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## JANE AUSTEN AND THE MORALISTS

Reprinted from 'The Oxford Review', no. 1, 1966, by permission of the editor

I

Jane Austen is often described as just a miniature-painter. Her blessed 'little bit (two inches wide) of ivory' has too often set the tone of criticism. I mean to show that she was more than this. Whether we like it or not, she was also a moralist. In a thin sense of the word, of course, every novelist is a moralist who shows us the ways or mores of his characters and their society. But Jane Austen was a moralist in a thick sense, that she wrote what and as she wrote partly from a deep interest in some perfectly general, even theoretical questions about human nature and human conduct. To say this is not, however, to say that she was a moraliser. There is indeed some moralising in *Sense and Sensibility* and she does descend to covert preaching in *Mansfield Park*. Here I do discern, with regret, the tones of voice of the anxious aunt, and even occasionally of the prig. But for the most part, I am glad to say, she explores and does not shepherd.

I am not going to try to make out that Jane Austen was a philosopher or even a philosopher *manquée*. But I am going to argue that she was interested from the south side in some quite general or theoretical problems about human nature and conduct in which philosophers proper were and are interested from the north side.

To begin with, we should consider the titles of three of her novels, namely, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*. It is not for nothing that these titles are composed of abstract nouns. *Sense and Sensibility* really is about the relations between Sense and Sensibility or, as we might put it, between Head and Heart, Thought and Feeling, Judgement and Emotion, or Sensibleness and Sensitiveness. *Pride and Prejudice* really is about pride and about the misjudgements that stem from baseless pride, excessive pride, deficient pride, pride in trivial objects and so on. *Persuasion* really is or rather does set out to be about persuadability, unpersuadability and over-persuadability.

To go into detail. In *Sense and Sensibility* it is not only Elinor, Marianne and Mrs Dashwood who exemplify equilibrium or else inequilibrium between judiciousness and feeling. Nearly all the characters in the novel do so, in their different ways and their different degrees. John Dashwood has his filial and fraternal feelings, but they are shallow ones. They do not overcome his and his wife's calculating selfishness. Sir John Middleton is genuinely and briskly kind, but with a cordiality too general to be really thoughtful. What he does for one person he does with equal zest for another, without considering their differences of need, desert or predilection. He would be in his element in a Butlin's Holiday Camp. Mrs Jennings, whose character changes during the novel, is a thoroughly vulgar woman who yet has, in matters of importance, a sterling heart and not too bad a head. Lucy Steele professes deep feelings, but they are sham ones, while her eye for the main chance is clear and unwavering. Like her future mother-in-law she has too little heart and too much sense of a heartless sort.

Marianne and Elinor are alike in that their feelings are deep and genuine. The difference is that Marianne lets her joy, anxiety or grief so overwhelm her that she behaves like a person crazed. Elinor keeps her head. She continues to behave as she knows she should behave. She is deeply grieved or worried, but she does not throw to the winds all considerations of duty, prudence, decorum or good taste. She is sensitive *and* sensible, in our sense of the latter adjective. I think that Elinor too often and Marianne sometimes collapse into two-dimensional samples of abstract types; Elinor's conversation occasionally degenerates into lecture or even homily. This very fact bears out my view that Jane Austen regularly had one eye, and here an eye and a half, on a theoretical issue. The issue here was this: must Head and Heart be antagonists? Must a person who is deeply grieved or

deeply joyous be crazy with grief or joy? To which Jane Austen's answer, the correct answer, is, 'No, the best Heart and the best Head are combined in 'the best person.' But Elinor sometimes collapses into a Head rather loosely buttoned on to a Heart, and then she ceases to be a person at all.

Jane Austen brings out the precise kinds of the sensibility exhibited by Elinor and Marianne by her wine-taster's technique of matching them not only against one another but also against nearly all the other characters in their little world. The contrast between Lucy Steele and both Elinor and Marianne is the contrast between sham and real sensibility or emotion; the contrast between Willoughby and, say, Edward is the contrast between the genuine but shallow feelings of the one and the genuine and deep feelings of the other. Lady Middleton's feelings are few and are concentrated entirely on her own children. Her husband's feelings are spread abroad quite indiscriminatingly. He just wants everyone to be jolly.

