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LORD FORBES OF PITSLIGO AND THE MAXIMS OF LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Irwin Primer

While the popularity of books of maxims, aphorisms and quotations seems to be a permanent fact in our culture, criticism of these short forms has usually remained marginal. But that seems to be changing. Owing to the recent revival of critical interest in genre studies, we are now witnessing an efflorescence of critical studies of the maxim on a scale not previously achieved.¹ This holds not only for the maxim genre as a whole, but also for specific practitioners of that art, among

¹ For a sampling of important studies and collections on the maxim and other short forms, see: J. P. Stern, *Lichtenberg: A Doctrine of Scattered Occasions Reconstructed from his Aphorisms and Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1959); Margot Kruse, *Die Maxime in der Französischen Literatur. Studien zum Werk La Rochefoucaulds und seiner Nachfolger* (Hamburg: Cram, de Gruyter, 1960); Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness and the Novel: Laying Down the Law in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Liane Ansmann, *Die "Maximen" von La Rochefoucauld* (München: 1972); Gerhard Neumann, ed., *Der Aphorismus: Zur Geschichte, zu den Formen and Möglichkeiten einer literarischen Gattung* (Darmstadt: 1976); Corrado Rosso, *La "Maxime." Saggi per una tipologia critica* (Napoli: E. S. I., 1968); Harold E. Pagliaro, "Paradox in the Aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld and Some Representative English Followers," *PMLA* 79 (1964): 42-50; Louis Van Delft, *Le Moraliste Classique: Essai de définition et de typologie* (Genève: Droz, 1982); Jean Lafond, ed., *Les Formes Brèves de la Prose et le Discours Discontinu (XVIe-XVIIe Siècles)* (Paris: Vrin, 1984); Jefferson Humphries, *The Puritan and the Cynic: Moralists and Theorists in French and American Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Kevin L. Cope, "The Propositions of Faith: The Ideology of the Royal Society and Bunyan's Academy of Maxims," *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association* 88 (1989): 28-38.

whom La Rochefoucauld still reigns supreme. No one, I think, has challenged the preeminence of the duc de La Rochefoucauld as the greatest writer of maxims in the last three or four centuries. He wrote in an age when maxim-writing was one of the most popular literary pursuits, and his small book of maxims, more popular than any other in his time, went through numerous editions and soon became a modern "classic." Before the end of the seventeenth century his maxims had already appeared in at least three different English translations. He was also cited and imitated a good deal, but very few English responses to his maxims appeared before the eighteenth century.

What is usually examined first in tracing an author's reputation is the impact he or she had on later authors, especially those of the first rank. The most famous writer in eighteenth-century English literature to affirm his approval of La Rochefoucauld was Jonathan Swift. If we can take Swift at his word, in his famous letter to Pope of Nov. 26, 1725, he "found [his] whole character" in La Rochefoucauld. Fourteen years later, in his satiric autobiographical poem "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (1739), he seems to have corroborated his earlier pronouncement by founding his poem upon one of the most spectacular of the duke's maxims:

In the adversity of our best friends we always find
something that does not displease us. (#583; MS 18)

Although his role in making this particularly mordant maxim widely known to English readers is a commonplace of eighteenth-century literary history, most of his readers have not known that #583 had not previously appeared in an English translation. Swift thereby contributed both to the Englishing of La Rochefoucauld and to the advancement of his reputation among readers of English.

Equally important in bringing La Rochefoucauld to the attention of English readers in that period was Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, which quotes three of the duke's maxims and alludes to many more. Joseph Addison generally despised the maxims (and moral philosophy) of self-love. Alexander Pope responded to Swift's letter by declaring his intention to compose maxims in opposition to those of La

Rochefoucauld.² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was so annoyed by the duke's single maxim on marriage that she wrote a full essay—in French—attacking the duke's dismissive remark and claiming more for marriage than he was willing to allow.³ Samuel Richardson's book of maxims (extracted from his three novels) was assembled in part as a deliberate attempt to emulate the duke's maxims while substituting approved Christian morality in place of their allegedly dangerous doctrines.⁴ In Lord Chesterfield's posthumous *Letters to His Son* (1774) readers discovered that Chesterfield had recommended the duke's maxims to his son, thus challenging the common denunciations of the duke's ethic of self-love.⁵

Though it was not possible to regard each of his maxims as a subversion of conventional Christian morality, they came to be regarded by many as an assault on the dignity of man and on the possibility of disinterested benevolent conduct. But that seems not to have interfered with their popularity. They were frequently quoted, paraphrased, imitated, praised and repudiated. In virtually every anthology of aphorisms or maxims in that period we find at least a few of them, and sometimes a few hundred. Most of the major eighteenth-century authors used them or at least took notice of them, but if we look for a detailed discussion in English on all or most of them, we remain disappointed. It is one thing to note the spread of his maxims but quite another to find early discussions or criticisms of them. The remainder of this paper is devoted to an obscure work by an obscure author who took greater pains to comprehend La Rochefoucauld's meanings than any other eighteenth-

¹ For Pope and Swift on La Rochefoucauld, see *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), III, 108, 117-18, 121, 510. See also Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. James M. Osborn, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 219-20 (#517). For a useful compilation of many eighteenth-century British authors and works that cite or allude to the *Maximes*, see Antony McKenna, "Quelques aspects de la réception des *Maximes* en Angleterre," *Images de La Rochefoucauld: Actes du Tricentenaire, 1680-1980*, ed. Jean Lafond and Jean Mesnard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983): 77-94.

