



Shaftesbury on the Beauty of Nature

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ABSTRACT

Many people today glorify wild nature. This attitude is diametrically opposed to the denigration of wild nature that was common in the seventeenth century.

One of the most significant initiators of the modern revaluation of nature was Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713). I elucidate here Shaftesbury's pivotal view of nature. I show how that view emerged as Shaftesbury's solution to a problem he took to be of the deepest philosophical and personal importance: the problem of how worship of God can be both transportingly emotional and entirely rational.

In section 1 I sketch the denigration of wild nature in two of Shaftesbury's predecessors: Burnet and Locke. I next turn to Shaftesbury's problem, describing in section 2 the love of God he aspired to and in section 3 his commitment to rational religion. I then explain Shaftesbury's solution, describing in section 4 his view of beauty in general and in section 5 his view of the beauty of nature.

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1. BURNET'S RUIN AND LOCKE'S WASTELAND

At the turn of the eighteenth century one of the most discussed books in Europe was Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*.¹ First published in English in two volumes in 1684 and 1690, Burnet's *Theory* was at the storm center of the era's disputes about religion and science in the same way Galileo's work had been a century before.

Burnet argued that the common understanding of Noah's flood was fundamentally mistaken. There was, on the common understanding, a forty-day 'Deluge of Water' that 'over-spread the Face of the Whole Earth, from Pole to Pole, and from East to West, and that in such Excess, that the Floods over-reacht the Tops of the highest Mountains' (Burnet 1759: 11). Eventually, the waters subsided, the mountains and fields reappeared, and Noah's descendants began to re-inhabit the world that had been temporarily flooded.

This story couldn't be true, Burnet argued, because there simply wasn't enough water.

If the flood reached above all the highest mountains of the entire world, there would have had to be unbroken global ocean that was more than a mile higher than current sea-levels. The volume of water, moreover, would have had to increase its rate of growth as sea-levels rose, since the surface area of a sphere increases as the sphere expands. Burnet calculated that this would require 'a Quantity of Water eight times as great' as what all the oceans currently contain (1759: 15). But where would all this water come from?

There are two sources on our planet: bodies of water such as seas and lakes, and clouds. The seas and lakes could not contribute to the rise in sea-level, since any water moved from one body of water would have to be replaced by water from somewhere else. 'If you have two Vessels to fill, and you empty one to fill the other, you gain nothing by that, there still remains one Vessel empty' (Burnet 1759: 19). The clouds supply rain, but no rate of cloud-fed rainfall could produce eight oceans of water in forty days. That would take a constant torrent of at least forty years, which the clouds could not contain.

There's another problem as well. Even if we suppose that that much water did fall on the earth, there can be no accounting for where it all went. According to the common understanding, 'the Earth was dry and habitable' only four or five months later (Burnet 1759: 22). But there would have been no place for the water to have drained into, since every cavity and channel would have already been inundated. The story is thus 'impossible and unintelligible upon a double Account, both in requiring more Water than can be found, and more than can be disposed of if it was found' (Burnet 1759: 21–22).²

After establishing that the common understanding of Noah's flood conflicts with what science plainly tells us, Burnet draws the only logical conclusion: at the time of Noah's flood, the entire surface of the Earth must have been perfectly 'smooth and uniform' (1759: 174)—like an egg—so that it could 'easily be overflowed, and the Deluge performed with less Water' (1759: 36).

Before the flood, a person who had traveled all over the world would 'not meet with a Mountain or a Rock' (Burnet 1759: 65). '[T]here was no Sea there, no Mountains, nor Rocks, nor broken Caves, 'twas all one continued and regular Mass, smooth, simple, and compleat, as the first Works of Nature use to be' (1759: 214). Everything was as flat as 'the face of the calmest Sea' (1759: 62). Burnet calls his theory of antediluvian geography the 'Doctrine of the *Mundane Egg*' (1759: 341).

1 The definitive account of Burnet's work and its influence, both positive and negative, is Nicolson (1959).

2 Some might claim that the Flood was a miracle, that God contravened the laws of nature by creating new waters 'to make the Deluge, and then annihilated them again when the Deluge was to ease' (Burnet 1759: 23). Burnet wanted no part of such miraculous explanations. He sought 'to give an Account of these Phaenomena' that coheres with the rest of our understanding of nature (1759: 38). The *deus ex machina* of a miracle is not an explanation but a failure to explain. To resort to a miracle, moreover, is to discredit God, for it is to imply that God's original design of the world was imperfect, in need of *ad hoc* alteration.

We think him a better Artist that makes a Clock that strikes regularly at every Hour from the Springs and Wheels which he puts in the Work, than he that hath so made his Clock that he must put his Finger to it every Hour to make it strike. (1759: 131–32)

Before the flood, the ground everywhere was as even and regular as the shell of an egg, with all the world's water encased underground (like an egg's albumen) between the flat surface and a hard inner core.

The mundane egg was a marvel of divine architecture, the 'whole Globe of the Water vaulted over, and the exterior Earth hanging above the Deep, sustain'd by nothing but its own Measures and Manner of Construction: A Building without Foundation or Corner-stone' (Burnet 1759: 80). The era of egg-world was most wonderful, a golden age of human history.

In this smooth Earth were the first Scenes of the World, and the first Generations of Mankind; it had the Beauty of Youth and blooming Nature, fresh and fruitful, and not a Wrinkle, Scar or Fracture in all its body; no Rocks nor Mountains, no hollow Caves, nor gaping Channels, but even and uniform all over. And the Smoothness of the Earth made the Face of the Heavens so too; the Air was calm and serene; none of those tumultuary Motions and Conflicts of Vapours, which the Mountains and the Winds cause in ours: 'Twas suited to a golden Age, and to the first Innocency of Nature. (Burnet 1759: 82)

Egg-world was paradise. And it was beautiful: proportionate, regular, uniform, ordered, simple, geometrically perfect.

But humans were sinful, and punishment followed. The smooth outer shell of egg-world cracked. '[T]he Frame of the Earth was torn in pieces, as by an Earthquake' (Burnet 1759: 88). Massive fragments fell onto the water that had been beneath the surface, causing tsunamis so large and widespread that for a time the entire planet was covered by water. When the waters later rushed in to fill the lower places, they swept 'Woods, Buildings [and] Living Creatures' with them, carrying it 'all headlong into the great gulph' (1759: 92). This created scars on the land, and additional debris. And the massive fragments came to rest in all sorts of postures, chaotically, some close to upright, others at different angles, forming mountains and canyons, islands, rocks, and crevices.

The geological features we see today are the consequences of the cataclysm. By that 'fatal Blow, the Earth fell out of that regular Form, wherein it was produced at first, into all these Irregularities which we see in its present Form and Composition' (Burnet 1759: 40). Everything on the face of the planet that is a departure from egg-like smoothness is the result of God's punishment of 'the Wickedness and Degeneracy of Men' (1759: 119).

Egg-world was beautiful. Our world is not. What we inhabit is rough and unsightly, monstrous, rude and irregular, disordered, disproportioned, ghastly. We traverse a scene of dislocation and dissolution, with broken pieces of the earth 'scatter'd like Limbs torn from the rest of the Body' (Burnet 1759: 136). Nature is a vast array of deformity, ugliness caused by human sin. Our mountains and valleys and seas and chasms 'have the true Aspect of a World lying in its Rubbish' (1759: 136). '[S]ay but they are a *Ruin*, and you have in one Word explained them all' (1759: 156).

John Locke didn't cherish wilderness any more than Burnet.

In 1690, about the same time as Burnet's *Sacred Theory*, Locke published his *Second Treatise of Government*. Chapter V of the *Second Treatise* addresses a crucial question. God gave the earth to all of humanity. The land's benefits were originally bestowed on every human. But the land is now owned by some and not by others. A few rich individuals control huge swaths, from which the multitudes of poor are excluded. If God gave the land to in common to all of humanity, how can the current state of land ownership possibly be justified?

It can be justified, according to Locke, because God intended for the earth to be of maximal benefit to all humans. The crucial thing to realize is that the earth produces its greatest benefits when cultivated. People do God's will when they work the land—when they 'subdue the earth'—for by so doing they 'improve it for the benefit of life' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V, § 32, 113).³ And by working the land a person gains ownership of it. Every person owns himself, owns his body. It follows that every person owns the labor of his own body. When a person works the land, he mixes his labor

3 Reference to Locke's Two Treatises includes chapter, section, and the page number of the 2003 edition.

into it. Cultivated land contains the labor of the person who cultivated it. Since the person owns his labor, it follows that he now owns the land. The prospect of gaining ownership of the land by cultivating it is, as well, a salutary incentive to improve the land for humanity's benefit.

There is much to say about Locke's theory of land appropriation. The point I wish to highlight is that his view implies that land is valuable just to the extent that it benefits human beings. The more benefits the land produces—the more 'conveniences' or 'provisions' it provides—the more valuable it is. Land's value 'depends only on [its] usefulness to the life of man' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 37, 115). And the benefits of wilderness are miniscule in comparison to the benefits of land that is cultivated. An acre of farmland in Devonshire is a hundred times more valuable than an 'equally fertile' acre of 'wild woods and cultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 37, 116). Wilderness is 'almost worthless' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 43, 119). The 'benefit of it amount[s] to little more than nothing' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 42, 118). 'Ninety-nine-hundredths' of the value of land is 'wholly to be put on the account of labour' rather than to what 'is purely owing to Nature' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 40, 117).

When Burnet looks at wilderness he sees deformity—an originally beautiful earth that has been ruined by sin. Locke doesn't seem to care about beauty or ugliness. The land's productivity is all that matters to him. But Locke too denigrates wilderness. The pejorative distinctive of Burnet's attitude toward nature is 'ruin.' The pejorative distinctive of Locke's is 'waste.' A place that has not been 'improved' by human cultivation is a 'waste land' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 36, 115). 'Land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 42, 118). All the wild woods of America are but 'uncultivated waste' (Locke, *Second Treatise* V: § 37, 116). For Locke, there is nothing to cherish in wilderness. Uncultivated nature is wasted, something God wishes us to alter for human benefit.⁴

Many today hold views of nature diametrically opposed to Burnet and Locke. Many today think of rugged mountains, old growth forests, and ancient grassland as the Earth's most precious places. Wilderness is not a ruin, not a waste. It is unspoiled. Uncultivated nature, at least in certain circles, has enjoyed a hundred-and-eighty-degree revaluation. It is now taken to be of great intrinsic value, the height of beauty.

This contemporary appreciation of nature has a rich philosophical heritage: from the recent philosophical view of positive aesthetics, which affirms the beauty of all things wild; to the twentieth century environmentalism of Leopold and Muir; to the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau; to Humboldt's scientific holism; to the Romanticism of Wordsworth in England and Goethe in Germany.

Shaftesbury was instrumental in initiating this modern revaluation of nature.⁵ Unlike Locke and Burnet, Shaftesbury loved the 'original Wilds' (C 2.217). He thought all things untouched by human influence were 'beauteous in themselves' (C 2.217). Everywhere he looked he saw 'Master-pieces in Nature,' sources of intense 'Delight' (C 2.224; 2.164). As one of his characters puts it, 'The Wildness pleases' (C 2.217).⁶

Let us turn now to the problem to which Shaftesbury's view of nature emerged as a solution: the problem of how to develop transporting love for God while remaining within the limits of reason. We'll then examine how he thought that solution is supposed to work.

⁴ As a reviewer for JMP has pointed out to me, however, while Burnet and Locke might both believe uncultivated wilds can only be improved by cultivation, Locke's view of human nature differs from Burnet's. On Burnet's lapsarian view, humans were originally created entirely good and have since the Fall become entirely corrupt. Locke has a more complex, ambivalent view of human nature, thinking that pre-civilized people were in some ways better and in some ways worse (see, for instance, *First Treatise* VI: § 58, 39). For Locke, movement towards civilization is not entirely a value-gain with regard to human nature, even if it is a value-gain with regard to the land.

⁵ Shaftesbury had a close personal relationship with Locke but was opposed to much of Locke's philosophy. For accounts of Shaftesbury's objections to Locke, see Carey (2006: 98–149) and Stuart-Buttle (2019: 89–117). As far as I can tell, Shaftesbury did not have any personal connection with Burnet, but he owned a copy of Burnet's *Archaeologiae Philosophicae*, and it is almost impossible that he was unaware of *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*. For discussion of Burnet's possible influence on Shaftesbury's moral theory (and on Shaftesbury's rejection of Lockean philosophy), see Tuveson (1948).