I want briefly to enlarge on this special wine-taster's technique of comparative character-delineation. Jane Austen's great predecessor, Theophrastus, had described just one person at a time, the Garrulous Man by himself, say, or the Mean Man by himself. So the Garrulity or the Meanness is not picked out by any contrasts or affinities with contiguous qualities. Our view of the Garrulous Man is not clarified by his being matched against the Conversationally Fertile Man on the one side, or against the Conversationally Arid Man on the other. The Meanness of the Mean Man is not brought into relief by being put into adjacency with the meritorious Austerity of a Socrates or the allowable Close Bargaining of a dealer. By contrast, Jane Austen's technique is the method of the vintner. She pin-points the exact quality of character in which she is interested, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, against deficiencies of it and against qualities which, though different, are brothers or cousins of that selected quality. The ecstatic emotionality of her Marianne is made to stand out against the sham, the shallow, the inarticulate and the controlled feelings of Lucy Steele, Willoughby, Edward and Elinor. To discriminate the individual taste of any one character is to discriminate by comparison the individual taste of every other character. That is to say, in a given novel Jane Austen's characters are not merely blankly different, as Cheltenham is blankly different from Helvellyn. They are different inside the same genus, as Cheltenham is different from Bath or Middlesbrough, or as Helvellyn is different from Skiddaw or Boar's Hill.

Thus in *Pride and Prejudice* almost every character exhibits too much or too little pride, pride of a bad or silly sort or pride of a good sort, sham pride or genuine pride and so forth. Elizabeth Bennet combines a dangerous cocksureness in her assessments of people with a proper sense of her own worth. Jane is quite uncocksure. She is too diffident. She does not resent being put upon or even realise that she is being put upon. There is no proper pride, and so no fight in her. Their mother is so stupid and vulgar that she has no sense of dignity at all, only silly vanities about her dishes and her daughters' conquests. Mr Bennet has genuine pride. He does despise the despicable. But it is inert, unexecutive pride. He voices his just contempt in witty words, but he does nothing to prevent or repair what he condemns. It is the pride of a mere don, though a good don. Bingley has no special pride, and so, though a nice man, spinelessly lets himself be managed by others where he should not. His sisters are proud in the sense of being vain and snobbish.

Darcy is, to start with, haughty and snobbish, a true nephew of Lady Catherine de Burgh. His early love for Elizabeth is vitiated by condescension. He reforms into a man with pride of the right sort. He is proud to be able to help Elizabeth and her socially embarrassing family. He now knows what is due from him as well as what is due to him. Mr Collins is the incarnation of vacuous complacency. He glories in what are mere reflections from the rank of his titled patroness and from his own status as a clergyman. He is a soap-bubble with nothing at all inside him and only bulging refractions from other things on his rotund surface.

The same pattern obtains in *Persuasion*. Not only Anne Elliot but her father, sisters, friends and acquaintances are described in terms of their kinds and degrees of persuadability and unpersuadability. Anne had suffered from having dutifully taken the bad advice of the over-cautious Lady Russell. Her father and sister Elizabeth can be persuaded to live within their means only by the solicitor's shrewd appeals to quite unworthy considerations. Her sister Mary is so full of self-pity that she can be prevailed on only by dexterous coaxings. Louisa Musgrove is too headstrong to listen to advice, so she cracks her skull. Her sister Henrietta is so over-persuadable that she is a mere weathercock. Mr Elliot, after his suspect youth, is apparently eminently rational. But it turns out that he is amenable to reason only so long as reason is on the side of self-interest.

This particular theme-notion of persuadability was, in my opinion, too boring to repay Jane Austen's selection of it, and I believe that she herself

found that her story tended to break away from its rather flimsy ethical frame. Certainly, when Anne and Wentworth at last come together again, their talk does duly turn on the justification of Anne's original yielding to Lady Russell's persuasion and on the unfairness of Wentworth's resentment of her so yielding. But we, and I think Jane Austen herself, are happy to hear the last of this particular theme. We are greatly interested in Anne, but not because she had been dutifully docile as a girl. We think only fairly well of Louisa Musgrove, but her deafness to counsels of prudence is not what makes our esteem so tepid. Some of the solidest characters in the novel, namely the naval characters, are not described in terms of their persuadability or unpersuadability at all, and we are not sorry.

I hope I have made out something of a case for the view that the abstract nouns in the titles *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* really do indicate the controlling themes of the novels; that Jane Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility* partly, at least, from an interest in the quite general or theoretical question whether deep feeling is compatible with being reasonable; that she wrote *Pride and Prejudice* from an interest in the quite general question what sorts and degrees of pride do, and what sorts and degrees of pride do not go with right thinking and right acting; and that she wrote *Persuasion* from an interest—I think a waning interest and one which I do not share—in the general question when people should and when they should not let themselves be persuaded by what sorts of counsels.

I shall now become bolder. I shall now say what corresponding theme-notions constitute the frames of *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, though no abstract nouns occur in their titles.

If cacophony had not forbidden, *Emma* could and I think would have been entitled *Influence and Interference*. Or it might have been called more generically *Solicitude*. Jane Austen's question here was: What makes it sometimes legitimate or even obligatory for one person deliberately to try to modify the course of another person's life, while sometimes such attempts are wrong? Where is the line between Meddling and Helping? Or, more generally, between proper and improper solicitude and unsolicitude about the destinies and welfares of others? Why was *Emma* wrong to try to arrange Harriet's life, when Mr Knightley was right to try to improve *Emma*'s mind and character? Jane Austen's answer is the right answer. *Emma* was treating Harriet as a puppet to be worked by hidden strings. Mr Knightley advised and scolded *Emma* to her face. *Emma* knew what Mr Knightley required of her and hoped for her. Harriet was not to

know what Emma was scheming on her behalf. Mr Knightley dealt with Emma as a potentially responsible and rational being. Emma dealt with Harriet as a doll. Proper solicitude is open and not secret. Furthermore, proper solicitude is actuated by genuine good will. Improper solicitude is actuated by love of power, jealousy, conceit, sentimentality and so on.

To corroborate this interpretation we should notice, what we now expect, that the novel's other characters also are systematically described in terms of their different kinds or degrees of concernment or unconcernment with the lives of others. Emma's father is a fusser, who wants to impose his own hypochondriacal regimen on others. But his intentions are kindly and his objectives are not concealed. He is a silly old darling, but he is not a schemer. He tries in vain to influence his friends' meals and his grandchildren's holiday resorts. He is over-solicitous and solicitous about trivialities, but he does not meddle, save, nearly, once, and then John Knightley properly loses his temper with him. Mrs Elton is silly and vulgar. Her fault is that of officiousness. She tries to force her services on other people. She is a nuisance, but there is nothing underhand about her; rather the reverse, she advertises too much the unwanted benefits that she tries to impose on her victims. John Knightley is somewhat refreshingly unconcerned with other people's affairs outside his own family circle. He is honest, forthright and perceptive, but, unlike his wife, her father and her sister Emma, he does not interest himself in things that are not his business. He is not brutal or callous, and only twice or three times is he even testy; but other people's affairs are not naturally interesting to him. Gossip bores him and social gatherings seem to him a weary waste of time. Mr Elton differs from John Knightley in just this respect, that Mr Elton affects solicitude without really feeling it, while John Knightley is frankly unsolicitous. By contrast, Miss Bates is an incessant, though entirely kindly natterer about other people's affairs. She cares very much about everybody's welfare, though her concern is, through no fault of her own, confined to talk. She is debarred from doing anything for anyone save her old mother, but all her little thoughts and all her little utterances are enthusiastically benevolent ones. She is the twittering voice of universal good will. Mr Knightley is like her in good will, but unlike her in that his is executive and efficient good will. He says little; he just helps. He does what needs to be done for people, but he does not do it behind their backs, nor does he shout about it to the world. Finally, Frank Churchill is matched against Mr Knightley in that while he too does things which

make small or big differences to other people's lives, he often does surreptitious things. He does not hurry to come to meet his new step-mother; and when he does come it is because his crypto-fiancée has just returned to the village. He flirts with Emma, but does not let her know that he is only playing a game, and playing a game as a camouflage. He forces a piano on his fiancée without letting her know to whom she is indebted. He is not wicked, but he is not above-board, so many of his actions affecting others belong to the class of interference, and not of legitimate intervention. He is ready to make use of people without their knowledge or consent, in order to get himself out of difficulties. He is like Emma in being a bit of a schemer, but he is unlike her in that she tried to shape the whole life of Harriet; he tricked people only for momentary purposes. He did not want to make big or lasting differences to anybody's life, save his own and his fiancée's; but he was reckless of the danger of making such a difference without intending it. He meddled by covert gambling, she meddled by covert plotting. It is no accident that he was the adopted son of a domineering and wealthy old lady and her intimidated husband. In effect they had trained him not to be forthright. This theme-notion of Emma, that of *Influence and Interference*, is explicitly brought out in the conversation in which the heroine and hero first open their hearts to each other. These two abstract nouns both occur there, as they occur sporadically elsewhere in the novel.

Now for *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen's profoundest, but also her most didactic novel. Its theme-notion is the connection, to use her own ugly phrase, between fraternal and conjugal ties. Here nearly all the characters are systematically described in terms of the affection which they feel, or do not feel, or which they only pretend to feel for their own flesh and blood. Their capacities or incapacities to make good husbands or wives are a direct function of their lovingness or unlovingness inside their own families. Fanny's devotedness to her brother William, her cousins, aunt and uncle gets its reward in happy marriage; while her coldheartedness at home results in marital disaster for Maria.

Jane Austen duly describes not only the major but also many of the minor characters in terms of their excellences and defects as brothers, aunts, daughters, cousins and parents. Sir Thomas Bertram is genuinely fond of his wife, children and niece. But he is too stiff and pompous to be intimate with them. He is affectionate at a distance. So his children do not love him and he does not understand them. Lady Bertram is drowsily fond

of her family but is so bovine and inert that she seldom does anything or says anything to affect anybody. Her sister, Mrs Norris, is an officious and mischief-making aunt and an unforgiving sister. Her eloquent professions of love for the Bertrams are a mere cover for self-importance. With such parents and such an aunt, Tom, Maria and her sister grow up selfish and coldhearted. Maria marries for the wrong reasons and destroys her marriage for worse ones.

The real hero of the story is Fanny's brother, William. He is gay, affectionate, vigorous, straight and brave, and he makes Fanny happy. It is their brother-sister love which is the paradigm against which to assess all the others. Fanny's love for her cousin Edmund had begun as a child's love for a deputy-William.

Henry and Mary Crawford have accomplishments, vitality, wit, artistic tastes and charm. But they speak undutifully in public about the unsatisfactory uncle who had brought them up; they resent the unexpected return of Sir Thomas Bertram from Antigua to the bosom of his own family, simply because it puts a stop to their theatricals; and even between brother and sister the relations are cordial rather than intimate. Unlike William, Henry never writes a proper letter to his sister. Nor does he mind setting the Bertram sisters at loggerheads by flirting with both at once. He has little personal or vicarious family feeling. Critics have lamented that Henry Crawford does not marry Fanny. But this would have ruined the point. He has indeed everything that she or we could wish her husband to have—everything save two. He lacks high principles, and he lacks filial and fraternal lovingness. He is without those very qualities which make William the ideal brother. Henry could never be what Edmund was, a deputy-William. Though by no means without a heart, he was too shallow-hearted for him and Fanny ever to be the centres and circumferences of one another's lives.

*Northanger Abbey* is the one novel of the six which does not have an abstract ethical theme for its backbone. I think that when Jane Austen began to write this novel, it had been her sole intention to burlesque such novels as *The Mystery of Udolpho* by depicting a nice but gullible teenager looking at the actual world through, so to speak, the celluloid film of Gothic romances. But even here Jane Austen's ethical interest came quite soon to make its contribution. For we soon begin to find that Catherine, though a gullible ninny about how the actual world runs, is quite ungullible about what is right and wrong, decorous and indecorous. Her



standards of conduct, unlike her criteria of actuality, are those of a candid, scrupulous and well-brought up girl, not those of the unschooled, novel-struck girl that she also is. Jane Austen began *Northanger Abbey* just poking fun at factual gullibility; but she soon became much more interested in moral ungullibility. Jane Austen the moralist quickly outgrew Jane Austen the burlesquer.

