

REDEEMING ENTHUSIASM: ENTHUSIASM AND REASON IN SHAFTESBURY'S *THE MORALISTS*

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Abstract. In this paper, I will examine Shaftesbury's prima facie ambivalent attitude towards demonstrative reason, and its role in his discussion of "reasonable enthusiasm" in *The Moralists*. I will show that such attitude is heavily influenced by Epictetus, with whom Shaftesbury shares several worries about the role of reason in philosophy. In both cases, there is no real hostility against demonstrative reason; what both writers oppose, rather, is the dominant preoccupation with demonstration and analysis, which, they feel, bogs down philosophical debates in largely irrelevant technicalities. Demonstrative reason, in both philosophers, is considered a tool to analyze and test knowledge otherwise acquired.

I will confirm this reading through an analysis of the narrative in *The Moralists*. Such narrative will confirm that, for Shaftesbury, the role of reason is that of testing enthusiasm, rather than causing it. In other words, the reasonableness of Theocles' (and Shaftesbury's) enthusiasm does not lie in its being caused by, or based on, a flawless demonstration, but in its being open to rational scrutiny. The openness to such scrutiny is what allows the philosopher to distinguish between good and bad enthusiasm.

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Enthusiasm: a bad reputation

*A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*¹ is the opening work in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*.² It is a denunciation of "enthusiasm," or religious fanaticism, inspired by the clamor raised by a small group of French Huguenots, known as Camisardes, who escaped persecution in their homeland by seeking refuge in England. Their theatrical and sometimes violent behavior caused them to be disowned even by England's own Huguenot community.³ Their excesses and the eventual trial of three of them in 1707 generated a flurry of commentaries. Debates on enthusiasm, often conflated with superstition,⁴ precede the Camisardes incident. Depicted as the enemy of reason and virtue, enthusiasm seems to belong strictly to the worst among us: moral and intellectual degenerates, slaves to their extravagant imagination and passions. Shaftesbury does not describe enthusiasm as a sign of depravity, but as a disease, more deserving of therapy and understanding than the rack. More interestingly, his

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discussion undermines traditional ways to distinguish genuine divine inspiration from fanaticism.

Originally referring to the real presence of the deity, and, later, of more sinister forces, in the 17th century enthusiasm became part of larger *ad hominem* arguments attacking certain religious groups in terms of the psychology of the believer rather than on philosophical or theological grounds.⁵ In his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*,⁶ for example, Henry More explains enthusiasm as an imbalance of the cognitive faculties, in which fancy successfully marginalizes reason. Thus, rather than engaging in philosophical refutations of the enthusiast's beliefs, More attacks a character type, highlighting issues of mental and social health.⁷ Using physical deformities as a metaphor for mental deformities, effectively dehumanizing their targets, was also a strategy in works like Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, and Shaftesbury himself endeavors to evoke disgust as a response in several passages of his *Letter*.⁸

While he is not the first to discuss enthusiasm as a disease, Shaftesbury's use of the label is novel and, to many of his contemporaries, alarming:⁹ for example, in *Letter III* he suggests that the early Christians presented the same mental symptoms as 17th century fringe religious groups like the Camisards. By appropriating a rhetorical weapon used until then against marginal religious groups, and turning it against mainstream Anglicanism, Shaftesbury shows that 'fringe' groups do not have a monopoly on irrationality.¹⁰

Shaftesbury is not the first to turn this kind of rhetorical weapon against contemporary, mainstream Christianity, as opposed to the 'low hanging fruit' of fringe sects. In Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, the notion of superstition (a cognate to "enthusiasm") is generously, if not explicitly, bestowed on the Counter Remonstrants, as Shaftesbury almost certainly knew. However, Spinoza's respect for the figure of Jesus Christ and his explicit connection of superstition with political disobedience are absent from Shaftesbury's discussion.¹¹ Another important distinction between the two is Spinoza's implication that superstitious speech can be close enough to sedition to justify suppressing it. While endorsing an almost unfettered freedom of speech, Spinoza claims that the government must keep a keen eye on the superstitious. A more significant influence on Shaftesbury's thought was certainly that of Pierre Bayle, whom Shaftesbury met in Rotterdam, and whose view of the rationality and morality of revealed religions, and on the dangers of fanaticism, has strong similarities with that of Shaftesbury.¹²

Shaftesbury's defense of religious tolerance, influenced by Bayle's views, is stronger than Spinoza's or Locke's.¹³ In *Letter*, Shaftesbury supports tolerance towards all non-violent enthusiasts. Part of the reason for Shaftesbury's lenience is, as we will see, his definition of enthusiasm as a form of love, as well as a view on the limits of philosophy that is influenced by Bayle. But the main argument in his *Letter* relies on the understanding of enthusiasm as a disease of the soul: drawing an analogy from physiology, Shaftesbury claims that suppression of the "mental eruptions" of the enthusiast is as harmful as physically preventing the elimination of toxins from the body. "Gentleness" in the form of tolerance is the best remedy available to the "physician of the body politic,"¹⁴ since enthusiasts are rarely violent.¹⁵

Famously, in *Letter*, Shaftesbury argues that the best weapon against enthusiasm is ridicule.¹⁶ Non-violent fanatics should be tolerated, but their irrationality should be publicly exposed, and the most effective way of doing so, for Shaftesbury, is overt ridicule. Shaftesbury's support of ridicule, which is considerably less forceful in his later writings,¹⁷ is the target of sometimes vitriolic attacks, such as the Bishop of Gloucester's.¹⁸ A more friendly reader than the Bishop, G.W. Leibniz, who admired Shaftesbury, also notes that ridicule is not an effective test.¹⁹ Leibniz claims that the notion that truth cannot be victimized by ridicule is unrealistic: later remarks show that Shaftesbury agrees.²⁰ As ancient and recent history shows, overt ridicule often exacerbates fanaticism, rather than cure it.

Independently from the argument in favor of ridicule, *Letter* suggests a robust dose of reason as the main remedy against enthusiasm. Yet, Shaftesbury often cautions against the arrogance of reason: excessive reliance on demonstrative reason brings systems of philosophy largely irrelevant to human concerns, or, even worse, detestable ethical systems such as Hobbes' or Locke's moral egoism.²¹ Yet, at the end of *Letter* (Sect. 7), Shaftesbury declares that there is such thing as a good, or "divine," enthusiasm and that "Heroes, Statesmen, Poets, Orators, Musicians, and even Philosophers themselves" experience it. If this statement is to be taken seriously, finding a balance between irrational fanaticism (the enthusiasm of the Camisardes) and contemporary über-rationalism is necessary in order to achieve such divine state.

Shaftesbury became engaged in his project of redeeming enthusiasm several years before writing *Letter*. Around 1703-04, he completed and printed *The Sociable Enthusiast*, the first version of what would become *TM*.²² The main characters, Theocles, Philocles and Palemon, are already present in this early version, as are several tenets defended in the final work, in particular the notion of a "divine enthusiasm." Even earlier, Shaftesbury had declared himself an enthusiast in his private *Askemata*, especially in the section entitled "Deity," written, according to Voitle, during Shaftesbury's first stay in Holland in 1698.

Redeeming enthusiasm, in fact *embracing* enthusiasm, as Shaftesbury does in these earlier writings, appears to be a risky project. Shaftesbury does not want to be mistaken for a fanatic. With all his distaste for the excesses of rationalism, he has a deep appreciation for what he considers the divine gift of reason. In order to defend enthusiasm, then, he must show that "reasonable enthusiasm" is not an oxymoron.

This seems to be a fool's errand: respectable philosophers, as we have just seen, rejected enthusiasm as antithetical to solid philosophy and good religion. The apparent tension between enthusiasm and philosophy has been pointed out by scholars such as Michael Gill and Timothy Dykstal, who worry about the workings of enthusiasm and reason in the apparent "conversion" of Philocles in *TM*. While Michael Prince argues that *TM* ends in a "tragic impasse," an unsolved disagreement between incompatible points of view,²³ most interpretations see Theocles and Philocles engaged in a genuine exchange, ending in Philocles' (possibly temporary) conversion.

In this passage, Michael Gill summarizes what he considers a major problem with Shaftesbury's discussion of enthusiasm in *TM*:

The main point to remember, however, is that his position requires a rational proof of God's existence. Theocles' enthusiasm is supposed to be *reasonable*. If he cannot show that his passionate love has a rational basis, then he has no grounds for claiming that it connects with the world as it really is, and that other's differing passions are delusive... Furthermore... it's unclear how an argument for the existence of God can produce such a feeling.²⁴

Shaftesbury's goal, Gill claims, is to show that *reasonable* enthusiasm is such because it is reality-based. However, Gill claims, in order to claim that Theocles' enthusiasm (as opposed to the fanatic's) is based in reality, Shaftesbury must show that it is based on proof. In order to meet this requirement, Gill continues, Shaftesbury's proofs for the existence of God must be flawless, which they are not. Moreover, Shaftesbury must offer his readers an account of how reason *causes* Philocles' enthusiasm.²⁵ Such account, as Gill correctly notes, is absent.

If Gill is right, a major part of Shaftesbury's philosophy is deeply flawed. Relying on one's subjective feelings brings the danger of irremediable disagreement, and the impossibility to distinguish noble enthusiasm from the perverted kind. Unless Theocles can offer the zealot a proof, Gill writes, the zealot has no reason to abandon his irrational enthusiasm in order to pursue the philosopher's. If Theocles fails, his enthusiasm has no better philosophical standing than the zealot's. Moreover, even if Theocles' proofs were successful, we would be left with a psychologically implausible narrative in which cold scientific reasoning, somewhat mysteriously, causes the warm feeling of enthusiasm.

In an overview of the goals of skepticism and the dialogic form, Dykstal argues that Shaftesbury's skepticism is more an acknowledgment of the deep diversity of opinions, and the difficulty to eliminate it through rationalism, than a form of radical doubt.²⁶ In a chapter dedicated to Shaftesbury's *TM*, Dykstal argues that "enthusiasm" is the rhetorical weapon that Shaftesbury uses to help overcome the common difficulty (expressed by Philocles) to move from love of our group to love of humanity in general. For Dykstal, "rehabilitating enthusiasm" is rehabilitation of rhetorical techniques: he points out that there is a tension between Shaftesbury's idealization of the polite dialogue as the forum for a free exercise of reason, and his reliance on a form of manipulation of emotions that seems *prima facie* to go in the opposite direction.

In what follows, I will show that Gill misinterprets the role of demonstrative reason. I will argue that demonstrative reason is not supposed to *cause* reasonable enthusiasm, and it is not a necessary condition for it. While a rational, scientific understanding of the world as a system of interrelated parts facilitates reasonable enthusiasm, it does not *cause* it; in fact, it might even be a distraction.²⁷ The role of reason in *TM* is that of *testing* enthusiasm: good enthusiasm will stand, indeed it will embrace, the test of reason, while bad enthusiasm will shun it. So, Shaftesbury does not run in the problems described by Gill. Later, I will argue that, because of this weaker role of reason, even a flawed but persuasive argument could meet the standard of reasonableness. In the discussion of the narrative in *TM*, I will also show that

Dykstal underestimate the extent to which, for Shaftesbury, sentiments are connected to reason in the discovery of the most important philosophical truths.

TM consists for the most part of a dialogue between two friends, Philocles and Theocles. Theocles is a paragon of “sociable enthusiasm.” Intelligent and highly educated, virtuous, charming, and willing to subject his positions to Philocles’ scrutiny, Theocles is the opposite of the narrow-minded, rude²⁸ zealot who is a favorite target in Shaftesbury’s writings. However, there must be something that such different characters have in common, or we would be hardly justified in labeling all of them as “enthusiast.”

What makes Theocles, or Shaftesbury himself, as well as the unfriendly zealot, deserving of such label is the fact that they are “in love,” as Philocles explains in the first part of *TM*:

The manner of it was more after the pleasing Transports of those antient *Poets* you are often charm’d with, than after the fierce unsociable way of modern Zealots; those starch’d gruff Gentlemen, who guard Religion as Bullies do a Mistress, and give us the while a very indifferent Opinion of their Lady’s Merit, and their own Wit, by adoring what they neither allow to be inspected by others, nor care themselves to examine in a fair light. ...But Love, I found, was every-where the same.

In his *Askemata*, Shaftesbury writes:

Shall I be ashamed of this diviner love and of an object of love so far excelling all those objects in dignity, majesty, grace, beauty, and amiableness? Is this enthusiasm? Be it: and so may I ever be an enthusiast.²⁹

In this passage from Misc. II Part 1, in addressing criticism of his *Letter*, Shaftesbury explains the genesis of enthusiasm:

our Author himself³⁰ ... car’d not in reality to grapple closely with his Subject, or give us, at once, the precise Definition of Enthusiasm. This however we may, with our Author, presume to infer ... “That there is a Power in Numbers, Harmony, Proportion, and Beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the Heart, and raises the Imagination or Conceit of something *majestick* and *divine*.”

This feeling of “captivation of the heart,” indeed of love, then, is enthusiasm.³¹ The passages above convey the conclusion that *reasonable* enthusiasm is a form of *appropriate* response of pure and disinterested love for the perfections of its object (the deity).³² Yet, the Camisardes mocked in *Letter*, or the elderly zealot in *TM*, would claim that that *their* enthusiasm is the most appropriate response to the perfections of their deity.³³

There is, however, an undeniable difference between Theocles and the fanatics depicted, a difference that fanatics would be hard pressed to deny: the latter are earnestly and incorrigibly anti-intellectual. The bigoted gentleman portrayed in *TM*, for example, openly disparages the use of reason on religious matters as “freethinking.”³⁴ That anti-intellectualism is the poison that turns good into bad (“vulgar”) enthusiasm is made explicit in this passage from *Misc. V Ch. 3*:

...the most evidently ruinous and fatal to the Understanding is that of ... *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*. The artificial Managers of this human Frailty declaim against *Free-Thought*, and *Latitude* of Understanding. To go beyond those Bounds of thinking which they have prescrib'd, is by them declar'd *a Sacrilege*. To them, *Freedom of Mind*, *a Mastery of Sense*, and *a Liberty in Thought and Action*, imply *Debauch*, *Corruption*, and *Depravity*.

This open rejection of reason, and the demand that it be subject to strict limitations, are what make the fanatic's enthusiasm pernicious, and well deserving of censure. Contrariwise, it is the openness to Philocles' scrutiny that makes Theocles “reasonable,” and that justifies Shaftesbury's use of the oxymoron “sensible madness.”³⁵ This sets a very different standard for “reasonable enthusiasm” than the one offered by Gill's interpretation, and it is my opinion that it effectively shields Shaftesbury from this part of Gill's criticism. It is no longer necessary to show that enthusiasm is caused by a flawless proof in order to meet the standard of reasonableness: the willingness to be open, rather than resistant, to philosophical scrutiny is enough.

There is, however, an element in the narrative of *TM* that is puzzling, and that offers *prima facie* support for Gill's interpretation: the space and the location dedicated to the proofs of the existence of God. It seems that Theocles' strategy is to offer proofs to Philocles *in order to* cause him to feel the same enthusiasm that he experiences. The discussion of enthusiasm offered in *Misc. II Ch. 1* states that enthusiasm is brought by the *perception* of harmony and beauty, and it is very unclear how such perception can amount to, or be caused by, a proof. I will later argue that the narrative in *TM* shows that the role of the proofs is not to *cause* enthusiasm.

Before I proceed, I will devote the next section to a discussion of Shaftesbury's thoughts on the proper role of demonstrative reason, and to an examination of Epicetetus' influence.

The Stoic roots of Shaftesbury's ambivalence

Shaftesbury's writings, as has been noted, are lacking in systematicity. This is largely explained by the fact that Shaftesbury never aspired to entering the pantheon of 17th century systematic philosophers, à la Descartes; rather, he wanted to distance himself from them. In *Misc.*, he even mocks his own style in the only technical and

systematic work in *Characteristicks, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*, describing it as “dry” and “straight-laced.”³⁶ Shaftesbury’s attitude towards demonstrative reason, however, is more complex than such scorn seems to imply. He has no real hostility to demonstrative reason; however, he wants to challenge its dominant role in philosophy. A very similar attitude can be found in the writings of one of Shaftesbury’s philosophical role models, Epictetus.³⁷

There are several passages in Shaftesbury’s works that question the role of demonstrative reason as the one source of reliable knowledge. For example, in TM I.2 it is shown that Philocles turned to skepticism because he is unsatisfied with demonstrative reason. Skepticism is good insofar as it motivates one to question accepted wisdom; it is bad when it turns into a form of mental laziness, or, as Philocles says, “knowing nothing and believing everything.”³⁸ Yet, it is very clear that Philocles does not suffer from mental laziness: he turned to skepticism because he found that demonstrative reasoning, advertised as the source of all knowledge worth having, failed to deliver knowledge that is *truly certain* and *truly important*.

Shaftesbury is convinced that contemporary philosophy is plagued by two extremely serious problems that undermine the whole endeavor. On the one hand, philosophy has become largely irrelevant to the most pressing of human concerns: how to lead a good life. On the other hand, it has failed to provide the certainty that 17th century philosophers, such as Descartes, presented as the only worthwhile form of knowledge. Of course, advertising philosophy as providing certain, indubitable knowledge caters to the deeply human yearning for certainty, poignantly described here in TM I:

Men love to take party instantly. They can’t bear being kept in suspense. The Examination torments ’em. They want to be rid of it, upon the easiest terms. ’Tis as if Men fancy’d 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 chuse afterwards to hang, tho ever so insecurely, rather than trust their Strength to bear ’em above Water. He who has got hold of an *Hypothesis*, how slight soever, is satisfy’d. He can presently answer every Objection, and, with a few Terms of Art, give an account of every thing without trouble... Thus we will needs *know* every thing, and be at the pains of examining nothing. Of all Philosophy, therefore, how absolutely the most disagreeable must *that* appear, which goes upon no establish’d Hypothesis, nor presents us with any flattering Scheme, talks only of Probabilitys, Suspence of Judgment, Inquiry, Search, and Caution not to be impos’d on, or deceiv’d?

17th century rationalism overestimates the power and reach of demonstrative reasoning; moreover, it applies it to matters that are of very little relevance to human beings, in the sense that they are not conducive to a virtuous and thriving life, or so Shaftesbury things. Here Shaftesbury decries the excesses of philosophers of his times:

Many things exterior, and without our-selves, of no relation to our real Interests or to those of Society and Mankind, are diligently investigated: Nature's remotest Operations, deepest Mysteries, and most difficult *Phaenomena* discuss'd, and whimsically explain'd; *Hypotheses* and *fantastick Systems* erected; a Universe anatomiz'd; and by some notable Scheme so solv'd and reduc'd, as to appear an easy *Knack* or *Secret* to those who have *the Clew*. *Creation* it-self can, upon occasion, be exhibited; *Transmutations*, *Projections*, and other *Philosophical Arcana*, such as in the *corporeal* World can accomplish all things; whilst in the *intellectual*, a set Frame of metaphysical Phrases and Distinctions can serve to solve whatever Difficultys may be propounded either in *Logicks*, *Ethicks*, or any *real Science*, of whatever kind (Misc. III.1).³⁹

Leibniz, who devoted much of his philosophical career to such “philosophical arcana,” and who felt stung by Shaftesbury’s contempt, objected to this criticism:

It is right to scorn a sterile philosophy..., but I believe that, if the author had true ideas of space, matter, and, above all of substance (ideas which he speaks of as quite useless but which are not so common or so well known as may be thought), he would find in himself the self-knowledge of which he advises.... The question of whether or not there is a vacuum... is more remote from morals, but whoever would establish the true principles even of ethics, and be demonstratively sure of them, will not disdain this question. The agreement and disagreement of ideas are not known through a simple comparison of our perceptions; we must come to an analysis.⁴⁰

Such an attentive reader as Leibniz, then, interpreted Shaftesbury as dismissing not merely irrelevant “arcana,” but demonstrative reason *per se*. His retort defends the use of analysis and demonstrations, rather than self-reflectivity (“a simple comparison of our perceptions”), even in matters of morality.

As explained above, however, for Shaftesbury the real problem does not lie with demonstrative reason *per se*; rather, it is with its improper use. The passage from Misc. III.1 quoted above targets the improper reliance on demonstrative reason, rather than reason itself. In so doing, Shaftesbury resembles Epictetus, a philosopher whose work he much admired. Both Epictetus and Shaftesbury consider demonstrative reason a useful tool that ought to be utilized and developed, yet not worshipped. Most importantly, it must not be used to replace the deeper kind of character training that philosophy ought to provide. Epictetus warns his students that they ought to devote themselves to logic only after being properly trained to be *human beings*; or they will commit that most Socratic of sins, that is, they will be ignorant of their own ignorance.

Below is one of several passages where Epictetus censures what he considers poor philosophical training. Young men read the arguments of philosophers such as Crysippus, or his Epicurean challengers, in their philosophy lessons. They learn to play with rules of reasoning, and then consider themselves masters, with nothing more to

learn. Yet, they have not learned, and cannot teach, the most important lesson from philosophy: how to live a good life, worthy of a good human being.

Show us these things that we may see that you have in truth learned something from the philosophers. You say, No: but come and hear me read (philosophical) commentaries. Go away, and seek somebody to vomit them on. (He replies) And indeed I will expound to you the writings of Crysippus as no other man can: I will explain his text most clearly... Is it then for this that young men shall leave their country and their parents, that they may come to this place, and hear you explain words? Ought they not to return with a capacity to endure, to be active in association with others, free from passions, free from perturbation...⁴¹

As Crivelli explains in “Epictetus and Logic,” Epictetus does not demonize or reject demonstrative reason.⁴² Rather, he wants its role to be ancillary: it can help structure in proofs knowledge *that has been gained independently of it*, as well as defend it in debates. For Epictetus, self-knowledge and self-regulation are much more important, and philosophical studies ought to give them priority.

...for, universally, every faculty acquired by the uninstructed and weak brings with it the danger of these persons being elated and inflated by it. For by what means could one persuade a young man that *he ought not to become an appendage to them, but to make them an appendage to himself*? Does he not trample on all such reasons, and strut before us elated and inflated, not enduring that any man should reprove him and remind him of what he has neglected...? Do I take away these faculties that you possess? By no means; for neither I do take away the faculty of seeing. But if you ask me what is the good of man, I cannot mention to you anything else than that it is a certain disposition of the will with respect to appearances. (my emphasis)⁴³

The fact that Epictetus states, here and elsewhere, that such exercises ought to be an “appendix,” and only have the role to clarify, corroborate, and test,⁴⁴ shows that, for him, demonstrative reason has no major role in helping humans *acquire* important knowledge. Moving back to Shaftesbury, I will now argue that the narrative in TM show that the role of demonstrative reason is similar to the one Epictetus assigns to it: demonstrative reason *corroborates, clarifies, and tests*.

The Moralists: the narrative

Let me restate the problems. Gill claims that Shaftesbury’s search for a “reasonable enthusiasm” seems doomed by the inadequacy of Theocles’ demonstrations, and the connection between a proof and enthusiasm is psychologically implausible. Yet, if Philocles’ enthusiasm is not caused by the demonstrations, it is not clear what makes it reasonable. Worse, it would seem that,

given the failure of Theocles' proofs, both his and Philocles' enthusiasm must be as unreasonable as the fanatic's. I have already shown that Shaftesbury's texts on enthusiasm support the view that for him reasonableness lies in being open to rational scrutiny, rather than in being caused by demonstrative reason. In this section, I will focus on the narrative in *TM*, and show that Theocles' proofs are not meant to be the cause of Philocles' enthusiasm: rather, just as for Epictetus, the role of demonstrative reason is an ancillary role of clarification and testing.

TM consists of a long letter to Palemon from Philocles. It begins by summarizing a conversation with Palemon (Part I). Philocles then narrates his memorable visit to his friend Theocles, the "sociable enthusiast." At the beginning of Part II, Philocles arrives at Theocles' mansion and finds him in the countryside, reading his beloved Virgil. Theocles tries to persuade Philocles, who is in a rather cynical mood, that loving humanity overall despite its imperfections is no more difficult than loving "the people of old Rome" despite their well-known failings. This argument does not persuade Philocles, who needs a less abstract object of love. Theocles promises that he will show Philocles some "faint and distant view" of a proper object (II.1).

As the evening proceeds (2.IV), dinner guests arrive, one of them the personification of ill-mannered bigotry. The guests cajole Theocles into offering a speech described as "theological" and "philosophical." Theocles offers a version of the argument from design, insisting that unity and harmony are proof of a benevolent ruling mind. The argument is vulnerable to several criticisms, as Gill remarks.⁴⁵

Shaftesbury anticipates some such criticism in the form of an objection raised by Philocles. Our world, Philocles suggests, could just be a fleeting, tiny island of order and harmony in an infinite sea of chaos, in danger of being swallowed at any time.⁴⁶ The fact that we experience harmony and beauty is not decisive; in fact, our experience is marred by suffering, which might be evidence that the harmony we perceive is fleeting or perhaps imaginary. The objection is immediately dropped,⁴⁷ and Philocles moves to a different challenge that Theocles answers easily.⁴⁸

Later (II.5), Philocles defends Theocles' theism against the bigot who seeks evidence for God in miracles and prodigies of all kind. Evidence for the existence of an intelligent benevolent designer is found in order and harmony, not in breaches thereof, argues Philocles; he then clarifies that he has been playing the part of a theist for the sake of the argument, without actually embracing theism. This confirms that, even though his objections have been answered, at the end of the evening Philocles is unconvinced by Theocles' demonstrations. It is clear that, at this point, demonstrative reason has not "caused" enthusiasm, or even persuasion.