⁶ In addition to vindicating the beauty of the natural world, Shaftesbury also seeks to vindicate human nature, arguing against the view that human beings are irredeemably corrupt. I explore Shaftesbury's vindication of human nature in Gill (2006: 83–117).

2. LOVE OF GOD: THE FIRST PART OF SHAFTESBURY'S PROBLEM

Shaftesbury explores the psychology of religion throughout his writings, in discussions of self-interest, enthusiasm, zealotry, the spirit of faction. His most systematic treatment comes in the first part of *Inquiry concerning Virtue*, where he catalogues the emotional effects of different beliefs. The three main beliefs he discusses are: atheism, the belief that there is no god; daemonism, the belief that there is a god who is not perfectly moral; and theism, the belief that there is a god who is perfectly moral.⁷

The effects of atheism are grim. The atheist's experience of reality is of 'a vast and infinite Deformity,' a 'Pattern of *Disorder*' with 'neither *Goodness* nor *Beauty*' in it (C 2.40). 'There is nothing good or lovely which presents it-self,' nothing to raise 'any passion besides that of Contempt, Hatred, or Dislike' (C 2.40). Shaftesbury's atheist resembles Sartre's authentic existentialist, whose realization of the non-existence of God condemns him to a state of abandonment, anguish, and despair. 'Nothing indeed,' Shaftesbury writes, 'can be more melancholy, than the Thought of living in a distracted Universe' (C 2.40). To the atheist all is amoral and ugly. When the world accommodates his wishes, there is nothing about it that deserves his admiration, for it is merely the result of 'what *Atoms and Chance* produce' (C 2.42). All too often, moreover, the world does not accommodate his wishes. Its storms and diseases and biting things produce 'many Ills' (C 2.40). And while in theory the random movements of atoms don't deserve 'anger and abhorrence' any more than admiration or love, in practice an atheist will find it almost impossible not to rage at the meaningless suffering they cause.

[U]pon disastrous Occasions, and under the Circumstances of a calamitous and hard Fortune, 'tis scarce possible to prevent a natural kind of Abhorrence and Spleen, which will be entertain'd and kept alive by the Imagination of so perverse an Order of Things. (C 2.42)

Shaftesbury thinks it's possible for an atheist to be virtuous. But just barely. Human psychology and the events of a life being what they are, it's likely that an atheist's commitment to morality will wither. Good people suffer. Bad people prosper. Virtue seems to be an '*Enemy to Happiness*' (C 2.41). Nature is a vast disorder. This presentation of reality will produce in the atheist a dark attitude that 'affects the Temper, and disturbs that easy Course of the Affections on which Virtue and Goodness so much depend' (C 2.42). Unless a person has almost superhuman moral fortitude, atheism will 'by degrees imbitter the Temper, and not only make the Love of Virtue to be less felt, but help to impair and ruin the very Principle of Virtue, viz. *natural and kind Affection*' (C 2.41).

As grim as atheism is, the effects of daemonism are worse. Daemonists believe in a god with immoral tendencies. This belief corrupts their sense of right and wrong. It accommodates them to atrocity. This corruption occurs as a result of a deity's being represented as performing 'odious and abominable' acts (C 2.27). Shaftesbury gives several examples. Jupiter seduces and rapes. The god of another sect (Calvinism) 'arbitrar[il]ly and without reason' destines some people 'to endure perpetual Ill, and others as constantly to enjoy Good' (C 2.29). The god of still another sect (Judaism) has a character that is 'captious and of high resentment, subject to Wrath and Anger, furious, revengeful ... encouraging Deceit and Treachery amongst Men, favourable to a few, tho for slight causes, and cruel to the rest' (C 2.28). People's innate sense of right and wrong would naturally lead them to condemn such conduct. But religions teach their adherents to esteem and honor their gods, to worship and adore them. When a religion succeeds in inculcating 'love and admiration' for an odious and abominable god, it warps the moral sense to conform to conduct that is in reality 'horrid and detestable' (C 2.27). As a believer becomes

more and more reconcil'd to the Malignity, Arbitrariness, Partiality or Revengefulness of his believ'd DEITY; his Reconciliation with these Qualitys themselves will soon grow in proportion; and the most cruel, unjust, and barbarous Acts, will, by the power of this Example, be often consider'd by him, not only as just and lawful, but as divine, and worthy of imitation. (C 2.28–29)

⁷ Shaftesbury also mentions polytheism (C 2.7), which I do not discuss.

Jupiter's followers end up delighting in 'amorous and wanton acts.' Members of one sect self-righteously pursue arbitrary punishment. Members of another sect become captious, resentful, and deceptive.

And thus it appears, that where a real Devotion and hearty Worship is paid to a supreme Being, who in his History or Character is represented otherwise than as really and truly just and good; there must ensue a Loss of Rectitude, a Disturbance of Thought, and a Corruption of Temper and Manners in the Believer. His Honesty will, of necessity, be supplanted by his Zeal, whilst he is thus unnaturally influenc'd and render'd thus immorally devout. (C 2.29)

'Immorally devout.' That's just one of Shaftesbury's scathing descriptions of the fervidly religious. He calls them 'servile' (C 2.32). He condemns their 'Wretchedness and Meanness' (C 2.32). He speaks of the 'Narrowness of Spirit ... peculiarly observable in the devout Persons and Zealots of almost every religious Persuasion' (C 2.34). Shaftesbury loathes people of aggressive pieties. His attitude toward atheism is benign in comparison. Atheism is a melancholy condition, but atheists know what's right and what's wrong, and they may struggle toward virtue, difficult though it is for them to achieve. Deamonism is an inexorable slide to viciousness.

At the other end of the spectrum is theism, belief in a perfectly good god. The theist believes 'everything is govern'd, order'd, or regulated for the best, by a designing Principle, or Mind, necessarily good and permanent' (C 2.6). There is, the theist believes, a 'divine Providence and Bounty' that extends to all living things. God loves everyone and everything, and he has designed the world accordingly (C 2.29–30).

Our moral sense naturally approves of love for humanity. Religions prescribe approval of their deities. When a religion represents its deity as acting in conflict with love for humanity, something has to give. An embrace of the religion must result in a deforming of the moral sense. But the deity of the theist acts in perfect accord with love for humanity. While other religions deform moral sense, theism reinforces its natural shape.

And theism does more than stabilize judgments of right and wrong. The great goodness of a perfect god inspires by example. When the deity is represented as

good and excellent, [with] a Concern for the good of *All*, and an Affection of Benevolence and Love towards *the Whole*; such an Example must undoubtedly serve ... to raise and increase the Affection towards Virtue, and help to submit and subdue all other Affections to that alone. (C 2.33)

Contemplation of an omnibenevolent god produces feelings of gratitude, admiration, and awe. These feelings motivate us to godly emulation. The positive emotions of theism encourage expansive love. God's 'excellency and worth' leads the theist to aspire to 'the Perfection of Nature to imitate and resemble him' (C 2.31).

Belief in a perfect god promotes virtue in another way as well. Theists believe there is a god that is conscious of everything everyone thinks and does. Even in the 'deepest Solitude, there must be *One* still presum'd remaining with us; whose Presence singly must be of more moment than that of the most august Assembly on Earth' (C 2.33). Belief in the constant presence of this ideal observer can spur us to virtue because of our wish to avoid the shame of being observed acting badly. But Shaftesbury places more emphasis on the positive boost the ideal observer's presence can give to our desire to do what is honorable, 'even under the unjust Censure of a World' (C 2.33). When an atheist would feel utterly alone and abandoned, perfect theists will have the company of someone who completely understands their circumstances and fully appreciates their good deeds.⁸

Shaftesbury thinks that believing in God merely because of the benefits it will win you is a pernicious mistake (which we'll discuss in section 3). But he's willing to allow the possibility that virtue will be

⁸ Shaftesbury's point here anticipates Adam Smith's impartial spectator in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1776] 1976: 3.2.29, 185).

rewarded and vice punished in an afterlife (even if he doesn't give it full-throated endorsement). And thoughts of reward and punishment can be useful, so long as they flow from belief in a morally perfect god. For if reward and punishment are correctly administered—by a wise parent, a judicious magistrate a perfect god—they can be morally instructive, inculcating esteem for virtue and detestation of villainy in a way that penalties and bribes do not. The crucial thing is that the administrators themselves be virtuous. For 'it is *Example* which chiefly influences Mankind, and forms the Character' (C 2.37). It's not the reward and punishment themselves that are important. What's important is that they express the commitment to virtue of the person who is doing the rewarding and punishing. Thoughts of reward and punishment can be beneficial to virtue, but only to the extent that they ultimately inspire love of virtue for its own sake. Such inspiration is exactly what theism produces.

The atheist is a melancholy figure. Adherents of most established religions are angry and bigoted. But the personality of the theist is blue skies and sunshine. Theists love all of creation. They think everything has been designed for the best. Elevated by the example of God's omnibenevolence, they feel expansive love for humanity as a whole. The world fills them with delight. They are serenely happy—paragons of positive emotion.

The *Inquiry* description of the theist might give the impression that belief in a morally perfect god produces loving worship as surely as night follows day. Shaftesbury knew all too well it was not that simple. While Shaftesbury believed in a perfectly good god, he himself was gloomy, pessimistic, bleak, anguished. This caused him meta-anguish: he lacked the positive emotions theism ought to produce, and he excoriated himself for lacking them.

Shaftesbury described the problem by comparing himself unfavorably to atheists. Depressed atheists are wrong not to believe in a perfectly good god. But at least their affective responses to the world are consistent with their lack of belief. Shaftesbury, in contrast, believed in a perfectly good god but failed to feel the love that should accompany such a belief. Which is more shameful, he asks himself: to hold the atheist's position,

or thinking of Providence as thou dost, to be no otherwise affected than as thou art? Which of the two is the more absurd? To [be an atomist like Epicurus]; or, being consciose of Deity, to be no otherwise moved by his presence than if He were not, or had no Inspection of our Thought or Action? This is, in the same manner, *to live without Deity*, and perhaps this last may be esteemed the greater Impiety. (*Askemata* 96–97)

It's worse to believe in God but not feel the appropriate love for his creation than not to believe in God at all. And it was the worse offense of which Shaftesbury found himself guilty.

Some people may need a vision—'a Throne, a shining Light, a [heavenly] Court & Attendance'—in order to feel love for God. But that is 'Wretched Folly' (*Askemata* 97). Rational belief in God's goodness should be enough. Shaftesbury had that belief. He was convinced that God's '*Administration is intirely Just & Good*' (*Askemata* 98). He should, consequently, have felt the joy of being in the constant presence of the greatest being imaginable. But he didn't. Like Sartre's existentialist, he felt alienated, 'Alone,' 'miserable.' (*Askemata* 97–98). 'Is this thy Conception & Belief of a Deity?,' he sardonically asks himself. 'This is, in effect, to believe, & not believe' (*Askemata* 97).

Shaftesbury tried hard to instill in himself the loving worship appropriate to perfect theism. He resolved to consider as often as possible the perfection of God's design, with the hope that over time this would have elevating effects. '[E]nter into what is done,' he told himself, 'so as to admire that Grace & Majesty of things so Great & Noble.... Bring thy self as oft as thou canst into this Sense and Apprehension [of] what is chiefly Beautifull Splendid & Great in things' (*Askemata* 94).

Shaftesbury rejected 'vulgar Prayer' (*Askemata* 100), which he took to be the sycophantic act of begging God to bestow benefits. We shouldn't ask God to change the world. God's creation is already perfect. We should love everything just the way it is. But Shaftesbury did write one prayer himself. It was a self-exhortation to develop the positive emotions he thought perfect theism should arouse.