² Lady Mary Pierrepont Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 157-64.

³ Samuel Richardson, *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments* (London: 1755). See note 22, below.

⁴ *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to His Son*. 2 vols. (London: 1774). See the letters dated March 9, 1748 O.S. and September 5, 1748 O.S., among others.

century anglophone writer. My original intention was to keep La Rochefoucauld at the center of this stage, but his commentator turned out to be an attractive figure, of considerable interest even apart from any connection with the duke's maxims. Thus what began as an effort to disclose new facts about La Rochefoucauld's English reputation gradually came to include a survey of the career and literary output of this neglected and almost unread commentator.



The author in question, the Scottish Jacobite Alexander Forbes, Lord Forbes of Pitsligo (1678-1762), was born two years before the death of François, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680). He has remained virtually unknown to all except those who are well-informed about the course of Jacobitism and the history of Scotland in the eighteenth century. Forbes's locale is Aberdeenshire in the northeast of Scotland, and his name is associated with the group known as the Scottish mystics of the north-east.⁶ In history his surviving image is that of a Jacobite activist who participated in the '15 and the '45. Years before engaging in these military ventures, Forbes ("an adherent of the protestant episcopal church of Scotland," according to the *DNB*) had traveled on the Continent and had personally met Archbishop Fénelon, who introduced him to the Quietist Madame Guyon and to others attracted to mystical religion. He is reported to have spent seven days in her vicinity, up to the day of her death, in 1710.⁷ He did not convert to Catholicism (as did Andrew Michael Ramsay and John Hughes), but his encounters with Fenelon and Mme. Guyon nevertheless influenced him deeply.

Always loyal to the Stuart line, he refused to accept the Act of Settlement (1701) and left the Scottish Parliament in 1705, unwilling to abjure his allegiance to the House of Stuart. Following the failure of the Jacobite uprising of 1715, he spent about four years (1716-20) on the Continent, sometimes at the

⁶ See G. D. Henderson, *Mystics of the Northeast* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Press, 1934).

⁷ See Albert Cherel, *Fénelon au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1917), 45n. Forbes, we are further informed, was one of the seven or so Protestants who stayed with Mme. Guyon at Blois, praying in her household and absorbing the Quietist doctrines and manner of living (48-9).

court of the Jacobite exiles. In the 1730's he completed two books, the second of which (the subject of this paper) was published first.⁹ In the '45, in his sixty-seventh year, he commanded a troop of "130 horse and 250 foot" from Banffshire and Aberdeen," and after the rebels were defeated he did not emigrate with other defeated Jacobites but remained a fugitive in hiding in his own neighborhood and lands until his death in 1762.⁹ He was much hunted but never apprehended, and the most appealing episodes in his somewhat romantic biography are the tales of his narrow escapes while eluding his pursuers. In a recent article Murray G. H. Pittock writes that in Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, the character Bradwardine (a man of learning, of the Lowland gentry, who also hides on his own estate) was modeled upon the career and character of Lord Forbes of Pitsligo.¹⁰

In this paper I am concerned specifically with his first published book, *Essays Moral and Philosophical, on several subjects: viz. A View of the Human Faculties. A short Account of the World. Two Discourses on Decency. An Essay on Self-*

⁹ It should be noted that Forbes's *Essays* of 1734 was his first published book. His other book, *Thoughts concerning Man's Condition* was written in 1732 but first published in 1763 and reprinted in 1835 with a memoir by his kinsman Lord Medwin. It is more pietistic and (I think) less interesting than his *Essays*. Other writings by Lord Forbes include a narrative that takes up most of Henrietta Tayler, ed., *The Jacobite Court of Rome in 1719* (Publications of the Scottish Historical Society, 3rd Series, vol. xxxi; [Edinburgh: 1938]), and Alistair and Henrietta Tayler, eds., *Jacobite Letters to Lord Pitsligo, 1745-46, preserved at Fettercairn House* (Aberdeen: Milne and Hutchison, 1930).

⁹ Fitzroy Maclean, *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (New York: Athenæum, 1989): 99. See also A. McKenzie Annand, "Lord Pitsligo's horse in the army of Prince Charles Edward, 1745-6," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 60 (1982): 1. I wish to thank Deborah Leslie for this reference. The biographical articles on Lord Forbes always repeat a number of romantic anecdotes about his disguises, ruses and close calls in eluding his English pursuers.

¹⁰ The most important indication of renewed interest in Lord Forbes is Murray G.H. Pittock's article "Jacobitism in the North East: The Pitsligo Papers in the Aberdeen University Library," *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*, ed. Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987): 69-76; see 70-71. Because Pittock is concerned primarily with certain aspects of Forbes's political position that can be known only from surviving manuscripts in the Aberdeen University Library, he sees no need to bring Forbes's *Essays Moral and Philosophical* into his discussion. However, a comprehensive account of Forbes's political ideas and opinions would also have to include passages from his *Essay* that touch upon liberty, equality, power, dominion, private property, money, the necessity and functions of government, and the views of the French political theorist Domat on the distinction of ranks.

Love. (London: Printed for J. Osborn and T. Longman, at the *Ship*, in *Paternoster-Row*. M. DCC. XXXIV). None of the better-known philosophers and literati of the mid-eighteenth century, it would seem, bothered to take any notice of this work, possibly because it did not appeal sufficiently to the trendsetting intellectuals—or perhaps because Forbes withheld his name from the title page of the first and only edition in his lifetime. Published three years before Hume's "stillborn" *Treatise* (1737), it too seems to have appeared and disappeared quietly, having produced no controversy. Thus far no contemporary replies, rebuttals or reviews of this book have been found. After he died it was reprinted in 1763, but even with his authorship identified on the title page, it again stirred no intellectual waves. James Boswell at this time was newly acquainted with Johnson, and they probably did discuss Lord Forbes on occasion, but never once does the name Alexander Forbes appear in Boswell's Journals or in his massive *Life of Johnson*.¹¹

Forbes's book lay buried for more than a century and did not reappear until 1970 in a facsimile reprint of the first edition. His philosophical achievement is admittedly far less distinguished than that of Descartes, Hobbes, Malebranche, Bayle, Locke, Berkeley, Leibniz or Hume. In our histories of philosophy he does not even rank with writers like Clarke, Toland, Shaftesbury, Butler, Hartley, Kames, Smith, Reid or Priestley. Standard reference works on English philosophy and theology for this period have generally ignored him, perhaps because Forbes had never been regarded as belonging within the mainstream of philosophical writing. T. E. Jessop, whose well-known bibliography of David Hume (1938) includes a list of 38 other Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century, excluded Forbes entirely. (In a list of 38 Scottish philosophers

¹¹ This omission could have resulted from a deliberate attempt to avoid naming Lord Forbes in print; on the other hand, there seems to be no record of Lord Forbes in Boswell's journals. While Boswell was working on his *Life of Johnson*, one of his correspondents was his dear friend (and eventually the executor of his estate), the baronet Sir William Forbes (1743-1806). This Sir William was distantly related to the attainted Lord Forbes of Pitligo, much of whose estate he had earlier acquired. The only mention of Lord Forbes in the Yale Boswell Papers occurs in a letter by Sir William Forbes (to Boswell, 29 October 1791) in which he reports that he has been perusing a manuscript account of the Jacobite court at Rome in 1719, written by Lord Forbes. That manuscript was later published in a previously-mentioned volume edited by Henrietta Tayler, *The Jacobite Court at Rome in 1719* (see n9 above).

of the eighteenth century, was there no room for an attainted Jacobite who had written a not uninteresting work on some of the most important philosophical issues of his time?) Apart from the fine article by Murray G. H. Pittock, most recent studies of eighteenth-century Scottish culture have continued to ignore his writings.¹²



Forbes's *Essays Moral and Philosophical* is best classified as a miscellany because it is not entirely a collection of essays in the genre of Montaigne and Bacon. Of the three distinct units of this work, the first, which takes up half of this book, comprises a series of brief philosophical dialogues between Lucinus and Æmilius, two gentlemen who agree so often that both can be thought to express Forbes's views. This genre, descending from Plato and Cicero, was popular in the Renaissance and seventeenth century, and continued to be used in the eighteenth century by such contemporaries of Forbes as Lord Shaftesbury, Berkeley, Mandeville and Hume. Part I of these "Dialogues on several Subjects betwixt two Intimate Friends" is named "A View of the Human Faculties," and the subjects they discuss in about one hundred pages are "men in general," the body, the soul, sensation, imagination, the passions, complexion/disposition/humour, liberty, reason, the memory and speech, in that order. In the next hundred pages—Part II, "A Short Account of the World"—the two speakers first review different senses of the term "world" (i. e., "the whole Creation, visible and invisible," the Universe, the Natural World, the Moral World, and the Polite World). Thereafter they discuss a series of related subjects: the two cities of St. Augustine, the mixed state of things, remains of virtue, helps to religion, the

¹² On the exclusion of Forbes from the mainstream of Scottish philosophy, I have noted his absence in T. E. Jessop, *A Bibliography of David Hume and of Scottish Philosophy from Francis Hutcheson to Lord Balfour* (London: 1938). Henry G. Graham ignored him completely in his *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (London: A. & C. Black, 1901). Jane Rendall, who attempts to give a broad survey of earlier eighteenth-century Scottish writing and culture, also ignores Lord Forbes; see her book, *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1978). Nor is Forbes mentioned by Claude Nordmann in "Les Jacobites Écossais en France au XVIII^e siècle," *Regards sur l'Écosse au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Michele S. Plaisant (Lille: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, n.d.): 81-108.

equality of men by nature, accidental characters, conversation and books. The dialogue form permits swift movement from subject to subject, and the entire performance reminds one of a series of short essays and reflections.

Much of Forbes's subject matter here is of the sort often seen in the treatises of the passions that flourished in that era. These dialogues reveal occasional quotations from La Rochefoucauld, but the presence of the duke's thought is much more fundamental—or foundational—in the next two major units. In the second unit, "Two Discourses on Decency," Forbes devotes about 35 pages to a close examination of the meanings and implications of decency, all proceeding from the single short maxim that La Rochefoucauld penned on that subject. The last major unit in Forbes's book, "An Essay on Self-Love," is yet more thoroughly suffused with the words and spirit of La Rochefoucauld. (We shall return to these latter units for closer examination.)

Forbes's book as a whole surveys most of the popular moral and religious issues of his time, interspersed with miscellaneous observations on and quotations from ancient and modern authors. It contains almost no "natural philosophy" or science, but generous space is given to Cicero, Horace, St. Augustine, Hobbes, Milton, Henry More, Lord Rochester, Shaftesbury, and especially to Pascal and the duc de La Rochefoucauld. Unlike his younger contemporary Francis Hutcheson, Forbes does not anticipate the major directions of the emergent Scottish Enlightenment, except where he grapples with issues of permanent importance such as the nature of reason and the selfish passions. His deepest commitment was to the Christian ethic and to arguments in favor of the "pure, disinterested love of God," a phrase that signaled his sympathy for Quietism.¹¹

¹¹ The literature on Fenelon, Guyon and Quietism is extensive. A good introduction is Jean Robert Armogathe, *Le Quietisme* (Paris: PUF, 1973). See also Françoise Mallet-Joris, *Jeanne Guyon* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978) and Henri G. Gouhier, *Fenelon philosophe* (Paris: Vrin, 1977). Writings by and about Fenelon and Guyon appeared in eighteenth-century English translations; for example, *A Dissertation on Pure Love, By the Arch Bishop of Cambrai, With An Account of the Life and Writings of the Lady [Mme. Guyon], for whose Sake the Archbishop was banish'd from Court: And the grievous Persecution she suffer'd in France for her Religion. [etc.]* (Dublin, 1739). In an article written for the Fenelon tercentenary in the early 1950s, Jean Orcibal briefly notes that Forbes encouraged the publication of translated writings by Fenelon, Madame Guyon and other French writers on religion. See Orcibal, "L'influence spirituelle de Fenelon dans les pays anglo-saxons," *XVIIe Siecle*, #12-14 (1951-2): 276-87.

At the heart of his book is his defense and explication of Christian values, but (as we are specifically informed) he wanted to avoid writing anything resembling a systematic treatise on theology:

I took all the care I could, that it might have no Air of a Religious Dissertation. It was indeed next to impossible to avoid saying somewhat on the Love of God, that the contrary Doctrine might appear the more in its own Colours. (v)

With respect to the manner, Forbes seems to be emulating the aristocratic attitude toward publication that readers of La Rochefoucauld's first edition encountered in 1665: a conscious effort to avoid pedantry and systematic composition. "Polite" authors do not engage in such demeaning tasks! As for the substance of his remark, just what is that "contrary Doctrine" he introduces? Probably atheism, or deism, or both. We are not told directly, but the next excerpt from his letter to the publisher concerns the reflection or essay on self-love (*amour-propre*) that La Rochefoucauld placed at the head of the first authorized edition of his maxims in 1665. The implication seems to be that La Rochefoucauld is representative of those who maintain the "contrary Doctrine" and are thereby opposed to "the Love of God." Forbes never makes so blunt an accusation, but the general drift of his polemic is that those thinkers and writers who argue that all human behavior is selfishly motivated or rooted inescapably in self-love are fundamentally antagonistic to Christianity, or at least are dangerous to that religion.

In these "essays moral and philosophical" Forbes avoids any sectarian partiality; he never identifies the church he supports. He quotes with approval not only from the Anglican clergyman and Cambridge Platonist, Dr. Henry More, but also from such Catholic authors as Fénelon, Pascal and St. Augustine. La Rochefoucauld, the author he cites most, was also a Catholic but his celebrated maxims are never exhibited as models of Catholic thought or piety, for they are most often concerned with worldly conduct or *mondanité*. What makes Forbes's treatment of La Rochefoucauld unusual in his moment is the

respect and admiration he seems to show for this noble author, even while criticizing his "doctrine." Most of the English clergy and moralists who dealt with Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld and Mandeville had harsh words for them. Forbes mentions and quotes from Hobbes in a few passages, but he never mentions Mandeville's name. Nor does he name or quote from any of the well-known deists of his age such as Collins, Toland, Tindal or Woolston. The authors upon whom he relies most are La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, St. Paul and St. Augustine. It can also be said that the images of Archbishop Fénelon and Madame Guyon are summoned up frequently, that is, whenever Forbes uses the phrases "the pure love of God" or "the pure disinterested love of God." Yet he mentions Fénelon's name only twice in this book, and the name Guyon is entirely absent.

He defends Christianity throughout but at the same time he completely avoids sectarian rhetoric: we never see him attacking or defending a specifically Protestant or an exclusively Catholic doctrine. His range of discourse is specified in his title, but not completely, because it soon becomes clear that his moral and philosophical ideas are entirely grounded in his Christian faith. Much of his effort is expended upon clarifying the meaning and importance of certain key terms: not eucharist or trinity or saving grace (terms from current Christian controversy), but "philosophical" terms such as decency and self-love, which take up the larger part of his book. When we find that he takes his texts for these terms from La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* and that he is mainly concerned to explicate these terms in their relationships to Christian beliefs, we come to realize how different and atypical this approach is.

Though Forbes appears loyal to the spirit of Fénelon and Madame Guyon, he never reveals himself as a mystic—unless adherence to the doctrine of "the pure love of God" immediately identifies one as such. Whatever propensities he may have had for the mystical, in this book he remains at the threshold of mystical divinity, never evincing more of it than the associations accompanying his code-phrase, "the pure disinterested love of God." That is as close to the language of inspiration as he takes us. Avoiding the visionary (which he generally regarded as "enthusiasm" in its negative sense), he is intent upon differentiating the multiple meanings that inhere in *amour-propre* and determining their relative goodness or evil

in relation to his axiomatic pure love of God. For his authorities on Christianity he cites St. Paul and St. Augustine, and (among the moderns) especially Pascal. John Barker has convincingly demonstrated an extensive "concurrence" or agreement between Forbes's outlook and "the themes and spirit of the *Pensées*," and concluded that Forbes "particularly favored Pascal."¹⁴ But Barker ignored the fact that if we compare the number of citations and the amount of space that Forbes devotes to both Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, it turns out that Forbes cites La Rochefoucauld more often than he cites Pascal.¹⁵ These references suggest that Forbes was preoccupied with La Rochefoucauld at least as much as he was with Pascal,

¹⁴ John Barker, *Strange Contrarities: Pascal in England during the Age of Reason* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975): 172. For Barker's comments on Forbes's *Essays*, see 168-76. The only other scholarly reference to Forbes's concern with La Rochefoucauld, so far as I know, is a paragraph in Antony McKenna's article; see note 1. McKenna summarizes Forbes's position on *amour-propre* but ignores what Forbes was trying to do with La Rochefoucauld's maxim on decency, which I take up later in this paper.

¹⁵ The following maxims by La Rochefoucauld are quoted, alluded to, or adapted to new uses by Forbes: the page number in Forbes's *Essays Moral and Philosophical* is supplied in parentheses following the G. E. F. and Truchet number that identifies the French maxim: G. E. F. and Truchet #10 (53), #13 (56), #83 (260 and 318), #85 (318), #89 (85), #102 (72), #171 (338), #218 (233-4 and 358), #266 (53), #447 (205 and 229), #454 (227), #483 (177 and 235), #563 = Truchet MS 1—the essay on *amour-propre* (55, 116, 249-52, and 341-5), #564 = Truchet MS 2 (53), and #606 = Truchet MS 34 (358).

The entry "G. E. F. 563" (for instance) refers to the maxim of that number as it appears in *Oeuvres de La Rochefoucauld* (in the series "Collection des Grands Écrivains de la France"), ed. by D. L. Gilbert, J. Gourdault, A. and H. Régner, 4 vols. (Paris, 1868-83). This edition of the duke's *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales* remained the standard edition until the appearance of the "Classiques Garnier" edition entitled *Maximes*, ed. by Jacques Truchet (Paris, 1967 and later revised editions). The Gilbert edition (1868) is commonly indicated by the abbreviation for its series: G. E. F., followed by the number of the maxim. It numbered the maxims consecutively from 1 to 641. Truchet gives the contents of the 1678 edition (504 maxims), then adds a group called "Maximes Supprimées" (MS: maxims removed by La Rochefoucauld from editions following the first, which appeared in 1665), and further adds a third group called "Maximes Posthumes" (MP: maxims from various sources attributed to La Rochefoucauld after his death). The Truchet numbers match the G. E. F. numbers up to #504; thereafter the MS and MP groups appear in Truchet's edition. For the convenience of the reader I shall identify the Rochefoucauld maxims using both editions. Thus G. E. F. 556 refers to that maxim in the Gilbert (or G. E. F.) edition; it corresponds to Truchet's MP 31.

References to and quotations from Pascal occur on the following pages of Forbes's book: 23, 132, 133, 155, 165, 252-4, 263-4, 309, 321, 350, 353, 361, 362.

though he was much more sympathetic to Pascal's expressions of Christian faith.



Most of the attention that Forbes gives to La Rochefoucauld is concentrated within the last and most ambitious of these essays, the 140-page "Essay on Self-Love" (245-385). For Forbes the *amour-propre* maxim/essay (or *réflexion*) is La Rochefoucauld's central text. He not only includes substantial extracts (with running commentary) from this spectacular essay on *amour-propre* (G. E. F. 563 or Truchet M.S. 1), but also provides a complete English translation of it in an appendix entitled "Additions." He regards La Rochefoucauld's conception of *amour-propre* as a new and dangerous image of self-love that regrettably came to be much admired in his own era. And since, as he argues, not all self-love is reprehensible, he undertakes to point out various misunderstandings of the duke's "doctrine," making sure to explain what *amour-propre* is not, as well as what it is. In the process he often reiterates his central argument, that any moral system founded on self-love is fallacious because it contradicts true religion founded on the pure disinterested love of God.