It was not intended to do so. Theocles does not engage in his philosophical sermon to cause enthusiasm in Philocles. In Part II, he is described as offering his arguments almost as a theatrical performance, at the insistence of his dinner guests. If Theocles' plan were to cause enthusiasm in Philocles through his proofs, he would have been more effective staging this conversation with Philocles in a quiet office, rather than at a dinner party, with the sometimes disruptive presence of others.

It is only in Part III, after Philocles climbs the hill at dawn to find Theocles, and the latter raises his voice in a lyrical praise, that Philocles experiences enthusiasm.

Even *before* Theocles begins expressing his “divine thoughts” aloud, Philocles feels the presence of “some divinity,” as he admits:

For well I see, methinks, that without any such preparations *some divinity has approached us and already moves in you...* We are on the most beautiful part of the hill, and the sun, now ready to rise, draws off the curtain of night and shows us the open scene of nature in the plains below. Begin! (My emphasis)⁴⁹

Theocles then offers his poetry to the deity. He soon interrupts his enthusiastic outburst: Philocles admits that his heart is moved, but his reason resists. While he begs Theocles to continue and silence his nagging reason, because he wants to continue to experience such a pleasant feeling, Theocles interrupts his poetic outburst and gives way to “cool reason” again. The most plausible explanation for Theocles’ interruption is that he does not want to take advantage of what he calls a “warm fit” of his friend’s imagination, and possibly give rise to the wrong kind of enthusiasm, that is, the kind that might later induce Philocles to reject rational scrutiny as disruptive to such pleasant feeling.⁵⁰ In the reasonable enthusiast, feeling and reason do not conflict, but Philocles does not seem to be at that stage yet. Hence, the necessity for a “cool reason” break.

Theocles wants to be sure that Philocles’ enthusiasm is a response to the *real* presence of beauty and harmony, rather than to an enflamed imagination (as is the enthusiasm of bigots). This is why he proceeds to demonstrate, “in the cool ways of reason,” the existence of that one principle of unity, beauty, and goodness. If proof had been necessary and sufficient, as Gill claims, Theocles’ “philosophical sermon” should have been sufficient to cause Philocles’ enthusiasm at the dinner table: after all, by his own admission, Philocles’ objections had all been answered.⁵¹

Therefore, we must conclude that, as a narrative device, the aesthetic experience in the park (the beautiful landscape, the colors of the sky at dawn, Theocles’ poetry) is rooted in Shaftesbury’s conviction that “divine” enthusiasm is an emotional response that can only be elicited in a certain state of unperturbed contemplation, untroubled by a hypertrophic imagination. Natural as well as poetic beauty is conducive to this state of contemplation. Yet reason, while not the cause of enthusiasm, must not be pushed aside: it must be embraced.

Once Philocles admits that the argument conquered his reason’s resistance, the two go back to enjoying their enthusiastic fervor. Again, it is evident that it is not *reason* that causes Philocles’ enthusiasm: it is the natural beauty that surrounds him, as well as the genius and beauty evoked by Theocles’ poetry. Ultimately, this “reasonable enthusiasm” is such because it is an *appropriate* emotional response in front of *real* beauty and harmony: nothing is more beautiful than the Mind or Deity invoked by Theocles, the source of all existing goodness and beauty.⁵²

That good enthusiasm must be reality based, that Theocles suspends his “sensible madness” in order to make sure that Philocles is not falling into actual madness, should also answer Ditzka’s worry about an incompatibility between the goals of enthusiasm (especially the rhetorical kind) and those of rational dialogue: while a

passage in Misc. II.2 suggests that Theocles overplays his enthusiasm for his friend's sake, Shaftesbury's narration shows that the intent is not to manipulate, but to make sure that the correct, reality-based form of love, or enthusiasm, is raised.⁵³

What makes Theocles' enthusiasm "reasonable," then, is the fact that it is attuned to the real order of things. Obviously, demonstrative reasoning can be among the means of assessing reality; yet, as we have seen, for Shaftesbury, its intrinsic limitations will not allow it to access the deeper unity and harmony of the universe. The proof of the existence of God offered the evening before does not fully convince Philocles: it is only after he is able to experience the presence of the deity through the perception of the harmony of nature that he accepts Theocles' theism. The role of demonstrative reason lies in scrutinizing enthusiasm and in avoiding the excesses of fanaticism; or, in plain English, to keep enthusiasm "grounded." Theocles does not hide behind faith, mystery or authority: he offers arguments that show that his belief in the existence and nature of the deity is tenable.

What is *reasonable*?

There are serious flaws in both of Theocles' arguments for the existence of God. His argument from design is largely vulnerable; the argument based on mind as the principle of unity is also problematic, for reasons that I cannot address here. For the purposes of this paper, however, the question is whether or not the failure to offer a flawless argument critically undermines Shaftesbury's notion of a reasonable enthusiasm.

It seems that, had Theocles met a more aggressive opponent, such as Hume's Philo (or maybe Cicero's Cotta),⁵⁴ and had he been forced to admit defeat, he should either renounce his enthusiasm, or be considered unreasonable, maybe a fanatic. Theocles' enthusiasm, however, is Shaftesbury's enthusiasm. Therefore, if Gill is right in claiming that reasonable enthusiasm depends on successful demonstrative reason as a necessary condition, a large part of Shaftesbury's project is endangered. Shaftesbury would be forced to acknowledge the impossibility of the brand of theism he cherishes; and while some aspects of his moral theory could be salvaged without his assumptions about a benevolent deity, Shaftesbury thought that his ethical system depended on his theism.⁵⁵ More than the reasonableness of Theocles' enthusiasm is at stake.

I suggest, however, that the standard for reasonableness is lower than the one set by Gill. If I have successfully argued that the task of reason is not to cause enthusiasm, but to *test* it, it seems that, in order to pass this test, the object of enthusiasm must be shown *not to be in conflict* with reason. This standard is extremely vague: it might mean something as broad as "being not logically impossible," a standard that is clearly overly inclusive. Many of those whom Shaftesbury describes as unreasonable enthusiasts have implausible, even repugnant beliefs, but not logically impossible. Shaftesbury would certainly have wanted a more stringent criterion.

However, for Shaftesbury, the *feeling* of enthusiasm, in and of itself, is evidence for the existence of the deity. While it is not possible here to expand on Shaftesbury's discussion of our sentimental response to the presence or absence of harmony (a notion that underpins several of his doctrines, including ethics and aesthetics), he does assert that such response is what can take us beyond the limits of

reason and allow us to perceive the harmony and unity of the infinite whole and its divine mind.⁵⁶ Reason and enthusiasm need to support each other: relying on the one and not on the other, for Shaftesbury, is why both philosophy and religion go awry.

Because of the need for both reason and sentiment, Shaftesbury does not need a completely flawless argument: he needs a plausible one. Philocles' Lovcraftian hypothesis, while interesting and powerful, does not prove that the argument from design is false, as Theocles notes during the third day.⁵⁷ We experience order and lawfulness, we do *not* experience the hypothetical ocean of chaos surrounding it; and Shaftesbury's benevolent principle of order would allow, in fact *must* allow, disorder and suffering in lower systems for the sake of the whole.

Bad enthusiasm is undermined by reason, then, because the enthusiast's beliefs can be *easily* shown to be implausible. Moreover, for Shaftesbury, religious claims must be consistent with the evidence that comes from our natural affections, as he explains in IVM.

Conclusion

If Theocles and his fellow theists respond emotionally to beauty and goodness as evidence of the presence of a benevolent deity, and if there is a plausible, if not watertight, argument to support the claim that it exists, theists are well advised to pay attention to the concurrence between their sentiments and their reason: their enthusiasm qualifies as reasonable. If there is a conflict between sentiment and reason (as with Philocles during Theocles' rapture), then the right course of action is to engage in philosophical inquiry, rather than muzzle one's reason. This claim is certainly vulnerable to objections; but it is not irrational. Moreover, it is consistent with Shaftesbury's philosophical attitude and the number of passages in which he denounces humans' search for demonstrative certainty.

There is a tension here, to be sure. Shaftesbury wants to preserve a role for rational proofs and dialogue because he is aware of the devastating consequences of uncontrolled emotions and anti-intellectualism in general. At the same time, Shaftesbury is also aware of the failures caused by the unchallenged supremacy of the method of demonstration in philosophy.

Shaftesbury's solution to this tension is to argue for sentiment as a source of knowledge, in the form of some response to the objective fact of harmony, be it moral, aesthetic, or natural harmony. But the input of sentiment must be such that it can be tested and shown to be compatible with rational scrutiny. It is a matter of debate whether Shaftesbury addresses this tension in a manner that is acceptable to today's reader, or not. But his attempt to address it is a sign of his modernity.

References

¹ *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (from now on, *Letter*) was written in 1707 and published anonymously in 1708, before being included in the first edition of *Characteristics* in 1711.

² All quotes from *Characteristics* are from: *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). 3 vols. Available at http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Fperson=3785&Itemid=28. Quotes from *Askemata* (notebooks containing private spiritual

exercises on the model of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*) and letters are from *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*. Ed. by Benjamin Rand. (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1900; from now on, Rand). Shaftesbury's life and philosophical development have been discussed in Robert Voitle's scholarly biography: Voitle, R., *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

³ Voitle (1984), Ch. VIII.

⁴ Enthusiasm refers to delusional claims of direct divine inspiration or visions, sometimes connected with disruptive or downright criminal behavior. The claims themselves, for many philosophers and theologians (especially among Protestants) was considered a form of superstition. Shaftesbury himself sometimes uses "enthusiasm" and "superstition" as synonyms in his *Letter*. More consistently, though, he uses the adjective "superstition" to label a specific creed or group, and the label "enthusiasm" to label a family of psychological attitudes. In his Essay X: "On Superstition and Enthusiasm," Hume will draw a distinction between superstition and enthusiasm based on psychological features, such as excessive depression or elation of spirits. In his description of enthusiasm, Hume focuses on an aspect that has captured much of the attention of enthusiasm critics: the ungovernability of enthusiasts, much less likely than the superstitious to be drawn back in the folds of a church because of their conviction of a personal relationship with God.

⁵ An excellent discussion of such reactions can be found in Heyd, M., *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the 17th and early 18th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

⁶ Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*. (1662: Augustan Reprint Society Publ. n. 118. Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1966). See, in particular, Heyd 1995, Ch. 3.

⁷ As Heyd writes: "In designating religious eccentrics as "mentally sick," the critics of enthusiasm imperceptibly redefined religious orthodoxy in medical terms of mental health and balance, rather than, or at least side by side with, theological terms of correct faith.... This shift is also noticeable in the increasing reliance on individual human reason alongside, if not instead of, Scripture." (P. 10) Heyd also analyzes the origins of the medical language in Shaftesbury's *Letter*. On the medicalization of enthusiasm (from evidence of demonic possession to mental illness) see also Manuel, F.E., *The Eighteenth Century Confront the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), chapter II.

⁸ Shaftesbury's reliance on disgust as a response to fanaticism reaches a high point in the jarring *The Adept Ladys, or The Angelick Sect*, which went unpublished until its inclusion in Vol. I of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury: Standard Edition (Eds: Emmerich, Benda. Salzburg: Frommann-Holzboog, 1981). See Voitle, ch. V; Amir, L.B., *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard* (Albany: Suny Press, 2014), ch. 1, and Hoover, S., "Voice and Accents": Enthusiastic Characterization in Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*," in *18th Century Life* 37/1 (2013): 72-96. Amir, in particular, considers *The Adept Ladys* the kind of mean spirited "buffoonery" for which Shaftesbury later reproaches himself.

⁹ Heyd (1995), Ch. 8. Klein, L., *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) In particular, see chapter 9.

¹⁰ The elderly gentleman who, in *The Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody* (included in *Characteristics*, Vol. II; from now on, TM), attacks any form of rational inquiry is an instance of bad enthusiasm in a conservative Anglican. However, religion is not a necessary condition for enthusiasm: in *Miscellaneous Reflections* (a series of commentaries and expansions on the other writings, added when Shaftesbury completed the three volumes of *Characteristics* for publication in 1711; from now on, Misc.), II, Ch. 2, for example Shaftesbury, citing Cudworth, claims that atheists are enthusiast.

¹¹ On Spinoza, superstition, and politics, see James, S. *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and di Poppa, F., “Diagnosing Superstition: Superstition and Piety in Spinoza’s Political Philosophy,” in *Eppur Si Muove: Doing History and Philosophy of Science with Peter Machamer*. A Festschrift Edited by: Adams, M., Biener, Z., Feest, U., and Sullivan, J. (Springer, forthcoming) While Shaftesbury was certainly acquainted with Spinoza’s thought (his connections with thinkers such as Bayle, Limborch, and Le Clerc, if nothing else, would have brought Spinoza’s ideas to his attention), the influence of the latter should not be overestimated. Spinoza’s *ordo geometricus* seems to be included in the kind of arid philosophy that Shaftesbury (unfairly) rejects as disconnected from genuine human concerns.

¹² Shaftesbury’s respect for Bayle’s philosophical intellect and integrity is explicit in a 1706 response to a letter to Basnage, in which the latter offered his condolences for the loss of a good friend. See (Rand), 1900, 372-374.

¹³ Pierre Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14.23, ‘Compel Them to Come In, That My House May Be Full’* (Kilkullen, Kukathas, eds; Online Library of Liberty) Available at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/bayle-a-philosophical-commentary-on-these-words-of-the-gospel>; Israel, J., *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Ch. 3. In this chapter, Israel does not include Shaftesbury, but he argues persuasively that Bayle offers the most comprehensive defense of religious toleration.

¹⁴ “...as there are strange Ferments in the Blood, which in many Bodys occasion an extraordinary Discharge; so in Reason too, there are heterogeneous Particles which must be thrown off by Fermentation... They are certainly as ill Physicians in the *Body-Politic*, who wou’d needs be tampering with these mental Eruptions; and under the specious pretence of healing this Itch of Superstition, and saving Souls from the Contagion of Enthusiasm, shou’d set all Nature in an uproar, and turn a few innocent Carbuncles into an Inflammation and mortal Gangrene...” *Letter*, Sect. II. Just as Spinoza did, and in opposition to Thomas Hobbes, Shaftesbury sees repression as a source of political instability, rather than a remedy against it.

¹⁵ Some of the groups targeted by More’s *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* were non-violent, e.g. Quakers.

¹⁶ Shaftesbury even suggests that, had the early Christians been ridiculed, rather than tortured and killed, Christianity might have had a much shorter lifespan.

¹⁷ The freedom to engage in humor on even the most serious matters, such as religion, is defended in *Sensus Communis-An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor*, where the blame for bad, destructive wit is placed squarely on the shoulder of intolerant religious leaders calling for the persecution of dissent. In *Misc.* I-II, the discussion of ridicule is much more restrained.

¹⁸ E.g. *Remarks Upon the Letter of a Lord Concerning Enthusiasm*, by Edward Fowler, Bishop of Gloucester. For a discussion of such criticisms, see Heyd, ch. 8.

¹⁹ G.W. Leibniz, “Remarks on the Three Volumes Entitled Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times... 1711,” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. A Selection Translated and Edited, with an Introduction by Leroy M. Loemker. (Dordrech, Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1989) Vol. II p. 629-635 (from now on, Remarks). Leibniz received the volumes from Pierre Coste, and found much to approve in Shaftesbury’s philosophy, claiming that his own *Essays on Theodicy* would have considerably benefited from Shaftesbury’s ideas, had he known of them when writing the work. *TM* was, understandably, much to Leibniz’s taste; but he also expressed warm approval for Shaftesbury’s admiration of the Ancient. In an age that Leibniz found obsessed with

disparaging old philosophies, he was relieved to find an author who “instead of being contemptuous of ancient language, the humanities, and criticism... realizes the importance of these fields, even in relation with religion.” (p. 634)

²⁰ Shaftesbury tries to draw a distinction between “true wit” and “false wit,” claiming that the latter should be discouraged and even forbidden. He approves of Greek and Roman censorship of “licentious wit” in *Soliloquy*. Yet, he fails to offer satisfying criteria for true wit.

²¹ Shaftesbury’s work and letters show increasing hostility towards Locke’s moral theory, which he considered more dangerous than Hobbes’ (Hobbes’ reputation largely undermined his philosophical efforts). The evolving relationship between Locke and Shaftesbury has been analyzed by Voitle. See also Darwall, S., *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought, 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Ch. 6.

²² See Voitle, 1984, Ch. VIII, for a chronology and discussion of *The Sociable Enthusiast* and *TM*.

²³ Prince, M., *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ch. 2.

²⁴ Gill, M., *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 114.

²⁵ Gill’s reading of *TM* is the following: Theocles offers proofs of the existence of God to his skeptical friend Philocles in order to cause him to become a “reasonable enthusiast” like himself. I will show in a later section that this reading is mistaken, and that the goal of the proofs is not to cause Philocles to experience enthusiasm. Shaftesbury therefore does not hold the implausible psychological view that Gill ascribes him.

²⁶ Dykstal, T., *The Luxury of Skepticism: Politics, Philosophy, and Dialogue in the English Public* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2001), Ch. 3.

²⁷ In a critique of traditional metaphysics and epistemology offered in *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (Part III Sect. 1; from now on, *Soliloquy*), Shaftesbury famously writes that “The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is, *by a System*.”

²⁸ Rudeness is often associated with both intellectual and moral defects, in Shaftesbury’s discussions. He goes so far as to establish a strong connection between good manners and philosophy, writing in *Misc. III Ch. 1* that “To philosophize, in a just signification, is but to carry good breeding a step higher.” See Klein (1994) for a discussion of the notion and value of “politeness.”

²⁹ Rand (1900) p. 33.

³⁰ *Misc.* is presented as a series of critical reflection on the previous volumes of *Characteristics*, where Shaftesbury refers to himself as “the author.” They often complement the arguments offered in the writings in the previous two volumes.

³¹ As Paul Kelleher remarks in Ch. I of *Making Love. Sentiment and Sexuality in 18th Century British Literature*, “Given that love is identified as an affective force that moves the individual from a smaller and lower to a larger and higher level of experience, one would expect Shaftesbury to offer a thorough accounting of how love perform this task of connection, mediation, and elevation. However... he often paints a picture with broad strokes and few details.” (43). Kelleher offers a nuanced analysis of Shaftesbury’s ambivalence towards love as *affection* and love as *passion* (which would involve texts describing enthusiasm as loss of self-mastery, as in Theocles’ “fit” in *TM*), drawing on Stoic and Platonic influences. Kelleher, P., *Making Love: Sentiment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (London: Bucknell University Press, 2015) A discussion of Shaftesbury’s understanding of love would take too much space.

