AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN
SHAFTESBURY

by Richard Glauser and Anthony Savile

I—Richard Glauser

ABSTRACT Shaftesbury's theory of aesthetic experience is based on his conception of a natural disposition to apprehend beauty, a real 'form' of things. I examine the implications of the disposition's naturalness. I argue that the disposition is not an extra faculty or a sixth sense, and attempt to situate Shaftesbury's position on this issue between those of Locke and Hutcheson. I argue that the natural disposition is to be perfected in many different ways in order to be exercised in the perception of the different degrees of beauty within Shaftesbury's hierarchy. This leads to the conclusion that the exercise of the disposition depends, from case to case, on many different cognitive and affective conditions, that are realised by the collaborative functionings of our ordinary faculties. Essential to Shaftesbury's conception of aesthetic experience is a disinterested, contemplative love, that causes (or contains) what we may call a 'disinterested pleasure', but also an interested pleasure. I argue that, within any given aesthetic experience, the role of the disinterested pleasure is secondary to that of the disinterested love. However, an important function of the disinterested pleasure is that, in combination with the interested pleasure, it leads one to aspire to pass from the aesthetic experience of lower degrees of beauty to the experience of higher ones in the hierarchy.

Shaftesbury played a seminal role in the development of British aesthetics, and was to influence not only British, but also French and German writers during the 18th and 19th centuries. This view was established persuasively by Folkierski and Cassirer, among others, in the first half of the 20th century, and by Stolnitz in papers published in 1961.1 Stolnitz has been criticised, sometimes justly, from different quarters on one count or

another. But this has not jeopardised the overall consensus as to the historical importance of Shaftesbury. Indeed, valuable work has subsequently been devoted to relating Shaftesbury’s aesthetics to that of his predecessors, for instance some of the Cambridge Platonists, and to that of his contemporaries and successors, such as Addison, Hutcheson, Hume, Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer. Yet Shaftesbury’s theory of aesthetic experience seldom receives as much close scrutiny as is today commonly given the theories of several of the latter, partly because he is often taken to be less systematic than he is in fact.

So, what exactly is Shaftesbury’s theory of aesthetic experience? (I use the expression ‘aesthetic experience’ in the non-technical and, I hope, innocent sense of an experience through which beauty is apprehended and appreciated.) Without an answer to this preliminary question it is hardly reasonable to pursue the matter of Shaftesbury’s influence with any degree of precision, nor to describe precisely the relations between his theory and those of Hutcheson, Hume, Kant and so on. The question can be divided into two subordinate ones: (1) what is the nature of aesthetic experience according to Shaftesbury? (2) what are the objects of this experience in its fully developed form? The answer to the first question depends in part on the answer to the second. Sections I and II deal with the second question, sections III to V with the first.

I

Beaut, a Real and Natural Form. Shaftesbury’s notion of beauty is classical; he equates beauty with a formal quality which he


calls variously ‘harmony’, ‘order’, ‘symmetry’, ‘design’, ‘proportion’ or ‘numbers’. It is thus a complex property, for harmony and proportion imply relations of different parts or elements to each other. Even in relatively simple qualities such as shapes, motions and colours, beauty lies in the proportion and arrangement of their respective parts: ‘The shapes, motions, colours and proportions of these latter being presented to our eye, there necessarily results a beauty or deformity, according to the different measure, arrangement and disposition of their several parts.’

Even in the ‘simplest of figures’ it is the proportions of their parts that strike one with their beauty. If we move from relatively simple, but abstract qualities, to complex natural beings on the one hand, and to works of art on the other, their beauty is not only a complex quality, but also a quality that betokens design and finality: ‘Whatever things have order, the same have unity of design and concur in one, are parts constituent of one whole or are, in themselves, entire systems.’

Contrary to Hutcheson and Hume, however, Shaftesbury generally holds a realist conception of beauty. Hutcheson distinguishes between beauty on the one hand, and, on the other, the objective foundation or cause, in things themselves, of our appreciation of their appearing beautiful. For Hutcheson beauty is a mere idea, relative—but common—to the minds of all mankind. For Hutcheson, as for Crousaz, the cause in things themselves of our idea of beauty is a formal quality called ‘uniformity amidst variety’. Hutcheson holds that this quality belongs both to sensible and to purely intelligible things, such as theorems. Shaftesbury holds the same for harmony or proportion. However, unlike Hutcheson, Shaftesbury equates beauty with harmony or proportion, and thus for him beauty is generally a real form of things. It is unclear, though, whether he believes that beauty is composed of other qualities (physical or mental), or whether it depends on them as does an emergent or supervenient quality.

What does Shaftesbury mean by calling beauty ‘real’? He expresses himself in terms of the opposition between realism and nominalism. Beauty is a real form of things in a quasi-Aristotelian sense of ‘form’: it is a natural feature depending neither on social convention nor on individual taste. For Shaftesbury, to say that beauty is a real, natural feature is to say both: (1) that it is not non-natural, for it is nothing over and above harmony, order or proportion; and (2) that it is a quality that things possess either by virtue of their natural, internal constitution, or by some natural growth and development. This can be borne out by a number of passages, which concern all sorts of beauty, such as artistic beauty, moral beauty (the beauty of virtue) and the beauty of natural objects. (Although Shaftesbury never attempts to reduce ethics to aesthetics, both fields of investigation being distinct as to method and to aim, he considers moral value a sort of aesthetic value.) For instance, in the Soliloquy he claims that

> Harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of music. So is symmetry and proportion founded still in nature, let men’s fancy prove ever so barbarous or their fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, sculpture or whatever other designing art. It is the same where life and manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed standard. The same numbers, harmony and proportion will have place in morals and are discoverable in the characters and affections of mankind, in which are laid the just foundations of an art and science superior to every other of human practice and invention.8

In the Moralists, he distinguishes between ‘realists in respect of virtue’ and ‘nominal moralists’ who make ‘virtue nothing in itself, a creature of will only or a mere name of fashion’.9 He then goes on to defend moral realism (realism in respect of virtue) and ‘endeavours to show that it [virtue] is really something in itself and in the nature of things, not arbitrary or factitious (if I may so speak), not constituted from without or dependent on custom, fancy or will, not even on the supreme will itself, which can no way govern it but, being necessarily good, is governed by

---

8. Characteristics, pp. 157–158. This is why ‘In the very nature of things there must of necessity be the foundation of a right and wrong taste, as well in respect of inward characters and features as of outward person, behaviour and action’ (p. 150).

it and ever uniform with it.\textsuperscript{10} Shaftesbury does not say that if beauty is a real, natural form of things, it is a quality that things possess independently of our aesthetic experiences. But this view can reasonably be attributed to him as well.

\section*{II}

\textit{The Hierarchy of the Degrees of Beauty.} The number of kinds of beautiful things in Shaftesbury’s universe is indefinitely great. This is only to be expected since whatever has some harmony, order and proportion has beauty to some extent. Yet Shaftesbury does sketch out a general hierarchy of the degrees of beauty. Let us try to work from the bottom up, since, in Platonic fashion, such is the order of discovery.

In the \textit{Moralists}, Theocles, a rational enthusiast, wishes to show Philocles, a reasonable sceptic, that spiritual beauty is greater than that of material objects, natural or artistic. He brings Philocles to acknowledge that in a work of art, for example, it is not the physical support (‘the metal or matter’) that is really beautiful, but the art ‘which beautifies’ the support. Notice, however, that to say that art beautifies ‘the metal or matter’ is clearly to imply that the beautified physical support does have beauty, albeit a beauty which has its source in the beautifying art. Hence, Shaftesbury cannot be taken to mean that the physical support entirely lacks beauty, otherwise art would not be beautifying. All that can be construed is that art, because it is beautifying, has greater reality than whatever physical support is beautified by it: ‘The beautifying, not the beautified, is the really beautiful.’\textsuperscript{11} Theocles’s point is that a physical support can contingently receive or lose beauty, and because its beauty is transient or fleeting, whatever received beauty it does have is not as real or as great as the beauty of art itself, which is beautifying. The same goes for living bodies: whatever beauty they have depends on their organisation, but the organisation itself depends on an animating soul. Such an organisation, or beauty, comes and goes according to whether the body is animated by a soul

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Characteristics}, pp. 266–267.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Characteristics}, p. 322. Subsequent quotations, until further mention, are from pp. 322–323.
or not. Art is more beautiful than a physical support because it is a beautifying principle; a soul is more beautiful than a living body for the same reason. Yet, precisely because a physical support and a living body are temporarily beautified by their respective principles, they do have beauty, although in some lesser measure. This must be kept in mind when reading that ‘The beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter but in the art and design, never in body itself but in the form or forming power.’ Shaftesbury is sometimes carried away by his own rhetoric, since all that he has previously said shows, not that beauty is never in matter and body, but only that if it is, it is temporarily so. Theocles gets things right a few lines further, asking: ‘What is it you admire but mind or the effect of mind?’

He then sketches a hierarchy of degrees of beauty. Living bodies and physical supports of art, taken in abstraction from their respective beautifying principles, are ‘dead forms’, since, although they are beautified, they are not beautifying principles. They are ‘formed, whether by man or nature, but have no forming power, no action or intelligence’. Yet, below the beautified ‘dead forms’ are unbeautified ‘dead forms’, because ‘All which is void of mind is horrid, and matter formless is deformity itself.’ This is a zero degree of beauty. Furthermore, a distinction must be made among the beautified dead forms, between natural beings and works of art. Shaftesbury clearly ranks the former above the latter: ‘I ... gladly give the advantage to the human form, above those other beauties of man’s formation. The palaces, equipages and estates shall never in my account be brought in competition with the original living forms of flesh and blood.’ Above the beautified ‘dead forms’ are the ‘forming forms’. These are the forms that ‘have a power of making other forms themselves’; they have ‘intelligence, action and operation’. Forming forms, then, are finite minds. A problem arises which Shaftesbury does not deal with. For in his own scheme art is not a forming form, since it does not literally have ‘intelligence, action and operation’, nor is it a dead form, since it is a beautifying principle. So, although Shaftesbury does not say so, art seems to have a status intermediate between beautified dead forms and the forming forms which are finite minds. Finally, a few pages later we learn that the most perfect beauty belongs to God, the only forming form capable of producing other (finite) forming forms.
In the *Moralists* Shaftesbury mentions explicitly only three general degrees of beauty: dead forms, finite forming forms and the infinite forming form. In fact his hierarchy comprises at least seven degrees: (1) unbeautified dead forms (zero degree of beauty); (2) beautiful dead forms that are relatively simple qualities; (3) beautified dead forms that are works of art; (4) beautified dead forms that are natural beings; (5) art itself, which is a beautifying principle, hence not a dead form, but not a forming form either, since it is not a mind, but a product of finite mind; (6) forming forms which are finite minds (these are at least triply beautifying in that they animate bodies, produce works of art, and are capable of self-improvement towards moral goodness and virtue);12 and finally God, the infinite forming form of finite forming forms, from whom, as we shall see, all beauty flows directly or indirectly.13 The higher one moves in the hierarchy, the greater the reality of beauty.

Yet this sevenfold hierarchy is far from representing all that Shaftesbury wished to arrive at, for he elsewhere attempts to fill out much of what is comprised under the distinction between dead and forming forms by a distinction between the respective beauties of inanimate, animate and mixed beings. Inanimate beauty: ‘beginning from those figures with which we are delighted, to the proportions of architecture. The same in sounds’. ‘In things inanimate, nature before the arts, and thus from stones, diamonds, rock, minerals; to vegetables, woods, aggregate parts of the world, as sea, rivers, hills, vales. The globe, celestial bodies and their order; the great architecture of Nature—Nature itself.’ Animate beauty: ‘from animals (and their several natures) to men, and from single persons of men—their humours, dispositions, tempers, characters, manners—to communities, societies, commonwealths.’ ‘In things animate, from flocks, herds, to men and other orders of intelligences, to the supreme intelligence—God’. Next, he classifies as ‘mixed’ of inanimate and animate beauty the highly complex organisations to be found ‘in communities; a territory, land, culture, structures

13. Notice, however, that even this classification is problematic since works of art, according to Shaftesbury, are less beautiful than natural bodies, yet are capable of representing moral beauty, whereas many natural bodies are not.
and the ornaments of a city, mixed and making up (in conjunction) that idea of a native country.\textsuperscript{14} This hierarchy must be related to Shaftesbury’s conception—expounded in the \textit{Inquiry}—of the universe as a completely harmonious system of an indefinitely great number of stratified, teleologically structured, and relatively harmonious subsystems, all the way down to individual plants and rocks, which are themselves complex subsystems. The strata are designated as physical, geological, biological, artistic, moral, social and political, astronomical, cosmological, and theological.\textsuperscript{15}

