
Human Nature and Civil Society in Jane Austen

— ◆ —
MICHELLE ALBERT VACHRIS
AND CECIL E. BOHANON

Jane Austen, in her six novels published between 1811 and 1817, provides us with a picture of human nature that is grounded in classical liberalism. In particular, her interpretation illuminates Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which provides a theory about how free individuals in a free society would develop moral character. Austen's characters teach us about the virtues we should practice and the vices we should avoid in order to lead fulfilling lives. The moral development of her characters arises as a spontaneous order among free people in a free society. Furthermore, her story lines give us a glimpse into the types of economic arrangements that recognize the dignity of all and further promote human flourishing.

The virtues described by Smith and illustrated by Austen are prudence,¹ beneficence, and justice. We develop these virtues out of self-love and concern for others. "Concern for our own happiness recommends to us the virtue of prudence: concern for that of other people, the virtues of justice and beneficence; of which, the one restrains us from hurting, the other prompts us to promote that happiness" (Smith [1759] 1982, 262). The virtue of self-command is the root of these virtues.

Michelle Albert Vachris is professor of management, business, and economics at Virginia Wesleyan University. **Cecil E. Bohanon** is professor of economics at Ball State University.

1. For more extensive analyses of how Austen extends Smith's theory, see Knox-Shaw 2004 and Bohanon and Vachris 2015.

The Independent Review, v. 25, n. 3, Winter 2020, ISSN 1086-1653, Copyright © 2020, pp. 357-368.

Prudence

Prudence is a self-directed virtue, and each of us is best suited to take care of himself or herself. As Fanny Price explains in *Mansfield Park*, “We all have a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be” (Austen [1814] 2005, 478). This sentiment is also found in Adam Smith, who maintains, “Every man is, no doubt, by nature, first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so” ([1759] 1982, 219).

A prudent person tries to maximize long-term self-interest. To illustrate prudence or the lack thereof, Austen gives the contrasting examples of Anne Elliott and her father, Sir Walter, in *Persuasion*. Sir Walter’s vanity leads him to overextend his finances so much that he can no longer afford his estate. While his wife was alive, she “kept him within his income,” but after her death “he had been constantly exceeding it” (Austen [1816] 1983b, 1149). He is convinced that “[i]t had not been possible for him to spend less” because he had merely spent what was expected of a baronet (1149). The novel opens with Anne and Sir Walter’s dear friends, Lady Russell and Mr. Shepherd, trying to convince him of a plan for economizing so that he can pay off his debts.

Lady Russell devises a plan that, if followed, would clear his debts in seven years. Anne would have preferred an even more aggressive plan. “She considered it as an act of indispensable duty to clear away the claims of the creditors, with all the expedition which the most comprehensive retrenchments could secure, and saw no dignity in anything short of it” (1150). Lady Russell’s plan is more palatable to Sir Walter, so the family retrenches to Bath and rents out their estate to an admiral and his wife.

Anne can always be counted on by her family. She cares for her sister and nephew and takes charge when Louisa Musgrove becomes injured. There is “no one so proper, so capable as Anne!” (1210). Unfortunately, Anne “had been forced into prudence in her youth” (1160). At nineteen, she received an offer of marriage from Captain Wentworth, who “had no fortune. He had been lucky in his profession; but spending freely, what had come freely, had realized nothing” (1158). Lady Russell persuaded Anne to break off the engagement, “seeing it a most unfortunate” alliance. It was not just the captain’s lack of station that worried Lady Russell. She was not pleased by “[h]is sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind. . . . She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong. Lady Russell had little taste for wit, and of anything approaching to imprudence a horror” (1159). Because Lady Russell is Anne’s trusted mother figure, Anne “was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing: indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it” (1159). Anne even engaged in self-delusion, convincing herself that it was better for Wentworth that they did not marry. She thought she was being prudent by following Lady Russell’s advice because she did not yet have the maturity to trust her own instincts about what was in her long-term best interest.

Despite her refusal, Anne remains in love with Wentworth, turns down a marriage proposal from another man, and discourages the attentions from the heir to her father's estate. When she and the now successful Captain Wentworth meet again and reconcile, Anne explains that it was her duty to defer to Lady Russell all those years ago, even though Lady Russell was wrong. "If I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience" (1287).