## II

Jane Austen did, then, consider quite general or theoretical questions. These questions were all moral questions; though only in *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility* did she cross over the boundary into moralising. I am now going to be more specific and say what sorts of moral ideas were most congenial to her. I will try to bring out together both what I mean by this question and what its answer is.

In the eighteenth century, and in other centuries too, moralists tended to belong to one of two camps. There was what I shall call, with conscious crudity, the Calvinist camp, and there was what I shall call the Aristotelian camp. A moralist of the Calvinist type thinks, like a criminal lawyer, of human beings as either Saved or Damned, either Elect or Reject, either children of Virtue or children of Vice, either heading for Heaven or heading for Hell, either White or Black, either Innocent or Guilty, either Saints or Sinners. The Calvinist's moral psychology is correspondingly bi-polar. People are dragged upwards by Soul or Spirit or Reason or Conscience; but they are dragged down by Body or Flesh or Passion or Pleasure or Desire or Inclination. A man is an unhappy combination of a white angelic part and a black satanic part. At the best, the angelic part has the satanic part cowed and starved and subjugated now, and can hope to be released altogether from it in the future. Man's life here is either a life of Sin or else it is a life of self-extrication from Sin. We find people being depicted in such terms in plenty of places. The seducer in the *Vicar of Wakefield* is Wickedness incarnate. So he has no other ordinary qualities. Fanny Burney's bad characters are pure stage-villains. Occasionally Johnson in the *Rambler* depicts persons who are all Black; and since they possess no Tuesday morning attributes, we cannot remember a thing about them afterwards. They are black cardboard and nothing more. The less frequent angelic or saintly characters are equally unalive, flat and forgettable.

In contrast with this, the Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas represents

people as differing from one another in degree and not in kind, and differing from one another not in respect just of a single generic Sunday attribute, Goodness, say, or else Wickedness, but in respect of a whole spectrum of specific week-day attributes. A is a bit more irritable and ambitious than B, but less indolent and less sentimental. C is meaner and quicker-witted than D, and D is greedier and more athletic than C. And so on. A person is not black or white, but iridescent with all the colours of the rainbow; and he is not a flat plane, but a highly irregular solid. He is not blankly Good or Bad, blankly angelic or fiendish; he is better than most in one respect, about level with the average in another respect, and a bit, perhaps a big bit, deficient in a third respect. In fact he is like the people we really know, in a way in which we do not know and could not know any people who are just Bad or else just Good.

Jane Austen's moral ideas are, with certain exceptions, ideas of the Aristotelian and not of the Calvinist pattern. Much though she had learned from Johnson, this she had not learned from him. When Johnson is being ethically solemn, he draws people in black and white. So they never come to life, any more than the North Pole and the South Pole display any scenic features. Jane Austen's people are, nearly always, alive all over, all through and all round, displaying admirably or amusingly or deplorably proportioned mixtures of all the colours that there are, save pure White and pure Black. If a Calvinist critic were to ask us whether Mr Collins was Hell-bound or Heaven-bent, we could not answer. The question does not apply. Mr Collins belongs to neither pole; he belongs to a very particular parish in the English Midlands. He is a stupid, complacent and inflated ass, but a Sinner? No. A Saint? No. He is just a ridiculous figure, that is, a figure for which the Calvinist ethical psychology does not cater. The questions Was Emma Good? Was she Bad? are equally unanswerable and equally uninteresting. Obviously she should have been smacked more often when young; obviously, too, eternal Hell-fire is not required for her.

Let me now bring out my reservations. Jane Austen does, with obvious reluctance and literary embarrassment, use the criminal lawyer's Black-White process three or four times. Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* begins by being or at least seems to be, behind his attractive exterior, black-hearted. It turns out that he is only a bit grey at heart and not black. The latter shade is reserved for his fiancée, whom therefore we do not meet. In *Pride and Prejudice* Wickham and Lydia do become regulation Sinners, as do Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay in *Persuasion*. Fortunately London

exists, that desperate but comfortingly remote metropolis; so Jane Austen smartly bundles off her shadowy representatives of vice to that convenient sink. It is in London that Henry Crawford and Maria enjoy or endure their guilty association. Thus Jane Austen is exempted by the width of the Home Counties from having to try to portray in her pastel-shades the ebony complexion of urban sin. Human saints and angels gave her no such literary anxieties. She just forgot that there were officially supposed to exist such arctic paragons, a piece of forgetfulness for which we are not inclined to reprove her.

As early as in *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen explicitly relinquishes the Black–White, Sinner–Saint dichotomy. Catherine Morland, brought to her senses, reflects:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works . . . it was not in them, perhaps, that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine-forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland and the South of France might be as fruitful in horrors as they were there represented. Catherine dared not doubt beyond her own country, and even of that, if hard pressed, would have yielded the northern and western extremities. But in the central part of England there was surely some security of existence even of a wife not beloved; in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated; servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions were to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist. Among the Alps and Pyrenees perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction she would not be surprised if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney some slight imperfection might hereafter appear; . . .

In *Persuasion* Jane Austen gives us what she would have been surprised to hear was a good rendering of Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean.

Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him [Wentworth] to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and

advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him that like all other qualities of mind it should have its proportions and limits.

Not only was Jane Austen's ethic, if that is not too academic a word, Aristotelian in type, as opposed to Calvinistic. It was also secular as opposed to religious. I am sure that she was personally not merely the dutiful daughter of a clergyman, but was genuinely pious. Yet hardly a whisper of piety enters into even the most serious and most anguished meditations of her heroines. They never pray and they never give thanks on their knees. Three of her heroes go into the church, and Edmund has to defend his vocation against the cynicisms of the Crawfords. But not a hint is given that he regards his clerical duty as that of saving souls. Routine church-going on Sunday with the rest of the family gets a passing mention three or four times, and Fanny is once stated to be religious. But that is all. I am not suggesting that Jane Austen's girls are atheists, agnostics or Deists. I am only saying that when Jane Austen writes about them, she draws the curtain between her Sunday thoughts, whatever they were, and her creative imagination. Her heroines face their moral difficulties and solve their moral problems without recourse to religious faith or theological doctrines. Nor does it ever occur to them to seek the counsels of a clergyman.

Lastly, her ethical vocabulary and idioms are quite strongly laced with aesthetic terms. We hear of 'moral taste', 'moral and literary tastes', 'beauty of mind', 'the beauty of truth and sincerity', 'delicacy of principle', 'the Sublime of Pleasures'. Moreover there is a prevailing correlation between sense of duty, sense of propriety and aesthetic taste. Most of her people who lack any one of these three, lack the other two as well. Mrs Jennings is the only one of Jane Austen's vulgarians who is allowed, none the less, to have a lively and just moral sense. Catherine Morland, whose sense of what is right and decorous is unflinching, is too much of an ignorant yet to have acquired aesthetic sensibility, but the two Tilneys have all three tastes or senses. The Crawfords are her only people who combine musical, literary and dramatic sensitivity with moral laxity; Henry Crawford reads Shakespeare movingly, and yet is a bit of a cad. Elinor Dashwood, Anne Elliot and Fanny Price have good taste in all three dimensions. Emma Woodhouse is shaky in all three dimensions, and all for the same reason, that she is not effectively self-critical.

## III

So Jane Austen's moral system was a secular, Aristotelian ethic-cum-aesthetic. But to say all this is to say that her moral *Weltanschauung* was akin to that of Lord Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury too had, a century before, assimilated moral sense to artistic sense, aesthetic taste to moral taste. A Grecian by study and predilection, he had followed Aristotle in preference to Plato, the Stoics or the Epicureans. A Deist rather than a Christian, he had based his religion, such as it was, on his ethics and aesthetics, rather than these on his religion. So I now put forward the historical hypothesis that Jane Austen's specific moral ideas derived, directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, from Shaftesbury. Certainly she never mentions him by name; but nor is any moralist mentioned by name, even in those contexts in which her girl characters are described as studying the writings of moralists. Anne Elliot does advise the melancholy Captain Benwick to read, *inter alios*, 'our best moralists'; Fanny Price tutors her young sister, Susan, in history and morals; that teen-aged bluestocking, Mary Bennet, makes long extracts from the writings of moralists, and regales her company with their most striking platitudes. But the word 'moralist' would cover Goldsmith or Pope as well as Hutcheson or Hume, Johnson or Addison as well as Shaftesbury or Butler. We cannot argue just from the fact that Jane Austen speaks of moralists to the conclusion that she has any accredited moral philosophers in mind.

My reasons for thinking that Shaftesbury was the direct or indirect source of Jane Austen's moral furniture are these:

(1) I have the impression, not based on research or wide reading, that throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the natural, habitual and orthodox ethic was, with various modifications and mitigations, that Black-White, Saint-Sinner ethic that I have crudely dubbed 'Calvinistic'. Hutcheson, Butler and Hume, who were considerably influenced by Shaftesbury, all dissociate themselves from the Angel-Fiend psychology, as if this was prevalent. The essays, whether in the *Spectator*, the *Idler* or the *Rambler*, though I have only dipped into them, seem to me to use the Black-White process when very serious moral matters are discussed; but, perhaps partly for this reason, they tend not to treat very often such sermon-topics. The light touch necessary for an essay could not without awkwardness be applied to Salvation or Damnation. Fielding, who did

know his Shaftesbury, was too jolly to bother much with satanic or angelic characters. There are many Hogarthian caricatures in his novels, but they are there to be laughed at. They are not Awful Warnings. That is, I have the impression that the secular and aesthetic Aristotelianism of Shaftesbury had not acquired a very wide vogue. It was not in the air breathed by the generality of novelists, poets and essayists. Perhaps there were latitudinarian sermons, other than Bishop Butler's, in which concessions were made to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. I do not know. But I fancy that these ideas were current chiefly inside small, sophisticated circles in which 'Deist' was not a term of abuse and in which one could refer without explanation or apology to Locke and Descartes, Hobbes and Aristotle, Epicurus and Spinoza. So, if I am right in my assimilation of Jane Austen's moral ideas to those of Shaftesbury, then I think that she did not absorb these ideas merely from the literary, ecclesiastical and conversational atmosphere around her. I do not, on the other hand, insist that she got them by studying the writings of Shaftesbury himself, though if I was told that she got them either from Shaftesbury himself or from his donnish Scotch disciple, Hutcheson, I should without hesitation say, 'Then she got them from Shaftesbury.' Of Hutcheson's epistemological professionalisation of Shaftesbury there is not an echo in Jane Austen. She talks of 'Moral Sense' without considering the academic question whether or not it is literally a Sixth Sense. Nor do I find any echoes in her from Butler or from Hume, who in their turn echo little or nothing of the aestheticism of Shaftesbury.

(2) Another thing that persuades me that Jane Austen was influenced fairly directly by Shaftesbury himself, besides the general secular and aesthetic Aristotelianism which she shares with him, is the vocabulary in which she talks about people. Her stock of general terms in which she describes their minds and characters, their faults and excellences is, *en bloc*, Shaftesbury's. Almost never does she use either the bi-polar ethical vocabulary or the corresponding bi-polar psychological vocabulary of the Black-White ethic. The flat, generic antitheses of Virtue and Vice, Reason and Passion, Thought and Desire, Soul and Body, Spirit and Flesh, Conscience and Inclination, Duty and Pleasure hardly occur in her novels. Instead we get an ample, variegated and many-dimensional vocabulary. Her descriptions of people mention their tempers, habits, dispositions, moods, inclinations, impulses, sentiments, feelings,

affections, thoughts, reflections, opinions, principles, prejudices, imaginations and fancies. Her people have or lack moral sense, sense of duty, good sense, taste, good-breeding, self-command, spirits and good humour; they do or do not regulate their imaginations and discipline their tempers. Her people have or lack knowledge of their own hearts or their own dispositions; they are or are not properly acquainted with themselves; they do or do not practise self-examination and soliloquy. None of these general terms or idioms is, by itself, so far as I know, peculiar to Shaftesbury and herself. It is the amplitude of the stock of them, and the constant interplays of them which smack strongly of Shaftesbury. It had been Shaftesbury's business, so to speak, to Anglicise the copious and elastic discriminations of which Aristotle had been the discoverer. In Jane Austen Shaftesbury's Anglicisation is consummated without his floridity.

Given the stilted bi-polar vocabulary of, say, 'Reason and Passion' or 'Spirit and Flesh', then it is easy and tempting to reserve the top drawer for the one and the bottom drawer for the other. But given the copious, specific and plastic vocabulary of Aristotle or Shaftesbury, it then becomes a hopeless as well as a repellent task to split it up into, say, fifteen top-drawer terms and seventeen bottom-drawer terms, into a platoon of sheep-terms for angelic and a platoon of goat-terms for satanic powers, impulses and propensities. To the employer of a hundred crayons the dichotomy 'Chalk or Charcoal' has no appeal. For example, John Knightley's occasional testiness was obviously not a Virtue. But nor was it a Vice. At worst it was a slight weakness, and in his particular domestic situation it was even a venial and rather likeable condiment. Where the icing-sugar is too thick, a splash of lemon-juice is a welcome corrective. We would not wish to be surrounded by John Knightleys. But we would not wish to be without them altogether.

(3) There is one word which Shaftesbury and Jane Austen do frequently use in the same apparently idiosyncratic way, and that a way which is alien to us and, I think, subject to correction, alien to most of the other eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers. This is the word 'Mind', often used without the definite or indefinite article, to stand not just for intellect or intelligence, but for the whole complex unity of a conscious, thinking, feeling and acting person. I am not here referring to the philosophico-theological use of 'Mind' for, roughly speaking, the

Deist's or Pantheist's God. We do find this use occurring now and then in Shaftesbury, as in Pope.

Shaftesbury and Jane Austen both speak of the Beauty of Mind or the Beauty of a Mind, where they are talking about ordinary people; and when Shaftesbury speaks of the Graces and Perfections of Minds, of the Harmony of a Mind, or the Symmetry and Order of a Mind and of the Freedom of Mind he is talking in his jointly aesthetic and ethical manner just of laudable human beings. Jane Austen employs a lot of analogous phrases: 'Inferior in talent and all the elegancies of mind', 'delicacy of mind', 'liberty of mind or limb' (all from *Emma*); '[he] has a thinking mind', '. . . in temper and mind', 'Marianne's mind could not be controlled', 'her want of delicacy, rectitude and integrity of mind' (all from *Sense and Sensibility*). In 'one of those extraordinary bursts of mind' (*Persuasion*, ch. VII) the word 'mind' perhaps means 'intelligence' or just 'memory'. Now I think that Shaftesbury used this term 'Mind' as his preferred rendering of Aristotle's ψυχή, for which the normal rendering by 'Soul' would, I guess, have had for him too Christian or too parsonical a ring. He does once or twice use the disjunction 'mind or soul'. Jane Austen is even charier than Shaftesbury of employing the word 'soul'; and she, I surmise, just takes over the Shaftesburian use of 'Mind', very likely without feeling, what I think most philosophers would have felt, that this use was an irregular and strained one. If the Shaftesburian uses of the word 'Mind' did not subsequently become current in literature, sermons or conversation, or even, as I am sure they did not, in the philosophical writings of Butler and Hume, then the fact that Jane Austen often makes the same and similar uses of it would be fairly strong evidence that she drew directly on Shaftesbury. But whether this is the case or not is a matter of philological history, in which field I am not even an amateur. I am primarily arguing for the general, if vague, conclusion that Jane Austen was, whether she knew it or not, a Shaftesburian. It is a dispensable sub-hypothesis that she had studied the rather tedious and high-flown writings of Shaftesbury himself. Shaftesbury had opened a window through which a relatively few people in the eighteenth century inhaled some air with Aristotelian oxygen in it. Jane Austen had sniffed this oxygen. It may be that she did not know who had opened the window. But I shall put an edge on the issue by surmising, incidentally, that she did know.