³² Shaftesbury does not use the term “God” in his philosophical writings. See Grean (1967), Ch. 4.

³³ As Hoover writes, “Shaftesbury distinguishes between the kind of enthusiasm that is validated by attachment to proper objects, such as the social affections, and the kind of enthusiasm that, lacking such attachments, demonstrates only selfishness and disorder.” (Hoover, 2013: 74) Hoover, however, argues that the positioning of Letter as the first text of *Characteristicks*, “religious enthusiasm is acknowledged and set aside.” This is inaccurate: texts in other works, from *Inquiry* to *TM* to *Misc*, show that there is an ongoing worry with this distinction. This keeps the question of the role of reason at the forefront.

³⁴ Shaftesbury is no friend of “fashionable freethinking,” which he considers as dogmatic as authoritarian religions such as the Anglican High Church. However, he distinguishes philosophical inquiry from “fashionable freethinking,” contrary to the zealot in *TM*.

³⁵ “Now, Philocles, said he, inform me, How have I appear’d to you in my Fit? Seem’d it a sensible kind of Madness, like those Transports which are permitted to our Poets? or was it downright Raving?” *TM*, III. 1. Kelleher argues that this oxymoron is influenced by Plato’s language in *Symposium*.

³⁶ *Misc*. III.1. *Inquiry* is published in the same volume as *TM*.

³⁷ The influence of Stoicism on Shaftesbury’s philosophy has been well studied. One of his works, *Askemata*, is a private collection of philosophical reflections and exhortations modeled on *Marcus Aurelius’ Meditations*. For a discussion of Shaftesbury’s connections to Stoicism, in addition to Voitle, 1984, see Grean, S., *Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1967) and Rivers, I., *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. 2: *From Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Ch. 2.

³⁸ See Dykstal (2001), on the form of skepticism acceptable to Shaftesbury: skepticism about reason is a good tool, but Shaftesbury shows little tolerance for ethical skepticism. This is also shown in his rejection of “fashionable freethinking.”

³⁹ See also *Misc*. IV.2: “Or how dispense with these *darker* Disquisitions and *Moon-light* Voyages, when we have to deal with a sort of *Moon-blind* Wits, who, tho very acute and able in their kind, may be said to renounce *Day-light*, and *extinguish*, in a manner, the bright visible outward World, by allowing us to *know* nothing beside what we can *prove*, by strict and formal *Demonstration*?”

⁴⁰ Remarks, p. 630.

⁴¹ *Discourses*, Book III ch. xxi. In *The Discourses of Epictetus with the Enchiridion and Fragments*. Reprinted from the Translation of George Long. London: George Bell and Sons, 1891. From now on, Long. Vol. II, p. 161-2.

⁴² Crivelli, P., “Epictetus and Logic.” In Scaltsas, T., and Mason, A. S. (eds.): *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On Epicurus’ overall positive attitude towards demonstrative reasoning, see also Barnes, J., *Logic and the Imperial Stoa* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Crivelli writes: “Epictetus’ criticism strongly suggests that... the study of logic and of his technical aspects was widespread in the first century AD, and that Epictetus’ strong interest in moral questions was more the exception than the rule in the Stoicism of his day” (p. 21) This is particularly interesting, because it shows another strong commonality between Shaftesbury and Epictetus, one that Shaftesbury would have not failed to notice. Both philosophers see themselves in a minority position in their time, when it comes to the role and methods of philosophy.

⁴³ *Discourses*, I.viii; Long vol. I, p. 37-8.

⁴⁴ *Enchiridion*, LI.

⁴⁵ Some of it will be offered a few decades later in Hume’s *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Hackett Academic Publishing, 1998) by the skeptic Philo.

⁴⁶ For the sake of brevity, I will label this the Lovecraft hypothesis, from the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, the famous author of science fiction and horror stories. A theme present in several of his most famous stories is that our world is an unstable and ephemeral island of order and peace about to be swallowed by cosmic blind chaos.

⁴⁷ Later, in Part III, Theocles admits that the Lovecraft hypothesis cannot be disproved directly. Yet, he argues, because a finite mind cannot know the interconnectedness of everything, it would be unfair to demand proof of order in every corner of the universe. This shifting the burden of proof on the opponent of the argument from design is unsatisfactory, and one is disappointed to see Philocles retreat so easily. Once Philocles admits the existence of the principle of unity and harmony, Theocles argues that it follows that all evil is only appearance, that is, it is merely a conflict between inferior systems of laws. In fact, triumphs Theocles, the strength of his theology is that it predicts and explains the appearance of evil.

⁴⁸ Philocles complains that humans are much weaker than other species, and do not have the hard-wired instincts that allow animals to survive and be independent at a much earlier age. Theocles answers that such “weaknesses” are a good, rather than a liability, because such weakness and largely dependent status is what “forces” us into society, and offers us the pleasure of the natural affections. A stronger version of this objections is offered by Philo in Hume’s *Dialogues*, part 12, where Philo points out that “a greater liking for work” would have much improved the human condition (arguably without undermining our dependence on society).

⁴⁹ *Characteristics*, p. 297-8.

⁵⁰ For this reason, Theocles’ “fit” as a form of morally ambiguous Platonic eros, intent on seducing Philocles, as Kelleher does, is, in my view, a stretch, although Kelleher is correct in emphasizing homoerotic elements in Shaftesbury’s language. Shaftesbury, of course, sternly condemns “unnatural” sexual relationships not finalized to reproduction in IVM, and the eros he expresses is purely spiritual.

⁵¹ The exception is the Lovecraftian hypothesis, which Philocles, by his own admission, does not consider significant.

⁵² See *TM*, Part III, Sect. 2.

⁵³ “Even when his real Character comes on, he hardly dares stand it out; but to deal the better with his *Sceptick*-Friend, he falls again to personating, and takes up the Humour of the *Poet* and *Enthusiast*.” This supports the view that demonstrations alone are not supposed to trigger enthusiasm; this is true at the narrative level (Philocles is not, and is not supposed to, be ‘converted’ by proofs), as well as when it comes to Shaftesbury’s efforts to persuade his readers.

⁵⁴ Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum* influenced both Shaftesbury’s *TM* and Hume’s *Dialogues*: Cotta is the Academic skeptic. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*. Translated with Introduction and Explanatory Notes by G. P. Walsh (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997)

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Characteristics* p. 267.

⁵⁶ See Grean (1967), Ch. 5; Rivers (2000), Ch. 2.

⁵⁷ *TM* Part I Sect. 3.