Although self-care is an important part of virtue, prudence alone does not result in perfect virtue. Rather, as Adam Smith explains, "[p]rudence is, in all these cases, combined with many greater and more splendid virtues, with valour, with extensive and strong benevolence, with a sacred regard to the rules of justice, and all these supported by a proper degree of self-command. This superior prudence . . . is the best head joined to the best heart. It is the most perfect wisdom combined with the most perfect virtue" ([1759] 1982, 216). Prudence, then, must be supplemented by other virtues.

Benevolence

Benevolence means that one has feelings of a charitable nature toward others; when one acts on those feelings, one is beneficent. Evidence of beneficence runs throughout the societies depicted in Jane Austen's novels as those that are better off take positive steps to care for those less well off.

Mr. Knightley in *Emma* epitomizes the kind of benevolence and beneficence of Jane Austen's time. According to Michael Giffen, the novel provides us a glimpse into the "implied social contract" that is based in part on Austen's religious background (2002, 149). Mr. Knightley owns the estate named Donwell Abbey next door to his dear friends Emma Woodhouse and her father. The name "Donwell Abbey" is allegorical in nature (Gay 2011, 60) because "Mr. Knightley is a model of a caring squire" (Giffen 2002, 150). He actively manages his farm and rents out some of the property to tenant farmers, including Mr. Robert Martin. In addition to his farming responsibilities, he serves as magistrate for the Highbury area.

The most overt evidence of Mr. Knightley's beneficence is found in his care for the widowed Mrs. Bates, her daughter, Miss Bates, and Miss Bates's niece Jane Fairfax. Like the Woodhouses, Mr. Knightley sends them occasional gifts of food. But instead of sharing out of his extra supplies, as Emma does with the hind-quarter of pork, Mr. Knightley sacrifices his own consumption so that the Bateses can receive more apples than he usually sends after learning how much Jane enjoys them. Mindful of the Bateses' feelings, he insists that he has more apples than he can use, so he will send more "before they get good for nothing" (Austen [1816] 1983a, 857). Miss Bates learns, though, that Mr. Knightley has in fact sent them the last of his apples for the season and "had not one left to bake or boil" (858).

Mr. Knightley also provides occasional transportation for the Bateses and Jane. He rarely uses his carriage, preferring to walk. Here again, he is careful to make it appear to

them that he is not going out of his way to help. Emma's former governess, Mrs. Weston, imagining a budding romance, suspects that he used his carriage for them one particular evening out of fondness for Jane (849). Emma, however, sees Mr. Knightley's beneficence as merely part of his general good nature. As Theresa Kenney explains, "Mr. Knightley is likely to perform benevolent actions. It is a habit with him and does not arise out of whimsical or ulterior motives. He disguises his good actions. He can gain no good himself from the service. This characterization defines eighteenth-century benevolence, and is not guided by the passions" (2016, 77).

Mr. Knightley serves as example to Emma with regard to the Bateses during the outing to Box Hill. After Emma insults Miss Bates during the picnic, Mr. Knightley explains why people of his and Emma's stature owe a special consideration for Miss Bates: "She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion" (938).

Emma's protégé Harriett is also the beneficiary of Mr. Knightley's charitable nature. At the ball, Harriett is left as the only young lady without a dance partner and is publicly snubbed by Mr. Elton, her former love interest. Mr. Knightley comes to her rescue and asks her to dance. His beneficence leads Harriet to recognize "[t]hat was the kind action; that was the noble benevolence and generosity; that was the service which made me begin to feel how superior he was to every other being upon earth" (956).

Finally, Mr. Knightley is very attentive to Mr. Woodhouse. When he hosts a strawberry-picking outing at Donwell Abbey, he does "all in his power for Mr. Woodhouse's entertainment" indoors since the outing would be too strenuous for the elderly man. "Books of engravings, drawers of medals, cameos, corals, shells, and every other family collection within his cabinets, had been prepared for his old friend, to while away the morning; and the kindness had perfectly answered. Mr. Woodhouse had been exceedingly well amused" (930).

Mr. Knightley's concern for Mr. Woodhouse even extends to his agreeing to move into Hartfield upon marrying Emma in order to spare Mr. Woodhouse from moving. Emma observes that Mr. Woodhouse has already relied upon Mr. Knightley quite a bit: "—Whom did he ever want to consult on business but Mr. Knightley?—Who was so useful to him, who so ready to write his letters, who so glad to assist him?—Who so cheerful, so attentive, so attached to him?—" (992). So the new living arrangements would make sense.

Mr. Knightley has the local knowledge that enables him to tailor his beneficence to the needs of his neighbors. James Otteson (2018) explains the important role of local knowledge for beneficence in Adam Smith, who maintains that beneficence should not be forced on us from afar because in order to know what people really need, we have to know them and be able to sympathize with them. This is more likely to be the case when we have the local knowledge that Mr. Knightley demonstrates.