In his prayer Shaftesbury asks for the ‘power of Reason’ to overcome his impious tendencies. He wants to be rid of

those Monstrouse Thoughts, Absurd Imaginations Wild & Extravagant Suggestions of a Debauch'd Corrupted Mind, or a Discompos'd Entangled or Sick Reason, which are able att any time to make mee think of thy Being either Uncertainly, by falling into those Mazes of Atheisme, or Proposterously, by Superstition. (*Askemata* 536)

Instead of those monstrous thoughts, Shaftesbury tells himself to dwell on God's beautiful perfections. He hopes those pious thoughts will elevate him—to love everything and to act accordingly. Here are some examples of his self-exhortations:

Lett this therefore bee my Purpose, to Learn how to think on Thee, and Know Thee more, that I may bee more in love with Excellence and Admire Ador & Love, what alone is worthy to bee admird Ador'd & Lov'd. (*Askemata* 535)

Lett mee ... Consider every thing with a respect to the Excellence & Perfect of Thy Government & Rule. (*Askemata* 536)

[L]ett thy mighty Image in my Mind and right sence of thy Goodness, & of the Excellence of this high advantage thou hast bestow'd, support mee in the Work of making my self a worthy Spectatour of Things so Goodly to Contemplate, and not only a Spectatour, but an Actor such as thou wouldst have mee to bee on this thy Theater. (*Askemata* 537)

In his prayer, as in his notebooks in general, Shaftesbury engages in intensely reflective self-work. He meditates on God's goodness to try to inculcate in himself the love he takes to be appropriate response to God's creation.

Shaftesbury's characters in *The Moralists* also voice concern about not feeling the love belief in a perfect god should produce. They attribute this failing to adherents of ‘modern Deism’ (C 2.151). True religion ‘is not dry, and barren; but such Consequences are necessarily drawn from it, as must set us in Action, and find Employment for our strongest Affections’ (C 2.152). But while modern deists affirm the existence of a ‘supreme Nature, an infinite Being, and a Deity,’ they lack any motivationally efficacious ‘Love of God.’ As a result of their purely intellectual approach, they have in effect ‘given up Devotion; and in reality had left so little of Zeal, Affection, or Warmth, in what they call their *Rational Religion*, as to make them much suspected of their Sincerity in any’ (C 2.153). The modern deists' notion of God has no emotional power. Without that, religion is worthless.

Philocles, the narrator of *The Moralists*, expresses similar concerns about himself. Like Shaftesbury in the notebooks, Philocles worries that he's incapable of the elevated, ‘Mystical Love’ perfect theism should inspire (C 2.137). ‘[T]his complex universal sort,’ he confesses, ‘was beyond my reach.’ The other main character of *The Moralists* is Theocles. He is a paragon of Shaftesbury's religious ideal—someone who is emotionally transported by God's creation, a true perfect theist. The core of *The Moralists* is a conversation in which Theocles guides Philocles to the religious heights Theocles already occupies. Before we see how Theocles guides Philocles, let us turn to the other aspect of Shaftesbury's problem: his insistence that religion be entirely rational—his commitment to hold religion to a ‘premeditated & stubborn Resolution to give every thing the Lye besides Reason only’ (*Askemata* 120).⁹

⁹ When I speak of emotions, affections, and passions in Shaftesbury, I mean to refer to phenomenologically robust features of mind that move us to action. When I speak of rationality and reason, I mean to refer to the faculty that forms beliefs based on evidence. As Spurr (1988) explains, in the religious debates in the decades leading up to Shaftesbury, writers used ‘reason’ and its cognates in many different and incompatible ways, sometimes to argue for tolerance of free inquiry, sometimes to further an Anglican endorsement of revelation, sometimes to describe moral character, sometimes to describe discursive ratiocination. Shaftesbury's uses are not completely free of their own ambiguities. And the main point I wish to make here is that Shaftesbury thinks reason and passion come together into a single response to the creator of nature's beauty. But Shaftesbury also clearly thinks that there is a use of reason that can assess truth based on evidence rather than feeling (C 1.121–22, 2.162, 2.166–63, 2.187–88, *Askemata* 120), and a use of passion that feels and motivates distinct from reason (C 2.8, 1.35, 2.8, 2.203). Modern deism is an example of dispassionate reason. Vulgar enthusiasm is an example of unreasonable passion. Shaftesbury's goal is to merge the best and to lose the worst of both: a reasonable enthusiasm, a passionate deism.

3. RATIONAL RELIGION: THE SECOND PART OF SHAFTESBURY'S PROBLEM

Shaftesbury's commitment to rationality is clearly evident in the positive arguments he gives for the existence of a perfectly good god. We'll discuss those arguments in section 5. In this section we examine the commitment to rationality in his negative arguments against basing religion on self-interest and revelation.

To base religion on self-interest is to worship God not because you have rational grounds for believing God is worthy of worship but because you believe it will benefit you. Such worship, Shaftesbury argues, debases both God and yourself. It's 'the most beggarly Refuge imaginable' (C 1.23).

Truthfulness is part of goodness. So a perfectly good god—a god worthy of worship—will value truthfulness. To value truthfulness is to endorse all and only those beliefs for which there are rational grounds. As a result, we conduct ourselves in accord with a perfectly good god's values when we believe all and only those things we have rational grounds to believe. We conduct ourselves contrary to the values of a perfectly good god when we affirm things we do not have rational grounds for. There is no 'Virtue in assuming an Opinion contrary to the appearance of things' or 'against our Reason' (C 1.22). The consequence is that it is disrespectful to a good god to assume he would be pleased by worship based not on what we have good reason to believe but merely on what we think will serve our interests.

When we are afraid to use our Reason freely, even on that very Question, 'Whether He [God] really be, or not'; we then actually presume him *bad*, and flatly contradict that pretended Character of Goodness and Greatness; whilst we discover this Mistrust of his Temper, and fear his Anger and Resentment, in the case of this *Freedom of Inquiry*. (C 1.21)

Any god that would be pleased by worship of selfish convenience would not be worthy of worship, for such a god would not value the truthfulness that is part of goodness. Only a thoroughly rational approach to religion accords with the values of a god worthy of worship—with the 'Excellent Character of the God of Truth' (C 1.22).

As an example of self-interested basis for religion Shaftesbury points to Pascal's Wager. Pascal places his bets on worship of God because he has everything to gain by worshipping, and nothing to lose. If God exists, Pascal will be better off if he worships than if he doesn't. If God doesn't exist, Pascal will be no worse off if he worships than if he doesn't. But to worship God for such self-interested reasons rather than to rationally investigate whether there is a God who is really worthy of worship is to 'grow worse in our Religion' (C 1.23). It is to entertain a lowly, 'injurious' opinion of the Deity (C 1.23). A truly good god would never punish a person for 'an impartial Use of his Reason, in any matter of Speculation whatsoever,' nor reward a person for 'a mean Denial of his Reason, and an Affectation of Belief' (C 1.22). Shaftesbury compares Pascal to a shameless beggar who tries to manipulate passers-by into coughing up alms by addressing every one of them as 'My Lord' without any regard to whether or not the passer-by is actually titled. The beggar falsely flatters his marks and debases himself. A god worthy of worship would not wish for similar 'Sycophants in Religion' (C 1.22). A god worthy of worship would see no merit in 'mere Parasites of Devotion.'

Shaftesbury makes the same point in his discussion of the Book of Job. After Job suffers his hardships, his friends try to persuade him to regain God's favor by proclaiming God's goodness even though he lacks rational grounds for believing in it. But Job refuses to accede to anything simply because it is in his self-interest. He refuses to accede to anything for which he does not have fully rational grounds. Shaftesbury praises Job's rational steadfastness while condemning his friends' willingness to believe 'at the very stretch of their Reason, and sometimes quite beyond it' (C 1.22).

Equally illegitimate as a ground for religion is revelation. Shaftesbury's opponents here are those who would base religion on what revelation tells them—not because they grasp the rational cogency of the message but because what has been revealed to them possesses an inherent authority that transcends rational thought. A god worthy of worship, Shaftesbury argues, would see no value in such unreasonable submission. A god worthy of worship would never 'assert

his Being any other way to Men, than “By revealing himself to their Reason, appealing to their Judgment, and submitting his Ways to their Censure, and cool Deliberation” (C 2.187–88). Shaftesbury attacks two kinds of revelation: direct revelation, immediate personal communication from God; and scriptural revelation, the written word of the Bible.

People who claim direct revelation believe God has spoken to them directly. Such people, call them vulgar enthusiasts, believe they’ve experienced God’s voice first-hand. They know what the voice tells them is valid because it comes from God, not the other way around. Shaftesbury doesn’t deny that vulgar enthusiasts have had powerful personal experiences. He denies that such experiences constitute justifiable grounds for belief. We may be infallible authorities on what our experiences are like. But we are not infallible authorities on what has caused us to have those experiences. We can misdiagnose our own symptoms. We can suffer delusions. We can have strong reactions to events we have completely misinterpreted. The power of our responses is no guarantee of the accuracy of our beliefs about the stimuli.

To illustrate the fallibility of our perception of the causes of our own experiences, Shaftesbury tells a story of how Pan and a few fellows succeeded in repelling a much larger group of armed warriors. Pan waited until the warriors entered a narrow wooded valley amid rocky mountains. He and his company then clamored about ‘among the echoing Rocks and Caverns’ (C 1.10). The resulting noises echoed and reverberated through the gloom, terrifying the warriors, who came to believe that they were surrounded by a massive army of ferocious beasts. Each saw the fear in the face of his comrades, which amplified his own. Terrified, they fled in all directions, in what ‘in after-times Men call’d a Panick’ (C 1.10). The warriors really did have a powerful feeling of fear. But the power of their feeling did not make them any less mistaken about its cause. The same could very well be true of those who claim to have had direct revelation from God. No doubt these vulgar enthusiasts have had extraordinary experiences. But they may be as mistaken about the cause of their experiences as the warriors were about theirs. Rather than personal communication from God, the cause may have been decidedly more mundane. It may have been amazed confusion at ‘Storms, Earthquakes’ or other unusual natural phenomena (C 1.11). It may have been frustration with ‘publick Calamitys’—amplified by feedback loops into furious hysteria (C 1.11). It may have been ‘Unwholesomeness of Air or Diet’ (C 1.11).¹⁰

Even if you’re not delusional, you still shouldn’t base religious belief on perceptions that have not passed rational muster. If you were to climb a mountaintop, espy a shaft of golden light shining through the clouds, hear a thunderous voice booming from on high—if the voice’s words were blazoned across the heavens or fired in legible characters unto stone—even then, Shaftesbury argues, you would not be justified in acceding to the message unless you had independent rational grounds for thinking its content ‘just and true.’

What tho the Sky shou’d suddenly open, and all kinds of Prodigys appear, Voices be heard, or Characters read? What wou’d this evince more than ‘That there were *certain* Powers cou’d do all this?’ But ‘*What Powers; Whether One, or more; Whether Superior, or Subaltern; Mortal, or Immortal; Wise, or Foolish; Just, or Unjust; Good, or Bad*’: this wou’d still remain a Mystery; as wou’d the true Intention, the Infallibility or Certainty of whatever *these Powers* asserted. Their Word cou’d not be taken in their own case. (C 2.188)

The only rational conclusion you could draw from such an occurrence is that there exists a being with the power to produce spectacular events. But the power of such a being is no proof of the justice of its claims.

The upshot is that we have no more reason to believe what is purported to be directly revealed than we have to believe any other set of claims. The drama of a statement’s packaging does nothing to establish the cogency of its content.

Scriptural revelation cannot legitimately supplant the primacy of reason any more than direct revelation can. Scripture is considered infallible because the individual who first produced the scriptural text is taken to have related the word of God as he experienced it through direct

¹⁰ Shaftesbury’s views on enthusiasm are influenced by Henry More’s *An Antidote against Atheisme* (1653) and *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656).

revelation.¹¹ We have just seen Shaftesbury argue against basing religion on direct revelation. But for the sake of argument, let's grant that the first relater did truly have a godly experience. Even so, the words the first relater delivers to us are not God's words. God would have expressed himself in 'a Language and Grammar different from any of human Structure ... deliver'd down from Heaven, and miraculously accommodated to human Service and Capacity' (C 3.140). But the first relater has to write in a specific '*human Language*' with 'grammatical Rules of human Invention' and arbitrary compositional mechanics (C 3.140). The words of even the very first version of scripture are the result of translation-decisions of an individual human, who was subject to the same perils of meaning-slippage all translators face.

Moreover, almost no one today reads the words of the original relater. People base their religion on a translated text (C 3.145). All the pitfalls of translation are thus compounded, further eroding confidence that what the people are reading is an accurate representation of the thoughts of God. And there are multiple translations to choose from. When someone bases her religion on one translation rather than another, she's putting her faith not in God alone, nor even in the first relater, but in the translation-decisions of yet another fallible human.

