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MORAL PERFECTION AND FREEDOM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, THIRD EARL OF SHAFTESBURY*

In this article, I juxtapose two themes in the philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713): moral perfection and freedom. Additionally, I indicate two other issues analysed by Shaftesbury: aesthetic experience and personal identity, which allow the overcoming, to some extent, of the rigour of Stoic moralism. These two themes were often treated separately, influenced by the reception of Shaftesbury's philosophy: his theory of beauty was seen as the beginning of the richly developing eighteenth-century British aesthetics,[1] while the issue of identity was viewed through the lens of the conclusions found in the philosophies of John Locke or David Hume.

For instance, Ben Mijuskovic[2] points out the similarity between Shaftesbury's and Hume's conceptions of identity. He contends, while rejecting Cartesian substantialism, that both philosophers present a concept in which the awareness of the self can be combined with a naturalistic explanation,

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[1] Jerome STOLNITZ, "On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 11, no. 43 (1963): 97–113; Dabney TOWNSEND, "Shaftesbury's Aesthetic Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41, no. 2 (1982): 205–13; Jorge V. ARREGUI and Pablo ARNAU, "Shaftesbury: Father or Critic of Modern Aesthetics?" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, no. 4 (1994): 350–62.

[2] Ben MIJUSKOVIC, "Hume and Shaftesbury on the Self," *Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 85 (1971): 324–36.

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where identity can be described similarly to the identity of plants or animals (despite changes over time). Mijuskovic recognizes the similarity between the two concepts, but overlooks a vital aspect of Hume's philosophy: by rejecting the Cartesian conception of *ego cogito*, Hume seeks the foundation of human identity on a social plane—in interaction with others. The continuity of self-awareness is maintained through participation in the network of social dependencies, which can be observed through a careful reading of his *Treatise*, especially if one pays attention to the role of sympathy as a condition for the "intimate presence" of the impression of the self.[3]

Developing this line of reasoning, one can ask to what extent the social plane influences the issue of human identity—and, consequently, human freedom—also in Shaftesbury's philosophy. Stanley Grean, in his influential monograph, also treats these two themes separately.[4] He describes the functionalist and activist description of the self in Shaftesbury's philosophy, founded on the structure of human affections, essentially in isolation from the existence of other subjects. Although he recognizes the dynamics of the structure of affections, whose harmony "given the right condition, it is realizable in degree",[5] he does not develop this idea further. Yet, since one of the determinants of this structure is natural affection (which Grean explicitly identifies with striving for social good), one can question to what degree the relations of an individual to others condition the development of human subjectivity and are the guarantee of freedom. Moreover, for Shaftesbury, aesthetic experience influences social relations and morality. His concept of beauty is not merely a theoretical contemplation, but a practical tool for shaping one's character and social attitudes. Aesthetic experience, according to Shaftesbury, sensitizes us to beauty and moral and social values, which are integral to our identity and freedom. The internal harmony we achieve through aesthetic experience influences our relationships with others and how we conceive of ourselves.

[3] This contradicts the scepticism at the end of the first book. However, the contradiction disappears when we notice that earlier in the same chapter, Hume introduces the concept of sympathy, "the most remarkable quality of human nature." See his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest Mossner (London: Penquin Books, 1985), 367–68. This identity is not substantial, but arises within the framework of social relationships defined by sympathy and the morality built upon them. A similar interpretation can be found in Amelie Oxenberg RORTY, "'Pride Produces the Idea of Self': Hume on Moral Agency," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 3 (1990). On my interpretation, I also see a similar understanding of personal identity in Shaftesbury.

[4] Stanley GREAN, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1967), 137–83.

[5] GREAN, 150.

In their recent works, Laurent Jaffro and Ruth Boeker have proposed interpretations of human subjectivity by analysing the relationship between passions and asking questions about the possibility of controlling them: whether rational will can control passions and whether virtue that opposes passions—a lasting moral disposition—is achievable. Analysing the "story of an amour" discussed by Shaftesbury in his *Soliloquy, or an Advice to an Author*, Jaffro argues that such virtue is an unattainable ideal for the average person,[6] for whom the "strategy of Cyrus" remains, i.e. avoiding conflicts between the rational will and passions. Usually we are doomed to failure: the will advocating moral virtue almost always loses the duel with passions. Stoic virtue turns out to be the destiny of a narrow group of moral heroes. Boeker softens this position, pointing to the possibility of grading moral disposition, making the right choice no longer a task reserved only for Hercules, who chooses the goddess of virtue and rejects the charms of the goddess of pleasure. I develop this interpretation, but I believe it requires a threefold correction.