Justice

Whereas beneficence is a positive virtue in that it requires that we actively try to improve the well-being of others (as Mr. Knightley does), justice is a negative virtue. We are just when we refrain from making others worse off. For example, harming someone physically is unjust, as is harming or taking their property. Living up to one's word is just; breaking promises to others is unjust. Otteson (2018) labels these examples as Adam Smith's three P's of justice: person, property, and promises.

One of the explicit examples of just versus unjust behavior in Austen is found in *Mansfield Park* (Austen [1814] 2005; for a fuller discussion of justice in *Mansfield Park*, see Bohanon and Vachris 2015, 57–68). The novel chronicles the family of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, who own the Mansfield Park estate as well as plantations in Antigua. Even though they have two sons and two daughters, they agree beneficently to take in one of Lady Bertram's poor sister's daughters, Fanny Price, on the suggestion (manipulation?) of Lady Bertram's other sister, Mrs. Norris, who lives nearby. Fanny is subject to both just and unjust treatment at the hands of her new family.

Mrs. Norris is most unjust to Fanny. She encourages the Misses Maria and Julia Bertram to think of themselves as superior to their cousin, and she constantly belittles Fanny. If Mrs. Norris had her way, Fanny would be denied outings, a ball in her honor, the use of the family's horses, and even a fire to heat her room. Luckily for Fanny, Sir Thomas and his son Edmund come to her rescue and treat her both justly and beneficently. Edmund encourages and befriends Fanny and defends her wish not to participate in the play that the sisters are planning. He makes sure she gets use of a horse for exercise and gets included in outings. Sir Thomas sees to her transportation needs and throws a ball in her honor. Even when he is disappointed in her decision to turn down Henry Crawford's offer of marriage, he makes sure she gets a fire for her room. Mrs. Norris, in contrast, blames Fanny's refusal of Henry as the reason he is free to take up with the newly married Maria.

Maria's affair with Henry is certainly unjust to her husband and leads to a scandalous divorce and disgrace for the family. Both she and the unjust Mrs. Norris end up living together in exile from the family. In contrast, the just Sir Thomas finds peace in their absence, and Edmund finds happiness with Fanny.

Self-Command

By practicing prudence, beneficence, and justice, then, we become virtuous. Circumstances often arise, though, to thwart our virtuous intentions, and we are tempted to succumb to our passionate natures. Self-command, an Enlightenment virtue found in Austen, can help us stay on the virtuous path. As Smith explains,

The man who acts according to the rules of perfect prudence, of strict justice, and of proper benevolence, may be said to be perfectly virtuous. But the most

perfect knowledge of those rules will not alone enable him to act in this manner: his own passions are very apt to mislead him; sometimes to drive him and sometimes to seduce him to violate all the rules which he himself, in all his sober and cool hours, approves of. The most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect self-command, will not always enable him to do his duty. ([1759] 1982, 237)

Indeed, Smith maintains that the virtues of prudence, beneficence, and justice are rooted in self-command.

To act according to the dictates of prudence, of justice, and proper beneficence, seems to have no great merit where there is no temptation to do otherwise. But to act with cool deliberation in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties; to observe religiously the sacred rules of justice in spite both of the greatest interests which might tempt, and the greatest injuries which might provoke us to violate them; never to suffer the benevolence of our temper to be damped or discouraged by the malignity and ingratitude of the individuals towards whom it may have been exercised; is the character of the most exalted wisdom and virtue. Self-command is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the other virtues seem to derive their principal lustre. ([1759] 1982, 241)

To explain what is meant by “self-command,” we can use the example set by Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* (Austen [1811] 2006c; for a fuller discussion of self-command in *Sense and Sensibility*, see also Bohanon and Vachris 2015, 39–48). Elinor and Edward Ferrars enjoy each other’s company during his first visit to the Dashwoods’ home, but upon meeting again it appears that his feelings have cooled. Rather than dwell on her disappointment, Elinor makes an effort to subdue her feelings and tries to take her mind off of Edward. “Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought nor avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much solicitude on her account” (120–21).

Later, Lucy Steele, who has a “want of real elegance,” tells Elinor that she has been engaged to Edward for four years (143). Upon learning this news, “Elinor’s security sunk; but her self-command did not sink with it” (151). In this case, Elinor is showing a great deal of self-command. She is overcome with emotion but undertakes the necessary effort to maintain composure. “[H]er heart sunk within her, and she could hardly stand; but exertion was indispensably necessary, and she struggled so resolutely against the oppression of her feelings, that her success was speedy, and for the time complete” (154). She “maintains a composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion

and distress beyond anything she had ever felt before. She was mortified, shocked, confounded” (155).

Self-command is more than merely a repression of one’s feelings, however, and Elinor’s behavior after Lucy’s revelation shows the richness of this virtue when practiced fully. In the very next scene in the novel, Elinor becomes other directed and begins to show concern for Edward. Although Elinor “might in time regain tranquility,” poor Edward would be stuck married to “illiterate, artful, and selfish” Lucy (160). Elinor tries her best to move on with her life and not wallow in self-pity (unlike her sister, Marianne).

The practice of self-command is not easy and takes “unceasing exertion” (161). Austen is not advising us to ignore our feelings but rather to govern our emotions and try to make the best of any situation. In Elinor, Austen gives us a perfect example to follow: “her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them” (7). By practicing the virtue of self-command, we are better able to face adversity and adjust our lives to whatever new normal awaits.

Vices

By reading Austen, we can see examples of the virtues of prudence, beneficence, justice, and self-command, but we can also learn about vices that sometimes lead us astray. We humans are especially prone to self-deception, and such self-delusion may cause us to become overly vain or proud. Adam Smith explains that although vanity and pride are similar to each other because both stem from “excessive self-estimation,” they are really different vices ([1759] 1982, 225). As Austen scholars such as Kenneth Moler (1967) and Christel Fricke (2014) have pointed out, Austen expresses this Smithian thought through the character of Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. “‘Pride,’ observed Mary, who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections, ‘is a very common failing I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it. . . . Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us’” (Austen [1813] 2006b, 234).

Overly proud people delude themselves into thinking they are better than those around them. Austen describes the moral development of the proud Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Only once they are humbled can they find happiness together. Austen’s vain characters do not achieve such redemption. Sir Walter (*Persuasion*) remains vain to the end; Henry Crawford (*Mansfield Park*) ends up in disgrace; and Lucy Steele (*Sense and Sensibility*) marries the equally vain Robert Ferrars.

Moral Development

How do people in a free society develop the virtues of prudence, beneficence, and justice, all rooted in self-command, and avoid vices? Smith explains that “Man naturally

desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely. . . . He desires, not only praise, but praiseworthiness” ([1759] 1982, 113–14). Because we wish to merit praise and love, we become attuned to whether other people approve of us or not. Others become “the mirror” (Smith [1759] 1982, 110) that guides our behavior as we seek mutual sympathy of sentiments. Otteson (2002) describes this feedback mechanism, as Smith describes it, that helps us develop our own internal judge, the impartial spectator. We see this feedback mechanism and development of impartial spectators in Austen’s work as her characters use feedback from others and from their inner judges to avoid the vices and develop the virtues of prudence, beneficence, justice, and self-command.

Anne of *Persuasion* learns prudence under the guidance of Lady Russell until she is able to judge on her own what is good for herself. The unjust characters Mrs. Norris and Maria in *Mansfield Park* serve as a cautionary tale to the main character, Fanny Price. In contrast, Fanny’s uncle, Sir Thomas, and her cousin Edmond treat her justly and serve as good role models for her. Elinor’s example of self-command in *Sense and Sensibility* helps her sister Marianne overcome her passions and find happiness.

Austen illustrates the feedback mechanism of the impartial spectator most fully in the relationship between Mr. Knightley and Emma (on this point, see also Michie 2000; Knox-Shaw 2004; Bohanon and Vachris 2015, 111–26). Early in the novel Austen tells us that “Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them” ([1816] 1983a, 726). Emma and Mr. Knightley argue when he learns that Emma has convinced her protégé Harriet to turn down a marriage proposal from farmer Robert Martin. Emma concedes that “[w]e think so very differently on this point, Mr. Knightley, that there can be no use in canvassing it. We shall only be making each other more angry” (758). Nonetheless, she “remained in a state of vexation” by their argument because “she had a sort of habitual respect for his judgment in general, which made her dislike having it so loudly against her” (759, 758).

Emma again receives disapprobation from Knightley after she insults poor Miss Bates at a picnic. “I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?—Emma, I had not thought it possible.” “It was badly done, indeed!” (937, 938). After his remonstrance, “[s]he was vexed beyond what could have been expressed—almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck” (938). Emma takes the feedback from Mr. Knightley so seriously that she visits the Bates the next day to try to make amends.