One of the more notable aspects of his rhetoric or argument is his determination to avoid sectarian religious polemic while still insisting on the truth of Christianity or revealed religion. His yardstick is not any of the commonplace standards by which the truth of any sect was usually judged (the sacraments, faith vs. works, inner light, etc.), but rather the position one takes on self-love. That he seems to regard as the new frontier separating true Christian believers both from the infidels (atheists or deists) and from erring Christians. He publicizes the errors of three positions on self-love maintained by writers on religious philosophy in his time, berating all three for their misuse of the concept of self-love. Adherents of the first group (who apparently agree with or follow La Rochefoucauld) assert "That a Man is not capable of the least Act of common Honesty, or common Friendship, without a deliberate Prospect of his own Interest as the prevailing Motive." Those in the second group accept the principle of disinterestedness "but...deny the Infirmity and Corruption of Human Nature," which amounts to denying the Fall of Man and Original Sin. Forbes mentions no names, but Lord Shaftesbury and his followers

belong here. Though the third group consists of professed Christians, "they are so violent Advocates for *Self-Love*, or the interested Principle, as to speak of the *pure disinterested Love* of God in very unbecoming terms." The members of this group would seem to be Presbyterians and Calvinists of any denomination; perhaps Forbes's countryman Archibald Campbell fits here.¹⁶ Forbes then tells the reader that he is concerned in this essay not to defend Christianity against the atheists or deists, but to address professed Christians who mistakenly accept self-love as the foundation of human nature. To oppose their error he will, "in a rational way...shew the best and the worst of *Self-Love*, and in what sense it is to be understood, before it can be set up either as the Principle of Vice or Virtue" (246-7).

His focus on *amour-propre* is most visible in the last major section of his book containing his "Essay on Self-Love," but the reader has been forewarned about the dominance of this subject at the very outset, in a quotation from a prefatory letter that Forbes addressed to his publisher:

I thought it was best to add the D. of *Rochefoucault's* Description [of *amour-propre* or self-love; G. E. F. 563, Truchet M.S. 1] intirely, as being a Run of natural Eloquence, without *Precision*, as the *French* call it; which makes it rather the more agreeable. Sometimes he puts *Self-Love* [i. e., *amour-propre*] for Covetousness, sometimes for Pride, sometimes for Vanity, sometimes for Passion, sometimes for Obstinacy, sometimes for mere Whim, and sometimes for all these together, as appears throughout his Reflections; but still he will be well enough understood: for by *Self-Love* he either means corrupt Nature in general, or some of its particular Qualities. (v-vi)

Here Forbes underscores the difficulty that any translator faces in trying to convey La Rochefoucauld's particular uses of *amour-propre*. Throughout his book he pursues his own dissec-

¹⁶ See Archibald Campbell, *An Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue* (Edinburgh: 1733). This work had previously been plagiarized and published by Alexander Innes, with a modified title, in 1728.

tion of this concept, arriving at a final pronouncement in the last section of the appendix, called "Additions":

With submission to the Duke of *Rochefoucault*, I'm unwilling to call by the name of *Self-Love* all the Irregularities of Human Nature: neither the Violence of our Passions, nor the Foolishness of our Imaginations are *Self-Love*...But neither wrong Reasoning nor right Reasoning is *Self-Love*; nor can the Disorders of any Faculty be imputed to the Faculty itself. Reason is sure within its own Sphere, but is bewilder'd and lost when it pretends to go farther: And *Self-Love* is lawful within due Allowances, but unlawful when it violates Order. (375-6)

Forbes objects to the comprehensiveness of the duke's key phrase; he seems to object even more to its changeableness or instability. But he never doubts the profound importance of its central meaning, which stands for him as a supreme fact of human nature. Of the deep-seatedness of *amour-propre* in each human being he observes that "The Search into human Nature can hardly be deep enough, so very latent is the Byass towards ourselves" (319). On this issue he seems to agree completely with La Rochefoucauld, but he is generally unwilling to accept the denigration of human nature that he finds throughout the *Maximes*. One senses his simultaneous attraction and repulsion; he never condemns the duke's maxims outright, and he frequently seems to be emulating his style.

