

# Spectatorship, Sympathy and the Self

The Importance and Fragility of Dialogue in the Work of  
the Third Earl of Shaftesbury

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In a work entitled *The Figure of the Theater*, American literary theorist David Marshall has traced the role played by the image of the theatrical relation between spectators and spectacle as a metaphor for everyday social relations within a group of predominantly eighteenth century writers. Crossing genres, Marshall examines works of philosophers, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Adam Smith and novelists, Daniel Defoe and George Eliot.<sup>1</sup> With Adam Smith, Marshall is interested in particular in the way the theatrical metaphor underlies the theory of sympathy developed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

The chapter on Smith seems to have been of particular importance for Marshall. Two years after the first book he published another, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, again crossing between philosophical works—now of Diderot and Rousseau—and dramatic and novelistic ones—Marivaux and Mary Shelley.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to this second work Marshall writes of his earlier book: 'I included Smith in the book because his treatise on sympathy seemed to me to be about the problem of theatricality but I began to sense that the texts which reflected or reflected on the problem of theatricality might also be addressing the question of sympathy.... By the time I returned to Marivaux and Rousseau, as well as to Diderot, Du Bos, and other eighteenth-century French authors, I knew that my subject had become the interplay of theater and sympathy.'<sup>3</sup>

Marshall's initial linking of Shaftesbury and Smith and his later linking of theatricality and sympathy seem highly significant from the point of view of aesthetics and moral philosophy. With these thinkers Marshall has chosen the philosophers who stand at the beginning and end of the tradition of moral and aesthetic sense theory. This tradition

1 New York, 1986.

2 Chicago, 1988.

3 *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, p. 2.

commences with Shaftesbury's postulation of a particular type of sense for the discrimination of aesthetic and moral qualities.<sup>4</sup> For Shaftesbury, our aesthetic and ethical judgments are importantly linked, and the aesthetic and ethical qualities of which they judge are treated as real, that is, in the world. Within English language philosophy, aesthetics and moral theory later parted ways and both tended to lose the 'realism' of Shaftesbury's approach. Recently, however, aesthetic and moral realism have returned.

As Marshall does not return to Shaftesbury, he does not explicitly address the relation between sympathy and theatricalization of social relations in his writings. Also, given the nature of his analysis, neither does he look at Shaftesbury or Smith within the wider contexts of their philosophical projects or the cultural dynamics of their time. In this essay I attempt to develop Marshall's analysis of Shaftesbury in this direction.

Marshall traces through a number of Shaftesbury's texts a recurrent concern, manifested not only in the content but also dramatized in the form of his writing, with the problematic ethical relationship existing between the writer and reader of publicly circulated texts.

In a number of places Shaftesbury returns to the theme of a type of corruption or perversion of communication which he perceives in the modern commodification of writing. The writer communicating with a mass and unknown audience is lured into a type of unauthentic playing to the crowd: 'The intercourse between the author and reader' writes Marshall, 'is cast as so much strutting, solicitation, seduction — what Shaftesbury calls 'the coquetry of a modern author' '.<sup>5</sup> Such authorial coquetry corrupts true communication by degenerating into a 'narcissistic appeal on the author's part to the reader's own narcissism, an appeal for the reader's favor.' Shaftesbury condemns the modern author's parading on the public stage and his solicitation of the reader as an audience for his 'immoderate' talk about himself.

4 Shaftesbury's essays were collected and first published in 1711. See Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinion, Times*, ed. John M. Robinson, introd. Stanley Grean, Indianapolis, 1964. The moral sense tradition influenced by Shaftesbury traverses the Scottish Enlightenment. Francis Hutcheson and David Hume are perhaps its two most central figures.

5 *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, p. 27. The quotation is from *Characteristics*, vol. 1, p. 131. All further references to this work will be given in the text as volume and page numbers.

Marshall highlights Shaftesbury's various rhetorical stratagems with which he attempts to prevent this degeneration of his own relation to the reader. In a number of works he adopts the letter form in which the communication pretends it is really for some single addressee. The appearance of the text in the market place and the author on the public stage is construed as a type of accidental by-product, the result of an act by a printer, rather than the author himself. Elsewhere he advocates and employs dramatic dialogue so as to avoid using the first person pronoun and so presenting himself before his audience. Finally, in his *Miscellaneous Reflections*, he talks about himself in the third person, claiming to 'descant cursorily upon some late pieces of a British author' and serve as 'critic and interpreter to this new writer' in order to 'correct his flegm, and give him more of the fashionable air and manner of the world' (2: 160-61).<sup>6</sup>

Shaftesbury's worry about such 'theatricalized' relations within written culture clearly is grounded in a more general concern with that type of corruption of everyday life in which lives are lived out entirely within the opinion of others. Here, one lives, in a self-alienated way, as it were, as an actor whose actions are predominantly for the gaze of others. We might read Shaftesbury here as gesturing towards that historical diagnosis of distinctly modern forms of intersubjectivity, forms linked to the emergence of market society, made with such precision later in the century by Rousseau.

Here, however, I wish to narrow the focus and examine the significance of such theatricalization of communicative relations from the point of view of Shaftesbury's critical orientation to his contemporary religious and political culture. As has been often pointed out, Shaftesbury held distinctly *pantheistic* philosophico-religious views and saw his contemporary world as threatened by two linked forms of life and thought: from a type of Hobbesian atheism on the one hand and from a transcendent theism from the other.<sup>7</sup> While

6 Such a technique enacts a device he advocates in the earlier work *Soliloquy or Advice to an Author* where he urges solitary discoursing with oneself by splitting oneself into two.

7 The interpretation of Shaftesbury as a pantheist, somewhat like Spinoza, has been common among German interpreters. On the whole English language commentaries have tended to cast him as a *deist*. Robert Toole ('Shaftesbury on God and his Relationship to the World', *International Studies in Philosophy*, 8 (1976): 81-100) surveys these two views and convincingly argues for the former. Stanley Grean in *Shaftesbury's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics*, Athens, Ohio, 1967, argues that he is a '*panentheist*' rather than a '*pantheist*' but, I believe, fails to make much of the distinction.

most of his contemporaries saw these as opposed cultural forms, for Shaftesbury they were, it seems, almost variants of the same thing. Both had accepted or were in the process of accepting the mechanical view of nature which had emerged out of the new science. In both cultural forms, God had gone from nature, either killed off or in exile, and nature was left as dead, mechanical, meaningless. Shaftesbury's pantheism split the difference by identifying god with nature in an effort to ward off the nihilism shared by the other views. From the pantheistic perspective the theatricalization of communication will be viewed as a corruption underlying patterns of those natural 'sympathetic' relations necessary for the underlying unity of the pantheist's world.

While certainly an unorthodox outlook in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pantheism was, nevertheless, far from unknown. The late renaissance thinker Giordano Bruno had advocated a pantheistic metaphysics which was modern in the sense that it incorporated the new Copernican cosmology, while in the seventeenth century, pantheism received a distinctly modern expression in the philosophy of Spinoza. Throughout these centuries pantheistic views were also not uncommonly found among the radical Protestant sects and tended to be associated with democratic and republican political views.

According to the historian Margaret C. Jacob, there was a revival of pantheistic views in England in the last decade of the seventeenth century, again in association with republican political views.<sup>8</sup> Such ideas, she argues, formed the basis of a radically Republican cultural and political movement, a 'radical enlightenment', which later crossed the channel and proceeded to run beneath the surface of the more moderate enlightenment culture of the eighteenth century. The English movement in the 1690s was centred on a London based group of intellectuals, linked to the neo-Harringtonian 'old Whigs' unhappy with the Revolution settlement of 1689 and the dominance of their 'court' Whig rivals.<sup>9</sup> Shaftesbury, grandson of the First Earl, the leading oppositional political figure of the restoration period, served as a member of parliament between 1695 and 1698 and moved

8 See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, London, 1981.

9 See J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform' in *Virtue, Commerce and History*, Cambridge, 1985.

in those circles Jacob identifies as at the centre of the radical enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> Of particular interest is Shaftesbury's association with the shadowy figure of John Toland, a political activist and propagandist who edited the works of both the earlier republican political theorist James Harrington and the Renaissance pantheist Giordano Bruno.<sup>11</sup> It was Toland who, in 1699, published Shaftesbury's first work, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*.<sup>12</sup> It was also Toland who coined the term 'pantheism'.

Whatever the details of its exact influences, Shaftesbury's pantheism seems to owe much to ancient Stoic cosmology. In the *Inquiry* and again in later works, Shaftesbury treats the living world holistically as a unified ecological system: the complementariness and interdependence perceivable between the parts of a single living body is repeated between the members of a species and then between different species and so on. Working one's way outward, one finally encounters a 'system of all things, a universal nature' (1: 246).

As for the Stoics, for Shaftesbury the human living subject is essentially part of such a world, standing, like other living things, in necessary relations to things around it. Like any other animal which has 'relation to some other being or nature besides his own' or which 'points beyond himself' the human being will 'undoubtedly be esteemed a part of some other system' (1:245). And this characteristic of 'pointing beyond itself' applies to human mental life as well. Conceived as already existing within necessary perceptual and cognitive relations to those other things forming part of the system to which it belongs, the human mind as conceived by Shaftesbury is a very different thing from that of the modern, individualist, Cartesian view which had been consolidating its grip on European culture since the mid seventeenth century.

- 10 Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713*, Baton Rouge, La., 1984, provides a comprehensive account of Shaftesbury's political and cultural affiliations.
- 11 On Toland see Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment*, as well as Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptation*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982. Pocock calls Toland the 'main actor in creating ... "the Whig canon" of seventeenth-century writers'. 'The Varieties of Whiggism' p. 232.
- 12 That the open espousal of controversial religious views was still dangerous is attested to by the fate of Thomas Aikenhead who was burned at the stake in Edinburgh in 1697, only two years before the appearance of the *Inquiry*, for attacking the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not unexpected then that Shaftesbury's views might often be cloaked in the outward garb of a more moderate theism.

From the Cartesian point of view, the mind is substantially different from the body. As not in time and space, the mind is figured as staring at the world from no particular place in it. Stanley Cavell has commented on the relevance of the theater as an image of such a relation.<sup>13</sup> Watching a play I am observing events within a time and space which I do not inhabit. And if I observe the world as if from nowhere in it, I, qua mind, can never be present to it despite the fact that it can be present to me. Hence arises one of the classic problems of modern philosophy, the problem of 'other minds'. Given the fact that all I can perceive of others is their *bodies*, how can I know that those bodies 'contain' *minds*?

But within the pantheistic framework, since the minds of others cannot be conceived as substantially distinct from their bodies, and since the embodied human mind itself points beyond itself to other things, there is no metaphysical barrier preventing individual mind from directly engaging with other minds. It is for this reason that Shaftesbury can describe the mind as a 'spectator or auditor of other minds' (1: 251), a conception which is essentially unthinkable from the modern individualist Cartesian perspective. In fact it is these relations between embodied minds which accounts for the individual mind's participation within the divine mind, a mind which is essentially simply the system of all living minds.

It is this idea of the individual mind as immanent within a living enminded system that allows Shaftesbury to be a realist about aesthetic and moral qualities. The individual human mind reaches out to engage with other things in the world from its rootedness in the human body and from the interested perspective of this body: 'We know that every creature has a private good and interest of his own, which Nature has compelled him to seek, by all the advantages afforded him within the Compass of his make. We know that there is in reality a right and a wrong state of every creature, and that his right-one is by nature forwarded and by himself affectionately sought' (1: 243). But as each individual is a part of a larger living system, it is not surprising that we find in humans, besides their private affections working toward their own private good, natural social affections directed towards the good of the system of which they are a part, the system that is the condition of their individual existence and identity.

From this perspective we now have a very different conception to

13 See Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge, 1976.

that found in Cartesianism concerning the experience of values. The individual perceives the world from the perspective of his or her own interests and thus finds affectively discerned qualities immediately present in it: the embodied mind 'feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable, in the affections; and finds as a foul and fair, a harmonious and dissonant, as really and truly here, as in any musical numbers or in the outward forces and representations of sensible things' (1: 251).

From the Cartesian point of view, the attribution to the world of qualities like these must be based on an error. These qualities are *subjective*, are actually *in* the subject's mind in the way that *feelings* are, they are not in the world. Science, that is, mathematical physics, reveals how the world in fact is, and science does not discover in the world qualities like these; our experience of things as soft or harsh or fair or foul involves the retrospective *projection* onto a featureless physical world of feelings produced in the mind *by* that world.

Such was the view of all qualities other than those 'primary' ones dealt with by science which was incorporated into English philosophy via Shaftesbury's tutor, John Locke. In the mechanistic Newtonian world view which combined with Anglican theology and came to dominate English high culture at the end of the seventeenth century, the physical world is devoid not only of aesthetic or morally relevant qualities, it is devoid of all life: all form and direction are imposed on a dead world from without by a transcendent God. One might see how such a view might appeal to the supporters of a centralized, hierarchical state, and be antipathetic to the republican spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Shaftesbury rejected both this view of the natural world and the mind's relation to it. For him the feelings or affections, while *in* the subject are not projected onto a featureless world in perception giving it the illusion of quality. Rather, they are more the essential subjective conditions for the apprehension of such qualities regarded as real.<sup>15</sup>

- 14 But as what Shaftesbury seems to have meant by 'atheism' was the inability to discern a meaningful order in the world, a state that we might think of now as 'nihilism', the Newtonian religion was almost a variant of atheism.
- 15 Recent revivals of moral realism based on a view of the subject as essentially embodied and located in the world have a somewhat Shaftesburian flavour. See, for example, Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, Oxford, 1983. Charles Taylor in 'Self-interpreting animals' in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*, Cambridge, 1985, has, from a similar perspective, explored the role of emotions as 'modes of affective disclosure' of the world. There has as yet been little reassessment of Shaftesbury against this sort of background—J. D. Filonowicz, 'Ethical Sentimentalism Revisited',

He thus rejects the very framework presupposed by the error theory of qualitative perception. Again, it is Shaftesbury's criticism of the religious presuppositions of the mechanical philosophy which is at work here. For Descartes and Galileo and subsequently Locke, Boyle and Newton, the idea of a transcendent deity provided the model of a type of 'spectatorial' knowing of the world from some point outside it, free of its conditioning. Science approximates God's knowledge of the world and God's *will* is the source of objective moral value. By rejecting the idea of a transcendent deity, Shaftesbury thereby rejects the idea of an 'absolute viewpoint' from which the world can be perceived free of subjective conditions. We can, of course, fall into particular errors in our affective discernment of values; and the error will be, in some sense, due to the subjectivity and limitedness of one's view. But this is to be interpreted as following on from perceiving the world from the vantage-point of one's *private* affections alone to the detriment of one's natural social ones. This is why a culture will have to tutor the individual in the discernment of the right feelings and why aesthetic and moral sensibilities are so intimately linked.

Such a theory as this will of course need some account of how this coordination of private and social affections is possible and it is here in Shaftesbury that we encounter the crucial concept of *sympathy*.

Ancient Stoics like Marcus Aurelius had thought of the cosmos as pervaded by a universal harmony or sympathy between all things. While Shaftesbury toys with such ideas, his idea of sympathy is basically tied to human communication. Thus among the natural public affections is to be found the 'enjoyment of good by communication. A receiving it, as it were, by reflection, or by way of participation in the good of others' (1: 298). Such 'pleasures of sympathy' are communicatively received 'from accounts and relations of such happiness, from the very countenances, gestures, voices and sounds, even of creatures foreign to our kind, whose signs of joy and contentment we can any way discern' (*ibid.*). We can now see how

