

The Challenges of Pride and Prejudice: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education

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Introduction

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), Adam Smith describes humans as being by nature social and disposed to become moral agents. In order to achieve this virtuous goal, they have to go through a sympathetic process, an interactive process of moral learning. The aim of this process is to make people aware of the partiality of their spontaneous evaluations and to overcome it. Progress can only be gradual, but the aim is to become an ‘impartial spectator’ or moral judge who can tell proper from improper feelings and actions. In the course of this process, people learn to become conscientious; they become critically aware of themselves as agents who have to respect the feelings of others and to exercise self-command over their passions. These passions typically originate in their excessive self-love; they are among the main sources of moral prejudice and evaluative partiality. Getting involved in such a sympathetic process is a challenge: Those who do not naturally have a virtuous disposition will, in the course of this process, have to face some bitter insights in their own moral failures. Some people succeed and achieve a certain degree of moral virtuosity: They become ‘wise and virtuous’, at least to a certain degree. However, in the real world and within the confines of a real society, there are many sources of distraction that can morally mislead people and stand in the way of properly developing their capacity for moral feeling, understanding and acting.

Jane Austen has long been recognized as a moral thinker. Below the surface of romance and the question ‘Who marries whom?’ which appears to exclusively determine the plots of her novels, the attentive reader discovers a sociologically, psychologically and also philosophically informed sub-text which provides a subtle study of human nature and conduct, of archetypical characters, their follies, weaknesses, but also their moral concerns and virtues.¹ As far as the topic of moral education and moral learning is concerned, *Pride and Prejudice* (PaP) deserves the pride of place.² In the course of this novel, the main characters, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, do not only learn to love each other and

¹ Literary critics and philosophers have related the moral views implicit in Jane Austen’s novels to the moral theories of many philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, and Hume. Richard Simpson attributed to Jane Austen a commitment to ‘the Platonic idea that the giving and receiving of knowledge ... is the truest and strongest foundation of love’ (Simpson 1968: 244; quoted after McMaster 1975: 68). David Gallop claims that Jane Austen’s fiction is informed by Aristotelian ethics (see Gallop 1999). Avron Fleishman has suggested a link between Jane Austen and Thomas Hobbes (see Fleishman 1967; quoted by Ruderman 1995: 2). Gilbert Ryle, in a well-known paper, not only characterizes Jane Austen’s moral views as Aristotelian in spirit; he also claims that her ‘moral Weltanschauung was akin to that of Lord Shaftesbury’, and that she derived her ‘specific moral ideas ... , directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly’ from him (see Ryle 1966/1975: 287). According D. D. Devlin, Jane Austen’s moral views are inspired by Hutcheson and Hume (see Devlin 1975:68-75). E. M. Dadlez has dedicated a whole monography to a Humean reading of Jane Austen’s novels, rejecting explicitly the plausibility of a Kantian reading (see Dadlez 2009, for the arguments against a Kantian reading see especially chapter 3). Knox-Shaw has provided the most extensive study of Jane Austen’s moral sources (see also Knox-Shaw 2004a). On the specific topic of Smithian sources of Jane Austen’s moral thought see below, fn. 4.

² Jane Austen wrote a first version of this novel, entitled ‘First Impressions’, between October 1796 and August 1897; she then revised the text and renamed it *Pride and Prejudice*. On the history of the composition of *Pride and Prejudice* see Halperin1984: 57 and 65-78 and Meyer Spacks 2010: 4. *Pride and Prejudice* was first published in 1813.

finally become a couple; they also undergo a process of interactive and, in particular, mutual moral education. As I shall argue in this essay, this process takes the shape of a sympathetic process as Adam Smith has analysed it in his TMS. Its central mechanisms include disagreements and mutual disapproval induced by the respective parties' partiality, people's learning to take another person's point of view into account, and their increasing critical self-awareness, moral conscience and impartiality as a means for becoming wise and virtuous. My first claim is that this process of interactive moral education is the main topic of the novel's sub-text. The love that brings the main characters together as a couple is informed by mutual moral respect and the virtue of an impartial spectator, rather than by erotic attraction exclusively.³

That the sub-text of PaP is informed by Smith's moral theory is no coincidence. Indeed, the young Jane Austen was acquainted with Smith's TMS. This has been pointed out before.⁴ But in this essay I am arguing for something more specific: Not only does Jane Austen, in her PaP, provide a detailed example of a Smithian sympathetic process and its various mechanisms; she also, and this is my second claim, used Smith's accounts of prudence, excessive self-estimation, pride, and vanity in TMS VI.iii. as a source of inspiration for creating most of the characters of PaP.⁵

In the following, I shall first provide textual evidence for my second claim. I shall then describe the main mechanisms of the sympathetic process of moral education as conceived by Smith, mechanisms that inform the plot of PaP. Finally, I shall provide, against this Smithian

³ Valihora uses the notion of 'moral romance' for describing Jane Austen's understanding of love and its moral conditions; these have to be satisfied if the relationship between husband and wife is to be happy and stable (see Valihora 2010: 51).

⁴ Kenneth L. Moler, in a very short paper from 1967, has provided evidence for Jane Austen's having been familiar with Adam Smith's TMS. (For more details, see below, p. 6-7.) But it seems that this paper is still widely neglected. Among the more recent critics, Peter Knox-Shaw is, as far as I have seen, the only one who is aware of Moler's discovery (see Knox-Shaw 2004: 7, fn. 17). Otherwise, it is still a widely held view that it is impossible to trace the *exact* sources of Jane Austen's moral inspiration (see for exp. Ruderman 1995: 17, fn 29, Gallop 1999: 106 and Meyer Spacks 2010). Neither Elsie B. Michie (Michie 2000), nor Sarah Emsley (Emsley 2005) nor Karen Valihora (Valihora 2010) mention Moler's discovery. For Michie this is particularly surprising since she is aware of the closeness of many of Jane Austen's views (not only in PaP, but also in her other novels, such as *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park*) to Smithian doctrines; according to her, 'it seems impossible to ascertain whether Austen read Smith', but she points out that '*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was a work that might have come her way since readers at the time found it appropriate both as religious reading and as reading for women' (Michie 2000: 5, fn. 1). Emsley does not even mention Adam Smith as one of the sources of inspiration for Jane Austen. Knox-Shaw claims that Jane Austen has been acquainted with Smith's writings through Thomas Percival's *A Father's Instructions: Tales, Fables and Reflections* (1776). But even though there is explicit reference to Adam Smith's WN in this work, it does not contain any direct quotations from the TMS (see Knox-Shaw 2004: 17/8). In his review of Knox-Shaw's 2004 monograph in the *TLS* of March 4, 2005, Michael Caines claims that Jane Austen may have read the TMS as a teenager, and in his response to Caines in the *TLS* of March 18, 2005, Knox-Shaw agrees with his reviewer (see also Dadlez 2009: 80). Dadlez's Humean reading of Jane Austen is based on a reading of Hume as a virtue ethicist – and on the highly controversial claim that Hume's and Smith's views especially on sympathy were 'strikingly similar'; she quotes as one of her sources of evidence a paper by Glenn R. Morrow from 1923 (see Dadlez 2009: 79); for defenses of the opposite view see for example Darwall 2005 and Fleischacker 2012. As far as Jane Austen's particular account of 'shared emotions' is concerned, Dadlez's says the following: 'The claim here is not that Austen's account of sympathy is *more* compatible with that of Hume than that of Smith or Shaftesbury or Hutcheson, though I am inclined to think it at the very least *as* compatible.' (Dadlez 2009: 81) Before Dadlez, not only Michie but also Karen Valihora had already argued for there being Smithian ideas in Austen's novels; Valihora, however, does not identify any exact sources (see Valihora 2007 and 2010, especially pp. 1-59 and 135-158).

⁵ Since book VI. of the TMS was an addition of the 6th edition published in 1790, Jane Austen must have been acquainted with this particular edition. The memory of her reading of the TMS may have been fresh when she started composing what later became *Pride and Prejudice* (see also footnote 2).

background, a reading of the process of moral education as it takes place among the central characters of PaP.

But before I proceed, I would like to try and prevent a misunderstanding of the claims I am making in this essay: The characters of PaP are members of the society to which Jane Austen herself belonged: the lower gentry of English late 18th and early 19th century. By identifying Smithian sources for some of these characters and a Smithian process of moral education as the main topic of the novel's sub-text, I do not mean to trivialize Smith's moral theory. In particular, I do not mean to imply that, in his TMS, Smith was merely describing the polite manners of a certain class of the English society of his and Jane Austen's time. Nor do I want to argue that, according to Smith, morality is a mere matter of romance, or that it can flourish only within the confines of traditional role models for men and women as husbands and wives. Romance, the prospect of marriage, or traditionally understood role models for men and women are by no means conditions for people's entering into a sympathetic process. It is quite the opposite: According to Smith, lovers are not the people most likely to enter into such a process since they are mainly enjoying each other's company and therefore less concerned about whether or not an impartial spectator would approve of their behaviour.⁶ Smith's topic is human nature and in particular human moral nature. He spoke to Jane Austen as much as he speaks to us today. His moral theory, psychologically and sociologically informed as it was, was and still is convincing. Jane Austen reveals her genius by making Smith's theory of interactive moral education the topic of the sub-text of a romantic novel. Whereas the romance attracts readers who are looking for entertainment and nourishment for romantic imagination, she provides them with role models the following of which might contribute to their moral education. And it may well be the case that Adam Smith and Jane Austen shared the concern for helping their readers to become morally better people.

I. Smithian Sources of Some of the Characters of *Pride and Prejudice*

Book VI. of the TMS is dedicated to the study of 'the character of virtue' (TMS, 212).⁷ Smith follows the example of Aristotle and asks, on behalf of various virtues (like prudence in section VI.i and beneficence in section VI.ii) what shape any excess or defect of the respective character trait might take. The main topic of section VI.iii is 'self command' (TMS, 237). Here, Smith distinguishes between two different kinds of passions over which the virtuous person should exercise self-command: '... those which it requires a considerable exertion of self-command to restrain even for a single moment, or even for a short period of time' (TMS VI.iii.2, 237), namely fear and anger, and '... those which it is easy to restrain for a single moment, or even for a short period of time; but which, by their continual and almost incessant solicitations, are, in the course of life, very apt to mislead into great deviations' (TMS VI.iii.2, 237), namely 'the love of ease, of pleasure, of applause, and of many other selfish gratifications' (TMS VI.iii.3, 238). As I shall argue in the following, Smith's study of the latter passions attracted Jane Austen's particular interest.

In PaP, the Bennet-family is in focus, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters – in the beginning of the novel all unmarried. Whereas Mr. Bennet is a gentleman,

⁶ See on the topic of lovers TMS I.ii.2.1, 31.

⁷ Ernst Tugendhat and Ryan Hanley have proposed readings of Smith's TMS as a theory of virtue (see Tugendhat 1993/2004 and Hanley 2009). Hanley's account of wisdom and virtue in the TMS is, however, controversial; he ascribes to the wise and virtuous the aspiration to a transcendent good (see Hanley 2009:141-145). For a rejection of this reading of Smith's account of virtue see Fricke (forthcoming in 2013).

his wife belongs to the upcoming bourgeoisie, both her bother and her sister's husband have to work for earning their living. Since Mr. Bennet has no sons, his estate will, after his death, be entailed to a cousin, the clergyman Mr. Collins. Due to these circumstances and the law of primogeniture which favours male over female heirs, the economic prospects of the Bennet family are far from secure.⁸ None of the daughters is a good match. Mr. Bennet is depicted as a witty, if not sarcastic man who is amused by the spectacle of human folly and refuses to take any major responsibility, just to preserve his own comfort and tranquillity of mind. Even though a spectator, he is not an 'impartial spectator' in Smith's specific sense of the term: Smith would object to his not being available for engaging in any sympathetic processes. Mr. Bennet reveals his character when asking this rhetorical question: 'For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?' (PaP 278). Mrs. Bennet is a silly person who has a problem of understanding even the mere social rules of respectability. Still, she sees the need of finding husbands for her five daughters, and this is her main concern. But she does not realize how very counterproductive her own bad manners as well as her ample patience for her youngest daughter's flirtatious behaviour are for actually achieving this goal.

