

**SHAFTESBURY'S ETHICAL
PRINCIPLE
OF ADAPTATION TO
UNIVERSAL HARMONY**

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Shaftesbury's ethical principle of adaptation to universal harmony by Alexander Lyons

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ALEXANDER LYONS

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Thesis for Ph. D.

By
ALEXANDER LYONS, M.A.

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REV. DR. HENRY BERKOWITZ, PHILADELPHIA

**TO WHOM THE AUTHOR OWES THE BEGINNING OF HIS
PROFESSIONAL LIFE, THIS MONOGRAPH IS LOVINGLY
DEDICATED AS A LITTLE TOKEN OF A LARGE
APPRECIATION**

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INTRODUCTION

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A. The aim of this thesis will be expository and critical. Its justification lies in the fact that there is need in English of a succinct, clear statement of Shaftesbury's ethical teaching from a comparative critical standpoint. This is especially true with reference to students of ethics to whom other languages than the English are not familiar. Besides, there is not at present in any language a presentation of the subject after the manner to be pursued here.

An appreciation of Shaftesbury must be determined by a comparison of his ethical teaching with that of Hobbes. This is not the usual course. As a rule presentations and discussions of our author take him in and by himself with only incidental reference to Hobbes. This manner of treatment is acceptable if our aim is the expression of a judgment from our standpoint. And yet even this is open to serious objection. It is unfair to judge a writer of the beginning of the eighteenth century by the more advanced standard and culture of the commencement of the twentieth century. We must estimate an author in his historical setting, and more particularly with reference to some standard of his time. Such a criterion in ethical teaching in Shaftesbury's day was furnished by Hobbes from whom subsequent English ethical speculation took its rise.

Shaftesbury's ethical system is diametrically opposed to that of Hobbes, but does not profess any such intention. We have no reason to believe that he intended a refutation of Hobbes. He refers to him several times by implication as when in his discussion, "Concerning Virtue or Merit" (I. 281), he mentions "a known way of reasoning on self-interest," according to which that which is of a social kind in us should of right be abolished. Here, as Robertson, the editor of the *Characteristics* (*Ibid.*), points out, Hobbes is in the mind of our author. A plainer reference to him may be found in the "Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor"