philosophy." Characteristics (1964), xiv-xv.

Shaftesbury's thoughts are a product of his age; and this was an age in which many thinkers were referring to "reason" and "nature" in an attempt to explain how man can know moral and political truth independently of external authority. It was upon this basis that Locke had justified the removal of James II from the throne of England. Shaftesbury was influenced by this approach and he can be found using both "nature" and "reason" as a means of justifying certain capacities that he thought were inherent in man. Without ever explaining clearly what he means by "reason", Shaftesbury never seems to have doubted that it was an efficient moral tool. Because of his insistence that it also applies to theological questions he is often labelled a Deist.

However, whilst never abandoning his appeals to reason, it is clear that by appealing to man's emotional ability to distinguish between right and wrong Shaftesbury moved away from a rational approach to ethics. By doing this he became a contributor to that school of thought which sought to find the basis of moral approbation (and disapprobation) in the sphere of "feeling" rather than reason. Shaftesbury's influence can be seen in the prescriptive theory of morality of Hutcheson, who wrote (1725),



That as the AUTHOR of Nature has determin'd us to receive, by our external Senses, pleasant or disagreeable Ideas of Objects, according as they are useful or hurtful to our Bodys; and to receive from uniform Objects the Pleasures of Beauty and Harmony, to excite us to the Pursuit of Knowledge, and to reward us for it; .... in the same manner he has given us a MORAL SENSE, to direct our Actions, and to give us still nobler Pleasures; so that while we are only intending the Good of others, we 'undesignedly promote our own greatest private Good.'

Similarly, Shaftesbury can be seen as a forerunner of Hume's\* descriptive moral theories when the later thinker says that (1739-40),

Pride and humility, love and hatred, are excited, when there is anything presented to us that both bears a relation to the object of the passion, and produces a separate sensation, related to the sensation of the passion. Now, virtue and vice are attended with these circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

For Hume, "Moral good and evil are certainly distinguished by our sentiments, not by reason ...."<sup>3</sup>

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\* In his attempt to publicise his own Treatise Hume was to mention Shaftesbury as follows: "He [Hume] mentions .... Mr. Locke, my Lord Shaftsbury [sic], Dr. Mandeville, Mr. Hutchison [sic], Dr. Butler, who, tho' they differ in many points among themselves, seem all to agree in founding their accurate disquisitions of human nature intirely upon experience."  
An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature, 7. (1740).

In Shaftesbury's statements concerning the emotional origins of moral judgements we find an early contribution to a debate on moral subjects that was to continue well into the eighteenth century.\* He introduced and made popular an alternative approach to moral subjects; an alternative approach that was to be more carefully elaborated by later thinkers than by Shaftesbury himself. Shaftesbury may even be said to have achieved his aim of "pluming the arrows of better wits."<sup>4</sup>

To the modern reader, however, Shaftesbury is not only worthy of interest because of his originality in considering

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\* Examples of opponents to the "moral sense" school are John Balguy and William Wollaston. Balguy considers ".... how improbable it is, that our Perceptions of Right and Wrong, and the Approbation or Disapprobation consequent thereupon, should depend on such a Sense, or Instinct, as he [Hutcheson] has advanced for that purpose." Selby-Bigge (ed.), II, 71. (From Balguy's The Foundation of Moral Goodness, 1734). Wollaston writes in The Religion of Nature Delineated (1722), "They, who contenting themselves with superficial and transient views, deduce the difference between good and evil from the common sense of mankind, and certain principles that are born with us, put the matter upon a very infirm foot. For it is much to be suspected there are no such innate maxims as they pretend, but that the impressions of education are mistaken for them: and beside that, the sentiments of mankind are not so uniform and constant, as that we may safely trust such an important distinction upon them." Ibid., II, 372/3.

morality as a non-rational aspect of human activity. For the historian of ideas Shaftesbury also provides an insight into some of the philosophical concerns of British thinkers both during and after the time he was writing. For instance, we find in his thought the belief that authority (moral, religious, or political) must find its justification within the structure of human experience. When Shaftesbury refers to reason, even though the concept is vague, we are left in no doubt that it stands in opposition to the arbitrary authority of either a church or a monarch. The authority of tradition alone was no longer sufficient in itself to a nation that had lopped off the head of one king and sent another into exile.