Lydia and Mary, two of the Bennet daughters, embody two kinds of character which Smith describes as either excessively or defectively sensitive to pleasure. Indeed, Lydia's main fault is 'not so much the strength of the propensity to joy, as the weakness of the sense of propriety and duty'; and her sister Mary is 'disliked as formal and pedantic' since she 'talks of nothing but ... [her] book' and 'we give ... [her] no credit for ... [her] abstinence even from improper indulgences, to which ... [she] seems to have so little inclination' (TMS VI.iii.21, 246). As for an example, Mary, in response to Lydia's 'enumeration of the various pleasures of the morning', 'in a voice rather louder than any other person's', says the following: 'Far be it from me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures. They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they would have no charms for me. I should infinitely prefer a book.' (PaP 169-170) The third of the younger Bennet daughters, Catherine, is a minor figure in the novel; about her and Lydia, their father once observes that they are 'two of the silliest girls in the country' (PaP 21). Catherine exemplifies what Smith says about 'mere imprudence' (TMS VI.i.16, 216), she is subject to 'the contagious effect of both good and bad company' (TMS VI.ii.17, 224) – even though, in the plot of the novel, rather in the opposite order. Wherever the two eldest daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, have acquired their reasonableness and decent understanding, it cannot have been within the small circle of their own family. Since none of the Bennet daughters has been educated at school and since they did not have a governess, it can only be the natural disposition of the two eldest and their interaction that provided the source of their decent understanding. As far as the extended Bennet family is concerned, the mother's sister is as silly as the mother herself. The mother's brother, however, who is a tradesman and lives in London, and his wife exemplify what Smith says about the 'prudent man'.⁹

The eldest sister, Jane, incorporates a high degree of virtue, paying 'keen and earnest attention to the propriety of ... [her] conduct'. When exposed to the sudden departure of a young man, Mr. Bingley, who had paid attention to her and whom she liked a great deal, she is indeed capable of feeling 'the full distress of the calamity which has befallen ... [her]'; but she feels even 'more strongly what the dignity of ... [her] own character requires'; she 'does not

⁸ Smith has critically commented on the law of primogeniture according to which property is entailed only to male heirs and which so seriously affects the Bennet family as well as other heroines of Jane Austen's novels. See LJ, 49-50.

⁹ See TMS VI.i.7-13, 214-216.

abandon ...[her]self to the guidance of the undisciplined passions which ... [her] situation might naturally inspire'; rather, she 'governs ... [her] whole behaviour and conduct according to those restrained and corrected emotions which the great inmate, the great demi-god within the breast prescribes and approves of' (TMS VI.iii.18, 245). Thus, in response to the letter that communicated to her Mr. Bingley's sudden departure and to her mother's lamentations on this behalf, she says to her sister Elizabeth: 'Oh! That my dear mother had more command over herself; she can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him. But I will not repine. It cannot last long. He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before.' (PaP 104) Jane's natural disposition to virtuous behaviour makes her very attentive to the feelings of others – and sceptical towards her own merit of happiness. In her moment of greatest happiness, at the very moment of her engagement with Mr. Bingley, she wonders whether she really deserves so much happiness and then anticipates the 'pleasure [her engagement will give] to all ... [her] dear family' (PaP 264), implying that the prospect of sharing her happiness with others will add to it and secure it. Due to her naturally virtuous disposition, she does not have to live through any bitter moments of moral self-disapproval. But, clearly, a world full of such virtuous or, as Elizabeth puts it, 'angelic' (PaP 104) characters does not provide the drama Jane Austen needs for an exciting plot.