Forbes spends many pages pointing out the errors of those who follow what Lord Shaftesbury called the "selfish system" and others called Hobbism. He frequently reminds us that although Rochefoucauld's image of self-love or *amour-propre* brilliantly characterizes mankind in the fallen state, it should by no means be taken as the full picture of human nature. The antidote to the selfish system, he argues, is always man's capacity to cultivate the "pure, disinterested love of God," as in this typical passage:

The Advocates for *Self-Interest* have rais'd it so high, as to make it the only Principle of acting, not only among common Men, but the Apostles and Ambassadors from Heaven. They have likewise perplex'd the Matter by substituting *Self-Love* for *Self-Interest*, and so have render'd

it an unfavourable thing to differ from them; since it is so natural to love ourselves, and even to consult our Interest. But they are to understand, that there is no difference but in this single Point, "Whether God is to be lov'd *principally* for his sake or our own." (332)

If we look for any of these "Advocates for *Self-Interest*" apart from La Rochefoucauld and Hobbes, the first name that comes to mind might well be Bernard Mandeville, whose *Fable of the Bees* exposes self-love or self-interest throughout the different professions, genders and classes of society. Though Forbes never names this older contemporary (the most notorious and most outspoken advocate for the ethic of self-interest at that time), it is difficult not to suspect that Forbes was consciously participating in the Mandeville Controversy, which in 1734, one year after Mandeville's death, was still quite active.

One conclusion that readers of La Rochefoucauld and Mandeville sometimes arrived at is that by making self-love or *amour-propre* the basis of virtually all human motivation, these authors seem to deny the reality of virtue as an effective or operative principle in human behavior. At least one contemporary philosopher has argued that Mandeville did not deny the reality of virtue.¹⁷ Forbes in 1734 delivered essentially this same judgment with respect to La Rochefoucauld, through a fictional speaker in a philosophical dialogue: "Among the Moderns the Duke of *Rochefoucauld* is thought too rigid in his Sentiments upon Virtue; but he only reckons the thing a greater rarity than the pretences to it" (133). This judgment is consistent with Forbes's fundamental outlook on Christianity, which assumes an ability (in at least some persons) to love God disinterestedly, and further assumes that the conduct of such persons can (at least sometimes) demonstrate the reality of virtue.¹⁸

¹⁷ See John Colman, "Bernard Mandeville and the Reality of Virtue." *Philosophy* 47 (1972): 125-39.

¹⁸ Forbes in another passage presents more "evidence" to show that La Rochefoucauld believed in the reality of virtue:

WHEN some Persons talk of the Deceitfulness of Virtue, they do not mean that the Rule is fallacious or uncertain, but that Men act not from the Motives they pretend to. The Duke of *Rochefoucauld* says, "What the World calls Virtue, is commonly but a Phantom form'd by our Passions."

[A]

For Forbes, uncritical adherence to the doctrine of self-love or *amour-propre* constitutes the great new heresy of modern times, but he reminds us that St. Augustine's doctrine of the two cities supplied an earlier formulation of essentially the same concept. Though he quotes (263) Pascal's famous maxim "Le moi est haïssable" and other passages to describe the fallen nature of man, his principal exhibit on this subject remains La Rochefoucauld's essay on *amour-propre*. Unlike many other Christian readers of his time, he seems to place a high value on this *réflexion* as a key to the positive and negative values of self-love. Far from despising this piece, he makes it appear useful to moralists and religious philosophers.¹⁹ There is also the implication that he is reclaiming this text from those proponents of self-love theory who have turned away from Christianity.



The more we come to see the uses that Forbes makes of the *Maximes*, the more we may come to think that one of his aims is to advance the prestige and reputation of its author. In some cases, as we shall see, he tries to convert the duke's maxims from their original intentions as descriptions of worldliness and secular values, into statements of religious or redemptive significance. But in one exceptional instance, he devotes a two-part essay "A Discourse on Decency" (205-42), to explicating (and thereby dignifying) a single brief maxim

THIS is far from denying there is such a thing as Virtue: on the contrary, that same Author says, "Hypocrisy is an Homage which Vice renders to Virtue." [B]

IF a Man denies there is any Virtue in the world, he is only suppos'd to speak for himself and his own Club. (357-8)

[A] (G. E. F. 606, Truchet M.S. 34): Ce que le monde nomme vertu n'est d'ordinaire qu'un fantôme formé par nos passions, à qui on donne un nom honnête, pour faire impunément ce qu'on veut.

[B] (G. E. F. and Truchet 218): L'hypocrisie est un hommage que le vice rend à la vertu.

¹⁹ It is commonplace knowledge among La Rochefoucauld scholars that he had de-emphasized or excised a number of his earlier references to Christianity in successive editions of his *Maximes*. Whether the value-system that dominates the *Maximes* is essentially Epicurean or Augustinian is still for some a matter of contention.

regarding human or this-worldly conduct. The broader subject of this essay is not simply the word "decency," but more precisely La Rochefoucauld's maxim on decency (G. E. F. and Truchet 447). Without immediately identifying La Rochefoucauld as the author of this maxim, Forbes uses an English translation of it as the epigraph to the first of the two related "discourses" comprising this essay. The maxim is marvelously concise, abstract and pregnant: "Decency is the least of all Laws, and the most observed." In the original, "La bienséance est la moindre de toutes les lois, et la plus suivie." On this slender foundation Forbes builds a striking discussion of that segment of social behavior which, with respect to the higher religious and moral obligations, is almost neutral and consists of "things indifferent," and of manners rather than morals. In some ways what Forbes manages to extract from this maxim seems considerably more inventive than his identifying La Rochefoucauld's *amour-propre* as a "bottomless Pit of Self-Love" (50), the greatest obstacle to the pure disinterested love of God. The diminutive maxim on decency—La Rochefoucauld's only pronouncement on that subject in his *Maximes*—becomes Lord Forbes's gateway to the much-discussed subject of "the honest man" or "l'honnête homme."²⁰

