



*Anthony, Third Earl of Shaftesbury*

*Characteristicks*  
OF  
Men, Manners, Opinions, Times

*Anthony,*  
THIRD EARL OF SHAFTESBURY

Foreword by Douglas Den Uyl

*Vid.*

*Inf.*



Vol. III.

*Sim: Gribelin sculps:*

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## FOREWORD

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, wrote one of the most important and influential books of the eighteenth century. Other than Locke's *Second Treatise*, Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, first published in 1711, was the most reprinted book in English in that century. A three-volume work, the *Characteristicks* was influential not only in England but throughout Europe. Three centuries later, Shaftesbury is most remembered—when he is remembered at all—as the initiator of the “moral sense” school of British ethical theory usually associated with another eighteenth-century thinker, Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, and others of that era are connected to Shaftesbury as part of a way of moral theorizing that emphasized sentiment in moral experience.

The groundwork for that movement is certainly to be found in the pages of Shaftesbury, but one would do well not to approach these texts predisposed to a certain framework or perspective. In doing so, one would miss a richness of style and substance, an exceptional learning, and a subtlety of thought seldom paralleled in the English language. Shaftesbury's essay “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit” is the basis of his reputation. But it is a work quite unlike the others in these volumes. The “Inquiry” is deductive and reads like a formal treatise. Most of the other works are discursive and literary in character. It would be difficult even to classify some of the essays, such as the “Miscellaneous Reflections.” Indeed, when one considers the *Characteristicks* as a whole, one finds here a collection of writings of great diversity. No doubt this diversity was intentional on Shaftesbury's part. He tells us, for example, that “there is more need . . . to interrupt the long-spun thread of reasoning, and bring into the mind, by many different

glances and broken views, what cannot so easily be introduced by one steady bent or continued stretch of sight.”

It is, in fact, one of the intriguing features about Shaftesbury that, although his remarks seem clear enough, efforts to identify his full position on an issue can often be more complicated than expected. For example, in “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” we find, apparently, an argument for vented, but moderated, enthusiasm as part of a recommendation for religious toleration. Enthusiasm—which at the time was usually connected to religion and had a ring of “fanaticism” to it—was said to be natural to human beings. Rather than suppress enthusiasm as some would recommend, Shaftesbury argues for constrained tolerance. However, by the end of the essay, we read that “something there will be of extravagance and fury, when the ideas or images received are too big for the narrow human vessel to contain. So that inspiration may be justly called divine enthusiasm; for the word itself signifies divine presence, and was made use of by the philosopher whom the earliest Christian Fathers called divine, to express whatever was sublime in human passions.”

After reading “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm” one is left with more questions than answers. Is there a form of enthusiasm that Shaftesbury finds unqualifiedly good? If so, is this enthusiasm like the other enthusiasm that worried so many in Shaftesbury’s day? If not, what is the difference? Is enthusiasm really a feature of human nature? This passage suggests that enthusiasm comes from outside the human person. To what extent is enthusiasm a feature of Christianity? The same passage is ambiguous about that question, but it suggests an ancient, pre-Christian form of enthusiasm. If there are non-Christian forms, is the Christian version a purer form of enthusiasm? With respect to the number and variety of questions it raises, this essay is typical of the others found in the *Characteristicks*.

Not only do these writings open a number of questions for exploration, but they raise them in diverse formats. The “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm” is called a “letter,” but we have as well (in Shaftesbury’s own words) an “essay,” “advice,” an “inquiry,” a

“rhapsody,” and “miscellaneous reflections” on the preceding treatises. Not only are different modes of reflective thinking represented, but in the “Miscellaneous Reflections” Shaftesbury further complicates matters by giving us thoughts about his own thoughts. All this makes for fascinating reading, to be sure, but it also signals some fascinating rereading. One can come back to these texts over and over again and still find fresh insights. And the different nature of these works, not to mention the subtle contours within them, only adds to the enjoyment of rereading them. No wonder the *Characteristicks* was so popular during the eighteenth century.

Why, then, would the *Characteristicks* eventually fall into such obscurity? One can only speculate: are the different forms of writing diverse ways of pointing to one message, are they refracted glimpses from a single perspective, or could they be disparate and only loosely connected points of view? Whatever the answer, there is a certain degree of self-conscious subtlety that Shaftesbury has put into this work to elicit these questions. This subtlety is endemic to the sensibilities of the eighteenth century, but perhaps not so to subsequent eras. This difference of temperament may in part explain the *Characteristicks*' fall from favor. The work's messages are perhaps multiple and not driven home with the same transparency of purpose and objective as writings of later times. Indeed, Shaftesbury calls upon the reader to reflect with him, a somewhat more demanding task than asking only that the reader grasp a message. Furthermore, Shaftesbury expects the reader to make some effort, so the author is not compelled to please pre-existing tastes or opinions. In this respect, Shaftesbury stands in contrast to the modern author who “purchases his reader's favour by all imaginable compliances and condescensions.” Shaftesbury writes less to inform, instruct, or persuade than to move the reader to thought.

Yet despite the demands placed upon the reader for intellectual reflection, there is nevertheless a peculiarly aesthetic quality to Shaftesbury's array of styles and forms of writing. Indeed, the aesthetic element looms large in Shaftesbury, and he has been credited with pioneering some forms of modern thinking about aesthetics and aesthetic experience. The eighteenth century itself was deeply

concerned with the aesthetic, in large measure, I believe, due to Shaftesbury. One thinks of Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), but Hume, Hutcheson, Smith, and others give aesthetic issues—or at least the imagination—central importance in their theories.

For Shaftesbury, the companion to intellectual reflection is aesthetic experience. These activities are not only mutually reinforcing, but share certain dimensions. One is struck by the beauty of any object of understanding, and the beautiful is itself a sign of an order waiting to be grasped by the mind. Aristotle noted that the most abstract thought is aided by and represented in the imagination, and Shaftesbury is ever mindful of this insight. The *Characteristicks* appeals to both intellect and imagination. But more than this, Shaftesbury may have been one of the first to understand that the modern world would be moved primarily by imagination, however much he may have preferred the guidance of reason. Indeed, it is here that the link to sentiment mentioned earlier is to be found, for sentiment and imagination are themselves integrally connected.

Believing that the modern world would be moved by imagination and sentiment, Shaftesbury's task was to fashion a way to lead the reader to intellectual introspection and reflection while engaging the imagination. The aesthetic dimension was, therefore, the link between intellect and imagination, sentiment and judgment. One of the truly remarkable features of the *Characteristicks* is its use of visual images—one for each essay, each volume, and for the work as a whole. These images were carefully and meticulously designed by Shaftesbury himself to represent, in visual terms, some of the main themes of his writings. In the early editions containing these images, the page numbers for the corresponding passages are often included on the image itself.

The round frontispiece that serves as the image for the entire *Characteristicks* refers to two passages in the “Miscellaneous Reflections.” Both are given originally in Greek, and, interestingly, both originally appear in a footnote rather than the body of the text itself. The first passage, from Marcus Aurelius, is:



What view you take is everything, and your view is in your power. Remove it then when you choose, and then, as if you had rounded the cape, come calm serenity, a waveless bay.

In the frontispiece are ships in a harbor, which is the representation of the “waveless bay.” The ships have presumably “rounded the cape” as well. The second citation is from Epictetus and reads:

As is the water-dish, so is the soul; as is the ray which falls on the water, so are the appearances. When then the water is moved the ray too seems to be moved, yet is not. And when, accordingly, a man is giddy, it is not the arts and the virtues which are thrown into confusion, but the spirit to which they belong; and when he is recovered so are they.