Then there's the problem of what counts as scripture. The texts that are now taken to be the sacred word of God are a mere subset of the many documents produced in ancient times. At some point, certain of those documents were designated canonical and others apocryphal. Some were authorized, others controverted, still others declared heretical. These decisions were not made by God. History plainly reveals that they were made by contentious groups of human beings with a full complement of interests, agendas, and grievances (C 3.195–97, 3.201–3).

The texts we have, furthermore, are copies of earlier texts. And the centuries of iterated copying introduced even more variations, making it impossible to designate any one version as 'the very *Original, or a perfectly true Copy*' (C 3.202). There have been

so many thousands of *Copys* that were writ by Persons of several *Interests* and *Persuasions*, such different Understandings and Tempers, such distinct Abilities and Weaknesses, that 'tis no wonder there is so great *variety of Readings*:—whole Verses in *one*, that are not in *another*:—whole books admitted by *one Church* or Communion, which are rejected by *another*; and whole Storys and Relations admitted by *some Fathers*, and rejected by *others*. (C 3.197)

But given that the texts have been passed down to us through 'many Channels' and are 'subject to so many Variations, of which [we] are wholly ignorant,' it's ridiculous to unquestioningly place all our faith in the particular version of scripture we happen to find in front of us (C 3.144–45).¹²

Even if there were grounds for complete confidence in the human-worded, human-translated, multiply human-copied text we happen to be using—even then—there's still the problem of interpretation. The scriptures don't have a single clear and consistent meaning. Everyone acknowledges that they are '*of the most difficult Interpretation*' (C 3.141). Particularly unclear is whether various parts are supposed to be taken literally or figuratively (C 3.197–98). Yet the

¹¹ Spurr (1988) elucidates the central role in religious thinking in Restoration England played by the belief that scripture was the word of God. Spurr explains that to maintain that religion was rational was typically to assert that there are rational grounds for believing that the claims of scripture came from God, rather than to assert that the claims of scripture could be independently established by reason alone. Shaftesbury's attack on scriptural revelation is thus an attack on the cornerstone of much of the Christianity of his day. Spurr writes, 'Restoration Englishmen were repeatedly told that divine mysteries were above, not contrary to, reason, and they were warned not to confuse faith and science' (1988: 577). The following quotation from Howell is a good example of the view Shaftesbury opposes:

if we will believe no more than we can demonstrate to be true, our Assent is not Faith, but Science; for it is not built up the foundation of Gods Testimony, but on Demonstrations from the Nature of the things testified, and so it honours not God at all; because it receives not the Truth for his sake, but Him for the Truths sake. (1679: 225)

¹² Shaftesbury compiled his own index for the *Characteristics*. Under 'Scripture,' two of the subheadings are: 'Scripture interpolated, suppress'd, controverted, manag'd' and 'Variety of Readings, controverted Passages, Books, Copys, Catalogues' (C 3.285).

difference between a literal and a figurative interpretation can have momentous implications. And the interpretation one accepts is once again the result of undivine, human thought.

Most fundamentally, Shaftesbury denies scriptures are self-justifying. There is in their ‘Composition or Style nothing miraculous, or self-convincing’ (C 3.144). That there is in Scripture the assertion of a proposition is in and of itself no more reason to believe it than there is to believe assertions in any other text. Whether to accede to a proposition in all these cases is a matter for rational judgment—a question of thinking critically about the intrinsic merits of the proposition and how well it fits with other things we know (C 3.140, 3.144–45, 3.193, 3.201).

Shaftesbury’s scriptural skepticism stands out clearly when we compare him to other thinkers of his time who were considered religious rationalists. Burnet and Locke, for instance, saw themselves as being in the business of establishing the reasonability of Christianity. Indeed, Burnet and Locke came in for intense criticism for giving reason too prominent a religious role. But reasonability in Burnet and Locke is beholden to the claims of scripture in a manner Shaftesbury explicitly rejects.

For Burnet, it is a given that the events described in the Bible actually happened. His goal in *Sacred Theory of the Earth* is to rationalize scripture—to show how reason can make sense of what scripture tells us. We should think things through, by all means, but for Burnet that thinking-through consists of figuring out how to bring our other data into coherence with the fixed points of the Bible. He does not question the accuracy of scriptural history. If the Bible says there was a flood, there was a flood.

Locke may not have shared Burnet’s belief in the literal truth of the events described in Genesis. But Locke’s approach to the Gospels in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is similar to Burnet’s approach to the flood. Just as Burnet never entertains the question of whether the flood occurred, Locke never entertains the question of whether the Gospel accounts are true and morally perfect. Locke’s task is to explain what the Gospel’s truth and moral message amount to. Scripture is the fixed anchor from which all Locke’s chains of reasoning begin, not a set of propositions that themselves need to answer to reason’s demands

Another example is Benjamin Whichcote. Shaftesbury’s first publication, in 1698, was a collection of sermons by Whichcote, which Shaftesbury edited and wrote an effusively laudatory introduction to. Whichcote came under strong criticism from the Puritan establishment for his reliance—his perceived overreliance—on reason. ‘I oppose not rational to spiritual,’ Whichcote famously said, ‘for spiritual is most rational’ (Whichcote 1753: 99). But Whichcote’s commitment to rationality wavered in the face of moral claims found in scripture. Whichcote took to be rationally undeniable the principle of ought-implies-can, according to which persons can legitimately be held accountable for failing to do only those things that they are capable of doing (see Whichcote 1751: 1.205–7 and 1.220–21). Whichcote also took scripture to claim that the only way to achieve salvation is through acceptance of Christ (see Whichcote 1751: 1.385, 2.62, 2.293, and 2.306). Whichcote acknowledged, however, that people living in ancient times and distant lands had never heard of Christ and so were incapable of accepting Him (see Whichcote 1751: 3.302 and 3.307–8). There thus seemed to be a contradiction between the scriptural claim of the need to accept Christ and the rational principle of ought-implies-can. But Whichcote was unwilling to give up the scriptural claim, choosing instead to attempt various convoluted reconciliations, in torturously turgid passages that stand in stark contrast to the plain lucid reasonability of the rest of his work.¹³ None of those passages were in the sermons Shaftesbury chose for his collection.

A fourth example is John Toland, with whom Shaftesbury collaborated in the late 1690s and early 1700s. In his *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696), Toland proclaimed that he would show ‘That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d A Mystery.’ Toland was widely condemned for subordinating religion to rationality. But *Christianity not Mysterious* contains defenses of scriptural claims reason alone would never

¹³ I discuss this issue in Gill (1999).

produce.¹⁴ Toland argues, for instance, that Abraham's willingness to kill Isaac was justified because Isaac's birth (to Sarah, who was past child-bearing years) was a miracle (1696: 131). The miracle of Isaac's birth warranted Abraham in believing that after the sacrifice, God would perform a second miracle and restore Isaac to life. *Christianity not Mysterious* offers similar defenses of the reasonability of believing in original sin (1696: 92–95) and the resurrection (1696: 130). The book's task is to explain the reasonability of what the Bible says, not to submit what the Bible says to reason's examination. Shaftesbury eschews such rationalizations of scripture. He insists the Bible's claims be put to the same critical tests as claims from any other source.¹⁵

In his published works Shaftesbury does on a few occasions speak approvingly of the moral message of certain Biblical passages. But he treats those passages not as uniquely holy texts but as examples of morally perspicuous literature, of which he gives a great many more non-scriptural examples.¹⁶ Biblical references are also conspicuously absent in most of Shaftesbury's private notebooks from the late 1690s and early 1700s. Shaftesbury used those notebooks to do his deepest thinking—about what kind of person he wanted to be, about what was truly important, about how to live. This thinking of Shaftesbury's was inextricably bound up with his reading. He refers to other texts on almost every page. From Epictetus there are hundreds of quotations. Marcus Aurelius, Horace, Socrates, and Plato appear dozens of times each. But over many years of extensive writing of his most personal thoughts, Shaftesbury makes (so far as I can tell) only two references to the Bible, and both of those are to passages in Ecclesiastes to which he gives secular interpretations (*Askemata* 442, 453). The evidence suggests that when he was doing his deepest thinking, Shaftesbury hardly ever had a Bible on his desk or on his mind.

4. BEAUTY IN GENERAL: THE FIRST PART OF SHAFTESBURY'S SOLUTION

Shaftesbury wishes to be transported by love for God. But he is determined to remain entirely rational. How does he do it? The beauty of nature provides the answer. In this section we'll look at Shaftesbury's concept of beauty in general. In the next section we'll see how applying that concept to the natural world solves Shaftesbury's problem.

To be beautiful, according to Shaftesbury, is to possess 'Unity of Design' (C 1.89). A beautiful thing is beautiful because all its parts 'concur in one' (C 2.161), because it has the 'Character of *Unity*' (C 3.229), because it is 'a *Single Piece*' (C 3.214). A beautiful thing 'constitutes a *real Whole*, by a mutual and necessary Relation of its Parts' (C 3.214). It is 'a *Whole*, coherent and proportion'd in it-self' (C 1.129).

Shaftesbury uses numerous words to refer to the property that all beautiful things possess: unity, harmony, regularity, proportion, order, symmetry, balance. He also uses *intire*, as when he says that beautiful things 'are, in themselves, intire Systems' and that a beautiful thing is a 'One Intire Thing' (C 2.161 and 2.195). This is the adjectival form of 'integrity,' a word we generally use to get

¹⁴ Berman (1987; 1992) maintains that Toland himself did not really believe these scriptural claims—that the passages in which he seems to endorse them are a subterfuge, a lie, an artful concealment of his actual beliefs and real anti-Christian intentions. If that is the case, it is noteworthy that Shaftesbury also had such anti-Christian intentions and was less willing than Toland even to pretend otherwise. (Perhaps Shaftesbury, because of his higher social position, had the luxury of being less concerned about the personal ramifications of pretending otherwise.) At the same time, I believe that Pfeffer (2020) makes a strong case for reading Toland's writings as less subversive and radical than Berman maintains—which makes Shaftesbury's more thorough rationalism stand out even more clearly.

¹⁵ Shaftesbury argues that the Bible's descriptions of events must be put to the same critical tests as the descriptions we find in any other sources from long ago. As much as any other account, scripture stands in need of support from 'the collateral Testimony of other antient Records, Historians, and foreign Authors' (C 3.144). We should accept what the Bible tells us only to the extent that it fits best with things we know about history from other sources.

¹⁶ Shaftesbury's rational religion, moreover, doesn't seem to involve distinctly Biblical or Christian elements. Shaftesbury presents the 'Rites, Titles, Habits and Ceremonials' different Christian sects place so much stock in as being peripheral at best. He doesn't think a person is required to observe any particular set of them, or any of them at all (C 3.198, 3.207–9). His description of perfect theism in the *Inquiry into Virtue* doesn't include any of those rites or ceremonies, or even belief in Christ. Nor does there seem to be anything notably Christian about Theocles, the character who embodies true religion in *The Moralists*. Theocles communes with God by roving in the open fields. It's hard to imagine his having a spiritual experience in church.

across the idea that a person is internally consistent, in complete accord with herself. Shaftesbury thinks that to be beautiful is to have this quality. Every part of a beautiful thing agrees with all the rest. All its elements work together to form a singularly perfect system.

Many different kinds of things can have this property. Music, painting, and poetry can have it. A well-proportioned building can as well. So can a piece of quality workmanship, such as a cabinet or a wagon or a timepiece. Any of these can be beautiful because any of them can possess unity of design. In this, Shaftesbury's concept of beauty does not track our contemporary notions of aesthetic merit. A workaday object to which we might not think to give aesthetic consideration may possess the unity of design Shaftesbury identifies as beauty. A wildly original and provocative performance we judge artistically worthy may lack it.

Shaftesbury thinks we are naturally constituted to have an affectively positive response to beauty. We are 'imprinted' with a 'plain internal Sensation' in favor of it (C 2.161). For unity of design we have an instinctive 'Liking' or 'taste' (C 2.24–25). Imagine you hear a jumble of discordant notes. Then they come together to form the 'truest harmony' (C 1.208). That moment will be an emotionally pleasant experience. You'll feel an 'original Satisfaction,' a 'natural Joy' (C 2.60). Or imagine you come across a drawing of three hundred and fifty degrees of a perfect circle. There is an infinite number of ways of connecting the two ends. They can be connected by a jagged lightning bolt. By a loop-de-loop swirl. By a random squiggle that travels the margins of the page, or even off the page and onto the table, before connecting up. But the perfectly curved completion of the circle will give you a feeling of satisfaction those other connections will not. The completion of the circle, and only that, will feel right.