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*History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6 (1989): 189-206, is a notable exception. A reassessment of some of those *influenced* in this way by Shaftesbury, particularly Hutcheson and Hume, is, however, underway. See, for example, David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, Princeton, 1982.



the individual can be thought of as unproblematically able, in vision or hearing, to read the minds of others. Shaftesbury's concept of sympathy proceeds from the same foundations as his value realism. The mind is never outside the world, viewing as through a window, it is from the start in the world, embodied and communicatively engaged with other minds with whom it shares affections.<sup>16</sup>

Communication is thus, for Shaftesbury, the medium of that sympathy which, resonating through the social whole, is responsible for whatever harmony of social existence is possible. And so it is not surprising that we might find in his writings that obsessive concern which Marshall has discerned—a concern with the effects of those dramatic changes in the scope and media of public communication occurring in his time. Communication may be the key to understanding the Stoic notion of sympathy, but communication had certainly been transformed since antiquity.

In *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury represents dialogue rather than monologue as the natural context for reasoning: 'Vicissitude is a mighty law of discourse and mightily longed for by mankind. In matters of reason, more is done in a minute or two, by way of question and reply, than by a continued discourse of whole hours. Orators are fit only to move the passions: and the power of declamation is to terrify, exalt, ravish or delight, rather than satisfy or instruct' (1, 49). And yet dialogue is not the predominant form of discourse in the modern world. In *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury has Philocles comment on the way 'we moderns who abound so much in treatises and essays are so sparing in the way of dialogue, which heretofore was found the politest and best way of managing even the graver subjects' (2: 6).<sup>17</sup>

However, it would seem that the distinction between dialogue and monologue cannot be taken entirely literally: dialogical relations can,

16 It is on the basis of the same sort of reading of sympathy that revisionists like David Norton read Hume as a value realist. (See fn. 15).

17 In *Soliloquy*, Shaftesbury comments on the way that the ancient dialogue form looks ridiculous in modern garb and comments: 'Thus dialogue is at an end. The ancients could see their own faces, but we cannot.' (1, 136) Shaftesbury's overt meaning here is that we cannot portray ourselves as the agents of dialogue and so cannot see our own faces in this type of literature. Perhaps this can also be read, however, as commenting on the effects on communicative activity brought about by the creation of the press and the development of mass literacy and a reading public. Philosophical communication is no longer something that goes on predominantly in face to face exchange. It is only typeface that stares back at the modern philosophical 'dialogist'.

as it were, insert themselves into monologue. In *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* Shaftesbury notes how the *imagined* response of an audience can effect expression: 'Our modern wits are more or less raised by the opinion they have of their company, and the idea they form to themselves of the persons to whom they make their addresses. A common actor of the stage will inform us how much a full audience of the better sort exalts him above the common pitch' (1: 8). Shaftesbury uses this to reconstruct a modern version of the notion of the muse. In his monological 'letter' addressed and dedicated to an unnamed Lord, he is able to 'raise' his thoughts by virtue of addressing them to a 'great man of a more than ordinary genius, whose imagined presence may inspire me with more than what I feel at ordinary hours' (1: 8-9). The paradox is, as Marshall points out, Shaftesbury's letter is no ordinary letter to an individual but a printed text circulated on the market, put on the public stage to be read by an unknown audience.

But what is the actual problem with the writer appearing on the public stage before an unknown audience? Might not we see this as an instance of the universal sympathy for which the modern Stoic is searching? The problem here is that the universalization of relations strains the very notion of sympathy. In *Sensus Communis*, he contrasts sympathetic friendship with its 'consent or harmony of minds ... mutual esteem and reciprocal tenderness and affection' from 'that common benevolence and charity which every Christian is obliged to show towards all men ...' (1: 61, note 1).<sup>18</sup> That is, the universalizing of relationships abstracts away from those very qualities which allow particular natures to sympathize with each other.

The issue of the particularity of those communicative relations grounded in sympathy is raised elsewhere in the same work when Shaftesbury, in differentiating the 'liberty of the club' from the 'freedom of public assemblies', defends the limitation of certain forms of 'frankness of humour' to particular communicative contexts. The 'club' can provide the context for the greater liberty of speech because it is a realm of 'gentlemen and friends who know one another perfectly well'. Again it is in the maintenance of dialogue which is at issue here: "'Tis a breach of the harmony of public conversation to

18 The passage continues 'and in particular towards his fellow Christians, his neighbour, brother and kindred, of whatever degree' (1: 67 note 1). That is, where Christianity does bring particularity into its ethics it is not based in that 'natural harmony of minds' found within the voluntary relations of friendship but imposed by external factors.

take things in such a key as is above the common reach, puts others to silence, and robs them of their privilege of turn. But as to private society, and what passes in select companies, where friends meet knowingly, and with that very design of exercising their wit, and looking freely into all subjects, I see no pretence for any one to be offended at the way of raillery and humour, which is the very life of such conversations ...' (1: 53).

In Shaftesbury's concerns over the 'coquetry' of the modern author we can detect the structure of the corruption that threatens modern communication. Here communication is not being fuelled by the social affections: the universalization of the communicative relations means that the communication can no longer be motivated by the pleasures of sympathetic company. All that is now left to motivate the communication are the private egoistic affections and so the process now comes to be driven by the immoderate desire for fame and notoriety. The expansion of the public communicative realm, while promising to expand the channels of sympathy, actually threatens to destroy them by subverting them into instruments of private self-affections. In the *Inquiry* Shaftesbury talks of the hypertrophy of 'an honest emulation or love of praise' when it 'breaks into an enormous pride and ambition' (1: 327). An honest and moderate love of praise is by no means antipathetic to the public interest just as a moderate degree of desire for wealth is not antipathetic to the common good. But the threat posed to the common good is particularly acute when the fabric of communication is endangered by the private interests because this represents a threat to the medium of sympathy itself.

Shaftesbury's holistic and pantheistic framework allows a place for actions to be motivated by social affections. From the Cartesian based mechanistic point of view, however, all affective motivations are necessarily reduced to private self-interest. Sympathy becomes based on self-affections. Hobbes had set the model for this reduction. 'Pity' he said 'is imagination or fiction of future calamity to *ourselves* proceeding from the sense of *another man's* calamity.'<sup>19</sup> This idea

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. Molesworth, vol IV, p. 44. The master of this deflationary analysis of moral sentiment is the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. Maxim 264 is typical: 'Pity is often feeling our own suffering in those of others, a shrewd precaution against misfortunes that may befall us. ...' *Maxims*, tr. Leonard Tancock, Penguin Books, 1959.

was to be repeated in the eighteenth century by Mandeville in his influential critique of Shaftesbury's notion of natural social affections and was also the basis of Adam Smith's somewhat Newtonian reworking of the concept of sympathy in *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments*. As Marshall demonstrates, Smith constructs his whole theory of the moral sentiments on the basis of a theatricalised image of social relations. One views the other as one views an actor on a stage and in turn reflectively imagines oneself from their point of view, that is as on stage oneself and acting for a viewer. Moral sentiments are to be explained by the fact that the other serves not as a genuine other but rather as a type of screen onto which one projects imagined states of oneself. Sympathy becomes a disguised form of regard for the self, not a genuinely moral concern for the suffering of another. Like aesthetic qualities, qualities relevant for one's moral life, another person's pain for example, become reduced to a state of the self, one's own pain, projected onto an indifferent object.

Smith's reversal of the relations between sympathy and theatricality signals the triumph of the Newtonian mechanistic philosophy over Shaftesbury's pantheism. For Shaftesbury, the theatricalised and egoistic relations of a self to another was a constantly threatening degeneration of relations of sympathy. For Smith they become the infrastructure and truth of the phenomena of sympathy. Sympathy can be a primitive concept for Shaftesbury because of his holistic starting point while self-interestedness of motivation can be the primitive notion for Smith because of his mechanistic one. We might read this as a result of the triumph of a modern scientific metaphysics over a doomed attempt to revive an ancient pantheistic one. But this would miss the depth of Shaftesbury's critique. Shaftesbury is more 'moralist' than 'metaphysician' and his pantheism should not be seen as a metaphysical rival to science as much as a practical and therapeutic response to modernity's own hypostatization of science into a secular religion, as equally prone to fanatical degeneration as any other.

