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"A World Against Itself":
The Dynamics of Good Nature and Virtue in Henry Fielding's Plays

Abstract

In the eighteenth-century England, the aesthetic vision of most contemporary writers of the time was closely related to the social, political and religious system of belief. Augustan writers, satirists particularly, sought to reclaim for literature the morally privileged status, they thought, it supposedly held in the context of the Latitudinarian system of thought; the very rationale behind the ethic of good nature that distinguishes major writings of the time, namely the dramatic, journalistic and fictional works of the major eighteenth century novelist and satirist Henry Fielding. His major dramatic works not only display the influence of the Latitudinarian philosophy but mainly Shaftesbury's moral theory of innate goodness, which Fielding revokes, offering then a representation of a more universal moral frame which rather reflects and criticizes the society of the author's time.

The providential pattern that Fielding creates in his plays valorizes indeed the principle of good-nature and the triumph of virtue against all apparent social evils. Most significantly, it has positioned Henry Fielding himself in a "comedic" tradition in which characters are not ultimately responsible for themselves. In the present paper, and with reference to Earl of Shaftesbury's assumptions about the ideal good-natured man, I intend to evince that Fielding uses the value of good-nature and virtue not as pure moral abstractions, but rather as nodal points around which he organizes, and through which he presents a broad cultural and historical vision. With reference to his major regular comedies, and a through a close study of his most representative characters, I will attempt to evince that this underlying moral vision is more than an abstract rumination of the relative power of good and evil. When we view and consider such concepts as virtue, good-nature and ill-nature in the immediate contexts of his plays, we conceive a picture of a broad cultural landscape in which ethical values become nodal points of meaning, in which Fielding represents both the most basic, traditional values and the most sordid everyday events and attitudes of his society.

Keywords: good nature, virtue, value, moralism, ethics, satire, comedy, religion

The work of Henry Fielding, a major eighteenth century British dramatist and satirist, not only displays his genius in the artistic, aesthetic and stylistic sense, but also offers a representation of a more universal moral frame which rather reflects and criticizes the society of the author's time. In his major dramatic works which range from conventional comedies, to

more innovative farces and to the most explicitly pointed social and political satires, Fielding took an external approach to his characters and assigned them to various categories, using them as more symbolic illustrations of virtues and vices in people. This approach enabled him to express his own conception of human nature and the system of moral values. Fielding's "broad moral perspective" (Watt 1957, 322) is indeed perceptible in his design what he actually refers to as "characters of manners"¹ (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 297), who despite their "unconvincing" inner life, have the function of revealing the priority of "society and the larger order" (Fielding, *Tom Jones* 308), displaying then Fielding's own ingenious and complex system of moral values.

Critics such as Morris Golden and Martin Battestin assert that Fielding's engagement with religion was indeed thoughtful and critical: he was a "Christian censor" in the humanist tradition of didactic Augustan² satirists (Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* 9). Fielding's dramatic writings are said to validate the Augustan literary vision, primarily in methods and posture while constantly displaying his own particular interest in "showing humanity how to act rightly" (Golden 1966, 2). Two major critics, Paul. J. Hunter and Ronald Paulson, attempted to study Fielding's apparent self-contradictions by claiming that he responded ambivalently to both the Augustans and "the forces of modernity" (Hunter 1976, 11). Hunter further contends that Fielding yearned to join the "Augustan Circle," but managed also to develop a more distinctive "rhetoric of discovery", an "affirmation through diversion," which indeed

¹ In his novels *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Fielding discussed the dynamics of characterization. He sought to incite his readers into recognizing the complexities of "mixed" characters. Rejecting Samuel Richardson's character "types" as people who do not exist in nature, Fielding in *Tom Jones* suggests that "Richardsonian" readers hold people to standards that cannot be upheld. Their actions and words, as Fielding demonstrates, work in stark contrast with to one another and leave Fielding's characters appearing hypocritical and confusingly mixing their vices with their virtues. Fielding's novels, namely *Tom Jones*, provide his readers with a way of becoming critical readers of human nature, so that they learn not so much how to correct themselves but how to use reason to evaluate these "characters of manners" (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 297).

² Many other critics discussed the assumption that Fielding was primarily a traditionalist. Michael Irwin in *Henry Fielding: The Tentative Realist* (1967) argued that "Fielding's moral intention takes precedence over demands of form," then the "didactic purpose is an important shaping factor" (2). Glenn Hatfield in *Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony* (1968), stated that "Fielding's use of dramatic technique" and "irony" were "conscious and deliberate attempts to approximate in his fiction the conditions of truth in a hypocritical and nominalistic world" (197). Martin Price, in *Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake* (1964), maintained in this regard that though Fielding minimized the intensity of his moralizing plan by means of "artifice and easy rationalization" and intensified "feeling in a more radical and unguarded manner," Fielding was indeed an Augustan in his precepts and outlooks (286). For further details on the characteristic aspirations of the "classicizing subculture we sometimes call the Augustans" (Preface ix), see Claude Rawson's thorough discussion of the different affinities, loyalties and idioms of a culture in decline, as he argues in book *Satire and Sentiment (1660-1830)*. New Haven & London: Yale University, 2000.

allowed him to validate traditional values meanwhile responding to contemporary changes, he further describes Fielding's work as "an application for admission into the Augustan Circle" (Hunter 1976, 10). Although Paulson holds that Henry Fielding admired and sought to emulate the great Scriblerians satirists³ as he argues that "Fielding began his career consciously and ostentatiously grasping the coattails" (52) of Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Gay; he grants as well that the Augustan inspiration is counterbalanced by "another strain of Fielding's satire, perhaps deriving from his interest in the moral philosophers and Latitudinarian divines" (Paulson 1962, 3).

Fielding's regular comedies typically pit one or two-good natured characters against a world of scheming self-serving, ill-natured "thrivers", and in doing so, create a sort of recurring ethical dilemma: good nature, virtue, value, evil and corruption. Good nature and virtue, obviously, are inherently positive moral qualities and values, but do they ultimately function in the world as an absolute strength?

Though Fielding major regular comedies, namely *Love in Several Masques* (1728), *The Temple Beau* (1730), *Rape Upon Rape* (1730), *The Modern Husband* (1732) and *The Wedding Day* (1743) seem to answer this question by asserting that virtue is most certainly a pure strength—one which secures the worldly interests of the good-natured man and also promotes social harmony—its victory is always accommodated by a fortuitous, unforeseen occurrence—an odd accident or coincidence, a discovered legacy, an abrupt "reformation".

This providential pattern that valorizes the principle of good-nature and the triumph of virtue against all apparent social evils, has positioned Henry Fielding himself in a "comedic" tradition in which characters are not ultimately responsible for themselves, or as Jack Durant notes, in this regard, this providential system has placed Fielding, securely in an eighteenth century system of belief where the workings of a providentially-ordered universe may seem mysterious to mortal eyes but always just (Durant 1977, 31). In the present paper, and with reference to Earl of Shaftesbury's assumptions about the ideal good-natured man, I intend to evince that Fielding uses the value of good-nature and virtue not as pure moral abstractions, but rather as nodal points around which he organizes, and through which he presents a broad

³ The Scriblerus Club was first formed in 1714, it is likely that none of its founding members could have foreseen the extent to which they would affect the eighteenth century culture surrounding them. The Scriblerus Club, consisting of Pope, Swift, Gay and Parnell, was originally formed to write satires against modern corruptions in learning. The Club's invented critic Martius Scriblerus directs harsh criticism towards those he mocks and parodies. The historical information is taken from Charles Kerby Miller's *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*. He provides an extensive background of the Club's beginnings, and how this Club affected each member individually.

cultural and historical vision. With reference to his major regular comedies, and a through a close study of his most representative characters, I will attempt to show that this underlying moral vision is more than an abstract rumination of the relative power of good and evil. When we view and consider such concepts as virtue, good-nature and ill-nature in the immediate contexts of his plays, we conceive a picture of a broad cultural landscape in which ethical values become nodal points of meaning, and particularly in which Fielding represents both the most basic, traditional values and the most sordid everyday events and attitudes of his society.

In his major regular comedies, *Love in Several Masques*, *Temple Beau*, *The Universal Gallant*, *Rape Upon Rape* and *The Modern Husband*, Fielding uses the main characters not only to entertain the readers by their very comicality, but also to pose moral questions which challenge his readers to consider and judge the nature of the characters and the values of the society in general. As Fielding "was engaged in the exploration of a ... mechanism of human society as whole" (Watt 1957, 329), he was "interested ... only in those features of the individual which are necessary to assign him to his moral and social species" (ibid. 310).

It is then fundamental to begin with a preliminary definition of good-nature as Fielding uses the term in the plays. The definition he provides in his "Of Good Nature," embodies what Fielding firmly believed in and advocated; virtue lies not in the accomplishment of the action but in the intention:

What is Good-Nature? Gen'rous Richmond, tell;
He can declare it best, who best can feel.
Is it foolish weakness in the Breast,
As some who know, or have it not, contest?
Or is it rather not the mighty whole,
Full composition, of a virtuous Soul?
Is it not Virtue's Self? A Flow'r so fine,
It only grows in Soils almost divine.
What by this Name, then, shall be understood?
What? But the glorious Lust of doing Good?
The Heart that finds it Happiness to please
Can feel another's Pain, and taste his Ease;
The cheek that with another's Joy can glow,
Turn pale and sicken with another's Woe;
Free from Contempt and Envy. (Fielding, qtd in Battestin 1973, 824)

It is clear in the discursive writings of Henry Fielding that he was well aware of the difference between "goodness alone, unsupported by social intelligence or prudence or the higher moral imperative of religion" and true greatness and the true sublime in human nature"

which is "the union of a good heart with a good mind" (Fielding, Ed. Henley 1967, 285). Fielding draws on classical philosophers, Latitudinarians and eighteenth century moral philosophers namely Shaftsbury for his concept of good-nature. In an "Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men" Fielding contends that: "Good-nature is that benevolent and amiable temper of mind, which disposes us to feel the misfortunes, and enjoy the happiness of others; and consequently, pushes us further, to promote the latter, and prevent the former; and that without any abstract contemplation on the beauty of virtue, and without the allurements or terrors of religion" (Fielding, Ed. Henley 1967, 285) In the essay in *The Champion*, for March 27, 1740, Fielding defines good nature, partly by negation in order to counter false meanings, as "a Delight in the Happiness of Mankind, and a Concern at their Misery, with a Desire, as much as possible, to procure the former, and avert the latter; and this, with a constant regard to Desert." It "is not that weakness, which, without Distinction, affects both the Virtuous and the Base," nor is it "that cowardice which prevents us from repelling or resenting an injury" (Fielding, *The Champion* Vol 2, 39). And he continues, "As good-nature requires a distinguishing faculty, which is another word for judgment, and is perhaps the sole boundary between wisdom and folly; it is impossible for a fool, who hath no distinguishing faculty, to be good-natured" (Fielding *The Champion* Vol 2, 40).