Forbes first subdivides decency into two classes, *real* decency (founded "in the natural Congruity of Things" (207)) and *imaginary* decency, which is more arbitrary because it is founded on custom. This imaginary or customary decency, he argues, is the true subject of La Rochefoucauld's maxim on decency. It is by comparison the less worthy form of decency, but "in things that are harmless (208)" it is preferable to follow "customary Decency" rather than to dress or behave or speak in a singular manner. For him *real* decency, which is inseparable from virtue, is a fundamental value even though it is less significant than practicing virtue (Christian charity) and shunning vice. Nevertheless, "trespasses against Decency of all kinds are to be avoided: Singularity is very offensive, as being a tacit Reprimand of the Behaviour of others" (221). At the

²⁰ Modern scholarship on the "honnête homme" begins with Maurice Magendie's *La Politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté en France au 17^e siècle de 1600 à 1660* (Paris: 1925). For further discussion and bibliography, see Jean-Pierre Dens, *L'Honnête homme et la critique de goût: esthétique et société au XVIII^e siècle* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), and Oskar Roth, *Die Gesellschaft der Honnêtes Gens: Zur sozialethischen Grundlegung des honnêteté-Ideals bei La Rochefoucauld* (Heidelberg: 1981).

heart of Forbes's explanation of decency is the notion of a group or social standards: what is decent—i. e., fitting, proper or decorous—is never exclusively determined by individual whim or inclination.

Pursuing the two subdivisions or kinds of decency, Forbes relies on popular theorizing about motives, or theory of the passions. What drives the worldly-minded is not a pure love of God but their desire for the approval of others and consequently their fear of shame—worldly and selfish motives. The true decency that he lauds rises above these mundane motives. Forbes admits that there is something good and socially desirable in this lower form of (customary) decency; in fact, it is indispensable for the daily operations of civil society. But he must capture the higher ground, he must emphasize his spiritual allegiance, and he does so by reminding us of the emptiness of customary decency: by following worldly or customary decency only, "we are at more pains to please the World, than either to please ourselves or the ALMIGHTY" (209). Again Forbes is of two minds regarding a maxim by La Rochefoucauld; he cannot praise the duke's words on decency without pointing out their deficiency of spiritual value. Yet when he faults La Rochefoucauld, he refuses to regard his maxims as being completely false, misleading or corruptive.

One senses, moreover, that he admires the maxims. Why else would he recall them and imitate them throughout his book? He shows his admiration in two main directions: first, outright imitation of the duke's laconic style, and second, selective conversion or transformation of the duke's maxims to serve ends not originally intended. For examples of the first we have these sentences on decency with which Forbes concludes his essay (claiming that they are not really offered as authoritative maxims!):

[2] MAN naturally loves Virtue and Decency: and when he is deceived, it is under an appearance of something that's good.

[5] DECENCY in Opinions is more properly Truth: in Inclinations and Actions 'tis Virtue and Goodness. But the common Province of Decency goes no farther than the Circumstances of Actions, or the Manner of doing them.

[7] THE Indecencies of Conversation arise from Vanity, Ill-humour, and a bastard kind of Good-humour. This false Complaisance appears much in the Custom of Detraction: it goes on against the Absent, because 'tis suppos'd to be agreeable to the Present, who become the Absent the next moment, and suffer in their turn.

[8] PROFESS'D Indecency of any kind is Insolence. Vanity is commonly the first Inducement to foolish talking. Thus smutty Jest oftener shew the Ostentation of Wit than the Inclination to Lewdness; and impious Expressions are no sure Argument of Unbelief.

[11] INDECENCIES in Apparel are as much shunn'd as any. Herein Custom triumphs eminently: 'tis the chief Point of Uniformity among all Ranks and Parties.

[12] IN all other Articles of Expencc, that which is nearest the middle must be Decency; the precise Point not being discoverable: the Extremes of *High* and *Low* are either call'd Extravagant or Sordid.

[13] WE see of what use this inexplicable thing, Decency, is for regulating all our different Motions: it keeps our Pride itself in some order, tho' it be call'd its Daughter; and if it does not restrain our Inclinations and Aversions, it often hinders them from breaking out. It lulls our Spirits asleep, and by turns rouses them. In short, Decency may be *now* reckon'd of such service in the Commonwealth, that without it the Judicatures both in Church and State wou'd have much more to do than they have; to say nothing of the Tranquillity it helps to preserve in private Families. (240-42)

From one maxim treated as seedling, he grows a whole tree, but none of his attempts makes us think that he has come close to rivalling the artistry of the duke.

When he is not striving to imitate them, he can be seen trying to transform them to suit his purposes. In the following example Forbes borrows from La Rochefoucauld but uses the borrowed words and imagery to oppose the author's original intention: