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New Ages, New Opinions

Shaftesbury in his World and Today



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EDITION

INTRODUCTION

READING SHAFTESBURY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Reading Shaftesbury is difficult. While other literary and intellectual figures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers such as Swift, Pope, Addison, Johnson, Locke, Berkeley, or Hume, have rarely, if ever, disappeared off the academic radar, the Earl remained, for a long time, consigned to comparative oblivion. The very mention here in one breath of philosophers, satirists, essayists, and moralists points to one of the principal difficulties still encountered by many readers of Shaftesbury when they first come to peruse his work: for students of literature, his texts have more often than not been too philosophical in content, and for students of philosophy too literary in both form and style. The Earl neither chose to draw as author a strict line between literature and philosophy, nor cared for the subdivisions usually grafted upon philosophy, the taxonomic segmenting into political or moral philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of religion or of art. His *Characteristicks*, “a project almost sociological in nature,”¹ and the unfinished *Second Characters* would together have formed a comprehensive philosophical compendium, this designed as the vehicle for a coherent theory which would embrace and uncover the affinities between most aspects of human life and culture. One further obstacle to the acceptance of the Earl’s writings by a wider readership is his conspicuous absence from academic syllabi: *reading* Shaftesbury may be difficult, *but teaching* him can, with the possible exception of *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, be even more of a challenge.

Prior to the 1980s, Shaftesbury studies were in the hands of an ‘adept’ few, Benjamin Rand, William E. Alderman, Alfred Owen Aldridge, and Ernest Tuveson perhaps the best known among those. Every ten years a monograph or two would appear, and maybe a dozen articles. This occasional ‘fresh blood’ aside, scholars generally contented themselves with repeating a number of somewhat stale commonplaces about the “tame”² Shaftesbury’s “optimism,”³

1 Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. vii.

2 J. B. Broadbent, “Shaftesbury’s Horses of Instruction,” *The English Mind: Studies in the English Moralists Presented to Basil Willey*, eds Hugh Sykes Davis and George Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 79-89 (89).

3 See William E. Alderman, “Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Optimism in the Eighteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, 28 (1933), 151-59.

the (Neo-)Platonic foundations of his thought,⁴ his anti-Hobbesian, classically informed faith in the essential goodness of human nature,⁵ and the ‘moralistic’ tendency of his philosophy. In short, the Earl, a “‘friend of man,’” was regarded as the “typical English moralist of the ‘enlightenment’” and his fame rested largely on the fact that he was “usually accounted the founder of the ‘moral sense’ school.”⁶ Although often cited as one such prototype of “Augustan”⁷ austerity, Shaftesbury was at the same time (and often still is) relegated to the fringes of scholarly consciousness. The following quotation (the unmistakable sarcastic overtones of which appear to reflect a quite wide view of the Earl as an unexceptional thinker) sums up what two generations of scholars considered (al-most) sufficient for anyone to know about the author and his *Characteristicks*:

[C]onversation is sociable and fair. So is virtue. Shaftesbury refutes the self-interest that Hobbes imputed to man, on the ground that not even Hobbesian philosophers are really as selfish as their theory requires – people are, in fact, nice to one. Far from being naturally aggressive and selfish, men are inherently affectionate – if well-bred. Good breeding produces social affection automatically, in the same way as it produces good taste; social affection is virtue; and virtue is a kind of good taste in behaviour.⁸

The impression of naive intellectual mediocrity created by such synopses stands in clear contrast to earlier reception of Shaftesbury: “Mr. Pope told me, that, to his knowledge, the *Characteristics* had done more harm to Revealed Religion in England than all the works of Infidelity put together.”⁹

Given the glaring disparity between such assessments, there simply had to come a time when all simplistic handbook lore surrounding the Earl’s thought was put to the test, and the last twenty-five years have indeed witnessed both a long overdue revival of Shaftesbury studies and a concomitant re-evaluation of