In time, Emma internalizes Mr. Knightley’s guidance, much as Adam Smith describes in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. After trying to befriend Jane Fairfax, to whom she had previously been indifferent, but failing to make a connection, Emma “had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and of being able to say to herself, that could Mr. Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane

Fairfax, could he even have seen into her heart, he would not, on this occasion, have found any thing to reprove” (947).

Emma’s moral journey enables her to see herself as she truly is; she sheds her self-delusion once she realizes her true feelings for Mr. Knightley. According to Peter Knox-Shaw, “It would be difficult to find a better comment on the sort of moral struggle and clarification typified by *Emma* than Smith’s famous dictum: ‘This self-deceit, this fatal weakness of mankind, is the source of half the disorders of human life. If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all, a reformation would generally be unavoidable’” (2004, 70–71).

In line with Enlightenment thought, the development of the virtues of prudence, beneficence, justice, and self-command happens as we learn from the approval and disapproval from others we respect, and over time we internalize this external feedback and become judges of our own behavior. This moral development can happen as a spontaneous order that is not necessarily directed by the state or the church.

Although clergymen abound in Austen’s stories, we generally do not see characters learning moral lessons from the church. Rather, some of the clergy, such as Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr. Elton in *Emma*, are pictured as ridiculous. Despite the lack of explicit involvement of the church in her novels, however, it is well documented that Austen herself was very devout (Watts 1972; Collins 1998; Giffen 2002; White 2011). Indeed, she came from a family of clergymen, including her father (Collins 1998). Her Anglican background therefore permeates her novels and her understanding of human nature (Giffen 2002).

The state, too, is mostly absent in her work, although there are references to the military and to a legal system. Mr. Knightley is described as a local magistrate; several characters throughout Austen’s works are lawyers; and the entail laws vex several households. Nonetheless, in Austen’s world we see that a moral civil society can emerge on its own. Our moral development results from the feedback from others and from the development of our impartial spectator. This feedback loop also generates a set of general rules that govern our behavior (Bohanon and Vachris 2015). Or as Adam Smith writes, “Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided.” And “[t]hose general rules of conduct, when they have been fixed in our mind by habitual reflection, are of great use in correcting the misrepresentations of self-love concerning what is fit and proper to be done in our particular situation” ([1759] 1982, 159, 160).

Changing Economic and Social Institutions

Another classical liberal idea that Jane Austen beautifully depicts is the change in ideas about social rank and the movement toward a culture that recognizes the dignity of each human being (Bohanon and Vachris 2015). Earlier we described the difference of opinion between Emma and Mr. Knightley as to the worthiness of Robert Martin as a

match for Harriet Smith. Harriet's parentage is unknown, but Emma hopes to increase Harriet's social status by matching her up with the local parson, Mr. Elton. Because Mr. Martin is not a gentleman by the standards of the day, Emma sees him as unworthy of Harriet, calling him "a completely gross, vulgar farmer" (Austen [1816] 1983a, 739). Here Emma is still clinging to pre-Enlightenment class rankings, whereas Mr. Knightley shows a more enlightened view, seeing Mr. Martin as "a respectable, intelligent gentleman-farmer" (756).

Emma's bias is illustrated again in her treatment of the Cole family. The Coles are from the merchant class but had recently experienced "greater profits, and fortune in general had smiled on them" so much so that their "style of living [was] second only to" Emma's household (839). As their wealth increased, so did their desire to socially engage with the fine families of Highbury; Emma, however, does not approve of that. "The regular and best families Emma could hardly suppose they [the Coles] would presume to invite" because "it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them" (839). Emma changes her mind about accepting an invitation from the Coles only once she learns that although the other best families have received invitations, she and her father have not.

Through characters like Emma who are overly concerned with rank, Austen cautions us against judging people by social rank and instead encourages us to treat everyone with dignity. Emma realizes she has misjudged the Coles, but other Austen characters are ridiculed for remaining fixated on rank, as does Sir Walter in *Persuasion*, who is shown obsessing over his entry in the book of the baronetage. Other characters are not just ridiculed but also vilified for their views on rank. General Tilney of *Northanger Abbey* (Austen [1818] 2006a) is a horrid man who invites Catherine Morland to his home for an extended stay only because he thinks she is rich. Once he finds himself to be mistaken, he abruptly casts her out. He even denies his daughter approval of her marriage to the man she loves—that is, until the suitor becomes a viscount.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* "likes to have the distinction of rank preserved" so much that she prefers that her guests dress more simply than she does (Austen [1813] 2006b, 182). Michael Giffen explains, though, that even a character as powerful as Lady Catherine cannot stop the union of Elizabeth and Darcy. In this way, *Pride and Prejudice* "focuses on human agency within neoclassicism's enlightened and reasonable belief in social and economic and moral progress" (2002, 92). Elizabeth and Darcy's union exemplifies this shift from a hierarchical society to one based on meritocracy (Giffen 2002, 93).

Conclusion

Reading Jane Austen can give us insights into human nature that remain relevant today. Her characters give us examples of how we can develop virtues and avoid vices. Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* helps us learn about prudence. Mr. Knightley of *Emma* gives us an

exemplar to follow with regard to our beneficence toward others. We see how to treat others justly in how Fanny Price is treated by Sir Thomas and Edmund in *Mansfield Park*. Finally, the importance of self-command is beautifully illustrated by how Elinor Dashwood makes a strong effort to maintain her composure in *Sense and Sensibility*. This moral development happens, as Adam Smith describes, through a feedback mechanism that begins with approval and disapproval from others, as Mr. Knightley gives to Emma. Over time, this feedback leads us to develop our own internal impartial spectator and a set of general rules. In addition to demonstrating her acute understanding of human nature, Austen describes a changing social and economic order in which work and commerce (such as that provided by Mr. Robert Martin and the Coles in *Emma*) is valued. Austen's fiction, then, illustrates the shift from pre-Enlightenment societal structures such as the class system to a society that sees value and dignity in all human beings.

References

- Austen, Jane. [1816] 1983a. *Emma*. In *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, 721–1002. New York: Penguin Books.
- . [1816] 1983b. *Persuasion*. In *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, 1143–290. New York: Penguin Books.
- . [1814] 2005. *Mansfield Park*. Edited by John Wiltshire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . [1818] 2006a. *Northanger Abbey*. Edited by Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . [1813] 2006b. *Pride and Prejudice*. Edited by Pat Hughes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . [1811] 2006c. *Sense and Sensibility*. Edited by Edward Copeland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bohanon, Cecil E., and Michelle Albert Vachris. 2015. *Pride and Profit: The Intersection of Jane Austen and Adam Smith*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Collins, Irene. 1998. *Jane Austen: The Parson's Daughter*. London: Humbleton Continuum.
- Fricke, Christel. 2014. The Challenges of Pride and Prejudice: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education. *Revue internationale de philosophie* 269, no. 3: 343–72.
- Gay, Penny. 2011. *Emma and Persuasion*. In *Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, edited by Edward Copeland and Julie McMaster, 55–71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giffen, Michael. 2002. *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kenney, Theresa. 2016. Benevolence and Sympathy in *Emma*. *Persuasions*, no. 38: 66–80.
- Knox-Shaw, Peter. 2004. *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Michie, Elsie B. 2000. Austen's Powers: Engaging with Adam Smith in Debates about Wealth and Virtue. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34 (Autumn): 5–27.
- Moler, Kenneth L. 1967. The Bennet Girls on *Pride and Vanity*. *Philological Quarterly* 46, no. 4: 567–69.
- Otteson, James. 2002. *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2018. *The Essential Adam Smith*. Toronto: Fraser Institute.
- Smith, Adam. [1759] 1982. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund.
- Watts, Mary. 1972. God and Jane Austen. *New Blackfriars* 53, no. 620: 15–22.
- White, Laura Mooneyham. 2011. *Jane Austen's Anglicanism*. Williston, Vt.: Ashgate.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE A FREE BOOK!



“*The Independent Review* does not accept pronouncements of government officials nor the conventional wisdom at face value.”

—**JOHN R. MACARTHUR**, Publisher, *Harper’s*

“*The Independent Review* is excellent.”

—**GARY BECKER**, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

Subscribe to [The Independent Review](#) and receive a free book of your choice such as *Liberty in Peril: Democracy and Power in American History*, by Randall G. Holcombe.

Thought-provoking and educational, [The Independent Review](#) is blazing the way toward informed debate. This quarterly journal offers leading-edge insights on today’s most critical issues in economics, healthcare, education, the environment, energy, defense, law, history, political science, philosophy, and sociology.

Student? Educator? Journalist? Business or civic leader? Engaged citizen? This journal is for YOU!



Order today for more **FREE** book options

SUBSCRIBE

The Independent Review is now available digitally on mobile devices and tablets via the Apple/Android App Stores and Magzter. Subscriptions and single issues start at \$2.99. [Learn More.](#)