By insisting that men should attempt to discover codes of behaviour by using their natural faculties (rational or otherwise) Shaftesbury involves himself in what was, for his contemporaries, a topical subject of debate. According to Shaftesbury, man's nature is both social and moral. This belief placed him in opposition to those of his contemporaries who insisted that man, because he is by nature selfish and evil, should accept the revealed word of God as a means of limiting his tendency towards immorality. Shaftesbury regarded this attitude as



similar to that of Hobbes, whose authoritarian "mortal God" also found justification in the supposed inadequacies of human nature. In his "Preface" to Whichcote's Sermons (1698) Shaftesbury tells us that if Hobbes's view of man had not become so popular

.... it would have been the Business of those who had manag'd the Cause of Religion, to have contended for these better Dispositions [i.e. natural affections]; and to have shewn, how deep a Root and Foundation they had in Human Nature; and not, just contrary-wise, to have built on the Ruine of these. For, with some people, this was then become a Method to prove Christianity. Revelation was to owe its Establishment to the Depression and Lowering of such Principles as these, in the Nature of Man: And the Weakness of these was made the Strength of Religion.<sup>5</sup>

In saying this Shaftesbury stands opposed to those in his time who saw in Nature not a guide, but a source of licence. Such a one was Bishop Fowler of Gloucester who wrote in reply to the Letter Concerning Enthusiasm that,

Our Natures are corrupt, and our Passions deprav'd, our Thoughts vain, and Appetites irregular; and some Live in a perpetual sort of Heat and Intoxication of the Mind. In short, the Animal Life is more, in most Persons, than the Divine; and the Earthly Principle stronger than the Heavenly. This, and Reason of the Sublimer sort, are kept down, as it were, with Weights and Fetters .... So that, without some Change and Assistance .... great Numbers of Persons can seldom feel effectually the Force of Religion, or the Powers of the World to come.<sup>6</sup>

With Fowler we see the other side of a debate that had been present in Christian thought from the time of the early Christians. The question asked is, Is man, because of original sin, incapable of a moral existence without supernatural guidance? In Shaftesbury's writings we find evidence of the fact that the discussion centred on this question was still very much alive at the time he was writing.\*

When Shaftesbury says that man can have a moral existence without supernatural guidance, he ties this to a belief in an ordered cosmos (see above Chapters Two, Three and Four). This cosmological "optimism", which accepts all things as happening

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\* Whether "selfishness" (amoral or immoral) or "sociability" characterises human nature continued to be discussed after Shaftesbury's death. The former interpretation can be found in Mandeville's Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue (1723): "... no species of animals is .... less capable of agreeing long together in multitudes than that of man; ....being an extraordinary selfish and headstrong, as well as cunning animal, however he may be subdued by superior strength, it is impossible by force alone to make him tractable, and receive the improvements he is capable of." Ibid., II, 348. In contrast, Hutcheson was to follow Shaftesbury in arguing for the natural "benevolence" of man: "The human Nature is a lovely Form; we are all conscious of some morally good Qualitys and Inclinations in our selves, how partial and imperfect soever they may be; we presume the same of every thing in human Form, nay almost of every living Creature...." Ibid., I, 88 (From Hutcheson's Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good. 1725).

for the best, was to become popular both on the continent and in England during the first part of the eighteenth century.

Pope's Essay on Man (published 1733-34) gave it poetical expression as follows:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
 All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;      290  
 All Discord, Harmony, not understood;  
 All partial Evil, universal Good:  
 And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
 One truth is clear, "Whatever IS, is RIGHT."<sup>7</sup>

It was this view of Nature (termed "Cosmic Toryism" by Basil Willey)<sup>8</sup> that Voltaire was to criticise later in his Candide (1757):

Shaftesbury also appears to have been attuned to the interests of his age in his concern with the idea of "taste". During Shaftesbury's lifetime Richard Steele wrote in "The Spectator" of

.... the Folly of admitting Wit and Learning as Merit in themselves, without considering the Application of them. By this Means it becomes a Rule not so much to regard what we do, as how we do it. But this false Beauty will not pass upon Men of honest Minds and true Taste. Sir Richard Blackmore says, with as much good Sense as Virtue, "It is a mighty Dishonour and Shame to employ excellent Faculties and abundance of Wit, to humour and please Men in their Vices and Follies. ...."



Nothing ought to be held laudable or becoming, but what Nature it self should prompt us to think so.<sup>9</sup>

Taste is here used by Steele to represent wit (reason) acting in accordance with virtue as the latter is defined by Nature. Like Steele, Shaftesbury was also recommending the development of "taste" in morals and art.\* That it remained of interest to British thinkers during the eighteenth century is evident from the fact that both Edmund Burke and David Hume were to publish works in which they express their concern with the concept. Burke included an "Introduction on Taste" in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). He tells us there that

.... if Taste has no fixed principles, if the imagination is not affected according to some invariable and certain laws, our labour is like to be employed to very little purpose....<sup>10</sup>

In the same year, 1757, Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" was published (included in Four Dissertations). Hume wrote there that

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\* For Shaftesbury, "taste" is not necessarily a product of reason - See above Chapters Five and Six.

It is natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.<sup>11</sup>

With the continuing interest in the subject of "taste" it comes as no surprise that Shaftesbury's Characteristics remained popular through the eighteenth century.

In relation to the view that Shaftesbury reflects the interests of his own age we should also note that his lack of desire to see political change was appropriate to the eighteenth century. After the turmoils of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century is an age of stability.

The contrast between political society in eighteenth- and seventeenth-century England is vivid and dramatic. In the seventeenth century men killed, tortured, and executed each other for political beliefs; they sacked towns and brutalized the countryside. They were subjected to conspiracy, plot, and invasion. This uncertain political world lasted until 1715, and then began rapidly to vanish. By comparison, the political structure of eighteenth-century England possesses adamant strength and profound inertia.<sup>12</sup>

The political stability of the country under the post-1688 constitution can be seen not only in the constitution's continuance (in spite of a change in dynasty, threats from pretenders, and the loss of an empire), but also in the interests

of British philosophers during the eighteenth century. According to Leslie Stephen, political philosophy has been the product of political instability. In eighteenth-century England there was stability, and this stability was reflected in the absence of political philosophy.\*

.... theories have followed, more than they have guided, events. Happy is the nation which has no political philosophy, for such a philosophy is generally the offspring of a recent, or the symptom of an approaching, revolution. During the quieter hours of the eighteenth century Englishmen rather played with political theories than seriously discussed them. The interest in politics was chiefly personal. References to general principles are introduced in rhetorical flourishes, but do not form the basis of serious argument. In the mass of pamphlets and speeches which fill our library shelves it is rare to find even a show of political philosophy.<sup>13</sup>.

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\* For Stephen, "political philosophy" involved political prescription":  
 "At some future day," he wrote in his History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, "if the aspirations of philosophers are justified, there will be a science of sociology. We shall unravel the laws of growth of the social organism, and determine the condition of its health or disease. Then, and not till then, it will be possible to present political science as a coherent body of doctrines, deduced from certain axioms of universal validity, but leading to different conclusions according to the varying conditions of human society .... Then we shall have at once a firm base for our speculations, and the utmost possible flexibility in their application. We shall see how to reconcile justice and expediency; and establish the rights of man, not as conflicting with considerations of utility, but as logical consequences of the laws of social health."  
 Vol. II, 110 (1962 edition).



In the eighteenth century the centre for (prescriptive) political philosophy moved to the continent whilst British thinkers concerned themselves with the subjects of morality and art. When a person like Hume considers political matters, it is in the form of explanatory essays rather than an attempt to provide alternative political norms. Anglo-Saxon political thought was to take a radical turn only in the American colonies; and only then does reference to rational laws of nature re-emerge in the form of a political prescription that stands in contradiction to existing institutions. British thinkers do not concern themselves with making British political institutions conform to abstract concepts of natural right and natural law. In this orientation Shaftesbury is an early representative. It is true that Shaftesbury does make political recommendations. But it should be recognised that:

1. Shaftesbury never himself refers to the potentially radical doctrine of laws of nature.
2. Shaftesbury nowhere attempts to outline a general theory of politics. His political ideas are the off-spring of his enquiries in the fields of aesthetics and morality.
3. Any political recommendations that Shaftesbury makes are not seen by him to contradict the political norms of his own country.

As a consequence of these aspects of Shaftesbury's writings, he may be said to have appealed to the demands of the eighteenth-century public. His writings are appropriate to the political stability of that era. Only towards the end of the eighteenth century, when a rising industrialism and the French Revolution disturbed the national and international political fabric, did prescriptive political philosophy again seem to be relevant to British thinkers and their audience.

It has been said that the French Revolution enlightened English readers to the revolutionary potential of Shaftesbury's ideas on "sentimental benevolence"<sup>14</sup>, after which his popularity declined. However, a better explanation of the decline in the popularity of the Characteristics after 1790 is the fact that Shaftesbury's writings ceased to be relevant. In the first place, the element in Shaftesbury's thought which caused him to be looked upon as important by other thinkers had been more clearly elaborated by these thinkers. Both Hutcheson and Hume had provided more systematic explanations of the role played by emotion in our moral judgements. Secondly, it became more difficult to accept that everything that happens is for the best, as the blood-letting in France, the Napoleonic conquest of

Europe, the horrors of the slave trade, and the miseries of industrialisation all showed themselves to the world. Compared with these the Lisbon earthquake that was pointed to by Voltaire was both minor and temporary. Thirdly, the bourgeois class that was becoming socially dominant as industrialism spread did not find Shaftesbury's emphasis on social responsibility attractive. They preferred the idea that an "invisible hand" would automatically convert their pursuit of private gains into the public good. Fourthly, the attempt of Jeremy Bentham and the utilitarians to make taste a product of personal disposition based upon quantities of pain and pleasure stood in stark contrast to Shaftesbury's qualitative philosophy. Yet it was the utilitarian philosophy that the new middle class took to its bosom as the most appropriate means of explaining human experience and guiding human conduct. Finally, when an interest in attaining politeness was replaced by the interests of production and industry, the good-humoured pursuit of taste was replaced by the serious pursuit of profit. Only in the literary field did thinkers like Wordsworth and Coleridge provide a contrast to the sober reasoning of the industrial nation, and it was to these rather than to Shaftesbury that those who wished to find a qualitative note in human experience began to turn.



NOTES

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42. Ibid., I, 53. "Sensus Communis", I, v.
43. [John Balguy], A Letter to a Deist, 16.
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## CHAPTER NINE

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2. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, II, 180/81. (Book II, Part II)

3. Ibid., II, 284. (Book III, Part III).
4. See Characteristics II, 313. "Miscellaneous Reflections", V, i.
5. Shaftesbury. "Preface" to Whichcote's Select Sermons (See Appendix A of this work) — *see p. 387 of this work*
6. [Fowler], Reflections Upon a Letter Concerning Enthusiasm, 48/49.
7. John Butt (ed.), The Poems of Alexander Pope, 515.
8. See Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background, Chapter Three.
9. Richard Steele, "The Preference of Wit and Sense to Honesty and Virtue" (1711), Essays From The Spectator, 13/15.
10. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, 12.
11. David Hume, Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, I, 268.
12. J.H. Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725, xviii.
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APPENDIX A

Preface to the "SELECT SERMONS OF DR. WHICHCOT". [sic]  
(London, 1698).

Amongst those many Things which are made Publick; it may be thought, perhaps, of Sermons; that they are, of any other, the least wanted; and for the future, least likely to be found wanting: since to that rich and inexhaustible Store, with which the Learned and Orthodox Divines of England have already furnished us, there is daily fresh addition, from worthy and able Hands. Neither, have we cause to fear a Cessation in this kind; or that so great a Blessing is likely to fail us, for the future; having such security, not only from the unwearied Zeal of present Divines (of whom we may always hope a worthy Succession) but, from the just esteem which the Publick never fails to shew, for such pious Discourses: Upon which account, we find that many of these are every day made Publick: and, as it were, forced into the World; notwithstanding the great Modesty of their Authors, whose Humble Thoughts, and devoutly resigned Affections, lead them not towards Eminence, and Advancement in the World.

It may seem strange, therefore, that in such an Age as this, any one should be so officious, as to search after, and publish the Sermons of a Man long since dead, who (himself) never meant



to Publish any; or thought so highly of himself, as that he could benefit the World by such a Publication.

It is certain, that we must not ever imagine, nor can it enter into a Mind truly Christian, that because we see not an apparent Change for the better, in the Lives of Christian Professors; that, therefore all Preaching is ineffectual; or that here in England, the Labours of the most Eminent Divines that perhaps the World ever afforded, have been of no use at all: It might be said with the same reason (tho' very prophanely, and wickedly) that because the Christians are not reported to exceed the other Nations of the World, in Probity, and Good Living; but are said to be rather inferior in this respect, to the Civilized People, whether Pagan or Mahometan, lying round them; that therefore the Christian Religion is of no effect at all, nor any ways operative upon the Lives of its Professors.

But, if we consider this, as becomes us; and not perversely, as many do; it will be found that we are, even in this sense, the most highly indebted to Christianity; and should look upon It as the greatest Blessing imaginable; not only for its spiritual Advantages, which are Unspeakable; but for its Temporal Benefits, and Securities; inasmuch as that Mankind being so inclinable to Ill, we should have a Religion so full of

all good Precepts, and so enforcing with respect to all the Duties of Morality, and Justice. So that our Amazement ought rather to be; how Men, with such a Religion, should lead such Lives! and how Malice, Hatred, or Division, should have place in such Societies as these; which we might expect to see distinguished from all others, rather by a perfect Harmony, and Agreement, than by the fiercest Quarrels, Contentions, and Animosities.

And, indeed, when we consider the Nature of Preaching; how excellent an Order and Establishment it is; how highly raised and magnified in the Christian World: When we consider Numbers of Holy Men set apart for this great Work; having all advantages given them, the better to set forth those Glorious Truths of Revelation, and to create a Reverence of Religion in the Minds of Men; when we consider the Solemnity of a Church-Assembly, and the awful Presence and Authority of the Christian Orator; we may be apt to wonder perhaps, why we see not greater and more happy Effects hereof, in the World. However, we must of Necessity conclude, That this Institution being undoubtedly so powerful a support of our Religion; if such Assemblies as these were not upheld, if such Authority as this did not subsist, the consequence would be, that as in a little time there would be no

more Christianity left in the World, so neither any Morality; since, notwithstanding all the Helps of Preaching, and the Assistance and Support which Virtue receives from hence, the Lives of Men are still so far from being Reform'd, and the World so little Improved, in these latter Ages.

But, how reverently soever we have cause to think concerning this Institution, and the undoubted good Effects of it, upon Mankind; and, whatever high Opinion and Esteem we may justly have of their Performance in whose Hands this Power is placed; it seems not wholly impossible, but that there may be some Defect in this great Affair; and that the Causes of ill Success may not lye altogether in the Depravity, Perverseness, or Stupidity of Mankind, who are the Hearers and Readers of these Doctrines.

In some Countries, and amongst some sorts of Christians, we have seen, that the Whole of this Institution has not been appropriated to Spirituals; but, that a great part of those Divine Exhortations have had something in common with the Policies of the World, and the Affairs of Government. And, of whatsoever Benefit this may have been to Mankind, or to the Peace of the Christian World; it must be own'd that Preaching it self, will be so much the less apt to make any happy



Revolution in Manners, as it has at any time been serviceable to Revolutions in State, or to the support of any other Interest than that of Christ's Kingdom.

Nor do we find, since the Arts of Government, and Mysteries of Religion, have been thus suited together; that either has been much advantag'd by the Union; it having never yet appear'd, that Divinity has been greatly better'd by Policy; or that Policy has been any where mended by Divinity.

Amongst those Writers who have been forward in making this Unprosperous Alliance, and Building a Political Christianity; there has been one of our Nation (in the Time wherein our Author liv'd) who whether he may have been serviceable any way to the Civil Government, or Christian Church; it may be concluded, at least, that he has done but very ill Service in the Moral World. And, however other parts of Philosophy may be obliged to him, Ethicks will appear to have no great share in the Obligation. He has, indeed, with great Zeal, and Learning, been oppos'd, by all the eminent and worthy Divines of the Church of England: And had the same Industry been applied to the Correction of his Moral Principles, as has been bestow'd in refuting some other of his Errours, it might perhaps have been of more Service to Religion, in the Main.

This is He who reckoning up the Passions, or Affections, by which Men are held together in Society, live in Peace, or have any Correspondence one with another, forgot to mention Kindness, Friendship, Sociableness, Love of Company and Converse, Natural Affection, or any thing of this kind; I say Forgot, because I can scarcely think so ill of any Man, as that he has not by experience found any of these Affections in himself, and consequently, that he believes none of them to be in others. But in the place of other Affections, or good Inclinations, of whatever kind, this Author has substituted only one Master-Passion, Fear, which has, in effect devour'd all the rest, and left room only for that infinite Passion towards Power after Power, Natural (as he affirms) to All Men, and never ceasing but in Death. So much less Good-nature has he left with Mankind, than what he allows the worst of Beasts: Having allotted to us, in the way of our Nature, such mischievous Passions as are unknown to them; and not so much as allow'd us any Degree of their Good ones, such as they All are known to have, and are never wanting to exert towards their own Kind: By which Excellency of Nature (so little reckon'd upon, in the Case of Mankind) their common Interest is duly serv'd, and their Species propagated and maintain'd.

Had not the Poyson of these Immoral and (in reality) Atheistical Principles been diffused more than 'tis easie to imagine, (at that time especially when Dr. Whichcot appear'd) we should, perhaps, where Morality was concern'd, have heard less of Terror and Punishment; and more, of Moral Rectitude and Good-nature. At least, it should not have grown customary to explode Good-nature, and detract from that Good which is ascrib'd to Natural Temper, and is accounted Natural Affection, as having Ground and Foundation in Meer NATURE: On the contrary; it would have been the Business of those who had manag'd the Cause of Religion, to have contended for these better Dispositions; and to have shewn, how deep a Root and Foundation they had in Human Nature; and not, just contrary-wise, to have built on the Ruine of these. For, with some people, this was then become a Method to prove Christianity. Revelation was to owe its Establishment to the Depression and Lowering of such Principles as these, in the Nature of Man: And the Weakness of these was made the Strength of Religion. As if Good-nature, and Religion, were Enemies: A Thing, indeed, so unthought of, amongst the Heathens; that PIETY (which was their best Word to signifie Religion) had more than half its Sence, in Natural and Good Affection; and stood not only for



the Adoration, and Worship of God; but for the Natural Affections of Parents to their Children, and of Children to their Parents; of Men to their Native Country; and, indeed, of all Men in their several Relations one to another.

It must be confess'd, that it has been the Reproach of some Sects of Christians amongst us; that their Religion appear'd to be, in a manner, opposite to Good-nature; and founded in Moroseness, Selfishness, and Ill-will to Mankind; Things, not easily reconcileable with a Christian Spirit. But, certainly, it may be said of the Church of England, if of any Church in the World, that this is not Her Spirit: But, it is by Characters and Features just contrary to these, that this Church shews Herself, above all others, most worthily and nobly Christian.

It is certain, that there is nothing more contended for, by those who would not willingly admit a Deity; nor is there any thing of greater Use to them, in their Way of Reasoning; than to have it pass as current, that there are in Man, no Natural Principles inclining him to Society; nothing that moves him to what is Moral, Just and Honest; except a Prospect of some different Good, some Advantage of a different Sort from what attends the Actions themselves. Nor is it strange,

that they who have brought themselves off from so much as believing the Reality of any Ingenuous Action, perform'd by any of Mankind, meerly through Good Affection, and a Rectitude of Temper; should be backward to apprehend any Goodness of that sort, in a Higher Nature than that of Man. But it is strange to conceive, how Men who pretend a Notion and Belief of a Supream Power acting with the greatest Goodness, and without any Inducement but that of Love and Good-will; should think it unsuitable to a Rational Creature, derived from Him, to act after His Example: and to find Pleasure and Contentment in Works of Goodness and Bounty, without other Prospect. But, what is yet more unaccountable, is, that Men who profess a Religion where Love is chiefly enjoyn'd; where the Heart is expresly call'd for, and the outward Action without that, is disregarded; where Charity (or Kindness) is made all in all; that Men of this Perswasion, should combine, to degrade the Principle of Good-nature, and refer all to Reward; which being made the only Motive in Men's Actions, must exclude all worthy and generous Disposition, all that Love, Charity, and Affection, which the Scripture enjoyns; and without which, no Action is Lovely, in the Sight of God, or Man; or in it self, deserving of Notice, or kind Reward.

But, perhaps, one Reason of this Misfortune has been; that some Men, who have meant sincerely well to Religion and Vertue, have been afraid least [sic] by advancing the Principle of Good-nature, and laying too great a Stress upon it, the apparent Need of Sacred Revelation (a Thing so highly Important to Mankind) should be, in some Measure, taken away. So that they were forced, in a Manner, to wound VERTUE, and give way to the Imputation of being Mercenary, and of Acting in a slavish Spirit, in Ways of Religion\*, rather than admit a sort of Rival (in their Sense) to the Faith of Divine Revelation: Seeing that Christianity (they thought) would, by this Means, be made less necessary to Mankind; if it should be allow'd, that Men could find any Happiness in Vertue, but what is in Reversion.

Thus, one Party of Men, fearing the Consequences which may be drawn from the Acknowledgment of Moral and Social Principles in Human-kind, to the Proof a Deity's Existence; and, another Party fearing as much from thence, to the Prejudice of Revelation; Each have in their turns, made War (if I may say so) even on Vertue it self: Having exploded the Principle of

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 \* Expression of Dr. Whichcot's.



Good-nature; all Enjoyment or Satisfaction in Acts of Kindness and Love; all Notion of Happiness in temperate Courses and moderate Desires; and, in short, all Vertue or Foundation of Vertue; unless that, perhaps, be call'd Merit, or Vertue, which is left remaining, when all Generosity, free Inclination, Publick-spiritedness, and every thing else besides private Regard, is taken away.

If this may be said to be our Case, under this Dispute; and, that true Religion it self (which is Love) be thus endanger'd; and Morality so ill treated, between two such different and distant Parties; if each of these, notwithstanding their vast Disagreement, do yet, in this Matter, so fatally agree; to decry Human Nature, and destroy the Belief of any immediate Good or Happiness in Vertue, as a Thing any way suitable to our Make and Constitution; there is, then, so much the more Need of some great and known Man to oppose this Current. And, here it is that our Author has appear'd so signally.

Whatsoever (says he) some have said; Man's Nature is not so untoward a Thing (unless it be abused) but that there is a secret Sympathy in Human Nature, with Vertue and Honesty; which gives a Man an Interest even in bad Men. —God, in infinite Wisdom, has so contrived; that, if an Intellectual

Being sink it self into Sensuality, or any way defile, and pollute it self; then, Miseries and Torments should befall it, in this State ——— VERTUE, and VICE (says he) are the Foundations of Peace and Happiness, or Sorrow and Misery. ———There is inherent Punishment belonging to all Vice; and no Power can divide or separate them. For, tho' God should not, in a positive Way, inflict Punishment; or any Instrument of God punish a Sinner; yet, he would punish Himself; his Misery and Unhappiness would arise from Himself.

Thus speaks our excellent Divine, and truly Christian Philosopher; whom, for his appearing thus in Defence of Natural Goodness we may call the Preacher of Good-nature. This is what he insists on, every-where; and, to make this evident, is, in a Manner, the Scope of all his Discourses. And, in conclusion of all this; 'tis hop'd that what has been here suggested, may be sufficient to justifie the Printing of these Sermons.

As for our Author himself; what his Life was; how great an Example of that happy Temper, and God-like Disposition, which he labour'd to inspire; how much he was, for the Excellency of his Life, and admirable Temper, esteem'd and belov'd of all; and even in the worst of Times, when Feuds, and Animosities, on the Account of Religion, were highest (during the Time of the late great Troubles,) how his Character

and Behaviour drew to him the Respect of all Parties, so as to make him be remarkably distinguished; how much in Esteem he was with the greatest Men; and how many constant Hearers he had of the best Rank, and greatest Note, even of the most eminent Divines themselves; this is sufficiently known. And the Testimony which the late Arch-bishop Tillotson has given of him, tho' it be in a Funeral Sermon, is known to be in nothing superiour to his Desert.

The Sermons which are here Printed, have been selected out of Numbers of others less perfect; there being not any of our Author's extant, but such as were written after him at Church: He having used no other than very short Notes, not very legible: Tho' these have been of great Use to the Publisher, in whose Hands they have been.

The unpolish'd Style, and Phrase of our Author, who drew more from a College, than a Court; and who was more used to School-Learning, and the Language of an University, than to the Conversation of the fashionable World, may possibly but ill recommend his Sense to the Generality of Readers. And since none of these Discourses were ever design'd for the World, in any other Manner than as he (once for all) pronounc'd them from the Pulpit; they must of Necessity appear



to have a Roughness in them, which is not found in other Sermons more accurately penn'd by their Authors. For, tho' the Publisher has sometimes supplied him out of himself, by transferring to a defective Place, that which he found in some other Discourse, where the same Subject was treated; yet, so great a Regard was had to the very Text, and Letter of his Author; that he would not offer to alter the least Word: And, wheresoever he has added any Thing, to correct the most apparent Omission, or Fault of the Pen-man; he has taken Care to have it mark'd in different Characters: That nothing might appear as our Author's own, which was not perfectly His. Tho', some others in the World have been very far from this Caution: Since, of late, some things have been set out in our Author's Name, which his best Friends disown to be his; and which any one who studies him in his Genuine Works, will easily know to be unworthy of him.

And, now, when these Disadvantages which have been mentioned, are considered; since they are no more than what sensible People will easily make Allowance for; 'tis presum'd there may be in the World some Persons who will, notwithstanding, think these Sermons to be of Worth, and may perhaps discover in them some peculiar Beauties, such as are not to be despised for

want of that Ornament which might have accompany'd them, I know that there are now growing up, in the World, too many who are prejudic'd against all Pulpit-Discourses; and who, in this prophane Age, are led to think not only the Institution of Preaching, but even the Gospel it self, and our Holy Religion to be a Fraud. But, notwithstanding all the Prejudice of this kind; 'tis to be hop'd that even some of these Persons (if they have any Candour left) may be induced to applaud some Things that they may meet with, here: So as from hence, perhaps, to like Christianity the better. This we may with Assurance, say; that were there besides ours, any Religion, Ancient, or Modern, that had so Divine a Man as this, to shew; these very Men would admire and reverence him; and, tho' a Priest of that Religion, and bound to comply with establish'd Superstition, would praise his Vertue; and, perhaps, be the forwardest to extol his Sentences and Works, in Opposition to our Sacred Religion. But this is hard, that even Heathen Religion, and Paganism can be more mildly treated, and cause less Aversion than Christianity. To such Men as these, I can say nothing further. But, if they who are thus set against Christianity, cannot be won over, by any Thing that they may find here; yet we may assure our selves, at least,

of this good Effect from hence; that the excellent Spirit which is shewn here, and that Vein of Goodness, and Humanity, which appears throughout these Discourses, will make such as are already Christians, to prize and value Christianity the more: And, the Fairness, Ingenuity, and Impartiality, which they may learn from hence, will be a Security to them, against the contrary Temper of those other irreconcilable Enemies to our Holy Faith.

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APPENDIX B

Letter VIII from "LETTERS OF THE EARL OF SHAFTESBURY TO A  
STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY" Printed first in the year MDCCXLVI

June 3d, 1709.

I received your's since your recovery, which I am glad to hear of. The new book you have discovered, and the account of it gave me great satisfaction. Your conjectures of it perhaps are not amiss. Dr. TINDAL's principles, whatever they may be as to church government, are, in respect of philosophy and theology, far wide from the author's [i.e. Shaftesbury] of the rhapsody [i.e. The Moralists].

In general truly it has happened, that all those they call free writers now-a-days, have espoused those principles, which Mr. HOBBS set a foot in this last age. Mr. LOCKE, as much as I honour him on account of other writings (viz. on government, policy, trade, coin, education, toleration Etc) and as well as I knew him, and can answer for his sincerity as a most zealous Christian and believer, did however go in the self same track, and is follow'd by the TINDALS, and all the other ingenious free authors of our time.

'Twas Mr. LOCKE, that struck the home blow: for Mr. HOBBS's character and base slavish principles in government took off the poyson of his philosophy. 'Twas Mr. LOCKE that struck at

all fundamentals, threw all order and virtue out of the world, and made the very ideas of these (which are the same as those of GOD) unnatural, and without foundation in our minds. 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 came out of the other; but whether the constitution of man be such, that being adult and grown up, at such or such a time, sooner or later (no matter when) the idea and sense of order, adminis-  
tration, and a GOD will not infallibly, inevitably, necessarily spring up in him.

Then comes the credulous Mr. LOCKE, with his Indian, barbarian stories of wild nations, that have no such idea, (as travellers, learned authors! and men of truth! and great philosophers! have inform'd him;) not considering, that this is but a negative upon a hearsay, and so circumstantiated, that the faith of the Indian denier may be as well question'd, as the veracity or judgment of the relater; who cannot be supposed to know sufficiently the mysteries and secrets of those barbarians; whose language they but imperfectly know; and to whom we good Christians have by our little mercy given sufficient

reason to conceal many secrets from us; as we know particularly in respect of simples and vegetables, of which tho' we got the peruvian bark, and some other noble remedies; yet 'tis certain, that through the cruelty of the Spaniards, as they have own'd themselves, many secrets in medicinal affairs have been suppress'd.

But Mr. LOCKE, who had more faith, and was more learn'd in modern wonder-writers, than in antient philosophy, gave up an argument for the Deity, which CICERO (tho' a profess'd Sceptick) would not explode; and which even the chief of the Atheistick philosophers anciently acknowledged, and solv'd only by their primus in orbe Deos fecit timor.

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 any thing in themselves; nor is there any trace or idea of them naturally imprinted on human minds. Experience and our catechism teach us all! I suppose 'tis something of like kind, which teaches



birds their nests, and how to fly the minute they have full feathers. Your THEOCLES, whom you commend so much, laughs at this; and, as modestly as he can, asks a Lockist, whether the idea of woman (and what is sought after in woman,) be not taught also by some catechism, and dictated to the man. Perhaps if we had no schools of Venus, nor such horrid lewd books, or lewd companions; we might have no understanding of this, till we were taught by our parents: and if the tradition should happen to be lost; the race of mankind might perish in a sober nation. — This is very poor philosophy. But the gibberish of the schools, for these several centuries, has, in those latter days of liberty, made any contrary philosophy of good relish, and highly savoury with all men of wit; such as have been emancipated from that egregious form of intellectual bondage. But I see you are on a better scent. —

I can say no more at present: only I would not have you inquire further, as yet, after that book, entituled, an inquiry: Because it was an imperfect thing, brought into the world many years since, contrary to the author's design, in his absence beyond sea, and in a disguis'd disorder'd style. It may one day perhaps be set righter; since other things have made it to be inquired after. Have patience in the mean while, and

continue your studies. Dispute with no body on any subject. Keep your remarks to your self; and cultivate the good maxims and principles you have received. Be humble in all your manners, gesture, and behaviour: for that chiefly suits with the character design'd. GOD guide you in all true piety, moderation, and virtue. Farewel.

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