For some types of beauty, we feel love at first sight. For other types, love grows out of thoughtful consideration. We experience love at first sight when we encounter 'simple Beautys' (C 2.231). As examples Shaftesbury cites 'the simplest of figures, as either a round *Ball*, a *Cube* or *Dye*.' The beauty of such things 'is immediately perceiv'd' (C 2.161). '[E]ven an Infant [is] pleas'd with the first View' of them (C 2.231). Recognition of their proportionality is instantaneous. 'No sooner the Eye opens upon Figures, the Ear to Sounds, than straight the Beautiful results, and Grace and Harmony are known and acknowledg'd' (C 2.231).

For 'complicated Beautys,' in contrast, love develops as a result of rational examination (C 2.231). The 'true beauty and worth' of a thing is its fundamental structure, the harmony and order of all its parts (C 3.101). When an object is complex, an understanding of that structure may require plenty of 'the antecedent *Labour* and *Pains*' of 'Examination and Search' (C 2.224, 3.102). Consider the beauty of 'Mathematicks.' Someone who understands mathematical principles feels 'Admiration, Joy, or Love' for their 'Harmony, Proportion, and Concord' (C 2.60). Such a person 'receives a Pleasure and Delight' from the 'Proportion, Order, and Symmetry' of mathematical discoveries. But this pleasure depends on mathematical understanding acquired by 'progress in Science or Learning.' The mathematician's delight grows out of 'the exercise of his Mind.' Or consider the movement of a sophisticated timepiece. Discerning how the parts—cogs, mainspring, balance wheel, escapement—slot perfectly into place, how they all combine to form a single perfectly harmonious machine, is deeply satisfying, delightful, a joy. But the beauty of the mechanism is not 'immediately perceived.' An infant wouldn't see it, nor would the ignorant, nor the inattentive. It's a beauty you experience because of how the thing works. Your experience of this beauty is inextricably linked to your understanding of it.

This cognitive component of beauty underlies Shaftesbury's defense of art criticism. Some may think that first responses to works of art are the purest, that criticism is at odds with genuine aesthetic engagement, that 'to dissect is to kill.' Shaftesbury rejects that thought. He contends that aesthetic taste can and should be refined, and that such refinement grows out of well-informed criticism—what Shaftesbury calls 'the *criticizing* or *examining* Art' (C 3.101). Fully appreciating complex beauty involves moving beyond 'those *regular Figures* and *Symmetrys* with which Children are delighted; and proceeding gradually to [more complex] Proportions' (C 3.112). It is a 'false Relish, which is govern'd rather by what immediately strikes the Sense, than by what consequentially and by reflection pleases the Mind, and satisfies the Thought and Reason' (C

3.239). To appreciate complex beauty a person first has to do the mental work of bringing ‘Truth and Nature to his Humour’ (C 3.103). Love at first sight is nice enough, but only the superficial think it’s the highest kind of love there is.

Appreciation of architecture epitomizes the cognitive character of Shaftesbury’s view of the experience of beauty. There’s an obvious way architectural beauty is not immediately perceivable: you can’t see every facet of a building all at once.¹⁷ More importantly, the architect’s art consists of countless decisions that viewers may appreciate only if they possess some knowledge and understanding. Consider someone who on her way to work every day passes something that registers with her as nothing more than a black box office-building. Then she joins an out-of-town friend on an architectural tour that includes the black box. The guide explains how the architect used new materials to create open spaces that had before been impossible in structures of that height, how the building’s skin both reflects sunshine and emits interior lighting, how the exposed floor lines balance the building’s verticality, how the spacing of the window struts echoes the rhythm of the I-beams, how the recessed and transparent ground floor walls create the appearance of the building’s being lifted skyward. And the person gets it. She grasps the elegance of the design. When she passes by the building now she sees a perfectly proportioned structure that glows and floats, an entity that exudes light and lightness. Through her cognitive accomplishment she now experiences the building as beautiful.

Her new response to the building is emotional, but it’s also rational. It flows from reflection and understanding, informed by the facts she learned from the tour guide. Her new response is more objective than her old response in the sense of being responsive to more of the real features of the object—of being more responsive to the object’s real features.

Her new response to the building is rational, but it’s also emotional. When she looks at the building now, she has an affectively positive reaction she did not have before. The vision for her now is stirring. She does not merely notice new aspects. She feels a new joy.

What exactly is it that we love when we experience beauty? Someone might say that she loves a certain sonata or a particular building. According to Shaftesbury, that’s merely a way of talking. The person’s love is not actually for the soundwaves that constitute the music, not for the I-beams or the glass. The true object of her affection is the intelligence that composed the sonata and planned the building. Shaftesbury argues for this in a bit of dialogue between Philocles and Theocles that’s Socratic to the point of pastiche. Philocles loves beautiful sculpture and metalwork. But Theocles gets him to see that his admiration is not for the physical stuff. He loves the artistry that has brought the physical stuff into a certain form. And it’s the mind of the artist that has done that. What is ‘really Beautiful’ is the mind that has imposed form on the matter, not the matter that has been formed (C 2.225–26). ‘Mind alone’ is where the ‘Principle of Beauty’ resides. Love of beauty is love of a designing mind.¹⁸

5. BEAUTY OF NATURE: THE SECOND PART OF SHAFTESBURY’S SOLUTION

The Moralists is Shaftesbury’s most sustained attempt to convince us that the natural world is entirely beautiful. On the first of the two days that constitute the narrative of *The Moralists*, Philocles, Theocles, and two other guests take a stroll in the cultivated fields outside Theocles’s manor. The other guests note the appearance of the plants. This spurs Philocles, who is an expert in biology, to expound on how each thing works. Having acquired ‘Insight into the nature of Simples,’ Philocles is able to explain the unity of design of each organism, how its various parts fit together to form a single harmoniously functioning unit (C 2.159). The two guests ‘mightily’

¹⁷ But see footnote at C 1.89.

¹⁸ Although it is not clear whether Shaftesbury’s view implies that physical objects lack the property of beauty. Glauser argues that when Shaftesbury suggests that physical objects do not possess beauty, he is carried away by his own rhetoric, and that physical objects really do possess beauty, although of a lesser kind than the beauty of minds (2002: 29–30).

approve Philocles's explanations. They appreciate the structure of the plants as a result of learning what Philocles teaches them.

But Theocles urges Philocles to go beyond knowledgeable appreciation of particular plants and animals to something grander. What is of ultimate importance, according to Theocles, is appreciation of the 'Order, Union, and Coherence of *the Whole*' (C 2.162). His 'main Subject, insisted on' is that there is a beautiful harmony to all of nature. While Philocles has an astute understanding of 'Simples,' Theocles wants him to expand his focus to encompass the organization of nature as a whole.

'O my ingenious Friend!' said he, 'whose Reason, in other respects, must be allow'd so clear and happy; How is it possible that with such Insight, and accurate Judgment in *the Particulars* of natural Beings and Operations, you shou'd no better judg of the Structure of Things *in general*, and of the Order and Frame of Nature? Who better than your-self can shew the Structure of each Plant and Animal-Body, declare the Office of every *Part* and *Organ*, and tell the Uses, Ends, and Advantages to which they serve? How therefore, shou'd you prove so ill a *Naturalist* in *this Whole*, and understand so little the Anatomy of *the World* and *Nature*, as not to discern the same Relation of Parts, the same Consistency and Uniformity in *the Universe!*' (C 2.159–60)

Philocles discerns order within all the 'innumerable Parts of the Creation.' He understands how the different elements of each thing are 'united, and conspire[e] fitly within themselves.' But he appreciates 'neither Union nor Coherence' in 'the Whole it-self.' Philocles sees 'the Correspondency or Union of each *part* of Nature' but has to learn to see '*intire Nature her-self*.' Philocles is missing the forest for the trees.

A key word for expressing what Theocles wants Philocles to see, a word Shaftesbury adverts to time and time again, is 'system.' Careful study of the natural world shows that small systems function as parts of bigger systems, that bigger systems function as parts of still bigger systems, that those bigger systems function as parts of even bigger systems, and so on. And what study of the natural world eventually reveals is that all these embedded systems function as parts of one entire system, a system of all things. As Theocles says (in a passage with the marginal heading 'System of the World'), 'All things in this World are *united*' (C 2.162). Consider the different parts of a leaf. See the beauty of how the entire thing works as a unit. The leaf, though, is just one part of the tree, which is a more complex yet no less systematic unit. Equally systematic but of even greater complexity is the system comprising the tree and the animals who feed on it and disperse its seeds. And so on, until we eventually realize that there is a 'Universal System.' When we examine carefully, we'll see that everything is 'fitted and join'd' together, each contributing to the 'Order, Union, and Coherence of *the Whole*' (see also C 2.10–12).

Philocles hears what Theocles is saying. He understands that he's supposed to appreciate the systematic whole. But he doesn't think he's capable of such a 'Mystical Love.' As we've seen, Shaftesbury berated himself for the same failing.

The second day of *The Moralists* consists of Theocles's teaching Philocles how to overcome his emotional limitation and learn to love nature as a whole. Theocles begins with an examination of an oak tree. An oak tree, both characters unquestioningly assume, remains a single thing throughout its life. It has an identity. That identity cannot consist of the tree's outward form, for other things—such as 'a Figure of Wax ... cast in the exact Shape and Colours of this Tree'—could have the same outward form and yet not be an oak tree (C 2.195). Nor can it consist of the physical stuff of which the oak tree is made, as the tree will remain '*One and the same*; even when by Vegetation and change of Substance, not one Particle in it remains *the same*' (C 2.196). What the tree's identity must consist of, rather, is the 'Concurrence' of all its individual pieces '*in one common End*,' the enduring organizational principle of which its different elements partake, the '*Sympathizing of [its] Parts*.'

The same reasoning applies to the identity of a person. A person is a single thing, retaining an identity throughout the years. But that identity cannot consist of physical matter, as every particle of a person changes over time. The 'Stuff ... of which we are compos'd', says Theocles,

wears out in seven, or, at the longest, in twice seven Years, [as] the meanest Anatomist can tell us. Now where, I beseech you, will that same *One* be found at last, supposing it to lie in the *Stuff* it-self, or any part of it? For when that is wholly spent, and not one Particle of it left, we are *Our-selves* still as much as before. (C 2.196)

Nor can a person's identity be based on any idea or emotion, as all of a person's ideas and emotions change as well. There's no single mental item that has the constant existence that would be needed to fund a person's identity. So since a person remains '*one and the same*, when neither *one* Atom of Body, *one* Passion, nor *one* Thought remains the same,' his identity must be based on 'a Sympathy of Parts.' His identity must consist of an overall organization, of a 'simple Principle' of which all the person's different aspects partake (C 2.197).

Theocles next sets out to show that the natural world as a whole is just as organized as a tree, and considerably more organized than most people. To make this point, he cites the 'mutual Dependency' of plants and animals, and the coordinating roles of the forces of light, wind, water, and fire (C 2.162–63, C 2.207–9, C 2.214–15). The more we learn about the land and its inhabitants, the clearer it becomes that there is '*a uniting Principle* in Nature' that brings all its aspects into '*Harmony and Order*' (C 2.200–1).

This systematic order of the natural world is the basis of Shaftesbury's argument for the existence of God. A classic version of the argument from design, the argument has three parts. The first is the set of empirical observations that establish the world's extensive order. The second is the claim that there are only two possible explanations for the world's extensive order: random accident, or intelligent designing mind. So far as I can tell, Shaftesbury assumes this without argument. He takes it to be obvious that these are the only two choices. Writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, he doesn't betray any inkling of the possibility of the mindless but non-random processes that Darwin would later use to explain the organization of animals, plants, and ecosystems.

The third part of his argument from design is an inference to best explanation. The natural world manifests astounding systematicity. That an intelligent mind designed that system is a better explanation than that it arose randomly, by accident.