Firstly, while indeed the *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* should be considered as a whole showing different stages of the formation of moral attitudes, I do not think that this collection is arranged as linearly as Boeker suggests: I believe that the individual writings contained in this volume serve to present different aspects of this issue. *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*—the first work in the collection—does not necessarily describe the lowest stage of the process, in which a person is subjected to blind passions. This also makes it possible to see a positive aspect of enthusiasm, especially in its aesthetic dimension (as presented in *The Moralists*). Moreover, an excessive belief in the coherence of the *Characteristics* leads Boeker to overlook the private notes in Shaftesbury's *Askêmata* (previously published as *Philosophical Regimen* by Benjamin Rand,[7] where he discusses a number of issues significant to this problem.

Secondly, the issue of human freedom raised by Boeker should be linked to the problem of identity: Shaftesbury's abandonment of Cartesian substantialism means that identity is the result of internal tension, it is not something given and constantly present, but is rhapsodic.

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[6] Laurent JAFFRO, "Cyrus' Strategy. Shaftesbury on Human Frailty and the Will," in *New Ages, New Opinions. Shaftesbury in his World and Today*, ed. Patrick Mueller (Bristol: Peter Lang, 2014), 159ff.

[7] Anthony A. C. SHAFTESBURY, *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London–New York: Swan Sonnenschein, The Macmillan Co., 1900); SHAFTESBURY, *Askêmata*, vol. 2/6, ed. Wolfram Benda et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011).

Finally, it is necessary to point out the dependence between identity, freedom, and living in society, which closely links Shaftesbury's philosophy with the ideas of later freethinkers such as John Toland or Anthony Collins.

AFFECTIONS, PASSIONS, AND HUMAN IDENTITY

In his *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*, Shaftesbury presents the structure of human subjectivity by referring to the concept of affection. This term denotes not merely a perceivable emotional state, but rather directed internal inclinations that have their specific objects. As Grean writes, "affections are spontaneous emotions or dispositions generated from within the structure of the personality…, natural potentialities of the human personality, developed or realized in different degrees by different persons."[8] Shaftesbury distinguishes three types of affections: natural, private, and unnatural. The fundamental difference between the first two and the third lies in their purposive nature—the former are inclinations aimed at achieving one of two kinds of goods: the good of a whole or the good of an individual, whereas unnatural affections lead to actions that do not realize any good. Unlike the first two, they are motivating forces acting externally and, so to speak, mechanically. Thus, although the action of all affections should be considered in terms of motivation for action and passions experienced as a result of these actions, they differ in their essence: natural and private affections can be the subject of conscious choice, whereas unnatural affections result from the unreflective influence of emotions.

However, the opposition between the two goods—the good of an individual and the good of the whole—is temporary. Ultimately, the self does not exist in complete isolation from the whole it co-creates, whether it is the family, society, mankind, or nature. By distinguishing natural and private affections, Shaftesbury opposes the theories advocating the primacy of self-interest and egoistic motivation (e.g. by Thomas Hobbes or Bernard Mandeville). Consistent pursuit of only private good turns into its opposite, consisting of satisfying momentary whims and desires: an affection that would be entirely private would reveal its "unnatural" character. Moreover, pursuing the good of an individual requires not only considering the good of various wholes in which an individual participates, but also treating one's self as a

[8] GREAN, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy*, 149.

particular whole of individual transient states defined by variable relationships between affections and passions.

Thus, Shaftesbury aims to develop a disposition in which people recognize themselves as part of successive wholes, understand the relationships between them, and acknowledge an internal structure in which one's inner self is also treated not as transient and purposefully unrelated emotional states, but as organized around a unifying principle. The process of becoming aware of these dependencies occurs in three fundamental stages. The first is the recognition that action results from the influence of passions; the second is the stage where the goal of action is understood, but there may be a conflict between the good of the self and the good of what the self is not; and finally, the third stage is where this opposition is overcome, accompanied by the realization that the good of an individual can be achieved only within the framework of a higher-order good.

The structure of affections identified by Shaftesbury is formal: it describes only the types of motivation, the "springs of actions", rather than the specific goods that are the objects of pursuit. However, recognizing the forces governing human inclinations is a condition for emerging from the stage of unreflective submission to passions. The internal form determined by the structure of affections is described in the *Inquiry* as an organic, dynamical whole situated between two extremes: harmony and disharmony.

In this context, Shaftesbury asserts:

> 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 … to want them, is certain misery and ill; … to have the private or self-affections too strong, or beyond their degree of subordinacy to the kindly and natural is also miserable; and … to have the unnatural affections, namely 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.[9]

Thus the inner life of the mind oscillates between complete disorder, when one is at the mercy of momentary passions ("miserable in the highest degree"), and action subjected to reflection, through which one can identify the goals that actions serve. When guided by reflection, action can be di-

[9] Anthony A. C. SHAFTESBURY, *Inquiry*, in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 200.

rected towards both satisfying one's own good and achieving the general good. However, it must be emphasized that both the concept of the self and the concept of the whole are formal constructs. Only further reflection allows these concepts to be filled with content and enables an understanding, not only of who constitutes the centre of these actions, but also of what is the whole to which one belongs—it then becomes not merely a whole but a system of interconnected elements. Each disposition of the mind is a state determined by the tension resulting from the interaction of inclinations directed both towards one's centre (a self) and towards a whole, and is subject to various disturbances arising from the influence of unreflected passions.

The justification for and the development of this concept can be found in a brief text *Pathologia: A Theory of the Passions* (1706), which discusses the Stoic conception of passions. The distinctions made in this work are based on a threefold contrast: (a) good and evil, (b) their objects, which can be either actually present or merely imagined as future possibilities, and (c) two types of passions: constant and perturbed.[10]

For example, an emotion subject to disturbance related to present good is described as "overwhelming pleasure or sensuous delight", while the emotion related to present evil is "grief or pain, the mere misery due to a present ill"—a state that is always unstable owing to both the variability of external circumstances and the nature of the feelings themselves, which, once fulfilled, lead to their opposite. Constant emotions, on the other hand, include joy (in relation to present good) and will (in relation to imagined good)—"desire, not susceptible to be frustrated, of a true and supreme good" and "caution, aversion, not susceptible to be frustrated, towards a true ill".[11]

In the context of mental qualities (moral beauty and ugliness), one can speak of perturbed and variable emotions such as pride and shame (related to present goods), as well as affectation, vanity, or timidity (related to future goods). The opposites of these variable emotions are "sublimity or magnanimity, i.e., joy, raising up the mind upon the knowledge of the beautiful or laudable that is present" and "philosophy or philosophical ardour, i.e., the will desiring the beautiful or the laudable," as well as "modesty or decency, i.e., caution, avoiding the ugly or the ill-admired".[12] In relation to emotions concerning internal beauty or ugliness, this tension is characterized by pairs of

[10] Anthony A. C. SHAFTESBURY, "Pathologia. A Theory of the Passions," *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 2 (2013): 233.

[11] SHAFTESBURY, 233.

[12] SHAFTESBURY, 233.

variable emotions: pride–humility and affectation–timidity, where the former is associated with outward expansion and the latter with inhibition. For constant emotions, one can speak of enduring magnanimity or the pursuit of beauty versus the inhibition resulting from a desire to avoid ugliness.

The invariability of passions is guaranteed by acquiring proper knowledge about their nature and the place they occupy in the self. Passions—especially those concerning possible good and evil—arise from images suggested by the imagination, creating a feedback loop: passions, such as fear or apprehension, suggest images that, in turn, stoke increasingly turbulent emotions, which cause disharmony in affections and push the self in various directions. An example of such turbulence is enthusiasm, which signifies subjection to a violent flood of passions (e.g., panic or religious fanaticism). Overcoming internal chaos and developing a moral disposition that guides one towards the right choice rather than being swayed by fluctuating emotions requires both knowledge of the nature of passions and the proper formation of opinions about what is good and evil, as well as the reinforcement of this moral disposition.

The first of these is the recognition arising from the opposition between two worldviews: the mechanistic, as represented by, for example, the ancient atomists and, in the times closer to Shaftesbury, by Hobbes, and the organicist vision, in which each element is in dynamic relation with every other element, and there is "union and coherence" among things.[13] In the first model, the elements of nature are atoms: indivisible, devoid of force, inert, and subject to external influences. However, Shaftesbury is more aligned with the organicist vision of nature, where each element interacts with others, forming a coherent system. In this structure, the element is not a material atom, but a particular nature—a source of forces and a centre of tension created by various dynamic interrelations.[14] An example of such a centre is a living organism, e.g., a tree which "lives, flourishes, and is still one and the same even when by vegetation and change of substance not one particle in it

[13] SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists*, in *Characteristics of Men*, 273.

[14] Owing to the influence of Stoicism on Shaftesbury's philosophy, it would be interesting to compare his concept of nature with the reconstruction presented by Johnny Christensen in *An Essay on the Unity of Stoic Philosophy*, particularly the concept of dynamic nature, whose elements are defined by the relationships of "tensional fields", see Johnny CHRISTENSEN, *An Essay on the Unity of Stoic Philosophy* (Copenhagen: Munsgaard, 1962), 30, 36. Shaftesbury's description of human affectivity and the analogy between the macrocosm and microcosm he emphasizes seem to justify such an interpretation.

remains the same".[15] The identity of such natures cannot be reduced to a collection of simple elements but constitutes a centre of interaction among sympathizing parts. Nature appears as a system of interrelated individual natures and their systems.