In order to understand the ideological background that conditioned the portrayal of the Good-Natured Man in Fielding's work and in eighteenth-century English literature, we must review the growth and the evolution of the concept of natural goodness in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Even after the Restoration, Calvinian theology was the most prominent religious view. Accordingly, man was generally thought to be sinful and depraved because of the fall of Adam. The good man retained his virtue only by perpetual suppression and discipline of nature, and, of course, only through the grace of god. This view was indeed endorsed by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1650), who asserts that self-interest or "egoistic passion of pride and self-esteem," is the true motive of all man's actions and that the natural passions of man, if not controlled by government, would lead to a state of constant social war. He claims that:

Moral philosophy is nothing else but the science of what is good, and evil, in the conversation, and society of mankind. Good, and evil, are names that signify our appetites, and aversions; which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men, are different; and differs men differ not only in their judgment on the senses of what is pleasant and unpleasant to the taste, smell, hearing, touch and sight but also of what is comfortable or disagreeable to reason in the action of common life. Nay, the same man in divers times differs from himself, and one time praises, that is, calls good—what another time he dispraises and calls evil. (Hobbes 1950, 131)

Hobbes contends that man's actions are primarily the automatic results of forces operating through them. He then convincingly proposes that man is not essentially good or naturally social and that morality is basically relative. However with the advent of Restoration, these views were forcefully opposed. Figures such as Henry More and John Norris spoke in defense of the innate goodness of man; the same ethical assumption that Latitudinarian philosophers, namely Isaac Barrow and John Tilloston advocated and which Shaftesbury's moral theory further advanced and elaborated. In this regard, S. R. Crane has thoroughly studied and documented extensively the contributions of the Latitudinarian philosophers. He points out that in the 1660's and 1670's Isaac Barrow preached a number of sermons against both Hobbes and the Augustinian attitudes propagated by the Calvinistic dogma⁴.

It is prerequisite here to provide then a brief overview of the major characteristics of the Latitudinarian system of thought and Earl of Shaftesbury⁵'s own moral theory in order to become more acquainted with Fielding's own optimistic view of human nature. In fact, Fielding's moral conception finds its roots in the ethical theory of moral sense adopted from the Latitudinarian moral philosophy and one of its main later advocates, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury. In his philosophical treatise called *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), the Earl of Shaftesbury proposed the definitions of virtues and vices, the ways of recognizing them, and the possible methods of achieving the sublime moral state of wisdom. Both religious frameworks had significantly shaped Fielding's enthusiastic view of the benevolent good-nature. In fact, the study of Fielding's didacticism in his dramatic works requires an awareness of the influence of the Latitudinarian thought, the very rationale behind the ethic of good nature and good works that distinguishes his writings. The early Latitudinarians were in fact prominent in the late seventeenth century as they rejected the cynically moral discourse of Hobbes and developed a predominately optimistic view of human nature, acknowledging its essential goodness. According to them, human nature is essentially dignified, naturally delighting in benevolence but always corrupted by ill conduct

⁴ Crane has significantly studied the Latitudinarian philosophical system of thought and has focused on specific Latitudinarian sermons which amplify man's essential good nature in his article "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the Man of Feeling" (1943).

⁵ Anthony Ashley Cooper, is the third earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713 displayed an overt antipathy to libertinism is obvious, and examples are plentiful in his writings. His major work, the *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), consistently uses the words "libertine" and "rake" as insults; in all of his writings sensual pleasures are criticized and rejected as base and animalistic threats to human virtue. And despite the third earl's widespread reputation as a freethinker in matters religious, he always insisted that liberty of thought did not imply a freedom from moral restraint ("Brian Cowan: "Reasonable Ecstasies: Shaftesbury and the Languages of Libertinism," 1998).

and bad education. Commenting on the Latitudinarian theology, Robert Mayhew in his article "William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque" asserts:

The theological and ecclesiological position called "Latitudinarianism" is notoriously hard to define. Yet some general traits of low-churchmanship in the era after the Restoration can be detected. Above all, Latitudinarianism aimed to ensure that the sort of theological factionalism that had led to the Civil War did not recur, by developing a more comprehensive and moderate approach within the Church of England, which would have the "latitude" (hence the name, which was initially a pejorative one, given by High Church opponents) to include all types of Protestant beliefs within the fold of the established church. The retrospective and prospective sides of this creed, together with its rhetoric of inclusion and moderation, were neatly summarized by John Tillotson, the most important Latitudinarian spokesman: "The manners of men have been almost universally corrupted by a Civil War. We should therefore all jointly endeavor to retrieve the ancient virtue of the Nation, and to bring into fashion again that solid and substantial that plain and unaffected piety, (free from the extremes both of superstition and enthusiasm) which flourished in the age of our immediate Forefathers." Most of the details of Latitudinarian theology and church politics need not concern us ... The Latitudinarians were distinguished in theological terms by their repeated recourse to the natural world as a mode of evidence that fitted their need for uncontroversial proofs of God and Christianity, to draw those of diverse religious beliefs into concord. (Mayhew 2000, 359-360)

Donald Greene, another major literary scholar whose writings defined and discussed the views of the Latitudinarian churchmen, argues that the philosophy of Latitudinarianism is so complex because it combines four major distinct doctrines that developed simultaneously between 1660 and 1790 which are:

- The identification of virtue with benevolent actions and feelings of "good will to all men" long antedates 1660.
- So does "antistoical" admiration for warm human emotion.
- The doctrine that human beings are innately capable of some degree of mutual affection and benevolence was likewise held by Christian teachers long before 1660. But the holding of this tenet did not compromise their adherence, either before or after 1660, to the orthodox "Augustinian" doctrines of original sin and the need for divine grace, as Crane's essay seems to suggest and as many of those who have relied on it have assumed.
- Anglican divines did not teach that virtuous behavior should be practiced because of its rewards in the form of complacency and self-approbation. (Mayhew 2000, 350-351)

It becomes evident then that the Latitudinarian thinkers identified virtue with acts of benevolence claiming that the source of these acts is primarily the natural goodness of the human heart. They affirmed that human nature was noble and that social affectations and the capacity for natural goodness were inherently part of human nature. Shaftesbury's theory contains as well the same ideas and enthusiasms that are behind the appearance of good natured characters and the ethical controversy in eighteenth century England. The bases of Shaftesbury's moral theory is the idea that moral sense is natural to us; thus, thanks to the moral faculty, our "moral sensibilities generate autonomic responses" to what actually we perceive. As a result:

in these characters or pictures of manners, the heart cannot possibly remain neutral. However false or corrupt it be within itself, it finds the difference between one heart and another, one turn of affection, one behavior, one sentiment and another ... and must approve of what is natural and honest, and disapprove what is dishonest and (Shaftesbury 1999, 173).

The most important idea in the section of Shaftesbury's theory, defining the difference between virtue and vice, is in fact the claim that "it is therefore by affection merely that a creature is esteemed good or ill, natural or unnatural (Shaftesbury 1999, 170). By this claim Shaftesbury suggested "that the virtues were rooted in the affections" and, subsequently, "he aimed to establish the natural basis of virtue, and to demonstrate that the social impulses were a necessary component of human nature" (Grean 1967, 138) – because "there is naturally in every man such a degree of social affection as inclines him to seek familiarity and friendship of his fellows" (Shaftesbury 1999, 215), as he further contends. So, since Shaftesbury identifies the virtuous and the moral with naturalness, he divides the affections into three main categories:

- the natural affections which lead to the good of the public; or
- the self-affections which lead only to the good of the private; or
- such as are neither of these; nor tending either to any good of the public or private; but contrary-wise: and which may therefore be justly styled unnatural affections (Shaftesbury 1999, 196).

Then, he further evaluates them, stating: "So that according to these affections stand, a creature must be virtuous or vicious, good or ill. The latter sort of these affections, this evident, is wholly vicious. The two former may be virtuous or vicious according to their degree" (Shaftesbury 1999, 196).

As one of the highest values in the philosophy of Shaftesbury is harmony, it is clear that there should be "an exact proportionableness, constancy and regularity in all passions and

affections" (Shaftesbury 1999, 199). Therefore, "it follows that a primary degree of any creature would be that its affections be neither excessive nor defective" (Greene 1967, 150). Hence, it is the degree of affections in a man, especially in case of self-affections, which assigns the virtuous or the vicious value to the human behavior.

The doctrines of good nature and universal benevolence which Shaftesbury and the Latitudinarians opposed to Hobbes have significantly shaped Fielding's representation of his characters in his early satiric comedies. Discussing Fielding's genuine commitment to the Latitudinarian ideals, Greene in this regard argues that:

Fielding frees Shaftesbury's neo-Stoic vision of its anticlerical or deistic implications. Instead he fuses it with the views of those Latitudinarian churchmen who rejected Hobbes and offered a vision of man naturally delighting in good and strengthening his faith by practical exertions of charity. In response [to Hobbes] the latitudinarian divines of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whom Fielding frequently quoted with approval, argued that man was benevolence. (Greene 1977, 159)

In *The Temple Beau*, for instance, the good-natured Veromil finds that his love for the virtuous Bellaria is constantly threatened by the potential thrivers. The girl's father, George Pedant for instance, sent her to town to her uncle, only to prevent her from marrying Veromil, whose fortune he thinks is still insufficient, meanwhile planning her marriage with young Wilding. George's brother, Sir Avarice Pedant seeks as well self-interest and wants to gain financial profit from the intended marriage. The good Veromil is then placed in a duplicitous world of machinations and plotting in which even his closest friend, Valentine, who first promises to help him outwit the other thrivers, tries to deceive Veromil and expresses his interest in Bellaria. Veromil embodies then a virtue that lacks the practical wherewithal to advance his worldly interests. He displays then an innocent goodness that is constantly threatened. Yet always rescued and saved. At the end of the play, Fielding removes all obstacles and builds a vision of social harmony in which the good-natured Veromil, simply being good is reunited with his beloved. In the play's final lines, Veromil openly credits providence as the driving force behind the happy resolution, the central piece of which is the marriage of Veromil and Bellaria. He says:

All love, as folly, libertines disclaim;
And children call their folly by its name.
Those joys which from its purest fountains flow,
No boy, no fool, no libertine can know:
Heaven meant so blest, so exquisite a fate,
But to reward the virtuous and the great. (Fielding 2004, 179)

Veromil's fate is in fact ultimately determined by the power of providence which near the end of the play has been credited with the improbable restoration of Veromil to his inheritance, making of him then an acceptable husband to Bellaria: "that Fortune, sir, which recommended me to this lady's father, and which by forgery and perjury I was deprived of, my happy stars now promise to restore me" (Fielding 2004, 177). In a similar vein, an initial dialogue between Veromil and Bellaria provides ample evidence that providence is indeed the catalyst to the rest of the action of the play:

Bellaria. Oh! Tell me what strange, what unexpected chance brought us once again together.

Veromil. A chance so strange; it seems the direction of a providence, which looks with a propitious pleasure on the sincerity of our virtuous loves; for had not the accidental meeting of a friend prevented it, I had tomorrow gone for France, whither I falsely heard you was sent. (Fielding 2004, 131)

It is true that along the course of the events in the play, Veromil's good-nature, unselfishness and generosity are responsible for the man's being victimized by the scheming world, yet each turning point in the fate of Veromil is ironically attributed to providence, regardless of whether the society rewards virtue or not. Fielding's irony in contrast with the pointed satire of his contemporaries, namely Swift, is particularly interesting in its intent. Rather than being radically corrective, Fielding is gently satirical of any deviation from a healthy and reasonable social morality, his irony is being that of "integration rather than disintegration." (Humphreys 1962, 183) Fielding's irony is indeed dynamic and emblematic of the social stability and harmony he seeks to preserve. In contrast to many of his contemporary philosophers who believed that man is depraved and bad, Fielding believed that much of the evil in the world happens purely by accident (Battestin *The Moral Basis of Henry Fielding's Art*, 69). He then assumed that man is naturally good (Paulson 1967, 136), providence will then interpose and enforce a just harmony in the world.

In *The Temple Beau*, the good nature of Veromil has also the power to engender virtuous behavior in other members of society. The workings of providence are displayed in the context not only of the events of the play but also in the character of Valentine, whose virtue is doubtful as he lusts after Bellaria the beloved of his best friend. Although Fielding did not use the analytical method, based on the observation of the particularities of a character, he carried out its function "through integration of characters to one another and to a large, coherent moral vision" (Alter 1968, 65). At the same time, Fielding achieved to make his characters "vividly alive, even more complex, as he judges them and asks us to judge them" (Alter 1968, 65). In this portrayal of Veromil and Valentine, Fielding addresses not only the question of

virtue and vice but also two other important problems of ethics – the question of moral sense and the problem of the relation of self-interest and public interest (Grean 1967, xi). In fact, he mirrors the theory of the Earl of Shaftsbury, who explored the three controversial issues – the essence of virtue and vice, the matter of moral sense and the subject of self-interest and exemplifies the same Latitudinarian optimistic view of the human nature.

In the fourth act, for example, Veromil convinces Valentine to abandon his passion for the beloved Bellaria, and the scene clearly suggests that Veromil's virtuous pleas have finally resulted in Valentine's virtuous behavior:

Veromil. Art thou a man, and can thy passion so outstrip thy reason, to send thee wading through falsehood, perjury, and murder, after a flying light which you can ne'er o'take!..

Valentine. O Veromil! Life, fortune, I coul easily abandon for thy friendship. I will do more and strive to forget thy mistress.

Veromil. Once more let me embrace thee. The innocent, the perfect joy that flows from the reflection of a virtuous deed far surpass all the trifling momentary raptures that are obtained by guilt. To triumph o'er a conquered passion is a pride well worthy of a man.

Safe o'er the main of life the vessel rides,
When passion furls her sails, and reason guides:
While she who has that surest rudder lost,
'Midst rocks and quicksands by the waves is tost;
No certain road she keeps, no port can find,
Toss'd up and down by ev'ry wanton wind. (Fielding 2004, 161)

The fact that Fielding portrays Veromil as a good-natured-man, so open-hearted that he was able to restore the deceitful Valentine, despite his own impetuous behavior can be explained by comparing the portrayal of Veromil's character to the description of Shaftsbury's category of "the natural affections" in his theory of morals:

Shaftsbury gives no precise list of the social affections, but treats them as a rather fluid group of related impulses including the drive for preservation of the species, gregariousness, sympathy, the various forms of familial affection, friendship, patriotism, and love of humanity. They unite the individual to a community, and commit him to work for the values of that community. (Grean 1967, 154)

In this view, Veromil's good-nature promotes social harmony, as well as his own self-interest. While he is constantly forced to attempt to defend himself against the guile of the thrivers, his virtue itself is never subject to corruption. Even as he stands helpless in the face of his own friend's threatening violence, when he is disarmed and Valentine breaks into a scene of fight, Veromil still trusts his friend's loyalty and his love for Bellaria. Fielding is actually

concerned more with striking the balance between outward action and inner goodness in order to ensure that human behavior is exclusively moral. According to him, by allowing virtue to develop too enthusiastically, virtuous men can become too ridiculous and fail to communicate their intrinsic goodness. Only the providential events of the conventional ending will save Veromil from this predicament.

Similarly in *The Modern Husband*, undesigning and untutored in the ways of a corrupt world, the good-natured Mr. Bellamant, in his essential innocence, seems to particularly become susceptible to the corrupting influences of contemporary society. In fact, in *The Modern Husband*, Fielding presents in Mr. Bellamant a character in constant trouble. First, Mr. Bellamant faces a variety of external threats. As the play begins, he has just undergone a severe financial loss, and then we learn that Lord Richly designs upon the virtue of his wife and plans to take from him his remaining wealth. The dangers faced by the good-natured man are similar to the proliferation of problems facing Veromil in *The Temple Beau*, contributing indeed to the shaping of a picture of the good-natured man as virtually victim to a considerable danger. Just as Veromil is subject to Valentine's violence when fighting for Bellaria, Bellamant becomes the object of Richly's most vicious plot to take his money and mischievous provocations to corrupt his virtue which he eventually escapes by his inherently essential goodness. Bellamant displays as well an open-hearted innocence that re-convincing his wife of his essential goodness after the discovery of his adultery affair with Mrs. Modern. In his final confrontation with his wife, she suggests that his indiscretion was caused by an inherent emotional impulsiveness in men: "How could I imagine there was such truth in man, in that inconstant fickle sex, who are so prone to change; that, to indulge their fondness for variety, they would grow weary of a paradise to wander in a desert?" (Fielding 2007, 74). Mr. Bellamant implies that promiscuity is a result of youthful passion, which was eventually brought under control by the wisdom of age.

The contrast between goodness and evil is indeed very important for Fielding's "realizing the meaning of good" (Grean 1967, 211). Bellamont or Veromil in *The Temple Beau*, who is gifted with good heart but burdened with imprudence, struggles through all the stages of moral development to achieve the state of virtue and happiness. Thus, "a man must be soundly ridiculous who, with all the wit imaginable, would go about to ridicule wisdom, honesty or laugh at honesty or good manners" (Shaftesbury 199, 60). In accordance with these claims, Fielding proves himself to be a true satirist because he fully realizes that the satire should not be "without morals and instructions, which is the majesty and life of this kind of writing" (Shaftesbury 1999, 119). So, in his work, he largely uses ridicule and wit, as a part of his moral conception, to expose the pretense and to criticize the wrong attitudes of his time. The fact that Fielding portrays Veromil and Bellamant as good-natured characters despite their

occasional disgraceful and impetuous attitude parallels one of the highest values in the philosophy of Shaftesbury which is harmony, it is clear that there should be "an exact proportionableness, constancy and regularity in all passions and affections" (Shaftesbury 1999, 199). Therefore, "it follows that a primary degree of any creature would be that its affections be neither excessive nor defective" (Grean 1967, 150). Hence, it is the degree of affections in a man, especially in case of self-affections, which assigns the virtuous or the vicious value to the human behavior.

In *The Wedding Day*, Millamour and Heartfort, two friends are essentially good-natured, but the rakish Millamour has been partially corrupted by "custom", the same dichotomy between virtue/good nature and vice/affectation is again displayed:

Heartfort. My practice, perhaps, is not equal to my theory; but I pretend to sin with as little mischief as I can to others: and this I can lay my hand on my heart and affirm, that I never seduced a young woman to her own ruin, nor a married one to the misery of her husband. Nay, and I know thee to be so good-natured a fellow, that what thou dost of this kind arises from thy not considering the consequence of thy actions; and if any woman can lay her ruin on thee, thou canst lay it on custom... in reality, there is no more mischievous character that a public debaucher of a woman.

Millamor. No more dear George; now you begin to pierce the quick.

Heartfort. I have done: I am glad you can feel; it is a sure sign of no mortification. (Fielding 2011, 130-131)

Like Bellamant in *The Modern Husband*, Millamour has been corrupted by the immorality of times and he is troubled by his own conscience and will eventually change his ways through his love for a good woman. Millamour's good-nature represents a threat to himself. After apparently defeating his passion with reason by resolving never to see his beloved Clarinda again, because she will now get married, he has immediately been unable to preserve his resolution and has gone out in an attempt to corrupt her. So both good-natured men become potential threats for others but mainly to themselves, given their inability to balance their passions with reason. The affected good-nature man in Fielding's dramatic work becomes the sentimental fool who goes about indulging his emotions purely for self-gratification. His sensibility is no longer moral consciousness of the feelings of others but merely an overtly acute sensitivity to his own emotions (Heilman 1940, 242). In *The Modern Husband*, good nature is placed in direct conflict not only with a dangerous external reality, but also, and more importantly, with another innate, possibly, a positive ethical alternative self-affection. In fact, self-affection as categorized by Shaftesbury is the degree of an affection which decides about its positive or negative significance because a moderated self-interest, which does not oppose the social affections in a man, can not only absolutely agree with virtue, but is even

necessary for achieving it. The basic list of self-interests in Shaftesbury's conception includes "love of life," "resentment of injury," "pleasure" (or "luxury"), desire for wealth and material conveniences ("interest"), love of praise ("emulation") and love of ease and rest ("indolence"), as Stanley Grean classified them on the basis of his studies of Shaftesbury's works (Grean 1967, 164). In a more practical sense, good nature is presented as a passion an instinctive quality impelling the subject, Millamour, to experience a perpetual conflict since he cannot guide his good-natured passion with reason, nor is his reason informed by a proper sensitivity of the passions.

In his portrayal of Millamour, Fielding discusses not only the question of virtue and vice but also two other important problems of ethics – the question of moral sense and the problem of the relation of self-interest and public interest (Grean 1967, xi). Eventually, Shaftesbury defined the bases of virtue and vice by connecting them to the question of moral sense and the problem of the interests of a man. Millamour who, as has been noted, is partially corrupted by the thriving times, demonstrates both facets of the reason vs passion issue and self-interest and public-interest dichotomy. In the thriving incarnation of him he devises elaborate scheming plots to satisfy his own passion. Yet, the good-natured Millamour strives to act rightly in regard to the married Clarinda and defeats his passion with reason. In this regard, "Shaftesbury not only considers the self-affections as necessary for the physical and mental health of the individual, but he regards them as essential constituents of virtue" (Grean 1967, 175). Thus, even though Fielding's character of Millamour fights for his own passion, he gradually discovers the right measure of self-affection. Ironically enough, at the end of the play, Millamour is rescued from his dilemma, not by reason but by providence again, as Mrs. Plotwall reveals to Mr. Stedfast that his new wife is actually his daughter. The discovery, before the marriage has been consummated, leads to their reconciliation. In the final lines spoken by Millamour, Fielding recommends to the audience the path of virtue:

From my example, let all rakes be taught
To shun loose pleasure's sweet but poisonous draught.
Vice, like a ready harlot, still allures;
Virtue gives slow, but what she gives secures. (Fielding 2007, 145).

Rape upon Rape or *The Coffee-House Politician* offers another frame where good-natured behavior will be tested and virtue to be valued. Unlike his earlier comedies, Fielding's concern in this play shifts to the proper conduct of the magistrates. Though rape is a potentially offending topic, the play is an extremely funny criticism of the judicial system. By exploring the conflicting philosophies of the wicked Justice Squeezum and the honored Justice Worthy, Fielding offers an ironic critique of the deficiencies and the corruptive

workings of the legal system during the eighteenth century. Justice Squeezum is in fact, collecting money from brothels to protect them. The principle of justice which normally ensures society's order symbolizes in this play the old man's selfish attitude and obstinate system of values that serves only his own corrupt and selfish. The ethical content of his play is astonishingly formalized in an amoral form, at least regarding issues related to sex and cuckolding, but brilliantly conveyed in a plot and through diction which are seemingly too artificial to embody serious moral ideals related to the practicalities of ordinary living. The hypocritical attitude of Justice Squeezum turns is indeed a satire of court procedures where ignorance is masquerading as learning and self-serving attitude as established laws. The immorality that Fielding associates with the financial revolution corrupts the institution of justice as well, Justice Worthy openly laments that saying:

Isabella. And yet our laws, brother Worthy, are as rigorous as those of other countries, and as well-executed.

Worthy. That I wish they were; but golden sands too often clog the wheels of justice, and obstruct her course: the very riches, which were the greatest evidence of his villainy [the villainy of the ill-natured Justice Squeezum, whom Sotmore calls 'justice merchant'] (Fielding 2004, 135), have too often declared the guilty innocent; and gold hath been found to cut halter surer than the sharpest steel. (Fielding 2000, 145-146)

The notion of justice is corrupted by money and ill-natured characters in the play who figure as embodiments of guile. Just as good-nature becomes for Fielding in *Rape Upon Rape* and many of the different satiric comedies, more than a simple, abstract concept of goodness, so too, the scheming thrivers are represented in distinctly cultural terms. As embodied in various characters in the plays, good-nature represents a sort of a defined moral and spiritual ideal rooted in the Shaftesbury's moral theory and the Latitudinarian thought. Ill-nature on the other hand is to be closely associated with what Fielding views as the corruption of values brought about by current financial and economic trends of the day. The contrast he maintains between Justice Worthy and Justice Squeezun in *Rape Upon Rape* further evinces that Fielding's standard conflict of innocent good-nature and scheming and corrupt ill-nature is indeed a conventional ethical dilemma between virtue and vice. Commenting on good-nature as an ideological weapon he argues that good-nature once had a virtually divine ability to influence those who come in contact with it, Fielding claims: "Sure modesty is quite banished from the age we live in. There was a time when virtue carried something of a divine awe with it, which no one durst attack; but now the insolence of our youth is such, no woman dare walk the streets, but those who dost for bread" (Fielding 2004, 145). In such a corrupt world where the villainies of ill-natured characters such as "Justice Merchant", are fully manifested the true value of goodness is authenticated.

The two male antagonists in *Rape Upon Rape* illustrate not only Shaftesbury's conception of virtue and vice but also the one of private interest and public interest. Shaftesbury claims that "to be wicked and vicious, is to be miserable and unhappy" (Shaftesbury 1999, 229); therefore, "Virtue is the Good and Vice is the Ill of everyone" (Shaftesbury 1999, 230). It corresponds with Fielding's concept of the story which ends in a happy-ending and the virtuous character of Justice Worthy gets from all the troubles, whereas the bad character of Justice Squeezum gets punished for all his corrupt acts. Shaftesbury's presumption that everyone is able to distinguish right from wrong thanks to the moral sense influenced the conception of Fielding's antagonistic characters in his plays. His conception of the two antagonist characters virtuous vs vicious, moral vs immoral is in accordance with Shaftesbury's moral theory, claiming that virtue is based on natural affections, which contribute to social welfare and lead to happiness of an individual, whereas unnatural affections are merely selfish, and thus vicious as they lead to misery of everyone.