The entire scheme serves as the background to Shaftesbury’s conception of moral beauty. Within this scheme the moral beauty of finite minds has at least three degrees. First of all, just as the beauty of living bodies depends on their health, any normal finite soul (animal or human) has a minimal inner proportion or harmony which is realised by its mental balance, the psychic equilibrium formed by its numerous and complex affections, dispositions, character traits and so on.\textsuperscript{16} Secondly, a higher degree of harmony, both internal and external, is realised inasmuch as the being is good. Goodness is realised in an animal or a human being by a higher degree of the internal harmony of their affections, and correspondingly, by a resulting external harmony between their behaviour and the optimal state of whatever higher proximate (sub)systems to which they respectively belong (families, flocks, packs, herds, etc., tribes, societies and species).\textsuperscript{17} Thirdly, a still higher degree of beauty is to be found in rational and self-conscious minds alone, and depends on their moral virtue. Virtue consists of a perfect harmony among three kinds of affections: natural social affections that further the public good; private natural affections that further one’s own interest; and unnatural affections, which are capable of subverting the former two. The perfect balance consists in having neither of the first

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Characteristics}, pp. 168 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{17} ‘When in general all the affections or passions are suited to the public good or good of the species ..., then is the natural temper entirely good’ (\textit{Characteristics}, p. 172).
\end{itemize}
two be too strong nor too weak, and in having none of the third. As with goodness, virtue is both an internal and external harmony. It is internal insofar as it is a harmony to be found specifically between the agent’s natural social and private affections, and in the absence of non-natural affections. This internal harmony of virtue is greater than in mere goodness because the internal harmony exists not only between such natural affections themselves, but also between these first-order affections and the rational agent’s awareness and critical appreciation of them, his second-order affections. Thus, a conscious virtuous agent is less prone than a vicious person to the inner dissension brought about by regret, self-accusation and remorse; internal dialogue replaces dispute with oneself. Virtue’s harmony is external, too, inasmuch as the internal harmony produces a harmony in the rational agent’s behaviour, between the furthering of his own good and the furthering of the optimal state of the public good. Yet this external harmony is greater than in the case of mere goodness, because it is conscious and critically appreciated by the agent himself. Of course, virtue, as goodness, varies in degrees; one can be more or less good, more or less virtuous. Nevertheless, as in Stoicism, a perfectly virtuous person not only accomplishes the role in the world-order that is teleologically natural for him to fulfil, but he is also approvingly conscious of doing so. In fully playing his role within the human subsystem, and knowing that he does so, he develops his human nature.

Thus, the hierarchy of degrees of beauty depends on God, either directly as in the beauty of natural beings and their goodness, or only indirectly as in artistic beauty and the beauty of virtue: ‘That which fashions even minds themselves contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by those minds and is consequently the principle, source and fountain of all beauty.’\(^{18}\) However, the beauty of the universe itself is not entirely exterior to God’s own beauty. For in one of the versions of the cosmological argument used to prove God’s existence, the conclusion shows that God animates the universe continually. He functions as a principle of unity and of identity of the world, in a way analogous to that in which a finite soul animates a body.\(^ {19}\) Moreover,

---

it is not merely that all beauty within the world depends directly or indirectly on God as its creator; it also depends more specifically on God’s beauty itself. For ‘Whatever beauty appears in our second order of forms or whatever is derived or produced from thence, all this is eminently, principally and originally in this last order of supreme and sovereign beauty;’ ‘Whatever in nature is beautiful or charming is only the faint shadow of that first beauty.’ This suggests that—in a way distantly reminiscent of Plato—all worldly beauty participates of divine beauty, which seems to function as an exemplary cause. This is surely the reason for which Shaftesbury approvingly quotes Maximus Tyrius: ‘The river’s beauty, the sea’s, the heaven’s and heavenly constellations’ all flow from hence [i.e. from ‘divinity itself ... of all beauties the brightest’] as from a source eternal and incorruptible. As beings partake of this, they are fair and flourishing and happy; as they are lost to this, they are deformed, perished and lost.’

In two senses, then, beauty is mind-dependent. First, all beauty ontologically depends on God’s beauty, which is the beauty of an infinitely wise, virtuous and providential mind. Secondly, artistic and moral beauty depend directly on finite minds since they are produced by them. But this is compatible with the realist tenet, rejected by Hutcheson, that beauty is independent of finite minds’ aesthetic experiences.

Here, four points should be suggested. First, given that beauty is not only a real, natural quality, but a highly pervasive one, permeating nearly everything in the universe from relatively simple qualities to the structure of the universe and to God himself, there is bound to be in human minds a natural disposition to perceive beauty. Secondly, it 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

22. There are two passages (p. 172 and p. 326) where it is said that beauty ‘results from’ our perceiving the objects that have proportion and harmony. But if one takes the expression ‘results from’ in a literal sense, which would make beauty dependent on our experiences, such a construal is contrary to the realist line of Shaftesbury’s thought expressed in the contexts of the passages themselves.
great deal of knowledge in physics, geology, biology, astronomy and cosmology. Although Shaftesbury does not explicitly 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. Thirdly, because the kind of knowledge required in order to perceive the beauty of whatever is contemplated must be different from case to case, one cannot hope to come up with a uniform account of aesthetic experience applicable to all cases. The aesthetic experience of the beauty of relatively simple qualities, of crystals, of horses, of the solar system, of the complex mental balance of human minds, of virtue, of social systems, etc., will require, from case to case, vastly different cognitive conditions. Further, it is not just that the prerequisite kinds of knowledge will have to be different, but also that the mental faculties and operations needed to perceive the different kinds of beauty will have to differ from case to case. Fourthly, since there is a hierarchy of degrees of beauty, and since we are supposed to move up—in Platonic fashion—from the aesthetic experience of the lower degrees to that of the higher degrees, what is the driving force that moves us from one degree to the next? Why does Shaftesbury believe that a mind will be motivated to progress from a child’s aesthetic contemplation of the figures of his ball and die all the way up to a perception of the higher orders of beauty, perhaps even to the beauty of God?23 I discuss this in the last section.