Elizabeth is the most important character in the novel; Jane Austen often chooses to tell the events from her point of view, thus inviting her readers to share it and to get themselves involved in the drama – as well as in the unfolding process of moral education. As far as I can see, she does not incorporate any of the archetypical characters described by Adam Smith. Elizabeth is by no means silly; rather than with a naturally virtuous disposition, she is provided with a great deal of wit. She has 'more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister [Jane], and ... a judgment too unassailed by any attention to herself' (PaP, 10). This lack of critical self-awareness does not facilitate her becoming morally virtuous, since – with her quickness of mind – she does not hesitate to form opinions about other people which are based on appearances rather than on factual knowledge and proper understanding. Bitter lessons are awaiting her in the novel. She has to learn that wit alone does not qualify for the approval of an impartial spectator, or for taking the role of an impartial spectator herself. In the beginning, her sympathy is reserved to those dear and near to her. As far as other people, and in particular Mr. Darcy are concerned, she misjudges their states of mind more than once and lets herself be entirely misled by the lies about the latter from the side of the apparently charming Mr. Wickham.

Mr. Darcy – Elizabeth's male counterpart in the novel – is a man of great fortune, a descendant from a 'respectable, honourable, and ancient, though untitled' family (PaP 272). His first appearance in the novel is at a ball, and the first impression he makes on the assembly is that of a 'fine, tall person, [with] handsome features, noble mine' and a 'large fortune' (PaP 6). No wonder that 'he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased' (PaP 6). Indeed, 'admiration' is, according to Smith, an attitude that people of common rank in society have to those 'rich and powerful'.¹⁰

At the occasion of this first ball, Jane Austen introduces the main topics of her novel: prejudice as based on 'first impressions' and 'pride' as a trait of a non-virtuous character.¹¹

¹⁰ See TMS I.i.2.8 (319), I.iii.1.13 (48), I.iii.2.3 (52), I.iii.3.1 (61-2) and IV.1.8 (182).

¹¹ Remember that 'First Impressions' was the title of the manuscript which later turned into the novel 'Pride and Prejudice'.

During the first encounter of the main characters at this ball, Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with any woman not in his own company; he is unwilling to get acquainted with people whose social and economic status does not equal his own. When his friend Mr. Bingley draws his attention to Elizabeth, his response is as follows: ‘She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men’ (PaP, 7-8). What adds to the rudeness of this reply is that he does not even take any precautions for preventing his being overheard by Elizabeth. Elizabeth, naturally enough, is aware of the insult. Mr. Darcy inspires in her not ‘very cordial feelings towards him’ (PaP, 8). But she does not let him humiliate her; rather, she ‘[tells] the story, ... , with great spirit among her friends’, an expression of her ‘lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous’ (PaP 8). At the same time, she is more than ready to sympathetically share her elder sister Jane’s pleasure about the attention she enjoys from the side of Mr. Bingley at this first ball.

After the ball, the members of the Bennet family and some friends from the Lucas family living in the same neighbourhood share their impressions. Elizabeth finds her opinion of Mr. Darcy as a man full of pride and conceit confirmed. ‘Pride’ is the particular topic of the following discussion which again reveals Smith’s TMS as a direct source of Jane Austen’s inspiration: Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte Lucas tries to find an excuse for Fitzwilliam Darcy’s pride saying: ‘One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself ... he has a right to be proud’, revealing her understanding of social rules and social practices as well as her sensitivity to the importance of social rank, fortune, beauty, and youth – finding herself without any of these socially advantageous properties (PaP, 13). The following passage from the TMS may be read as a description of Charlotte Lucas’ character: ‘Our admiration of success is founded upon the same principle with our respect for wealth and greatness, and is equally necessary for establishing the distinction of ranks and the order of society. By this admiration of success we are taught to submit more easily to those superiors, whom the course of human affairs may assign to us’ (TMS VI.iii.30, 253) Charlotte is the one who submits to those superior to her in socio-economic standing without rebellion.