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- 4 This persistent tradition was sparked by Ernst Cassirer’s *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James P. Pettegrove (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1953 [1932]), chapter 6.
 - 5 Chester Chapin, “Shaftesbury and the Man of Feeling,” *Modern Philology*, 81 (1983), 47-50 (p. 50).
 - 6 Basil Willey, “Natural Morality: Shaftesbury,” *The Eighteenth-Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980 [1940]), pp. 57-58.
 - 7 Broadbent, “Shaftesbury’s Horses of Instruction,” p. 80.
 - 8 Broadbent, “Shaftesbury’s Horses of Instruction,” pp. 79-80. For a similar synopsis, see *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays*, ed. Scott Elledge (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 520.
 - 9 William Warburton to Richard Hurd, 30 January 1749/50; *Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of his Friends* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809 [1808]), p. 36 (Letter XVII). Pope’s was not a minority view: an entire generation of writers from George Berkeley over Elisha Smith up to John Brown saw Shaftesbury as, to use an expression culled from the subtitle of Smith’s *The Cure of Deism* (1737), an “oracle” of Deist thought.

his legacy. Alongside the now almost completed *Standard Edition* of Shaftesbury's entire oeuvre, three different editions of *Characteristicks* have been published over the past fifteen years, each of them with a very different editorial approach,¹⁰ and that alone evidences renewed interest in the Earl. The reasons for his resurgence are manifold. There is, first, the fairly banal observation that it is easier to say something 'new' about Shaftesbury than, for example, about Swift or Johnson. Secondly, Robert B. Voitle's pioneering biography¹¹ and then Lawrence E. Klein's seminal recapitulation of the Earl's thought¹² both contributed significantly to our image of Shaftesbury, consolidating the knowledge we have of him and at the same time offering new perspectives that encourage and facilitate fresh approaches to his work. The upcoming publication of the Earl's complete correspondence will, as its editors hope, solidify the academic community's interest in him.¹³ Finally, recent decades have seen various of the Earl's writings published either for the first time ever or in reliable (old-spelling) critical editions designed to take the place of older printed texts which, while widely used, long cited, and, for a good eighty years after 1900, the 'point of

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- 10 In the same year as Klein's paperback student edition came out (see footnote 1), Philip Ayres published a hardback text in two volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For the principal differences between these two editions, see Lawrence E. Klein, "Review of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999)," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 64 (2002), 529-37. The third version appeared two years later: *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Douglas J. den Uyl, 3 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). A general classification and assessment of all three editions is found in Michael B. Prince, "Editing Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*," *Essays in Criticism*, 54 (2004), 38-59; unfortunately, Prince does not discuss the *Standard Edition*.
 - 11 Robert B. Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).
 - 12 Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
 - 13 The letters will be published as SE Volumes III 1-3. So far, only parts and selections of Shaftesbury's correspondence have been made available in print: in the eighteenth century editions of his letters to Michael Ainsworth (now SE II 4) and to Robert Molesworth (1721, edited by John Toland), in the nineteenth his correspondence with Benjamin Furl (Original Letters of Locke; Algernon Sidney; and Anthony Lord Shaftesbury, *Author of the "Characteristicks"*), ed. Thomas Forster [London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1830]). A broader collection appeared in *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Author of the "Characteristicks"*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London: Swan Sonnenschein and New York: Macmillan, 1900), pp. 273-535; see also Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and 'Le Refuge Français'-Correspondence*, ed. Rex A. Barrell (Lewiston, et al.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).

entry' to Shaftesbury's world for almost all scholars (for some still that now), have, in a sense, outlived their original purpose.¹⁴

(Re)reading these texts, today's scholars have come to recognise that here is an author of great depth and range. In the eighteenth century the delight of freethinkers and bugbear of High Churchmen, Shaftesbury's writings – not least because of his accomplished concealment of their true sense – still continue to elude any consensus in discussions of their author's philosophical, political, and other intentions. In fact, the sheer diversity of the Earl's output is quite overwhelming for the novice: the various and variform treatises collected in *Characteristicks*, the enigmatic and reflective *Askēmata*, the challenging, fragmentary *Second Characters*, the two patently propagandistic (and frequently overlooked) political tracts, together with the erudite *Pathologia* and *Chartae Socraticae* (both recently edited for the first time)¹⁵ seem at first sight to present themselves as a motley crew of styles and forms. But there is method to the madness, even if we have only just begun to understand in how far these different projects were all part and parcel of one overriding design and combined seemingly divergent components within one widely ramified theory that was, as Klein has so convincingly shown, meant to redefine cultural standards for Great Britain.