III

*A Natural Disposition to Experience Beauty.* According to Shaftesbury we have a natural disposition to experience beauty. The

meaning of ‘natural’ varies in Shaftesbury according to the entity qualified and to the context of its use. So the first thing to do is to explain the sense and implications it has here. The issue is related to Locke’s rejection of innate ideas and to Shaftesbury’s dissatisfaction with this rejection. He believes that Locke misused the word ‘innate’. But he prefers to steer clear of the controversy raging over the question of innateness in his day, and to use instead the terms ‘natural’, ‘connatural’ and ‘instinct’.24 Were it not for the dispute concerning innateness, Shaftesbury would be happy to call ‘innate’ or ‘instinct’ both the disposition to experience beauty and the idea of beauty.25 Even so, he does not want to imply that the disposition and the idea are not acquired some time after birth. In fact he scorns as idle speculation attempts to determine whether they are implanted in the mind before birth, at birth, or after birth, and if the last, how long after birth. What he sees as the substantial question is whether, if they are acquired after birth, they are acquired naturally, that is by natural means as opposed to artificial means such as ‘art, culture or discipline’. If such is the issue a disposition will be natural whether it is part of man’s constitution at birth or whether it is acquired at some later stage by a process ‘exclusive of art, culture or discipline’. The model along the lines of which Shaftesbury is thinking is that of a biological organism. A rose plant has many qualities that are natural to it in that they are actual as soon as the plant exists; other qualities are also natural to it, such as having flowers, but they will only appear later. In any case, if the disposition to experience beauty is acquired, it is so at a very early stage, for small children enjoy it, as when they take pleasure in discerning the regular forms of a ball or a die.26 Also, it is acquired naturally, by means ‘exclusive of art, culture or discipline’, for it is the ‘first view’ of the proportions of a ball or die that pleases an infant. In general ‘There is in certain figures a natural beauty, which the eye finds as soon as the object is presented to it.’ In

26. ‘It is enough if we consider the simplest of figures, as either a round ball, a cube or die. Why is even an infant pleased with the first view of these proportions?’ (p. 326). Cf. also p. 416 footnote: ‘beginning from those regular figures and symmetries, with which children are delighted’.
such cases ‘No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged.’

For this reason, and because the disposition to perceive beauty is natural, the idea of beauty is too: ‘Nothing surely is more strongly imprinted on our minds or more closely interwoven with our souls than the idea or sense of order and proportion.’ Another important analogy with a living organism is that the natural disposition, like a rose plant, has a development which can be natural or not. This should seem obvious, since the disposition to perceive beauty that a child exercises will have to be developed, sometimes highly, and also in different directions, before it can be properly exercised in the perception of the beauty of an oratorio, a social system, or an astronomical system, not to mention the beauty of virtue and of God himself.

The disposition is natural in the further sense that it is universal, common to all persons. But here, too, one must keep in mind the analogy with a living organism. It is natural for all rose plants to bear flowers sooner or later, but insufficient conditions and natural accidents either prevent flowering altogether or mutilate whatever flowers there are. Similarly with human beings and their disposition to experience beauty. Because of insufficient affective and cognitive conditions, or because of natural accidents, the disposition may be mutilated or insufficiently developed in some persons, and just about absent in others. Hence, one could not refute Shaftesbury merely by pointing to cases of persons incapable of appreciating the complex beauty of a Titian or of some physical subsystem.

IV

Is the Disposition to Perceive Beauty a Sixth Sense? In the quotation given in the last footnote, Shaftesbury calls the disposition to experience beauty a ‘natural sense of a sublime and beautiful in things’. Is he saying that the disposition is literally a sixth

29. ‘So that to deny the common and natural sense of a sublime and beautiful in things will appear an affectation merely to anyone who considers duly of this affair’ (Characteristics, p. 173, my italics).
sense? What might seem to favour an affirmative reply is, first, that the disposition is called a ‘natural sense’, and secondly, that Hutcheson, advocate of a special, ‘inner’ sense for the perception of beauty, claims to have been influenced by Shaftesbury.30 However, Hutcheson does not say that this influence has anything to do specifically with the perception of beauty. Also, we commonly use ‘sense’ casually, as in speaking of a sense of duty or a sense of rhythm. In Shaftesbury and Hutcheson’s time it was not uncommon to use the expression ‘sixth sense’ casually in the context of aesthetic experience. For instance, the Abbé Du Bos in his Réflexions Critiques sur la Poésie et sur la Peinture (1719), speaks of a ‘sixth sense which is in us without our seeing its organs’. But this is merely a general sensitivity (le sentiment) that he calls ‘the heart’.31 So, if we lacked any prior knowledge of Hutcheson, would we be inclined to read more than a casual use of ‘sense’ into Shaftesbury, and attribute to him a proper sixth sense theory? I believe not. Shaftesbury’s position is closer to Burke’s, who claims that taste can be accounted for by the joint, collaborative functioning of our ordinary faculties, without invoking an extra sense.32 Nevertheless, Hutcheson did not develop his theory out of thin air. What must be shown, I believe, is an important and somewhat complex connection between Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, a connection that justifies the latter’s claim to be influenced by the former, but which does not justify our treating Shaftesbury’s natural disposition as a special sense in addition to the ordinary ones. So, let us attempt to show that Shaftesbury takes at least two significant steps down a road which, as things will turn out, can be seen as leading towards Hutcheson.

Two well known passages of the Characteristics seem to lend themselves to a Hutchesonian reading. The first is from the Inquiry. The second and third paragraphs quoted below are the first two of a sequence of four which did not appear in the first

edition (1699), but were added in the later, revised edition of 1711.

In a creature capable of forming general notions of things, not only the outward beings which offer themselves to the sense are the objects of the affection, but the very actions themselves and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects. So that, by means of this reflected sense, there arises another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt and have now become the subject of a new liking or dislike.

The case is the same in the mental or moral subjects as in the ordinary bodies or common subjects of sense. The shapes, motions, colours and proportions of these latter being presented to our eye, there necessarily results a beauty or deformity, according to the different measure, arrangement and disposition of their several parts. So in behaviour and actions, when presented to our understanding, there must be found, of necessity, an apparent difference, according to the regularity or irregularity of the subjects.

The mind, which is spectator or auditor of other minds, cannot be without its eye and ear so as to discern proportion, distinguish sound and scan each sentiment or thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its censure. It feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable in the affections, and finds a foul and fair, a harmonious and a dissonant, as really and truly here as in any musical numbers or in the outward forms or representations of sensible things. Nor can it withhold its admiration and ecstasy, its aversion and scorn, any more in what relates to one than to the other of these subjects. So that to deny the common and natural sense of a sublime and beautiful in things will appear an affectation merely to anyone who considers duly of this affair.33

The second passage is from The Moralists (first edition, 1709):

‘Let us view the charm in what is simplest of all, mere figure. Nor need we go so high as sculpture, architecture or the designs of those who from this study of beauty have raised such delightful arts. It is enough if we consider the simplest of figures, as either a round ball, a cube or die. Why is an infant pleased with the first view of these proportions? Why is the sphere or globe, the cylinder and obelisk, preferred and the irregular figures, in respect of these, rejected and despised?’

‘Is there then’, said he, ‘a natural beauty of figures and is there not as natural a one of actions? No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged. No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than straight an inward eye distinguishes and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious or the despicable. How is it possible therefore not to own that as these distinctions have their foundation in nature, the discernment itself is natural and from nature alone?’ 34

The overall aim of both passages is to introduce the idea of a disposition to perceive and appreciate the moral worth of affections and actions, whether they be one’s own or someone else’s. Shaftesbury’s strategy—which will be duplicated by Hutcheson35—is to use the natural disposition to perceive beauty as a stepping-stone towards introducing a natural disposition to perceive moral worth, in the belief that the former will be more readily accepted than the latter. The first passage has the further purpose of presenting in part the important distinction Shaftesbury makes between mere goodness and moral virtue. Virtue requires two intellectual functions: (1) the capacity to form concepts, ‘general notions of things’, and (2) inward consciousness of one’s actions and affections.

Shaftesbury uses Locke’s term ‘reflection’ to name consciousness: ‘The very actions themselves and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude and their contraries, being brought into the mind by reflection, become objects.’ It is important to note that Locke called consciousness or reflection an ‘internal sense’.36 Conflating two of Locke’s expressions, Shaftesbury coins a new name for the same old Lockean faculty: ‘reflected sense’. However, he adds three features that, as far as I know, do not feature—certainly not prominently—in Locke’s account of

34. Characteristics, pp. 326–327.
36. ‘This source of ideas, every man has wholly in himself: and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called internal sense. But as I call the other Sensation, so I call this reflection, the ideas it affords being such only, as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself’ (J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1975): II, 1, §4, p. 105).
consciousness. They come to the foreground here, and make Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ something more than mere introspective awareness. First, Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ depends on the intellect, since, according to the first passage quoted above, it depends on the mind’s ‘forming general notions of things’. Secondly, it is nevertheless an emotive capacity. For ‘[the mind cannot] withhold its admiration and ecstasy, its aversion and scorn’; it produces ‘another kind of affection towards those very affections themselves, which have been already felt and have now become the subject of a new liking or dislike’. The awareness of some actions and (first-order) affections produces an emotional response which is a second-order affection. Thirdly, whereas Locke’s ‘reflection’ is basically a source of ideas, Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ is an active source of evaluative judgements, for ‘the heart cannot possibly remain neutral but constantly takes part one way or other’. Inasmuch as the second-order affection is a liking or a disliking (of an action or of a first-order affection), it comprises or depends on a moral approval or disapproval, an evaluative judgement. In these respects, then, Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ is not mere consciousness or awareness, which is why he calls it a ‘natural moral sense’. Because of these features one should grant that Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ is situated, as it were, between Locke’s mere consciousness or ‘internal sense’ and Hutcheson’s inner sense.

Shaftesbury’s point is that, precisely because of the two last features mentioned—emotive and evaluative—the disposition to perceive and appreciate the moral value of actions and affections is similar to the disposition to perceive beauty in external, physical objects. Also, moral value is itself a kind of beauty. So much for the similarity of (what up to here we have been invited to take as) the ‘two’ natural dispositions. What of their differences? One should notice, first of all, that the examples given of beautiful things in both passages are not of complex objects such as natural beings, works of art, and so on, but only of relatively simple qualities: ‘shapes, motions, colours and proportions’ in the Inquiry; ‘the simplest of figures, as either a round ball, a cube

or die’ in the Moralists. Bearing this in mind, note that in both passages the capacity of perceiving the beauty of such qualities is that of the external senses (the eye, the ear). Nothing whatever is hinted at concerning the need for an ‘inner sense’ for apprehending the beauty of these qualities. Pursuing the contrast between the moral objects of ‘reflected sense’ and the beautiful, external objects of the senses, Shaftesbury generalises what he has said about relatively simple sensible qualities to include the whole domain of complex sensible objects. For he clearly implies that the external senses, not ‘reflected sense’, perceive the beauty to be found in natural beings and in works of art: ‘in any musical numbers or in the outward forms or representations of sensible things’. No ‘reflected sense’ or ‘inner sense’ is invoked to explain our perception of the beauty of external things, whether they be simple qualities or complex objects, natural or artefactual.

Of course, the external senses will not suffice for the perception of the beauty of just any external entity, for two reasons at least. The first is that, as we have seen, many external objects are not sensible. The second is that even when they are sensible, as soon as we move from simple qualities to complex sensible objects, it is no longer true that the perception of beauty is immediate. That is to say, Shaftesbury does not hold for complex sensible objects, whether natural or artefactual, what he holds for simple qualities (‘No sooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to sounds, than straight the beautiful results and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged’). On the contrary, he holds in general that ‘Never can the form be of real force where it is uncomtemplated, unjudged of, unexamined.’ The context of this statement is a passage in which Shaftesbury—in Platonic fashion—distinguishes intellect from sense. Hence, we should gather that the contemplation, judgement and examination required for the beauteous form to ‘be of real force’ depend much more on the intellect than on the external senses. So it seems, indeed, that cases where the perception of beauty is accomplished merely by the external senses are so scarce as to be confined merely to very simple qualities. Further, even if in the vast majority of cases the experience of beauty requires the intellect in addition to the external senses, we still have no requirement for a special, sixth, ‘inner’

sense. All that we have up to this point is a natural disposition that depends on the collaborative functioning of ordinary faculties and operations. Inner, ‘reflected sense’ is invoked solely in connection with the perception of the moral beauty of ‘inner’ objects: actions and affections.40

Hutcheson believes that a special inner sense, one and the same, is required for each and every experience of beauty; there is no experience of beauty that does not require a sixth sense. Shaftesbury claims nothing of the sort. Not only is his internal ‘reflected sense’ restricted to the perception of moral beauty, it is also not an additional faculty, but merely an admittedly amplified and elaborate version of Locke’s consciousness. Thus, when compared to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson makes two crucial moves: (1) he believes that the evaluative and affective functions that Shaftesbury added on to Locke’s power of consciousness can only be performed by another, additional sense, distinct from the five external senses and from mere consciousness; and (2) he claims that each and every experience of beauty, whatever the beautiful object, requires this additional sense.

Even so, there is no question of removing Shaftesbury’s ‘reflected sense’ from the natural disposition to perceive beauty. For what ‘reflected sense’ perceives and appreciates is a special kind of beauty, moral beauty. So there is a kind of beauty for the perception and appreciation of which an ‘inner sense’, a ‘natural moral sense’, is indispensable. Yet this is not an additional faculty, but rather an augmented version of Locke’s consciousness working with the intellect.