The dialogical form of Shaftesbury's *The Moralists* suggests how his pantheistic vision should be regarded. In part 3, Theocles, whose rapturous hymn to nature articulates the pantheistic world-view (and who has been traditionally thought as representing Shaftesbury's own views) attempts in his rhapsodizing to convince the sceptical Philocles of the perfect unity, goodness and beauty of a divine nature.

Philocles' scepticism centres on his resistance to the pantheist's treatment of evil. For the pantheist, the perfection of the whole of nature must imply that the evil in it is only apparent. Such apparent evil is actually redeemed by the contributory role it plays to the goodness of the whole.

Throughout the work, Philocles has returned on numerous occasions to the existence of human evil in the world. Unconvinced by Theocles he tells him that his 'solutions ... of the ill appearances are not perfect enough to pass for demonstration' (2: 108). Theocles' reply hangs on the unreasonableness of Philocles' demand for demonstration: 'in an infinity of things, mutually relative, a mind which sees not infinitely can see nothing fully, and must therefore frequently see that as imperfect which is itself in reality perfect. Are the appearances then any objection to our hypothesis?' To Philocles' reply that they are not 'whilst they remain appearances only' Theocles counters 'Can you then prove them to be any more?' (*ibid.*)

The conception of philosophy dramatized here is a therapeutic one. Neither conversationalist is able to rationally generalize their point of view in a way that it can explain away the other and so reject its place in the dialogue. In an 'infinity of things, mutually relative' there can be no point from which the whole itself can be grasped and so the pantheist cannot legitimately claim for himself a view of the whole to dismiss his opponents claims. But from this point of view neither can the opponent claim a position from which to assert the ultimacy of human evil, such as the Hobbist view that all human motivations are forms of individual self-seeking. What the pantheist *can* do, however, is claim a place within the dialogue on the world as no single point of view can have the final word.

The task the metaphysician sets himself is that of attaining a conception of how the world actually is irrespective of the subjective conditions of its viewing. For the nonmetaphysical pantheist, however, the task is 'how to gain that point of view whence probably we may best discern; and how to place ourselves in that unbiased state in which we are fittest to pronounce' (2: 31).

For both Theocles and Shaftesbury, the unbiased state aimed for must always be within a form of sympathetic dialogue in which the other's point of view plays a moderating and correcting role. In order to sing his hymn to nature Theocles, accompanied by his skeptical companion, has taken himself to a place in the woods to be inspired by its genius. But his companion's presence is just as crucial as that of the sylvan spirit. Midway through his rapturous hymn, Theocles

breaks off and reprimands Philocles for not having interrupted him. 'Have you at once given over your scrupulous philosophy, to let me range thus at pleasure through these aerial spaces and imaginary regions where my capricious fancy or easy faith has led me? I would have you to consider better, and know, my Philocles, that I had never trusted myself with you in this vein of enthusiasm, had I not relied on you to govern it a little better' (2: 114).

Theocles' admonition of Philocles suggests that rather than merely serving as a device for articulating a pantheistic vision, the notion of our essential embeddedness within dialogical relations to others is Shaftesbury's essential concept. Like a number of recent philosophers, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Emmanuel Levinas to name but two,<sup>20</sup> Shaftesbury tries to develop some of the epistemological, ethical and aesthetic consequences of this concept. His diagnosis of the cultural, political and psychological dangers of a seducing monological mass-communication, his view of the philosopher not as an aspirant to a God's-eye-view of the universe but as a therapist of disempowering degenerations of language, and his attention to the dangers of a view of nature as dead and without intrinsic value and so as potential raw material for our fantasies of total power over it, all resonate within contemporary thought.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. J. Cumming, London, 1975, and Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. A. Lingis, Pittsburg, 1969.