The various theoretical approaches of which modern critics and scholars can avail themselves are reflected in the different new interpretations and revisionist readings we now have of Shaftesbury. Literary scholars, to name just one group, have re-examined the Earl's sexual politics, combining feminist theory, the principal tenets of cultural materialist thought, and psychoanalysis in order to supplement the findings of more traditionally-minded historians of ideas. The range of interpretations reflects the character (both elusive and allusive) of the prose which those attempt to illuminate. From a perspective which regards Shaftesbury as one of the principal representatives of "civic humanism," this the "most authoritative fantasy of masculinity in early eighteenth-century

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- 14 One example is John M. Robertson's edition of Shaftesbury principal (published) work: *Characteristicks*, ed. John M. Robertson, 2 vols (London: Richards, 1900), reprinted with an introduction by Stanley Grean (New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). Another: Benjamin Rand's editions of *Askēmata* and *Plasticks* (*The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Author of the 'Characteristicks'*, ed. Benjamin Rand [London: Swan Sonnenschein and New York: Macmillan, 1900] and *Second Characters or The Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914, reprint New York: Greenwood Press, 1969]), both texts are now available in the SE (Volumes II 6 and I 5).
 - 15 The *Chartae Socraticae* as SE II 5 (published in 2008), the *Pathologia* by an editorial team headed by Laurent Jaffro: Christian Maurer and Laurent Jaffro, "Reading Shaftesbury's *Pathologia*: An Illustration and Defence of the Stoic Account of the Emotions," *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2012), 207-20; Laurent Jaffro, Christian Maurer, and Alain Petit, "*Pathologia*, A Theory of the Passions," *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2012), 221-40.

Britain,”¹⁶ it appears that, in *Characteristicks*, “the lover of boys ... is more disinterestedly focused on *to kalon* than the heterosexual lover.”¹⁷ Others may find in *Characteristicks* “a kind of therapeutic mental masturbation – a way of purging sexual self-indulgence in order to purvey a philosophical product that is free, in the end, of seductive possibilities,”¹⁸ whereas the Earl’s *Askēmata* has been seen to contain “an aggressive sexualization of philosophy which ... leads, finally, to a metaphorical sexual assault on the ‘Deity’ who in the opening entries was the necessary guarantee of universal moral order.”¹⁹ While it may be difficult for some to agree with these views, such fresh interpretations are without doubt the perfect food for the savoury dialectical process in which alone the thus stimulated digestive juices will help us break down the texts under analysis.²⁰

Apart from sexual politics, there are of course various other aspects of Shaftesbury’s philosophy which have recently been reconsidered, among them his views on art (including his role as patron).²¹ One very important field in which much remains to be learned is that of the Earl’s rhetorical strategies of concealment, especially the ways in which he disguised his political views in order to disseminate them under a clandestine cloak of allusions and contextual referencing.²² The Platonic, Stoic, and Socratic ingredients in his thought are

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- 16 John Barrell, “The Dangerous Goddess: Masculinity, Prestige and the Aesthetic in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 63-87 (64-65).
 - 17 Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 26-27.
 - 18 See Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, “Shaftesbury’s *Soliloquy*: Authorship and the Psychology of Romance,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38 (2005), 605-21 (pp. 612-13).
 - 19 Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 91-134 (98).
 - 20 See Patrick Müller, “Shaftesbury on the Psychoanalysts’s Couch: A Historicist Perspective on Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in *Characteristicks* and the Earl’s Private Writings,” *Swift Studies*, 25 (2010), 56-81 and, partly by way of reply to that, Lori Branch’s contribution to this volume.
 - 21 See, for example, Isabella Woldt, *Architektonik der Formen in Shaftesburys ‘Second Characters’: über soziale Neigung des Menschen, Kunstproduktion und Kunstwahrnehmung* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2004); Martin Kirves, “Shaftesbury,” *Das gestochene Argument: Daniel Nikolaus Chodowieckis Bildtheorie der Aufklärung* (Berlin: Reimer, 2012), pp. 151-339; Livio Pestilli, “A Herculean Feat,” *Paolo de Matteis: Neapolitan Painting and Cultural History in Baroque Europe* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 115-44. Unfortunately, the iconographic traditions behind the emblematic engravings (see James Pratt’s and Isabella Woldt’s contributions to this volume) designed for the second edition of *Characteristicks* (1714/15) are usually not analysed in any great depth.
 - 22 I have recently investigated these strategies in a series of essays; see, for example, my “Rewriting the Divine Right Theory for the Whigs: The Political Implications of Shaftesbury’s Attack on the Doctrine of Futurity in his *Characteristicks*,” *Great*

still an often chewed bone of contention.²³ Last but not least, Shaftesbury's attitude towards and position within the Deist movement will continue to fuel studies.²⁴ This variety of opinions notwithstanding, one thing can perhaps be agreed on, something which seems to be confirmed by each new publication: Shaftesbury stood, paradoxically almost, at the intersection between a classical rigour oriented towards the past and a forward-looking philosophy of enlightenment – an intermediary, as it were, between the traditional and the modern.

“New Ages ... new Opinions” (*Askēmata* 211): the essays collected in this volume reflect the diversity and vitality of Shaftesbury studies some three hundred years after the Earl's death. They are the fruits reaped from a conference held in Nürnberg in August/September 2012, three days devoted to a presentation and discussion of the latest research on his life, work, and intellectual context. The speakers, chosen from a number of different academic fields, represented a broad spectrum of approaches, and the underlying agenda of the conference was, as it is now for the present volume, to encourage and reflect interdisciplinary discussion and constructive argument. The international line-up that converged in Nürnberg stood, moreover, for the widespread appeal of a ‘cosmopolitan’ thinker whose work managed to fascinate intellectuals all over Europe in the eighteenth century. One of the initial concepts behind the conference was to embrace the philosopher Shaftesbury and the man, a holistic approach which reflects the diversity of his interests and which accordingly meant that the call for papers included no restrictions in terms of subject matter. The resulting (and wholly appropriate) miscellany now covered in this volume includes ethics, aesthetics and art, politics, literary criticism, landscaping, and

Expectations: Futurity in the Long Eighteenth Century, eds Mascha Hansen and Jürgen Klein (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 67-88; “Mapping a Tory's ‘prostitute Pen and Tongue’: Satire, Criticism, and the Political Dimension of Shaftesbury's Aversion to Swift,” “*The first wit of the age*”: *Essays on Swift and his Contemporaries in Honour of Hermann J. Real*, eds Mascha Hansen, Kirsten Juhas, and Patrick Müller (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 297-314 and “Hobbes, Locke, and the Consequences: Shaftesbury's Moral Sense and Political Agitation in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37 (2014), forthcoming.

- 23 See Mark-Georg Dehrmann, “‘Virtue is the Good, and Vice the Ill of every-one’: Shaftesbury's Humanismus und die Stoa,” *Genese und Profil des europäischen Humanismus im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds Hubert Cancik and Martin Vöhler (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), pp. 35-55 and Friedrich A. Uehlein, “‘Stoisch, wahrhaft sokratisch’: Epiktet und Marc Aurel in der Philosophie Shaftesburys,” *Stoizismus in der europäischen Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Politik*, eds Barbara Neymeyr, Jochen Schmidt, and Bernhard Zimmermann, 2 vols (Berlin, et al.: de Gruyter, 2008), II, 1047-62. See also Yu Liu's and Andrea Gatti's contributions in this volume.
- 24 See Andrea Gatti, “I moventi nascosti del deismo di Shaftesbury,” *Il Gentleman Filosofo: Nuovi saggi su Shaftesbury*, eds Giancarlo Carabelli and Paola Zanardi (Padova, 2003), pp. 213-32.

biography. It has been ten years since the last collection of essays devoted exclusively to Shaftesbury was published, but this is a rhythm which needs to be broken: *multa desiderantur*.