The claim that moral goodness and virtue are species of beauty has implications which must be seen from two different perspectives. On the one hand, there are consequences that should be studied from the point of view of moral philosophy. I cannot go into those here.41 On the other hand, there are equally important

40. In the Soliloquy Shaftesbury speaks of an ‘eye or ear for these interior numbers’ (p. 150). But this has to do only with the ‘moral truth, the beauty of sentiments, the sublime of characters’, not with the beauty of sensible objects. In The Moralists he says that ‘This difference [between beauty and the lack of it] is immediately perceived by a plain internal sensation’ (p. 274). I suggest that our response is called a ‘sensation’ because it is an emotional, evaluative response, and ‘internal’ because, trivially, all responses are internal.

consequences for aesthetics. Here, the first implication is that, although Shaftesbury introduces his natural moral sense, in the passages quoted above, by comparing it with our ability to perceive the beauty of external objects, they are not in fact two faculties, nor two dispositions situated at the same level. ‘Reflected sense’, we have seen, is indeed a proper faculty, operating in conjunction with the intellect when our natural disposition to perceive beauty is exercised on moral beauty. The natural disposition can also be exercised towards the beauty of non-moral objects without the operation of ‘reflected sense’, but with other faculties. The exercise of the natural disposition depends on whatever ordinary cognitive, evaluative and affective faculties and operations are necessary to attain the perception of whatever kind of beauty is at hand. According to the kind of beauty, the exercise of the self-same disposition will require different collaborative functionings of ordinary cognitive and affective faculties. Sometimes ‘reflected sense’ will be called for, sometimes not; it depends on the kind of beauty to be discovered and appreciated. This reading suggests that Shaftesbury’s natural disposition to perceive beauty is to a large degree a higher-order, essentially dependent disposition.

Many of its different exercises, according to the diverse kinds of beauty to be perceived, require the development and perfecting of the disposition. And perfecting it depends on previously acquiring whatever cognitive, evaluative and affective abilities are necessary to the exercise of the disposition towards this or that kind of beauty. Inasmuch as it depends on ‘art, culture or discipline’, the development is not natural. Consider, for example, artistic beauty. Shaftesbury says that a ‘refined taste’ depends on ‘use, practice and culture’. Although the disposition to perceive beauty is natural, a sure taste in the fine arts is not natural in the sense of ‘innate’: ‘A legitimate and just taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived or produced without the antecedent labours and pains of criticism.’ For this reason he declares ‘open war’ against those who ‘reject the criticizing art, by which alone they are able to discover the true beauty and worth of every object’.42 and assigns to criticism the role of educating the natural disposition and transforming it into refined

taste. Criticism includes many different elements, such as learning from the test of time, rational discussion, enlightened raillery and, given Shaftesbury’s distrust of introspection, self-criticism in soliloquy. Refined artistic taste, however, is merely a cultivated development and perfection of the natural disposition. And it is a perfection in one direction only, that of artistic beauty, which furthermore stands at a comparatively low position in the scale of forms of beauty. Nevertheless, the implication is clear: by analogy, similar education is necessary for the same disposition to be ably exercised towards the perception of all the higher degrees of beauty within the hierarchy: ‘Is it a wonder we should be dull then, as we are, confounded and at a loss in these affairs, blind as to this higher scene, these nobler representations? ... Is study, science or learning necessary to understand all beauties else? And, for the sovereign beauty, is there no skill or science required?’ Not only is the natural disposition supposed to be extensively developed through rational knowledge, culture and critical appreciation, but there are also many different directions of development required, each direction depending on different cognitive, evaluative and affective abilities. Hence, there is no self-same psychic model or mental structure according to which the disposition to aesthetic contemplation and appreciation is exercised in all cases. In some cases few faculties, operations and abilities will be required; in other cases, many more will be needed. This is why it is wrong to claim, as is often done, that aesthetic experience is always an immediate response in Shaftesbury. It is naturally so only in cases of relatively simple, abstract qualities; for the rest it can only become immediate once the disposition has been painstakingly perfected. However, each and every acquired perfection of the disposition contributes to making its owner a better person: ‘The admiration and love of order, harmony and proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affection, and highly assistant to virtue, which is itself no other than the love of order and harmony in society.’

43. Characteristics, pp. 77–78.
44. Characteristics, p. 321.
A Pleasurable Ascension. To deny a self-same mental structure for all cases of aesthetic contemplation and appreciation is not to deny some common features. One common feature is what has been called ‘disinterested pleasure’; another is disinterested love. The notion of disinterested pleasure was to have a celebrated and controversial historical fortune in the hands of Hutcheson, Kant and many others in more recent times. But it is important not to lay too much weight on this notion in Shaftesbury. I would like to show that what we may rightly call ‘disinterested pleasure’ in Shaftesbury, although prominent in his theory of aesthetic experience, is less important than disinterested love, and entirely depends on it.

Stolnitz has shown how Shaftesbury uses the terms ‘interest’, ‘interested’ and ‘disinterested’.46 ‘Interest’ has both an axiological and a conative sense. In the axiological sense it denotes a being’s real good, whether it be known by the being to be its real good or not, and whether it be desired or not. In this sense Shaftesbury holds that ‘by improving, we may be sure to advance our worth and real self-interest’.47 In the conative sense, ‘interest’ refers to whatever is taken, either rightly or wrongly, by an individual to be his good, and is desired by him. ‘Interested’ is used by Shaftesbury in connection with the conative sense of ‘interest’: an interested action, desire, or character trait is one that tends to further whatever it is that the individual takes, rightly or wrongly, to be his good. A synonym for ‘interested’ in this sense would be ‘selfish’, as long as we keep in mind that a selfish affection or desire, if moderate, can either be, or not, ‘consistent with public good’ and ‘in some measure contributing to it’, and thus either morally good or not.48 If ‘disinterested’ is taken as the contrary of ‘interested’, then it is close to ‘unselfish’, ‘altruistic’, ‘benevolent’ or ‘aiming at the public good’. This sense of ‘disinterested’, however, is irrelevant to aesthetics. But the use that Shaftesbury makes of ‘disinterested’ that is relevant to aesthetics is the contradictory, privative sense of ‘interested’, i.e. ‘non-selfish’, which,

47. Characteristics, p. 320.
according to the context of its use, means ‘impartial’, ‘unbiased’ or ‘impersonal’. An instance of this is the disinterested love of God or virtue; it is ‘the love of God or virtue for God or virtue’s sake’, which ‘has no other object than merely the excellency of that being itself’. 49 This is opposed to ‘loving’ God interestedly, as in the hope of reward or out of fear of punishment.

Let us part with Stolnitz and say a bit more about disinterested love. What does it mean to say that something is loved for itself? According to Shaftesbury, ‘every real love’ is ‘only the contemplation of beauty’. 50 Thus, to say that something is loved for itself can mean two things. If the thing simply is a form of beauty and harmony, such as virtue, it is contemplatively loved for itself, and that is it. If, on the contrary, the being has some form of beauty or virtue, then to say that it is loved for itself is to say that it is contemplatively loved merely for its beauty, moral or otherwise. This is the case, first of all, with God. If he is loved disinterestedly, explains Shaftesbury, the love ‘has no other object than merely the excellency of that being itself’, which is to say that he is loved for his mere value, his supreme beauty. By analogy the same applies to the disinterested love of lower sorts of beings that have some degree of beauty, moral or otherwise, transient or not: if virtuous persons and their character traits, affections and actions are loved disinterestedly, or if natural beings, works of art, and even relatively simple sensible qualities are loved disinterestedly, they are loved for whatever kind of ‘excellency’ or beauty they have. And if a being that has different sorts of beauty—such as a person, who may be both physically and morally beautiful—is loved disinterestedly, it is loved for its highest form of beauty, for this is the kind of ‘excellency’ with which the person is then associated.

As suggested above, disinterested love does not apply only to God, but, in a fully accomplished person, to whatever in the hierarchy either is beautiful or has some degree of beauty. Shaftesbury makes this clear by calling disinterested love ‘enthusiasm’ in a positive sense, and arguing that positive enthusiasm in an accomplished person ranges over the whole scale of beautiful things from the bottom up. 51

51. For instance, Characteristics, p. 320
All sound love and admiration is enthusiasm. The transports of poets, the sublime of orators, the rapture of musicians ... all mere enthusiasm! ... [I] am content you should call this love of ours ‘enthusiasm’ ... For is there a fair and plausible enthusiasm, a reasonable ecstasy and transport allowed to other subjects, such as architecture, painting, music, and shall it be exploded here? Are there senses by which all those other graces and perfections are perceived, and none by which this higher perfection and grace is comprehended? Is it so preposterous to bring that enthusiasm hither and transfer it from those secondary and scanty objects to this original and comprehensive one [God]?52

Thus, disinterested love or positive enthusiasm is a feature common to all aesthetic experiences, ranging over the entire scale of beautiful things. It is to be identified with what we encountered in the previous section in the guise of ‘a new liking’, the affective, evaluative approval immanent in aesthetic experience.

As for ‘disinterested pleasure’, Shaftesbury does not use this expression, nor does he use ‘disinterested perception’ and ‘disinterested attitude’. But he points emphatically to a pleasure immanent in the aesthetic experience of beautiful objects, and which is different from the pleasures that result from an interested perspective on the same objects. The locus classicus is a passage in the Moralists,53 where the context is a discussion of ‘real love’, disinterested love. Theocles begins by explaining that ‘every real love’ is ‘only the contemplation of beauty’. This love produces a certain pleasure, and Theocles distinguishes this pleasure from those arising from an interested perspective on the same object. The interested perspectives to which disinterested love is contrasted are the intentions of commanding, of possessing and of consuming. If one loves ‘the beauty of the ocean’, for example, the resulting pleasure is distinct from that which would ensue (per impossibile) from commanding or possessing it. The pleasure found in contemplating ‘such a tract of country as this delicious vale’ is different from that which would follow from owning it. The pleasure of ‘the beauty of those trees under whose shade we


rest’ is distinct from that which would arise from eating their fruit.

The point Shaftesbury wants to make is not that it is psychologically impossible for some of the pleasures resulting from the satisfaction of interested perspectives, such as commanding, possessing, consuming, to coexist with the pleasure resulting from the disinterested love of the beauty of the same object. Surely one can simultaneously be pleased to own a Veronese and be pleased by its beauty. In other cases, however, the two kinds of pleasures do seem to be psychologically incompatible: if a person takes pleasure in commanding another, this pleasure can hardly coexist with that resulting from a disinterested love of the person’s moral beauty.

Nor does Shaftesbury deny that the disinterested pleasure taken in the aesthetic experience of an object can raise an interested perspective towards the object, such as a desire to possess it. Rather, he means that even if an interested perspective towards the object is caused by a disinterested pleasure, cause and effect necessarily remain distinct. In order to have such an effect, the disinterested pleasure must first be an accomplished experience. As such it is independent of the effect—the desire—that it may or may not elicit. A disinterested pleasure remains disinterested whether or not it causes an interested perspective on the object; and if it does cause one, it remains disinterested whether or not the interested perspective is satisfied.

The positive points that Shaftesbury wishes to make are that: (1) an aesthetic experience is basically a form of contemplative disinterested love of an object’s beauty; (2) the pleasure that arises from disinterested love is of a different kind from, but not necessarily psychologically incompatible with, some other pleasures regarding the same object; (3) the pleasure that arises from a disinterested love of an object’s beauty is the only one that is appropriate to the object’s beauty. There is nothing wrong in calling this aesthetic pleasure ‘disinterested’, just as long as we keep in mind two things. (1) Such a pleasure as Shaftesbury wants to draw our attention to in aesthetic experience depends on—and can only be explained in terms of—disinterested contemplative love. The notion of ‘disinterested pleasure’ present in his aesthetics bears the marks, as it were, of its religious origins and context, and the historian of philosophy should avoid the
temptation to construe Shaftesbury’s notion of what we call ‘disinterested pleasure’ in such a way as to divorce it from them. (2) According to what we, today, put under the headings ‘disinterested’ and ‘interested’, there may or may not be in Shaftesbury some disinterested pleasures which do not stem from disinterested love, and which are non-aesthetic.54

Disinterested love is a feature more basic to aesthetic experience in Shaftesbury than the kind of pleasure resulting from it. Furthermore, disinterested pleasure as such is not a reliable criterion of the degree of beauty, in the case of beauties that require a cultivated taste in order to be apprehended. An insufficiently educated person may have great pleasure in contemplating lower forms of beauty, and little or no pleasure with regard to higher forms. What counts is a degree of pleasure appropriate to the degree of the beauty of the contemplated object. For the question is, explains Shaftesbury, ‘Whether we are rightly pleased and choose as we should do?’ One must ‘learn to fancy, to admire, to please, as the subjects themselves are deserving’. One should always ask: ‘But is this pleasure right?’55

Townsend is correct in saying that disinterestedness of pleasure ‘is not really proposed as any kind of test, nor does it characterize a special class of perceptions or judgements. It is much more important to Shaftesbury to determine what our true interests are’56. Were Shaftesbury to distinguish the aesthetic experience from other experiences, he would do so, contrary to Kant, in terms of disinterested love rather than disinterested pleasure. And he would not explain beauty in terms of disinterested pleasure, as Kant sometimes does,57 but would explain the disinterested pleasure stemming from disinterested love as the kind of pleasure appropriate to beauty. Furthermore, he would not seek to distinguish sharply between aesthetic, moral and religious

54. It should be noted that, according to Hutcheson, one of the reasons why it is necessary to postulate an internal, sixth sense for aesthetic contemplation is precisely that aesthetic perception shares with the (non-aesthetic) perceptions of the five other senses the common feature of producing disinterested pleasures (cf. An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design, Section I, §6, pp. 31–32, and one aspect of the complex argument running through §§12–14, pp. 35–38). According to him there are non-aesthetic disinterested pleasures.

55. Characteristics, pp. 250 and 151, my italics.

56. 55 D. Townsend, ‘Shaftesbury’s Aesthetic Theory’, p. 211.

experiences, since both of the latter are kinds of aesthetic experiences; they are, respectively, the experience of the moral beauty of finite minds and the experience of the (moral) beauty of God, either in himself or as is manifested in the universe.

If an aesthetic experience is basically a form of pleasurable disinterested love, it is both a contemplative and a practical experience. We have seen that the contemplative aspect of the experience is bound to vary enormously in cognitive preconditions from case to case according to the kind of beauty contemplated within the hierarchy. The appropriate practical loving reactions are bound to vary just as much from case to case: one does not act appropriately towards a person whom one loves disinterestedly in the same way that one acts appropriately towards God if one loves him disinterestedly. Nor in the same way that a child can react lovingly when he perceives the beauty of the figures of his ball or die.

We must now return to an unanswered question. In an accomplished person, the natural disposition to experience beauty is to be extensively developed in two ways: vertically, inasmuch as we are supposed to perfect the disposition so as to be able to contemplatively love higher and higher forms of beauty; horizontally, inasmuch as we are supposed to perfect the disposition in order to be able to contemplatively love all the forms of beauty present at any given level of the hierarchy. The least that can be said is that both developments, vertical and horizontal, require considerable ‘labours and pains’. What, then, is the motivating, driving force that is to lead us to aspire, in optimal cases, to perfect our natural disposition in both directions?

The mathematician who labours at his problem, the bookish man who toils, the artist who endures voluntarily the greatest hardships and fatigues—none of these are said ‘to follow pleasure’, as the expression is ordinarily taken. Yet, Shaftesbury claims, follow pleasure they do. In the Inquiry, Shaftesbury gives another example of the kind of pleasure proper to disinterested love, a love pertaining in this case to the beauty of mathematics:

When we have thoroughly searched into the nature of this contemplative delight [in mathematics], we shall find it of a kind which

relates not in the least to the private interest of the creature, nor has for its object any self-good or advantage of the private system. The admiration, joy or love turns wholly upon what is exterior and foreign to ourselves. And although the reflected joy or pleasure which arises from the notice of this pleasure once perceived may be interpreted as self-passion or interested regard, yet the original satisfaction can be no other than what results from the love of truth, proportion, symmetry in the things without.59

Shaftesbury distinguishes two pleasures. The first is the disinterested pleasure caused by, or contained in, a disinterested contemplative love of beauty. The second pleasure is a ‘reflected joy’ because it depends on the ‘the notice’ of the first pleasure. (Due to ‘reflected sense’ we have first and second-order natural affections in the perception and evaluative appreciation of moral beauty; but we also have first and second-order pleasures in the perception and evaluative appreciation of all beauties, such as those of mathematics. The two distinctions—between, on one hand, orders of natural affection and, on the other, orders of pleasure—are different.) What is the second pleasure? Since it depends on the awareness of the first-order pleasure, it has that pleasure as its object: one is pleased to be pleased. And since the first-order pleasure is known to be one’s own, the second-order pleasure is a ‘self-passion’. But why is the latter an ‘interested regard’? I suggest the following reading as best fitting what we have previously seen. The ‘reflected joy’ is not only a pleasure in being pleased; it is also a pleasure in being disinterestedly pleased, due to an implicit awareness that having disinterested pleasure is somehow conducive to our real self-interest. Whether we know it or not, the reason why disinterested pleasure is conducive to our real self-interest is that it directly results from disinterested love. Of course, the first pleasure does not have one’s (real) self-interest as its object; it has ‘no object within the compass of the private system’.60 Its object is merely the beauty that is ‘exterior and foreign to ourselves’. But the ensuing ‘reflected joy’ comes not only from the consciousness of the first pleasure, but also from some awareness, faint or lively, that experiencing the first pleasure somehow contributes to our true self-interest. If this

60. Characteristics, p. 203.
reading is correct, Shaftesbury means that the mathematician, the ‘bookish man’, the artist, indeed all persons (‘we all of us know something of this principle’),\(^{61}\) have an awareness, dim or acute, that they become better persons by exercising their natural disposition to experience beauty, by loving it disinterestedly and taking pleasure in it.

Pleasures often foster a desire to renew the same pleasure or to have greater ones of the same kind. Presumably, then, Shaftesbury believes that the two pleasures—the first-order, disinterested one and the second-order, interested one—produce a desire to renew the same disinterested pleasure or to have greater ones. Yet an aesthetic pleasure is necessarily caused directly by (or contained in) disinterested love (‘the original satisfaction can be no other than what results from the love of truth, proportion, symmetry in the things without’). So, if the desire to have a renewed or greater disinterested pleasure is satisfied, the pleasure will be the direct effect of a renewed or greater disinterested love, itself an effect—although only an indirect one—of the desire. But the fact that the new aesthetic pleasure is an (indirect) effect of the desire that it satisfies does not jeopardise the pleasure’s disinterestedness. For it can surely remain true that the new, desired aesthetic pleasure ‘relates not in the least to the private interest of the creature’ in the sense that it does not have ‘for its object any self-good or advantage of the private system’, and that it is directly caused by a disinterested love of ‘what is exterior and foreign to ourselves’. This is so even if having a disinterested pleasure does relate, causally, to the ‘private interest of the creature’ in contributing to making it a better person. But again, this sort of ‘private interest’ is not only compatible with, but conducive to morality and ‘the public good’.

In endeavouring to satisfy the desire for renewed or greater disinterested pleasures, one will be motivated to seek pleasures appropriate to beauties situated higher in the hierarchy, and in perhaps exceptional cases, appropriate to the beauty of God, either in himself or at least as manifested in the universe. Hence, although within any given aesthetic experience the role of the disinterested pleasure is secondary to that of the disinterested

\(^{61}\) Characteristics, p. 351.
love, an important function of the disinterested pleasure, I suggest, is that, in combination with the interested pleasure, it leads one to aspire to pass from the aesthetic experience of lower degrees of beauty to the experience of higher ones. If this reading is on the right track, the importance of 'disinterested pleasure' is to be found at least as much in the ascending transition from one aesthetic experience to another, as within aesthetic experiences themselves.62

62. I wish to thank Laurent Jaffro and David Spurr for their helpful comments.