Now having recogniz'd this uniform consistent Fabrick, and own'd the *Universal System*, we must of consequence acknowledg a *Universal Mind*.... For can it be suppos'd of any-one in the World, that being in some Desert far from Men, and hearing there a perfect Symphony of Musick, or seeing an exact Pile of regular Architecture arising gradually from the Earth in all its Orders and Proportions, he shou'd be persuaded that at the bottom there was no *Design* accompanying this, no secret Spring of *Thought*, no active *Mind*? Wou'd he, because he saw no Hand, deny the Handy-Work, and suppose that each of these compleat and perfect Systems were fram'd, and thus united in just Symmetry, and conspiring Order, either by the accidental blowing of the Winds, or rolling of the Sands? (C 2.164)

We would expect randomness to produce a 'distracted Universe' (C 2.121). If everything originated in mindless accident, there would be 'no Coherence in the World,' 'No Order, no Proportion,' no evidence of a general 'Project or Design.' But observation reveals the natural world to be exactly the opposite—'a System compleat,' all its components fitted to wondrously coherent design. The natural world bears the marks we would expect in the handiwork of a 'supreme Intelligence.'¹⁹

¹⁹ Hume's comments in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* about the rotting of a turnip seem to me to be a variation on Shaftesbury's *Moralists* discussion of decay and rotting; compare C 2.205–6 with Hume's *Dialogues* part 12, paragraph 7 ([1779] 2007: 185). Hume seems to modify Shaftesbury's theme of our world's being only one of many created worlds; compare C 2.168 with Hume's *Dialogues* part 5, paragraph 12 ([1779] 2007: 45). The narrative tone of Hume's dialogue also seems to be very similar to the first night of *The Moralists* (with Demea adopting a tone similar to Shaftesbury's old Gentleman, and Philo adopting a tone similar to Philocles). Given these similarities, Shaftesbury's prominence at the time, and Hume's close acquaintance with *Characteristicks*, it seems to me very likely that Hume had *The Moralists*' argument from design very much in mind when composing the *Dialogues*.

Shaftesbury presents this as a thoroughly rational conclusion. We thus see Theocles surveying the 'Universal System' 'from the minutest Ranks and Orders of Beings to the remotest Spheres' and then concluding that belief in God is 'establish'd on abundant Proof, capable of convincing any fair and just Contemplator of the Works of Nature' (C 2.162). Shaftesbury intends to establish belief in God on a 'rational and just Foundation.'

Shaftesbury's argument from design relies on the findings of geology, botany, and biology.²⁰ He points to the minute phenomena revealed by the 'mechanick Art' of microscopes (C 2.206), to the vast phenomena revealed by the 'new philosophical Scene' of astronomy (C 2.196), and to all the different kinds of phenomena in between. '[T]o Minds, like yours, enrich'd with Sciences and Learning,' says Theocles to Philocles, the 'Order and Perfection' of everything in heaven and earth will become apparent (C 2.164). Theocles again: 'The Contemplation of the Universe, its Laws and Government was, I aver'd, the only means which cou'd establish the *sound Belief of a Deity*' (C 2.187–88). Religion must be 'establish'd on abundant Proof, capable of convincing any fair and just Contemplator of the Works of Nature' (C 2.162). Just as one needs artistic knowledge of '*shades and masterly Strokes*' to judge accurately the beauty of paintings, so too one needs 'Study, Science, or Learning' in order to judge the true beauty of nature (C 2.224). Shaftesbury disdains analytic exercises that do nothing to improve conduct or character, and he believes many thinkers of his day had become so enamored of their narrow empirical investigations that they forgot that the search for wisdom that should be of the highest importance (C 1.127–80, 2.205).²¹ But he is no enemy of a rational understanding of nature, no enemy of science.²²

His rational approach leads Shaftesbury to reject miracles. Many base their religious confidence on the occurrence of miracles. But Shaftesbury argues that miracles are not merely unnecessary for belief in a perfectly good god but are actually incompatible with such belief.

We can conclude the designer of the world is perfectly good when we see that the result of his design is perfectly 'regular and orderly,' when it runs entirely by 'just and uniform' laws (C 2.188–90). But a miracle, by definition, is a violation of regular and orderly uniform laws. A miracle is 'Breach of Laws, Variation and Unsteadiness of Order,' a 'mangling and disfigurement of *Nature*,' 'Irregularity and Discord,' something 'irregular, variable, inconstant,' manifestation not of a 'just

²⁰ Important predecessors of Shaftesbury in this wave of scientific design arguments were More's *An Antidote against Atheisme* (1653), Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691), and Bentley's *A Confutation of Atheism from the Origin and Frame of the World* (1693). Influential works following on Shaftesbury's include Derham's *Physico-Theology: or, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from his Works of Creation* (1713), Collins's *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713), and Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730). Newton expresses a view of nature that is similar to *The Moralists* in its rational requirements for religious belief (1718: 377–79).

Rivers has a different view of Shaftesbury's place in this line of thought, writing that for Shaftesbury belief in God

is not reached by metaphysical speculation (although Theocles engages Philocles in metaphysical argument before summarising the faith of theism, Shaftesbury's methods are not like Cudworth's). Nor is it demonstrated through minute empirical observation of the hand of the divine artificer in natural phenomena (the enormously influential method of Ray and Derham). The basis of Shaftesbury's epistemology is psychological. (2000: 141)

I am claiming that Shaftesbury *does* reach appreciation of God's design through the observational method of Ray and Derham. But I agree with Rivers that Shaftesbury also uses psychology to make his point. The second part of the *Inquiry* is Shaftesbury at his most psychological. The second day of *The Moralists* is Shaftesbury at his most naturally scientific.

²¹ The passage at C 1.179–80 includes the sentence, 'The most ingenious way of becoming foolish, is *by a System*,' which is often cited as evidence of Shaftesbury's disregard for philosophical coherence. That's a misreading. True philosophy is, for Shaftesbury, systematic—all the elements will fit together into a perfectly coherent whole, with subject matter and packaging that promotes the improvement of character and conduct. Shaftesbury's point is that many would-be philosophical explorations become derailed from what should be their true purpose (wisdom, virtue) by an over-fondness for the construction of elaborate academic positions.

²² I agree with Glauser when he writes,

[I]t is impossible for this disposition to be exercised with regard to the beauty of a great many things in the absence of considerable scientific, psychological, moral and theological knowledge. Even given the last three, a person wishing to discover the beauties of the material world would need a great deal of knowledge in physics, geology, and cosmology. Although Shaftesbury does not stress this point, it is fair to say that whatever his conception of aesthetic experience is, it is bound to rely heavily in many cases on the accumulation of a great deal of rational knowledge. This is important to stress in the face of romantic interpretations of Shaftesbury. Rather, his whole approach to beauty leans on the hopeful promise of important progress in scientific, psychological and moral knowledge. This is why he is a figure of the Enlightenment. (2002: 34–35)

and uniform' will but rather of 'Caprice' (C 2.189–90). Far from proving the existence of a perfectly good god, the occurrence of miracles would imply that the universe is the result of imperfect creation, or chaos. As Philocles says to a miracle-touting character,

For whilst you are labouring to unhinge Nature; whilst you are searching Heaven and Earth for Prodigys, and studying how to miraculize every thing; you bring Confusion on the World, you break its Uniformity, and destroy that admirable Simplicity of Order, from whence the One infinite and perfect Principle is known. (C 2.189)

A master craftsman will design a machine that fulfills its purpose smoothly on its own, without the need for ad hoc alterations. It is a poor craftsman whose mechanism relies for its operation on jury-rigged, one-off interventions. The occurrence of miracles would imply that the creator of our world is like the poor craftsman.

Shaftesbury's commitment to rational understanding of nature and his resultant rejection of miracles is more thorough than that of other writers of his day with reputations for a rational approach to religion.²³ Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious*, for instance, contains some statements that may suggest a rejection of miracles. It condemns the irrational reliance on miracles of 'the Papists, the Jews, the Bramins, the Mahometans;' and it ridicules the silly credulousness of those who believe that 'Christ was born without opening any Passage out of the Virgin's Body' or 'that a Head spoke some Days after it was sever'd from the Body, and the tongue cut out' (1696: 146). It turns out, however, that the problem with such people is not their belief in miracles *per se*. The problem is that they believe in too many miracles, that a miracle can happen for too trivial a reason. 'God is not so prodigal of *Miracles*' that he will deal them out them willy-nilly (1696: 146). God only plays the miracle-card when it's really important.

The Order of Nature is not alter'd, stopp'd or forwarded unless for some weighty Design becoming the Divine Wisdom and Majesty. And, indeed, we learn from *Scripture* and *Reason*, that no *Miracle* is ever wrought without some special and important End. (Toland 1696: 146)

As we've seen, *Christianity not Mysterious* contends that the birth of Isaac was a miracle. It asserts that the curing of 'the blind, the deaf, the lame, the diseas'd' by Jesus and the disciples was miraculous as well (1696: 147).

Locke also argues that God doesn't work by miracles—unless it's really important.

For though it be as easie to Omnipotent Power to do all things by an immediate overruling Will; and so to make any Instruments work, even contrary to their Nature, in subservience to his ends; Yet his Wisdom is not usually at the expence of Miracles (if I may so say) but only in cases that require them, for the evidencing of some Revelation or Mission to be from him. He does constantly (unless where the confirmation of some Truth requires it otherwise) bring about his purposes by means operating according to their Natures. (Locke [1695] 1999: 91)

God can miraculously violate the laws of nature whenever he wants. But miracles are precious. Better to save them up for special occasions. Indeed, if God were to perform too many of them, 'Miracles would lose their name and force' (Locke [1695] 1999: 91). The rarity of miracles ensures that God will get the most bang for the buck for each one. Some examples Locke cites: Moses's staff becoming a snake and devouring the staff-snakes of the Pharaoh's magicians; Jesus's walking on water and feeding the five thousand; the disciples' curing the deaf, dumb, and blind. God's purpose in all these cases was to convince observers of the credentials of his messengers. The miracles were unassailable marks of authority, the seal God set on what Moses, Jesus, and the disciples had to say.

Ralph Cudworth, another one of Shaftesbury's predecessors who endorsed rational religion, argued that God executed His providence through 'the Regular and Orderly Motion of Matter' (1678: 150).

²³ But with regard to miracles, Shaftesbury follows entirely in Burnet's footsteps. See note 2 above.

Cudworth was especially well-known for his idea of a 'Plastick Nature,' which explained phenomena that could not be accounted for by the movement of dumb matter or the conduct of conscious beings (1678: 150). These ideas of Cudworth's helped lay the groundwork for the development of the modern view of scientific laws. Cudworth maintained, however, that 'there is also besides this, [i.e., besides the regular and orderly operations of plastic nature] a Higher Providence to be acknowledged, which presiding over it, doth often supply the Defects of it, and sometimes Overrule it' (1678: 150). The providential overruling of the regularly and orderly operations is the occurrence of miracles, which are on occasion necessary for God to achieve purposes the laws of nature cannot.

Shaftesbury, in contrast, gives no quarter. He denies categorically that a truly good god would design a world in which the laws of regular and orderly motion ever need to be circumvented. The design of a truly good god would be regular and orderly through and through. A truly good god would create a world that has all and only the beauty that science can reveal.²⁴

Shaftesbury's uncompromising rationalism is also evident in the answer he gives to an objection to his argument for a perfect creator of nature. The objection is that certain natural occurrences don't make sense to us. We can see the logic of some of what goes on in nature but we can't see it all. Some natural occurrences appear stubbornly mysterious, pointless, random. The conclusion that nature has been designed by a perfectly harmonious and ordered mind is supposed to be based on the harmony and order of the observable phenomena. But if we cannot discern harmony and order in some of those phenomena, it looks as though we are unwarranted in attributing them to a perfectly harmonious and ordered mind after all.

In response Shaftesbury does not deny that some natural phenomena appear to us to be disorderly and inharmonious. He claims, however, that it's more rational to conclude that the recalcitrant phenomena are part of a harmony and order we have not yet discerned than that they are random or ill-designed (C 2.163–65, 2.203–4). He argues for this claim by pointing to the perception a person entirely 'ignorant of the Nature of the Sea or Waters' would have of a large sailing vessel anchored on a perfectly calm day (C 2.163–64; see also 2.203). If the person were on board and examined all the rooms below, he would appreciate how many different parts of the ship work together to perform complex functions. But because the ship would be still, he would not be able to see the purpose of the sails above. Nonetheless, it would be unwarranted for him to 'pronounce the Masts and Cordage to be useless and cumbersom, and for this reason condemn the Frame, and despise *the Architect*.' For since there are so many parts of the machine that he realizes work so well, the most rational conclusion for him to draw is that the sails are also well-designed, even if he is at the moment unable to see what that design is. Now compare this view of the ship to our perception of the world. There have been numerous features of the world whose purpose we have not initially understood. As a result of careful observation and scientific study, however, we have come to see that they do indeed serve a purpose. We have achieved the realization that what had initially seemed random or ill-designed in actuality fills perfectly a role in the system of which it is a part. But since we have had so many of these experiences in the past—of initially not understanding the purpose of a thing, and of then coming to realize that it does indeed serve a purpose—the rational conclusion to draw is that those things we do not now understand also fill a systematic role.

Imagine you are acquainted with a very brilliant person. In the past she has done things you initially did not understand the rationale for. But you eventually came to see that those things were perfectly planned and executed. You now realize that they were exactly the right things to do, even though you hadn't been able to see it at the time. Now imagine that this person does something that you do not understand the rationale for. Your past experience gives you reasonable grounds for trusting that in fact she has full justification for what she is doing—that her actions really are part of a systematic plan, even if you currently cannot see the reasons for them. Our relationship to the natural world, according to Shaftesbury, is the same as your

²⁴ Some of Shaftesbury's narrators, however, do seem to allow for the occurrence of miracles in ancient times, even if they reject that God would produce any miracles in the current age. See C 2.184 and C 3.46.

relationship to the plans of the very brilliant person. We have had many experiences in the past of encountering natural phenomena we initially did not understand and then coming to see their role in the overall system. And we have come to realize that the systematic workings of nature are more sophisticated than what we ourselves could have designed. It is thus reasonable to conclude that things we don't currently understand do indeed have a purpose. The very brilliant person's track record gives you rational grounds to infer that even if you can't see the point of an action of hers right now it does indeed have a point. Just so, nature's track record gives us rational grounds to infer that its occurrences follow a deep order even if we can't discern that order at the moment. This is a rational argument for concluding there's an underlying reason even for those things we can't see the reason for.

Some recent commentators have claimed that Shaftesbury believes religion outstretches rationality. Patrick Müller says that Shaftesbury believes that rational thought alone cannot get us all the way to belief in a perfect god:

In contemplating the beauty of nature, fancy transcends the limits of the human mind.... Theocles' sublime meditations do not attempt to produce logically sound arguments; they are allegorical verbal paintings of the deity's creation. The order of the divine cosmos, its inherent goodness [and] its 'Mysterious Beauty' cannot be rationally understood by human beings. (Müller 2010: 224)

According to Müller's Shaftesbury, belief in a perfect god is 'anti-rational' (Müller 2010: 227). John McAteer says that Shaftesbury believes in 'a kind of mystical vision of the natural world, a vision of things "too wonderful" for human beings to understand' (2016: 789),²⁵ and that Shaftesbury believes it is 'in vain' to 'seek to rationally understand the basic principles of nature' (2016: 791). Yu Liu contends that Shaftesbury wants 'to free himself from his own rational control or to lose himself in his admiration,' and that as a result Shaftesburean beauty 'is certainly not predicated' on 'the ideas of order and regularity' (Liu 2004: 224–25).

Müller, McAteer, and Liu are mistaken to suggest that Shaftesbury bases his religion on anti-rational grounds. Shaftesbury's religion is based on the experience of the beauty of nature, and for Shaftesbury our experience of the beauty of a complex entity is downstream of our understanding of the entity's unity. It's true that Shaftesbury thought there are particular natural phenomena whose purpose we cannot understand. But Shaftesbury thought he had a rational argument for the conclusion that nature as a whole is nonetheless beautiful: we have observed enough things in nature that do make sense that it is rational to assume that there is a sensible purpose for even those particular phenomena we do not (yet) understand.

For Shaftesbury, knowledge of the natural world is an essential component of the proper identification and appreciation of the beauty of God's creation. The importance of such knowledge for appreciation of the world's beauty is something Philocles learns. He used to be like the 'Vulgar' who form their judgments 'freely on the first view.' But he now realizes that he must understand objects if he is to grasp their true beauty. Pretty-as-a-picture scenic views are 'slight superficial Beautys.' Their charms are 'very shallow,' they sit 'upon the Surface.' By acquiring scientific knowledge, Philocles comes to see a deeper beauty. Theocles compares this appreciation of the beauty of nature to the sophisticated responses of expert art critics.

What difficulty to be in any degree knowing! How long ere a true *Taste* is gain'd! How many things shocking, how many offensive at first, which afterwards are known and acknowledg'd the highest *Beauty*! For 'tis not instantly we acquire the *Sense* by which these Beautys are discoverable. *Labour* and *Pains* are requir'd, and *Time* to cultivate a natural *Genius*.... In *Painting* there are *Shades* and *masterly Strokes*, which the *Vulgar* understand not, but find fault with; in *Architecture* there is *the Rustick*; in *Musick* *the*

²⁵ McAteer claims Shaftesbury's view is similar to the Book of Job, in which God gives Job 'a kind of mystical vision of the natural world, a vision of things "too wonderful" for human beings to understand' (2016: 789). As I explain in the body of the text, Shaftesbury himself uses the Book of Job to argue for a more rational view.

Chromatick kind, and skillful Mixture of *Dissonancys*. And is there nothing which answer to this, in *The Whole*? (C 2.224)

Training in the arts will uncover for us beauty in objects to which we previously gave no regard. Scientific learning is even more necessary for understanding the full extent of the ‘*Master-pieces* in Nature.’

But Müller, McAteer, and Liu are absolutely right to stress the emotionally positive character of Shaftesbury’s appreciation of the beauty of nature. Like the person who learned about the architecture of the black box building, Philocles does not merely come to a new understanding. He also develops a new love. Theocles’s account of the world’s unity produces in Philocles an experience of joy, not just an exercise of understanding. Says Philocles:

’Tis true, said I, (Theocles!) I own it. Your *Genius*, the *Genius* of the Place, and the Great Genius have at last prevail’d. I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for things of a *natural* kind. (C 2.220)

Philocles’s positive emotional response is downstream of his rational understanding of the order of nature—just as a mathematician’s satisfaction in an elegant proof and a mechanic’s satisfaction in an ingenious machine depend on their expert understanding. Philocles’s response to nature is ‘cognitively rich’—inextricably linked to his understanding of the object.²⁶ But it’s a truly emotional response nonetheless.

And Shaftesbury’s rationally anchored conception of nature’s beauty leads him to value exactly those places and things that Burnet and Locke denigrated.²⁷ Theocles takes Philocles on a virtual tour of ‘the darkest and most imperfect Parts of our Map’ (C 2.214), of places that initially appear ‘ghastly and hideous’ (C 2.217). They scale massive, jagged mountains that fill them with ‘giddy Horror’ (C 2.217). They tremble in the ‘faint and gloomy Light’ of a deep forest of ‘lofty Pines’ and ‘falling Trees which hang with their Roots upwards’ (C 2.218). They consider ‘particular Animals [that] are deform’d even in their first Conception, when the Disease invades the Seats of Generation, and seminal Parts are injur’d and obstructed in their accurate Labours’ (C 2.122). And Theocles convinces Philocles that even these ‘seeming Blemishes cast upon Nature’ are in fact part of its comprehensive beauty (C 2.123). ‘Things seemingly deform’d are amiable; Disorder becomes regular; Corruption wholesom; and Poisons (such as these we have seen) prove healing and beneficial’ (C 2.217). ‘The Wildness pleases,’ says Theocles when considering ‘the scaly Serpents, the savage Beasts, and poisonous Insects’ of the desert (C 2.217). Though these animals are in a sense ‘terrible’ and ‘contrary to human Nature’—though they do not serve any Lockean human purposes—they ‘are beauteous in themselves’ (C 2.217). The world’s beauty includes things that look deformed and seem wasteful when we fail to understand them. When we are able to ‘view [Nature] in her inmost Recesses,’ we will contemplate everything with ‘Delight’ (C 2.217; see also 2.224–25).²⁸

Because the beauty of wild places is so exquisitely complex, human interference will often diminish it. Theocles is thus a ‘bitter enemy’ of the environmental degradation mining causes (C 2.219). Of those who rifle the Earth for precious minerals he says, ‘Not satisfy’d to turn and manure for their Use the wholesom and beneficial Mould of this their Earth, they dig yet deeper, and seeking out imaginary Wealth, they search its very Entrails’ (C 2.210–11). Nor is it only such gross destruction of

²⁶ For discussion of cognitively rich aesthetic experience, see Carlson (2000: 7); and Parsons and Carlson (2008: 31–61).

²⁷ Nicolson explains how Shaftesbury’s claim that there is great beauty in rugged, jagged, foreboding places (see C 2.214, 2.217–18) was of great historical significance (Nicolson 1959: 289–300), marking a turning away from the popular view of the time (exemplified most clearly by Burnet’s *Sacred Theory*; see, e.g., Nicolson 1959: 170–79) that mountains and grottoes and dark forests were ugly reflections of human depravity. Nicolson also explains how Shaftesbury helped spark the rise of Romantic views of beauty and conceptions of the sublime that would come to exert strong philosophical and literary influence in the centuries to come.

²⁸ Shaftesbury’s view resembles a position in contemporary environmental philosophy called ‘positive aesthetics’ (Carlson 2000: 73–102). Positive aesthetics holds that wild nature is completely beautiful—that ‘the natural world untouched by humanity is essentially aesthetically good’ (Budd 2000: 137), that that ‘all untouched parts of nature are beautiful’ (Kinnunen 1981: 49), that ‘landscapes always supply beauty, never ugliness’ (Rolston 1988: 237).

nature that Shaftesbury's characters contemn. They think that turning a wild place into a garden is also a falling away.²⁹

Given *The Moralists'* identification of beauty with symmetry, proportion, and order, we might expect to find there a fondness for formal gardens: perfectly ordered plans of perfectly regular lawns, perfectly formed borders, and perfectly straight paths.³⁰ But Philocles and Theocles prefer 'original Wilds' (C 2.217). Says Philocles,

I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for Things of a *natural* kind; where neither *Art*, nor the *Conceit* or *Caprice* of Man has spoil'd their *genuine Order*, by breaking in upon that *primitive State*. Even the rude *Rocks*, the mossy *Caverns*, the irregular unwrought *Grotto's*, and broken *Falls of Waters*, with all the horrid *Graces* of the *Wilderness* it-self, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a *Magnificence* beyond the formal *Mockery* of princely *Gardens*. (C 2.220)

In comparison to the immense intricacies of any natural ecosystem the surface symmetries of a formal garden are piffling, its man-made ordering a beauty merely skin-deep. The 'primitive State' has a 'genuine Order' whose beauty no human plan can match (C 2.220).

Formal gardens are static. The kind of beauty they possess can be captured in a single moment. The order of a wild place, in contrast, is temporally extended, the continuous unfolding of lawful processes. Theocles:

The temporary Beings quit their borrow'd Forms, and yield their elementary Substance to New-Comers. Call'd, in their several turns, to Life, they view the Light, and viewing pass; that others too may be Spectators of the goodly Scene, and greater numbers still enjoy the Privilege of Nature. (C 2.205)

The surface appearances of wild places constantly change. Yet those changes are determined by 'sacred and inviolable *Laws*.' The beauty of wild places consists of the elegance and lawfulness with which those changes occur.

As an example of this beautiful order-in-change Theocles points to waste and corruption.

New Forms arise: and when the old dissolve, the Matter whence they were compos'd is not left useless, but wrought with equal Management and Art, even in *Corruption*, Nature's seeming Waste, and vile Abhorrence. The abject State appears merely as *the Way or Passage* to some better. But cou'd we nearly view it, and with Indifference, remote from the Antipathy of Sense; we then perhaps shou'd highest raise our Admiration: convinc'd that even *the Way it-self* was equal to the *End*. (C 2.205–6)

Our senses of sight, smell, and touch can produce in us an antipathy to waste and corruption. It can seem disgusting. But on learning the role these processes play in the larger natural systems—through an understanding of it all—we come to appreciate the sublime organization of what had initially struck us as a 'vile Abhorrence.' We come to see that these too are among the 'masterpieces in nature.' To make his case for the beauty of nature, Theocles does not point to a formal garden nor a landscape idyll nor any scene we'd typically feature as aesthetically pleasing. He directs us instead to the logic of decay.

29 A referee for JMP raised an interesting question: why does Shaftesbury favor wild nature over a cultivated garden if in fact the garden was created by a mind created by the divine mind, namely, a human gardener? Why not see a formal garden as a work of art just as much as a piece of architecture? Shaftesbury himself was certainly amenable to the beauty of gardens. But he uses Theocles and Philocles in *The Moralists* to argue against the idea that wild nature is ugly, and to make vivid that point he has them explain how the beauty of wild nature surpasses that of any garden. The idea that wild nature is more beautiful than any garden is nonetheless compatible with the idea that a garden can be beautiful.

30 David Leatherbarrow (1984) and Katherine Myers (2010) argue—correctly, I believe—that Shaftesbury's characters are not saying that landscape gardens are better than formal gardens. Shaftesbury's characters are saying that no garden compares favorably to anything wild. For an alternative view, see Liu (2008: 115–17).

Shaftesbury himself was a keen observer of the beauty of waste. His involvement in the management of his estate's farmland led him to make a careful study of the varying benefits of different kinds of manure. In a 1707 letter Shaftesbury articulated his fine-grained views on the subject, discoursing on the relative merits of ox dung, cow dung, sheep dung, the dung of different kinds of fowl, the dung of wild animals versus domesticated ones, and the dung of a mule versus the dung of each of its parents. At the end of what Voitle aptly calls a 'two-thousand-word essay on manure,' Shaftesbury described the worshipful attitude such farming experience can awaken (Voitle 1984: 265).

Mean while I have this inexpressible Satisfaction in these sort of speculations; that with their help in this Country-Retirement I can converse more intimately with Nature; view the greatness of her Design and Execution, & in the simplicity and Uniformity of her operations descry that sovereign hand that guides & governs all, with infinite Wisdom and Bounty; so that a student of this sort can never fail not only to believe; but to be (if I may say so) even conscious of a God, & witness to his Divine Economy.³¹

As a result of careful study and investigation, Shaftesbury came to see in excrement the beauty of God (see also C 2.210–11).

Shaftesbury expresses a similar love of nature in his notebooks from 1698–99. He reminds himself there that experiencing the great good of nature has nothing to do with owning 'a neat House: Garden: Seat,' nothing to do with the envy one might garner from conventionally impressive possessions (Askemata 198).

He who truly studdyes Nature, & lives with Nature, needs not either a Garden, or Wood, or Sea, or Rocks, to contemplate, & admire. A Dunghill, or Heap of any seeming Vile & Horrid Matter, is equall nay Superior to any of those pretended orderly Structures of things forcd out of their natural State. He [that] sees not the Beauty of Corruption; can see nothing in Generation or Growth: and he who has not allways before, & can kindly & benignly view the incessant & Eternall Chang & Conversion of things one into another, will in the midst of his Gardens & other Artifices, oftener arraign & disparage Nature, than applaud, & accompany Her. (Askemata 200)

Shaftesbury sought to impress on himself the superiority of wild beauty to 'pretended orderly Structures of things forcd out of their natural State.' He wanted to appreciate not just forests and oceans but also dunghills and heaps of seemingly vile matter, in which one can witness 'the Beauty of corruption,' the beauty of the conversion of things into one another.

'Beauty of every kind,' Shaftesbury says, 'naturally captivates the Heart' (C 3.20). The grander the order of an object, the more captivating its beauty. But rational investigation reveals that the order of nature is very grand indeed. That's why a cognitively rich appreciation of natural beauty is so intensely uplifting, rapturous.

In the meanest Subjects of the World, the Appearance of Order gains upon the Mind, and draws the Affection towards it. But if *the Order of the World it-self* appears just and beautiful; the Admiration and Esteem of Order must run higher, and the elegant Passion or Love of Beauty ... must be the more improv'd by its Exercise in so ample and magnificent a Subject. For 'tis impossible that such a *Divine Order* shou'd be contemplated without Extasy and Rapture; since in the common Subjects of Science, and the liberal Arts, whatever is according to just Harmony and Proportion, is so transporting to those who have any Knowledg or Practice in the kind. (C 2.43)

The greater the beauty of an object, the greater the love it arouses. Through knowledge of the system of nature we come to see the stupendous beauty of the world as a whole. Correspondingly stupendous is the love appreciation of it will arouse.

This love is not for physical stuff. Appreciation of fine sculpture is actually admiration for the sculptor. Love of beautiful things is actually love for the mind that has created the beauty.

31 The Earl of Shaftesbury to Mr Eyre, December 17, 1707 in PRO 30/24/22/4, pp. 55–56.

Love of nature's beauty is, then, love of nature's author. Admiration for 'whatever in Nature is beautiful' is admiration for the 'Sovereign Genius' responsible for the natural order, for the 'original and comprehensive One' (C 2.220–21). And since nature's beauty is surpassing, love for its author will be surpassing as well: ecstatic appreciation of the creator of cosmic unity. Theocles gladly calls this love 'enthusiasm,' but in the very same breath he reminds Philocles that it is based on rational understanding.

All Nature's Wonders serve to excite and perfect this Idea of their Author. 'Tis here he suffers us to see, and even converse with him, in a manner suitable to our Frailty. How glorious is it to contemplate him, in this noblest of his Works apparent to us, The System of the bigger World! (C 2.207)

We appreciate nature's wonders through 'Study, Science, or Learning' (C 2.224). The positive emotions of perfect theism grow out of appreciation of nature's wonders. Rationality transports us to love.

The enkindling of this love in Philocles is the underlying narrative thread of *The Moralists*. About religious matters Philocles had previously been ironic, bemused, detached. He enjoyed philosophical give-and-take, and was good at it, but the activity was for him essentially a game, a kind of banter. He'd adopt positions others were opposing, for the fun of it, and was not especially displeased if his ingenious counter-arguments provoked shocked indignation. He'd advance skeptical arguments about God as fluently as non-skeptical ones. And as just one more position to be intellectually bandied about, belief in God did not elicit from him any real passion. It did not engage in any significant way with his emotions or motivations.³² But after spending time in nature with Theocles he is transformed. Surprisingly to his friend Palemon and even to himself, there has arisen within him an ardor that shatters his former detachment (even if he can't resist still sometimes engaging in a bit of skeptical needling of 'over-serious' interlocutors). Theocles asks whether his 'poetick Extasys' have led Philocles 'into some deep View of Nature, and the Sovereign Genius' that would prove 'the Force of Divine Beauty' (C 2.223). Philocles affirms that he has been won over. 'You have indeed made good your part of the Condition, and may now claim me for a Proselyte' (C 2.223). 'I had,' he tells Palemon, 'chang'd my Character' (C 2.123). He finds himself now animated by a 'nobler Love' (C 2.120), an 'extravagance' of 'Admiration' that was 'unknown to me before' (C 2.224) 'Philocles, the cold indifferent Philocles, is become a pursuer of the same mysterious beauty,' says Theocles with a 'significant' smile (C 2.219–220).

Philocles's development embodies Shaftesbury's synthesis of deism and enthusiasm. The great virtue of deism is its rationality. Deism tells us to believe only that for which we have convincing evidence. Deism denies that we should ever deny reason within ourselves. But that is only part of the story. True religion also 'affects the Temper' (C 2.42). It shapes the 'Course of the Affections.' For this emotional power, 'divine Passion' is needed. Enthusiasm is passionate in just that way. Enthusiasm is a spirit within that is moved by 'an Opinion or Conceit of something majestick and divine' (C 3.20). Enthusiasm is dangerous when untethered from reason. But when it grows out of fully rational apprehension of the world—when the passion is a response to nature as it actually is—it completes religion within a person. The result is '*Philosophical Enthusiasm*,' 'a fair and plausible Enthusiasm, a reasonable Extasy and Transport,' an enthusiasm that is 'agreeable' (C 2.119, 224). Other writers opposed enthusiastic states to calm philosophical reflections, contrasted reasonable frames of mind with transporting ecstasies. Shaftesbury unites them through the experience of beauty, an experience that starts with rational understanding of the natural world and ends with rapturous love for nature's creator.

Shaftesbury wanted his readers to feel what Philocles came to feel. He gave *The Moralists* a form he thought would accomplish that. It's a Bildungsroman, with Philocles's development of love for nature's creator the personal progress. Shaftesbury strengthens our identification with Philocles by having him tell the story in first-personal letters. Those letters are to a friend named Palemon,

³² In this passage Philocles is initially talking about what he perceives to be his inability to love all of humanity. It's only later that the discussion shifts to the question of whether Philocles can love all of nature (which is the only part of the question I describe here). I discuss this shift in Gill (2016).

who is himself struggling to develop expansive love, which is another device to foster the reader's sympathetic identification. Also crucial is the character of Theocles, whom Shaftesbury portrays as the most appealing of characters, the most intelligent, the most delightful to be with, the most worthy of emulation. And then there are the florid landscape descriptions and paeans to nature's beauty, which bloom repeatedly during Philocles and Theocles's walk through the wilds. The elevated rhetoric of these passages might seem, if you come to *The Moralists* seeking only discursive argumentation and find yourself trying to fillet the logical skeleton out of the lengthy (very lengthy) novelistic features (who has time to wade through all that fluff?), ridiculous. But Shaftesbury has his characters explicitly comment on how highfalutin they themselves sound. There's a self-mocking humor to those passages that attempts at logico-philosophical filleting will miss (see C 2.109–11 and 2.210–11). And Theocles and Philocles always return to more flatfooted rational discourse. At the same time, Shaftesbury does sincerely want *The Moralists* to engage not only our reason but also our emotions, just as those with big ideas who choose to write philosophical novels have always done.³³ Towards that end, his characters' encounters out of doors, in 'the free Air,' are supposed to vivify a transformative experience the natural world can effect in even the most aloofly rational among us. Perhaps current expectations concerning philosophical argument and writing style are too far removed for Shaftesbury's approach to work well on us. But I hope we can still appreciate his attempt to spark in readers the cognitively rich emotional response he thinks essential to true worship.

Shaftesbury said that he originally intended the dialogue between Theocles and Philocles to be read by only a few friends. But either he was being disingenuous or he changed his mind. For he not only published versions of it on its own in 1704 and 1709, he also included it in the three-volume collection of his writings called *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.

The first edition of *Characteristicks* appeared in 1711. In the two years after that, Shaftesbury oversaw the preparation of the second edition. He was meticulous—obsessive, even—about how the book should look, sending the printer voluminous instructions about layout and design. The result was, as Voitle explains, a strikingly 'beautiful book at a time when English books were about the ugliest produced anywhere' (1984: 339).

The most important change from the first edition to the second was the addition of engraved illustrations, the details of which Shaftesbury took great care with. Paknadel writes,

[H]is notes and correspondence dealing with them are much more abundant than those about the revision of the text of *Characteristicks*.... [T]hese illustrations were not for him mere ornaments. They were to convey in another medium the main points of his written work, to 'instil some thoughts of virtue and honesty, and the love of liberty and mankind.' They were an 'underplot' working in perfect harmony with the main plot. (Paknadel 1974: 290)

The first new illustration of the second edition was a frontispiece portrait of the author. The engraver worked from a 1700–1701 portrait painting. The central figure of Shaftesbury is much the same in both images. But Shaftesbury instructed the engraver for the *Characteristicks* frontispiece to make significant changes to the setting (see Leatherbarrow 1984: 339–41). In both pictures, Shaftesbury stands in a room next to an arched exterior doorway. But while in the earlier painting a servant stands in the doorway, blocking our view almost entirely, in the later frontispiece the servant is gone and we can see out.

Directly outside the doorway are rectangular lawns with straight paths. In the middle distance are a square wall and a straight row of trees trimmed to identical pyramid shapes. But where the picture draws the eye, what we're most powerfully attracted to, is the landscape beyond—through the house, out the door, past the manicured lawns, past the topiary trees—to distant rugged hills rising under dramatic skies. The room houses books of philosophical wisdom. The garden and arbor look pleasant enough. But what the composition frames is a yearning to light out for the hilly wilds.

33 For Shaftesbury and the early novel, see Prince (1996: 43).

The beautiful second edition of *Characteristicks* was published in 1714. Shaftesbury did not live to see it. He died in 1713, at the age of forty-two.

ABBREVIATIONS

- C: Shaftesbury, the third Earl; Anthony Ashley Cooper. (1714) 2001. *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Introduction by Douglas Den Uyl. 3 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/shaftesbury-characteristicks-of-men-manners-opinions-times-3-vols>. Cited by volume and page number of the Liberty Fund edition.
- Askemata: Shaftesbury, the third Earl; Anthony Ashley Cooper. 2011. *Askemata*. Edited by Wolram Benda, Christine Jackson-Holzberg, Patrick Müller, and Friedrich A. Uehleim. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog. Cited by page number.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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