One sees in the frontispiece a water-dish with a ray striking it. The Greek on the image itself can be rendered as “what light can be given,” pointing further to the passage from Epictetus. The image then, with the interpretative help given to us by Shaftesbury, can not only offer us some insight into the text, but also serve as a way of reminding us of the text in significant themes. And, in a manner reminiscent of the emblem books of the preceding century, in which didactic messages are reinforced with visual imagery, these images encourage the sort of reflection that Shaftesbury more fully elicits from the reader.

For almost the first time in an English edition since the eighteenth century, this Liberty Fund edition produces Shaftesbury’s images as part of his text as they were originally situated. Certainly these images were regarded by Shaftesbury to be as much a part of the *Characteristicks* as the words themselves. That the words could have appeared without the images for so long offers a possible reason for scholarly inattention to the *Characteristicks* for the last three centuries. What Shaftesbury sought to have function together—namely, words and images—came to be separated and specialized in later eras. Today, the so-called “mixing of media” represents something of a return to Shaftesbury’s insight into the presentation of ideas.

The images are meant to help the reader sort through a rather complicated text, but they are themselves complicated. For example, in the frontispiece image, one finds a snake with its tail in its mouth, the shield of Athena, a lion biting a column, a bridle and bit, a scroll and book, a sphinx, and more. In this as in the other images, all symbols are placed deliberately and, presumably, have significance for accomplishing the ends Shaftesbury has in mind. Exploration of the images leads to exploration of the text and vice versa. But what exactly the symbols in these images signify may not always be clear to the contemporary reader. Some imagery may be particular to Shaftesbury himself or to his time. There is, at present, little scholarship on this issue, with a notable and helpful exception in Felix Paknadel's "Shaftesbury's Illustrations of *Characteristics*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtnauld Institutes*, vol. 37, 1974. Shaftesbury's images are more complicated and abstract than most of the emblem images in earlier emblem books, but this fact only adds to our puzzlement over particulars in Shaftesbury's case. Clearly, however, the aesthetic dimension was of central significance to Shaftesbury. This Liberty Fund edition is essentially the 1732 edition, including the "Letter Concerning Design" and "The Judgment of Hercules." Together these essays help us to appreciate Shaftesbury's desire to link imagery with broader philosophical themes.

In the end, however, both with respect to the images and the writings themselves, it is the reader's path to self-awareness that Shaftesbury seeks to illuminate. His invitation to exploration is an invitation to self-exploration. Significantly, the invitation is not meant to pull one towards a truth outside of oneself. On the contrary, as one rounds each corner of the labyrinth that is the *Characteristicks*, one takes another step on the path of self-exploration. As the author of this challenging work declares, "'Tis not enough to show us merely faces which may be called men's; every face must be a certain man's."

Douglas J. Den Uyl

2000

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This edition of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* is based upon the 1732 edition. The *Characteristicks* was first published in 1711, but was revised in 1713 by Shaftesbury before his death. The 1714 edition is therefore the edition most often considered as the reference point for other editions. It includes Shaftesbury's emblematic images and "A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules." Despite its inclusion in the 1714 edition, it seems not to be the case that the "Judgment of Hercules" was meant for the *Characteristicks*. The emblematic images, however, certainly were, for they were carefully designed in detail by Shaftesbury himself. The "Judgment of Hercules" along with the "Letter Concerning Design" were meant for a separate publication, but the latter gets included for the first time in the 1732 edition and remains through the 1790 edition. The reason we have chosen to include these two pieces in this Liberty Fund edition has to do with our presentation of the emblematic images. The images were designed to be part of the text of the *Characteristicks*, but have been virtually invisible since the eighteenth century. To include them now would seem to raise some interest in Shaftesbury's aesthetic views and thus in any direct statements he may have made about that matter. These two pieces offer some insight to the modern reader who is now rather distant from Shaftesbury himself. Moreover, these works (along with the images) were very much a part of the eighteenth century's familiarity with this work.

A guiding principle of this edition has been to invite the modern reader into it. Shaftesbury's main audience may have been those who were educated but who may not have been specialists or scholars. We therefore sought to produce an attractive "readable" edition. Apart from modernizing the letters, we have taken some other steps to make the text accessible to modern readers. The text of the *Characteristicks* contains many Latin and Greek quotations.

Today, even scholarly audiences, unless specially trained, are not able to read through these easily. In the Robertson edition—the most familiar English-language edition of the twentieth century—most of these passages have been translated in footnotes. We have done the opposite. We have moved the Robertson translations to the body of the text and the original language quotations to the footnotes. Because Robertson was the most extant edition of the twentieth century, we have kept his translations. However, Dr. Evanthia Speliotis reviewed the translations of the Greek, and Daniel Mahoney and Kathleen Alvis reviewed the translations of the Latin to see if there were any egregious errors. They also did the translations for those passages that Robertson somehow failed to translate. Unless we found a serious error or other fatal flaw, we retained the Robertson translation even if a “better” or more literal rendering could be imagined.

This edition of the *Characteristicks* is in three volumes, as the original was. Included is Shaftesbury’s original index. This index has sometimes been abandoned in later editions on the grounds that it was an inadequate and outmoded search device. It was, however, an index Shaftesbury did himself. It is often rather unusual in its entries (see for example what he has listed under “philosophy”), and for that reason may be useful as a tool of interpretation. Rather than transfer Shaftesbury’s page numbers listed in the index into our own, we have inserted them in brackets in the margins, with the precise point where the page begins indicated by an inverted caret ‘ in the text. Shaftesbury’s footnote cross-references also refer to these pages. Including the original page numbers has an additional advantage when it comes to the images. With each image that began an essay, Shaftesbury offered the page numbers where passages could be found that help to explain the meaning of the image. Retaining the original page numbers allows this referencing to be more easily accomplished.

Finally, we have sought to keep the text as free as possible from scholarly apparatus and commentary. There are recent scholarly editions of the *Characteristicks* in English, most notably the one

by Lawrence Klein for Cambridge University Press and the one by Philip Ayres for Oxford University Press. These editions are well worth consultation. The Liberty Fund publishing mission, however, is one that generally seeks to minimize such insertions whenever possible. In the end, our hope—somewhat like Shaftesbury’s own—is to have an edition that engages any educated reader as well as the scholar.

VOLUME I

A Letter concerning ENTHUSIASM.

*Sensus Communis*; an Essay on the Freedom  
of WIT and HUMOUR.

*Soliloquy*, or Advice to an AUTHOR.

VOLUME II

An Inquiry concerning VIRTUE and MERIT.

The MORALISTS; a Philosophical Rhapsody.

VOLUME III

MISCELLANEOUS REFLECTIONS on the said  
Treatises, and other critical Subjects.

A Notion of the Historical Draught, or Tablature  
of the Judgment of HERCULES. With a  
Letter concerning DESIGN.

# Characteristicks

## VOLUME I

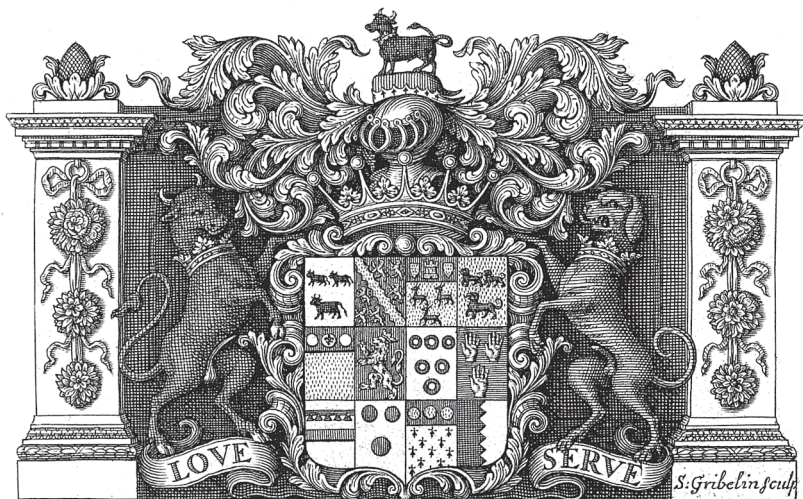
A Letter concerning ENTHUSIASM.

*Sensus Communis*; an Essay on the Freedom  
of WIT and HUMOUR.

*Soliloquy*, or Advice to an AUTHOR.



Printed in the Year M.DCC.XXXII.



## P R E F A C E

**I**F the Author of these united Tracts had been any Friend to PREFACES, he wou'd probably have made his Entrance after that manner, in one or other of the Five Treatises formerly publish'd apart. But as to all Prefatory or Dedicatory Discourse, he has told us his Mind sufficiently, in that Treatise which he calls SOLILOQUY. Being satisfy'd however, that there are many Persons who esteem these Introductory Pieces as very essential in the Constitution of a Work; he has thought fit, in behalf of his honest Printer, to substitute these Lines under the Title of a PREFACE; and to declare, "That (according to his best Judgment and Authority) these Presents ought to pass, and be receiv'd, constru'd, and taken, as satisfactory in full, for all Preliminary Composition, Dedication, direct or indirect Application for Favour to the Publick, or to any private Patron, or Party whatsoever: Nothing to the contrary appearing to him, from the side of Truth, or Reason." [iv]

Witness his Hand, this Fifth Day of December, 1710.

A. A. C. A. N. A. A. E.

C. M. D. C. L. X. X. J.



TREATISE I

VIZ.

A LETTER  
CONCERNING  
ENTHUSIASM,  
TO  
My Lord *Sommers*.

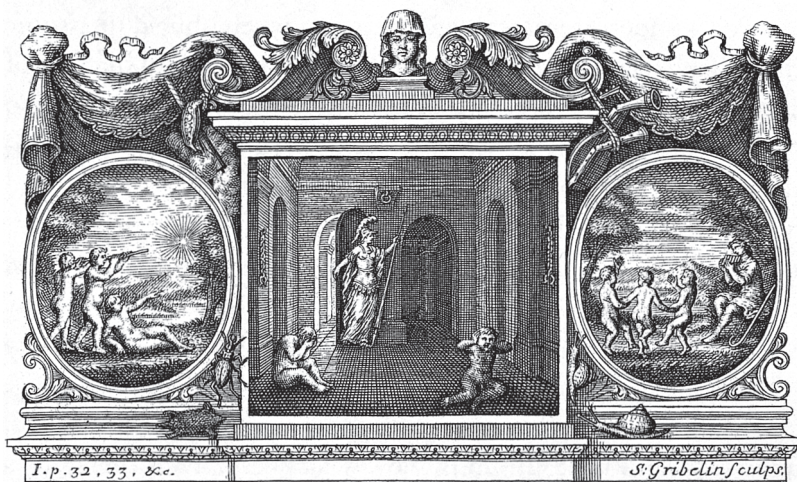
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*What is to prevent one from telling  
the truth as he laughs?\** Hor. Sat. I.

---

Printed first in the Year M.DCC.VIII.

\*Ridentem dicere Verum  
Quid vetat?



## A LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

Sept. 1707.

**N**OW, you are return'd to . . . . and before the Season comes which must engage you in the weightier Matters of State; if you care to be entertain'd a-while with a sort of idle Thoughts, such as pretend only to Amusement, and have no relation to Business or Affairs, you may cast your Eye slightly on what you have before you; and if there be any thing inviting, you may read it over at your leisure.'

[4]

It has been an establish'd Custom for Poets, at the entrance of their Work, to address themselves to some *Muse*: and this Practice of the Antients has gain'd so much Repute, that even in our days we find it almost constantly imitated. I cannot but fancy however, that this Imitation, which passes so currently with other Judgments, must at some time or other have stuck a little with your Lordship; who is us'd to examine Things by a better Standard than that of Fashion or the common Taste. You must certainly have observ'd

Sect. 1. our Poets under a remarkable Constraint, when oblig'd to assume this Character: and you have wonder'd, perhaps, why that Air of *Enthusiasm*, which fits so gracefully with an Antient, shou'd be so spiritless and aukard in a Modern. But as to this Doubt, your Lordship wou'd have soon resolv'd your-self: and it cou'd only serve to bring a-cross you a Reflection you have often made, on many occasions besides; *That Truth is the most powerful thing in the World*, since even Fiction \*it-self must be govern'd by it, and can only please by its resemblance. The Appearance of Reality is necessary to make any Passion agreeably represented: and to be able to move others, we must first be mov'd ourselves, or at least seem to be so, upon some probable Grounds. Now what possibility<sup>r</sup> is there that a Modern, who is known never to have worship'd APOLLO, or own'd any such Deity as the *Muses*, shou'd persuade us to enter into his pretended Devotion, and move us by his feign'd Zeal in a Religion out of date? But as for the Antients, 'tis known they deriv'd both their Religion and Polity from the *Muses* Art. How natural therefore must it have appear'd in any, but especially a Poet of those times, to address himself in Raptures of Devotion to those acknowledged Patronesses of Wit and Science? Here the Poet might with probability feign an Extasy, tho he really felt none: and supposing it to have been mere Affectation, it wou'd look however like something natural, and cou'd not fail of pleasing.

But perhaps, my Lord, there was a further Mystery in the case. Men, your Lordship knows, are wonderfully happy in a Faculty of deceiving themselves, whenever they set heartily about it: and a very small Foundation of any Passion will serve us, not only to act it well, but even to work our-selves into it beyond our own reach. Thus, by a little Affectation in Love-Matters, and with the help of a Romance or Novel, a Boy of Fifteen, or a grave Man of Fifty, may be sure to grow a very natural Coxcomb, and feel the *Belle Passion* in good earnest. A Man of tolerable Good-Nature, who happens  
[6] to be a little piqu'd, may, by improving his Resentment, become

\* *Infra*, p. 142, &c. and VOL. III. p. 260, &c.

a very Fury for Revenge. Even a good Christian, who wou'd needs be over-good, and thinks he can never believe enough, may, by a small Inclination well improv'd, extend his Faith so largely, as to comprehend in it not only all Scriptural and Traditional Miracles, but a solid System of Old-Wives Storys. Were it needful, I cou'd put your Lordship in mind of an Eminent, Learned, and truly Christian Prelate you once knew, who cou'd have given you a full account of his Belief in *Fairys*. And this, methinks, may serve to make appear, how far an antient Poet's Faith might possibly have been rais'd, together with his Imagination.

Sect. 1.

But we Christians, who have such ample Faith our-selves, will allow nothing to poor Heathens. They must be Infidels in every sense. We will not allow 'em to believe so much as their own Religion; which we cry is too absurd to have been credited by any besides the mere Vulgar. But if a Reverend Christian Prelate may be so great a Volunteer in Faith, as beyond the ordinary Prescription of the Catholick Church, to believe in *Fairys*; why may not a Heathen Poet, in the ordinary way of his Religion, be allow'd to believe in *Muses*? For these, your Lordship knows, were so many Divine Persons in the Heathen Creed, and were essential in their System of Theology. The Goddesses had their Temples and Worship, the same as the other Deitys: And to disbelieve *the Holy Nine*, or their APOLLO, was the same as to deny JOVE himself; and must have been esteem'd equally profane and atheistical by the generality of sober Men. Now what a mighty advantage must it have been to an antient Poet to be thus orthodox, and by the help of his Education, and a Good-will into the bargain, to work himself up to the Belief of a Divine Presence and Heavenly Inspiration? It was never surely the business of Poets in those days to call *Revelation* in question, when it evidently made so well for their Art. On the contrary, they cou'd not fail to animate their Faith as much as possible; when by a single Act of it, well inforc'd, they cou'd raise themselves into such Angelical Company.

[7]

How much the Imagination of such a Presence must exalt a Genius, we may observe merely from the Influence which an ordi-