The moral conflict between good and ill-nature that runs through Fielding's comedies is also characteristic of his most conventional and regular play *Love in Several Masques*. Fielding makes his exemplary sentimental lovers explicitly attack vice and preserve honesty. By introducing a serious subplot, Fielding has allowed his main characters to express his own social and moral views, making them liable to encounter ill-natured or vicious characters, by means of which he introduces his own attacks on the corrupted workings of society. The character of the female protagonist Helena in the play for instance, demonstrates, in fact, a sense of explicit moralism and awareness of her corrupt society. Yet, when she declares, for instance, that she is in love and refuses to disclose the identity of Veromil, the ill-natured Lady Gravely and Lady Pedant ridicule her for upholding such "immodest thoughts" and for being too stupid: "I can't help laughing at her" (Fielding 2004, 65). The ill-natured characters though they attack good-nature as a romantic irrelevance: "ha!ha!ha! then know, thou romantic hero, that right is a sort of knight-errant, whom we have long since laughed out of the world" (Fielding 2004, 67), their own narrowly-defined self-interest is ridiculously uncovered since Lady Matchless is in truth interested in the young Wisemore. Similarly to Shaftesbury, Fielding also stresses the importance of humor, which he considers to be a powerful weapon against hypocrisy, facilitating the quest for the truth. He promotes the "test of ridicule" (Shaftesbury 1999, 8) and encourages the satirical style, which functions "by comparing of the ideal and the actual" (Grean 1967, 121). Therefore, his satire becomes able to reveal what is "truly serious and what is ridiculous" (Shaftesbury 1999, 8) because all which is true and virtuous cannot be harmed by laughter, but what is inharmonious and vicious is discovered and justly criticized.

In a similar vein, Sir Avarice Pedant, for instance, in an attempt to force his son into a match with Bellaria in *The Temple Beau*, tells him to treat marriage as an exercise in stock-jobbing, while asserting that do behave so is part of the prevailing system: "Every man now who would live, must be a stock-jobber. Here is twenty thousand pounds capital stock fallen into your hands, and would you let it slip?" (Fielding 2004, 116). Dickson, referring to a number of contemporary sources, namely Defoe, asserts that the term "stock-brokering," was freely used to denote every kind of activity in the market, [and] had clear overtones of self-interest and corruption" (Dickson 1967, 32-33). Dickson introduces and discusses several attitudes and values that I think that they effectively describe the moral project that Fielding aims to advocate in his plays, and which according to Dickson is primarily based on a reaction against contemporary economic events coupled to a non-specific past. He notes:

Such were the main reactions of contemporaries [Fielding indeed being a primary figure] to the rapid changes in public and private finance in the six decades after 1688. They were essentially ones of alarm and disapproval. They were based on the fear of dislocation of the social order by the rise of new economic interests, and dislike of commercial and financial manipulation of all kinds, and had roots going back to the Middle Ages. They were to be much in evidence again during the early stages of industrialism, which also seemed to threaten 'traditional' society. (Dickson 1967, 35)

Fielding's ill-natured characters such as Sir Avarice and his son Wilding though they enjoy the reputation of socially respectable men, their selfish and profit-based attitudes are constantly satirized for they are not allowed to satisfy the criteria of virtue as it is:

something really in itself and in the nature of things, not arbitrary or factitious, 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 it and ever uniform with it. (Shaftesbury 1999, 267)

According to Shaftesbury "a man must be soundly ridiculous who, with all the wit imaginable, would go about to ridicule wisdom, honesty or laugh at honesty or good manners" (Shaftesbury 1999, 60). In accordance with these claims, Fielding proves himself to be a true satirist because he fully realizes that satire should not be "without morals and instructions, which is the majesty and life of this kind of writing" (Shaftesbury 1999, 119). So, in his work, he largely uses ridicule and wit, as a part of the moral conception he advocates, to expose the pretense and to criticize the wrong and corrupt attitudes of his time. The undercurrent beneath the comedic happy reversals in Fielding's plays, satirizes then not only the victimizer but the good-natured victim as well.

Fielding's contemporary society in his plays embodies then a vision in which essential values are reversed ethically and politically; in a corrupt economic change. Fielding's society exists thus in a state of moral contradiction and this notion is represented in the metaphoric structure of Fielding's plays as a world morally against itself, a world detached from itself or as Lady Matchless claims in *Love for Several Masques*: "Merit is demerit, constancy dullness, and love an out-of-fashion Saxon word, which no polite person understands. Lookee, sir, pull out your purse to a lawyer, and your snuff-box to a lady and I warrant you carry your point with both" (Fielding 2004, 67). In the conventional happy endings of the plays, when good-nature is assisted by providence, Fielding portrays a more unified and coherent society, in which values are harmonized with contemporary experience, shaping then a comic vision of harmony. But the space where good-nature is shown to be vulnerable to corruption and vice displays a final attitude of skepticism in which Fielding's society is shown as a world against itself, separated from and at a constant war with its own traditional values.

As a moralist and satirist as well, Fielding did not only emphasize the importance of good nature, social affections, liberty and wisdom. Along with these virtues, he also stressed the relevance of sentiment as a crucial part of understanding and judging the true nature of man. By doing so, he reflected one of the thoughts in the moral concept of Shaftesbury, who defined the process of moral knowledge and judgment as "a complex fusion of intellect and emotion" (Grean 1967, 219), claiming that "the knowledge of good is not merely intellectual process," as "it involves the affectional life, the trial or exercise of the heart" and thus, the "wisdom is more from the Heart than from the Head" (Grean 1967, 220). When we view and assess such concepts as good-nature and ill-nature in the immediate contexts of the plays in which Fielding uses them, we draw a more global picture of a broad cultural landscape in which ethical notions become basically nodal points of meaning, in which Fielding satirizes the most corrupt attitudes of his society.

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