> Now in this which we call the universe, whatever the perfection may be of any particular systems or whatever single parts may have proportion, unity, or form within themselves, yet, if they are not united all in general in one system but are, in respect of one another, as the driven sands or clouds or breaking waves, then, there being no coherence in the whole, there can be inferred no order, no proportion and consequently no project or design. But, if none of these parts are independent but all apparently united, then is the whole a system complete, according to one simple, consistent, and uniform design.… Neither man, nor any other animal, though ever so complete a system of parts as to all within, can be allowed in the same manner complete as to all without, but must be considered as having a further relation abroad to the system of his kind. So even this system of his kind to the animal system, this to the world, our earth, and this again to the bigger world and to the universe. All things in this world are united.[16]

The paradigmatic experience of such harmony is provided by aesthetic contemplation—especially the beauty of nature analysed in *The Moralists*. However, this harmony characterizes nature, considered both as a macrocosm and a microcosm. In both cases, the goal is to develop an attitude in which, despite apparent contradictions, a purposeful principle is revealed—a "simple, consistent, and uniform design."

In relation to the microcosm, the human mind, the beginning of this process is the realization that it cannot be reduced to disconnected images suggested by an imagination driven by passions. These images become the object of reflection—as images presented to the self, provoking specific tensions and actions.

> In whatever manner we consider of this, we shall find still, that every reasoning or reflecting creature is by his nature forced to endure the review of his own mind and actions, and to have representations of himself and his inward affairs constantly passing before obvious to him, and revolving in his mind.[17]

[15] SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists*, 273.
[16] SHAFTESBURY, 274.
[17] SHAFTESBURY, *An Inquiry*, 208.

The reflectiveness of actions, which is equivalent to defining their purpose, requires contemplation. An exercise in such contemplation is the inner dialogue, or soliloquy, which involves weighing the reasons behind choices in specific life situations. This process also ensures that the formal imperative to subordinate private affections to the natural—i.e. the recognition that individual good can only be realized within the good of the whole—is achieved through aesthetically impactful and passion-stirring images. Reflectiveness allows the mind to perceive, not only the pictures of the imagination, but also, thanks to the inner sense, the inner life of the mind, including its choices and inclinations.

> Thus the several motions, inclinations, passions, dispositions, and consequent carriage and behaviour of creatures in the various parts of life, being in several views or perspectives represented to the mind, which readily discerns the good and ill towards the species or public, there arises a new trial or exercise of the heart, which must either rightly and soundly affect what is just and right and disaffect what is contrary or corruptly affect what is ill and disaffect, what is worthy and good.[18]

The self, as the active centre of these choices, is each time a certain state of internal alignment of affections, manifesting itself as emotional tension. Consequently, when considering the issue of identity, Shaftesbury opposes Descartes's rationalist substantialism. The substantively conceived *ego cogito* can only be a metaphysical supposition. No experience teaches us of its existence: the sense of one's existence available in each specific, variable internal state does not determine the permanence and identity of individual selves. Although, from a first-person perspective, reflection allows one to identify with past choices and those yet to be made, this sense itself is variable and may be false. Moreover, unlike the identity of other living beings, reflective identity is not given, but requires constant effort and attention.

The irony with which Shaftesbury rejects Descartes's position[19] stems from the fact that, in his view, it contains several errors: it opposes the ego

[18] SHAFTESBURY, 173.

[19] "It will not, in this respect, be sufficient for us to use the seeming logic of a famous modern [Monsieur Descartes], and say 'We think, therefore we are,' which is a notably invented saying, after the model of that like philosophical proposition that 'What is, is.' Miraculously argued! 'If I am, I am.' Nothing more certain! For the Ego or I, being established in the first part of the proposition, the ergo, no doubt, must hold it good in the latter. But the question is, 'What constitutes the We or I?' And, 'Whether the I of this instant, be the same with that of any instant preceding,

to the *res extensa* reduced to a mechanism, arbitrarily assumes the existence of an immutable subject, and is theoretical and metaphysical rather than practical. Although it can be seen as expressing a specific religious desire for immortality, it contains no guidance for practical living. In contrast, Shaftesbury views subjectivity actively and processually: the self is not something permanent, always existing behind the scenes of human experiences, but something that appears as a result of tension in the moment of consciously made choices. Furthermore, this opens the possibility of the existence of various centres of activity – for example, in the situation of an internal conflict of values. When the desire to achieve fleeting goals gives way to pursuing a moral goal—the highest good, the good of the whole—we encounter an alignment of affections: the realization that what concerns me unfolds within a series of more general purposes.

It is crucial to recognize that in the *Pathologia*, the concept of will is explored primarily in the pursuit of internal harmony, which involves actions guided by a rational principle that upholds the good of the whole. Thus, in this sense, will does not embody the notion of freedom and independence as an unfettered choice. Will is neither a constant propensity towards free action, nor a force that arises independently to counteract passions. Instead, it denotes a reasoned desire to achieve specific goods based on rational premises. Therefore, it is determined not by mechanistic (unnatural) forces, but by teleological (natural) principles. A soliloquy, the persistent questioning about the choice of the good one should strive for, is only one of the three methods to develop the internal harmony and proper disposition. The other two—experiencing the beauty of nature and practising kind-hearted raillery—slightly soften the rigour of Stoic internal dialogues with oneself.

BEAUTY—THE STANDARD OF HARMONY

The most comprehensive discussion on beauty is found in the third part of *The Moralists*, where Theocles (Shaftesbury's *alter ego*) presents to Philocles the proper interpretation of the beauty of nature. This interpretation addresses in turn the beauty of "dead forms", of "forms that form", and ultimately, "the beauty of nature".[20] Phenomenal beauty—the first of the three—always

or to come.' For we have nothing but memory to warrant us: and memory may be false." SHAFTESBURY, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, in *Characteristics of Men*, 420.

[20] SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists*, in *Characteristics of Men*, 323.

refers back to spiritual beauty ("form that forms") which underlies phenomena. Thus the forms of human creations refer to the design at their foundation, and ultimately to the mind that is their source, while natural phenomena point to a natural purpose revealed through the entirety of experience. This understanding allows us to slightly adjust the interpretations by Jaffro and Boeker mentioned above.

According to Boeker, the first and lowest stage of personal improvement is the unreflective surrender to passions, which she describes as enthusiasm: "First, an individual may find themselves in a state of enthusiasm, in which they are governed by their passions. For instance, they may be overcome by erotic love, or drawn towards fanatic religious beliefs and practices. Enthusiasm often involves various forms of ecstasy, superstition, or fanaticism. In such a state, the individual is governed by passions and rarely has the desire or power to step out by themselves."[21] Given the context of *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, which was a response to the religious fanaticism of the French Prophets sect, this interpretation seems valid. However, apart from superstition or fanaticism, or the mere panic described in the *Letter*, *The Moralists* offers a different example of enthusiasm: the admiration inspired by the sublime beauty of nature. It is in such enthusiastic—a near-religious experience[22]—that the purposeful alignment of nature is revealed, being the world of living forms, where beauty is not merely phenomenal but ideal, subject to the divine designing principle.

Although enthusiasm can have various objects, unlike political or religious fanaticism, beauty gives us an aesthetic experience of the unity of nature—an experience in which the self is no longer opposed to nature, but becomes part of it. The aesthetic enthusiasm[23] reveals the organic purpose of

[21] Ruth BOEKER, "Shaftesbury on Liberty and Self-Mastery," in "New Perspectives on Agency in Early Modern Philosophy," special issue, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 27, no. 5 (2019): 740.

[22] As Shaftesbury declares, "we can admire nothing profoundly without a certain veneration" (SHAFTESBURY, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, 354).

[23] In his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or a Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds and Cure of Enthusiasme* (1662), Henry More pointed out that besides harmful enthusiasm, there can also exist "true and warrantable enthusiasm" (in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr. Henry More*, p. 45). A similar contrast between harmful and natural enthusiasm can also be found in Shaftesbury, especially in *The Moralists*, where he discusses "a fair, and plausible enthusiasm, a reasonable ecstasy and transport" (SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristics of Men*, 320). The difference between them lies in the different functioning of affects: religious or political fanaticism would stem from an attitude recognizing the opposition of an individual or certain group to other wholes (communities). Internal harmony of affects allows for ennoblement, magnanimity, and consequently, sincere and natural enthusiasm, manifested in the admiration of nature or the pursuit of

the whole of nature. Although the specificity of this view means that it represents a fleeting experience rather than a proof of nature's purposiveness, it is the only experience through which this purpose is accessible.

Philocles's aesthetic education represents a counterpart to the three stages of moral disposition development outlined in the *Inquiry*: the unreflective surrender to emotions here corresponds to a mere fondness for whatever pleases the senses, while the subsequent stages of reflectiveness are marked by comparing and valuing external beauty, the inner beauty of human characters, and ultimately the recognition of the general purpose of nature ("governing mind"). This final perspective of universal sympathy for things—where the stimulus is the manifestation of a connection in beauty that points to a single principle—also serves as a model for the analogous ordering of the human soul, albeit only momentarily, in the act of aesthetic enthusiasm. The potential for delight in nature, which seems to reflect Shaftesbury's sensitivity, breaks down elitism (consider the poor shepherd "who from a hanging rock, or point of some high promontory, stretched at his ease, forgets his feeding flocks, while he admires her beauty" in *The Moralists*[24]) and softens the stoic rigorism of morals. Adequately instructed, anyone can perceive beauty, and thus, potentially, anyone can develop the disposition for a proper understanding of nature.

There is, however, another dimension in which this sympathy is manifested: the human community. In Shaftesbury's philosophy, "sympathy" and "humour" are no longer merely notions used to explain the functioning of nature solely (such as humour related to a physiological description of the human body), but become concepts describing human emotionality. Here, sympathy represents the emotional resonance that one's behaviour elicits in other people. This creates a feedback loop: moral action, which arises from the proper functioning of natural affections, is benevolent and kind, and it elicits approval from others, which in turn reinforces the natural affections

social good. This becomes the basis for a certain vision of natural, non-denominational religiosity, which brings Shaftesbury closer to progressive currents of religious rationalization (albeit in a specific sense) and also to deism (a detailed discussion of this issue can be found in Alfred Owen Aldridge's work, see his "Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 41, no. 2 (1951): 297–385. A noteworthy biographical detail is the fact that Shaftesbury's protégé was Paul Crell, brother of Samuel Crell, an Arian philosopher and theologian (1660–1747), whom he met in the freethinking circle around Benjamin Furly in Rotterdam, see Robert WALLACE, *Antitrinitarian Biography; or Sketches of the Lives and Writings of Distingushed Antitrinitarians* (London, 1850), 3:468–83.

[24] SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristics of Men*, 319.

and benevolence in the person who acted. It is difficult to find a better example of Shaftesbury's optimism.

However, such a foundation of moral motives on sympathy exposes Shaftesbury to three known criticisms. First, although natural affection incites altruistic actions, these actions vary significantly in character and concern very different goods, leading to conflicts of values. Second, the recognition from others does not equate to the objective status of the good being realized and cannot serve as a valid test—morality built on such sympathy may indeed be a morality based on honour, but limited to a specific group of people. Finally, the third criticism pertains to the constancy of moral disposition in situations where an action stemming from moral motives does not receive approval from others—when virtue does not resemble a goddess wearing a splendid gown, but rather a beggar who is forced to walk in rags, unrecognized by anyone.

FREEDOM: ME AND OTHERS

Shaftesbury is aware of these difficulties and attempts to address them to some extent. The role of natural beauty and sociability in the process of moral improvement, as outlined above, does not guarantee the achievement of a lasting moral disposition. If only the "Cyrus strategy" were possible, as Jaffro suggests, one would need to sever ties with the world of human passions and, under the dictates of nature, pursue one's perfection until the harmony of nature is reflected in the human soul. I agree with Boeker's thesis that disposition can be graded. Still, I believe this position should be radicalized by acknowledging that the condition for this process lies in the realm of interpersonal relationships. The traditionally accepted order, where the self is inherently free and interacts with others, should thus be reversed: the interaction with others is a condition of human freedom.

It is no coincidence that most of Shaftesbury's writings take the form of addresses to a particular recipient. In *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, for example, we read: "my Lord, I have really so much need of some considerable presence or company to raise my thoughts on any occasion, that when alone, I must endeavour by strength of fancy to supply this want; and in default of a Muse, must inquire out some great man of a more than ordinary genius, whose imagined presence may inspire me with more than what I feel

at ordinary hours."[25] One could see this as a mere expression of politeness and convention—the addressee being John Byron Sommers, a prominent whig politician—yet other writings suggest that such an approach is Shaftesbury's deliberate choice.

Sensus communis contains statements addressed to a "friend," while the remarks on wit and humour are meant to echo an earlier praise of raillery in a dispute with him. *Soliloquy* refers to the practice of conversing with oneself, and *The Moralists* is an artful report of dialogues between Theocles and Philocles presented in letters to Palemon which multiply the dialogue. Lastly, *Askêmata*, which was not intended for publication, serves as a kind of Stoic exercise conducted as an inner dialogue—sincere, given that the sole intended addressee and addresser was Shaftesbury himself. However, even in this case, we encounter a multiplied dialogue, as it is also conducted with Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, whose statements are frequently quoted and require responses from Shaftesbury.

The distinctive feature of Shaftesbury's dialogic approach is a discussion in which the presented arguments are meant to express his worldview. Ultimately, it is Shaftesbury—or his *alter ego*, Theocles—speaking to an imagined interlocutor, but also to the ultimate addressee: the reader. This multiplication of the same dialogic form is evidenced by the analogous use of imagery, where the images are intended to set the imagination in motion and, through successive associations, achieve the desired persuasive effect. This, in turn, explains Shaftesbury's figurative writing style. A specific way of realizing this strategy can be found in *A Notion of the Historical Draught of Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*. In this work, Shaftesbury explores the possibility of artistically depicting Xenophon's fable of Hercules, who, at a crossroads, encounters two goddesses—Pleasure and Virtue—and must choose between them. He describes the encounter as follows: Hercules meets both goddesses, engages in a discussion with them, hesitates for a time, but ultimately the balance tips in favour of Virtue, and Hercules makes the right choice. Shaftesbury argues that the most effective moment to depict is this final choice, as it most fully engages the viewers and guides them towards recognizing the righteousness of Virtue over Pleasure. The similarity to the aforementioned literary dialogues lies both in the iconic nature of the depiction (Pleasure is represented with her attributes: a golden wine amphora and luxurious dining ware, while Virtue is symbolized by a winding, rocky path the goddess points at) and in the persuasive intent of drawing readers and

[25] Anthony A. C. SHAFTESBURY, *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, in *Characteristics of Men*, 7.

viewers into the conflict, encouraging them to imagine the choice and understand the correctness of Virtue's path. In both cases, the aim is to engage the imagination through a sequence of associations designed to clarify the experienced passions. Though the usual vocabulary of human passions is limited, and while we can name many of them, their nuances and subtleties are often lost. Using images that allow one to vividly imagine and experience a particular internal state proves to be far more effective.

We find the same way of depicting things in Shaftesbury's private Stoic exercises. Thus, depicting the torments of passions, he writes, for example, this:

> Dreams, dreams.—A dark night; dead sleep; starts; disturbing visions; faint endeavours to awake.—A sick reason; labyrinth; wood, sea.—Waves tossing; billows surging; the driving of the wreck; giddy whirlwinds; eddies; and the overwhelming gulf… how have its cheating visions, and false images supplanted those true ones, and deprived thee of those blessed views, that happy vision and enthusiasm without deceit![26]

The imagination leaps between successive images, allowing us to see the consequences of certain choices. The method is both persuasive and informative. In addition to imagery, this elucidation of choices and pointing out their validity requires breaking down the internal clamour into individual voices. "Here therefore," writes Shaftesbury, "arises work and employment for us within, to regulate fancy and rectify opinion, on which everything depends."[27] Although there is no direct way to influence passions, they can be shaped to some extent through the exercise of imagination. The will, which signifies directing desire towards the highest good, requires the tension of imagination and control over emotions. This can be an expression of each individual decision, but it does not have to be a permanent and unchanging disposition. This similarity exists between soliloquy and the admiration of the beauty of nature. In both cases, the alignment of affections does not have to lead to a lasting disposition. However, when this alignment is achieved, the inner harmony of affections reflects the order of nature.

The use of the literary and internal dialogues represents a much more natural form of relationship with others that takes place on a social level. By advocating "freedom of wit and humour", Shaftesbury argues that, in both its aesthetic and practical dimensions, good humour and raillery (which, as Jaffro

[26] SHAFTESBURY, *The Life*, 124.
[27] SHAFTESBURY, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, 422–23.

indicates, function as a type of social practice in this context[28]) have the power to restore social harmony and balance. Satire acts as an antidote to false enthusiasm—such as religious or political fanaticism—compelling us to question unjustified beliefs. In this context, good humour signifies a disposition similar to the magnanimity Shaftesbury describes in his *Pathologia*, which not only permits benevolent raillery of others, but also embraces the idea that one's own choices might be subjected to their ironic scrutiny. Moreover, since one can laugh, not only at others, but also at oneself, properly employed raillery fosters a community of mutual understanding. Wit and satire help dissolve the rigidity of interpersonal relationships, fostering understanding and creating a community of friends.[29] Shaftesbury is convinced that wit and satire possess a self-regulatory power. Satire can be free from hostility and does not need to represent a claim of superiority over others' flaws and weaknesses, as Hobbes had previously suggested. At the same time, it does not devolve into derisive buffoonery, as it can itself become the subject of satire. Thus, raillery should be understood as a form of social practice that reduces social passions and, if it does not liberate us from them, at least allows a certain degree of detachment and freedom.[30] It challenges particular viewpoints, thereby giving voice to the natural affections that bind a person to the community they help shape.

In this expectation of understanding by others, one can again discern Shaftesbury's optimism and belief in the solidarity that connects people, manifested in mutual kindness.[31] It is worth noting, however, that this optimistic vision is complemented by Shaftesbury's political engagement on the side of the Whigs, who advocated the "English constitution, liberty, Protestantism, and toleration".[32] This stance was likely influenced by the first Earl of Shaftesbury and resulted in political connections, including acquaintances with Somers, Robert Molesworth, and John Toland. Additionally, two extended stays among the friends of Benjamin Furley in Rotterdam (July 1698 –April 1699, August 1703–September 1704) not only led to contemplation of

[28] Laurent JAFFRO, "The Passions and Actions of Laughter in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson," in *Thinking about the Emotions: A Philosophical History*, ed. Alix Cohen and Robert Stern (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 137ff.

[29] JAFFRO, 130–49; Hans-Georg GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006), 22.

[30] Endre SZÉCSÉNYI, "Freedom and Sentiments: Wit and Humour in the Augustan Age," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 13, nos. 1–2 (2008): 79–91.

[31] JAFFRO, "Passions and Actions," 143.

[32] Lawrence KLEIN, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness, Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), xvii.

the stoicism of Epictetus and Aurelius, but also allowed Shaftesbury to engage in discussions with a circle of progressive theologians and philosophers who "shared ideals of freedom, social peace, religious and political toleration, and, especially, a spirit of erudition"—not only John Locke, who had collaborated with the first Earl, but also Pierre Bayle, Pierre Desmaizeaux, Pierre Coste, Jacques Basnage, and Jean Le Clerc.[33] Shaftesbury, a supporter of the Glorious Revolution and the establishment of political liberties, found justification for these in an ideology supported by humanistic models and ancient republican ideals of participation in power. The model meant to express these ideals was the culture of politeness and aesthetic refinement, opposing political ferocity and the pursuit of immediate private interests.[34] The political perspective complements the aforementioned social perspective and its postulate of the solidarizing power of kindly satire. The condition for Shaftesbury's proposed civic virtue, *sensus communis*, a sense of belonging to a community, is the possibility of open criticism, including freedom of speech. "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? Can there be a better than from that liberty itself which is complained of?" Shaftesbury asks rhetorically, referring to "a free nation, such as ours".[35] He recognizes the advantages of balancing the power of the monarch and parliament, and he can also point to specific liberal laws enacted at the time, such as the Toleration Act (1689) and the abolition of book censorship (1696).[36] This attitude connects Shaftesbury with freethinkers. It is not surprising that Anthony Collins, advocating the freedom of rational debate, cited the abovementioned words of Shaftesbury on the title page of *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713), proclaiming that there are no rational grounds for restricting freedom of speech and the possibility of criticizing superstitions and dogmas.

[33] Luisa SIMONUTTI, "English Guests at 'De Lantaarn'. Sidney, Penn, Locke, Toland, and Shaftesbury," in *Benjamin Furly 1646–1714. A Quaker Merchant and His Milieu*, ed. Sarah Hutton, 31–66 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2007), 63–65.

[34] KLEIN, *Shaftesbury and the Culture*.

[35] SHAFTESBURY, *A Letter*, 7.

[36] Ross CARROLL, "Ridicule, Censorship, and the Regulation of Public Speech: The Case of Shaftesbury," *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 2 (2018): 353–80.

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MORAL PERFECTION AND FREEDOM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, THIRD EARL OF SHAFTESBURY

Summary

In the article, I analyze the significance of moral disposition and freedom concepts in the philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), and their connection to the issues of personal identity and aesthetic experience. I point out that personal identity and freedom are not inherently given to a person but rather the goal of personality development. In this way, I compliment the interpretation presented by Laurent Jaffro and Ruth Boeker, indicating that the moral rigour characteristic of the Stoic stance is mitigated in Shaftesbury's view by the belief in the sympathy that connects people and the importance he attaches to the experience of beauty. Shaftesbury thus understands freedom as the result of self-improvement and internal teleological determination of the person, as well as political freedom, which is the outcome of free public debate. The postulate of social and political liberty links Shaftesbury with freethinkers such as John Toland and Anthony Collins.

Keywords: Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury; personal identity; beauty; virtue; freedom; freethinking

DOSKONAŁOŚĆ MORALNA I WOLNOŚĆ W FILOZOFII ANTHONY'EGO ASHLEYA COOPERA, TRZECIEGO HRABIEGO SHAFTESBURY

Streszczenie

W artykule analizuję znaczenie pojęć dyspozycji moralnej i wolności w filozofii Anthony'ego Ashleya Coopera, trzeciego Earla Shaftesbury'ego (1671–1713) oraz ich związek z zagadnieniami tożsamości osobowej i doświadczenia estetycznego. Wskazuję, że tożsamość osobowa i wolność nie są dane człowiekowi z natury, ale raczej stanowią cel rozwoju osobowego. W ten sposób

uzupełniam interpretację przedstawioną przez Laurenta Jaffro i Ruth Boeker, wskazując, że rygoryzm moralny charakterystyczny dla stanowiska stoickiego jest w ujęciu Shaftesbury'ego łagodzony przez wiarę we współczucie łączące ludzi oraz przez wagę, jaką przywiązuje on do doświadczenia piękna. Shaftesbury rozumie zatem wolność jako rezultat samodoskonalenia i wewnętrznej teleologicznej determinacji człowieka, a także jako wolność polityczną, będącą wynikiem wolnej debaty publicznej. Postulat wolności społecznej i politycznej łączy Shaftesbury'ego z wolnomyślicielami, takimi jak John Toland i Anthony Collins.

Słowa kluczowe: Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury; tożsamość osobista; piękno; cnota; wolność; wolnomyślicielstwo