But such submission is not for Elizabeth. To Charlotte’s defence of Mr. Darcy’s pride she responds: ‘That is very true ... and I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*.’ (PaP 13) Elizabeth requests to be respected even from someone as superior to her in socio-economic standing as Mr. Darcy. Next, Mary Bennet comes in with a general reflection about pride: ‘Pride ... 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, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. 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.’ (PaP 13-14) As Kenneth Moler has already pointed out, this discourse of Mary’s can be traced back to two particular passages in the TMS (TMS VI.iii.42, 257-8 and VI.iii.47, 259).¹² But Jane Austen has used the TMS more extensively as a source of inspiration. As Moler has equally pointed out, there is another passage in this work which must have been among the direct sources of this discussion of pride, a passage which is part of Smith’s analysis of the defects

¹² See Kenneth L. Moler 1967. Ruderman quotes this passage from PaP and comments on it without mentioning its originating in Smith’s TMS (see Ruderman 1995: 10) and so do Benditt (see Benditt 2003: 251) and Dadlez (see Dadlez 2009: 169). The same applies to the annotated edition of PaP edited by Meyer Spacks (see Meyer Spacks 2010: 53).

and excesses of self-estimation: ‘And in our companions, no doubt, we much more frequently complain of the latter [the excess of self-estimation] than of the former [the defect of self-estimation]. When they assume upon us, or set themselves before us, their self-estimation mortifies our own. Our own pride and vanity prompt us to accuse them of pride and vanity, and we cease to be impartial spectators of their conduct.’ (TMS VI.iii.22., p. 246) This is exactly what happens to Elizabeth: She is aware of the mortification and forms an opinion of the offender, namely Mr. Darcy, which reflects her own partiality – rather than the impartial point of view of an unconcerned spectator who recognizes the equal dignity of all people. Jane Austen here reveals the dialectics of pride and prejudice respectively: Mr. Darcy is proud; he considers himself as far superior to almost everyone else and to Elizabeth in particular. This attitude reflects his conceit and partiality. Her pride is mortified because she conceives of herself as a young and attractive woman who deserves to be treated with politeness and respect. The mortification induces her partial judgment about her offender. Thus, there is prejudice which manifests itself in the pride of one person who then hurts the pride of another person and induces prejudice in the latter. If there was no essential interest in and need for moral propriety and social harmony in human nature, people would just go round in circles of pride and prejudice.

Mr. Darcy bears all the character traits Smith attributes to the man of excessive self-estimation: In his intercourse with people who are inferior to him in socio-economic terms, he is ‘sensible of his own superiority’ (TMSVI.iii.25, 248); but he understands this superiority not only as socio-economic, but also as moral. Unlike the ‘wise and virtuous’, he ‘look[s] down with insolence ... upon those who are really below him’. Accordingly, he has ‘little’, if any, ‘sense of ... [his] own [moral] weaknesses and imperfections’ and equally little ‘modesty’: he is ‘often assuming, arrogant, and presumptuous’, a ‘great admirer[...] of ... [him]self’, and an equally ‘great contemner[...] of other people’. (TMS VI.iii.27, 249)

How do we think of such people when we observe them from a third-person point of view, without ourselves interacting with them? Smith’s answer to this question seems to have inspired Jane Austen for creating the plot of PaP: ‘When the same companions [those who suffer from excessive self-estimation] ... suffer any other man to assume over them a superiority which does not belong to him, we not only blame them, but often despise them as mean spirited. When, on the contrary, among other people, they push themselves a little more forward, and scramble to an elevation disproportioned, as we think, to their merit, though we may not perfectly approve of their conduct, we are often, upon the whole, diverted with it ...’. The one who assumes over Mr. Darcy a superiority which does not belong to him is Mr. Wickham. That he is indeed wicked and tells lies about both himself and Mr. Darcy and their previous encounter is at first not evident to Elizabeth; in her state of mortified pride, she is the more willing to believe any further story that confirms her negative opinion of Mr. Darcy and to ‘despise him as mean spirited’. And when Jane Austen describes the way Mr. Collins impudently imposes himself on Mr. Darcy at a ball (without having been introduced to him, that is against all the rules of politeness), her readers are mainly ‘diverted’ by the sight of this character who is indeed described as exceptionally silly, socially blind (see PaP 74-75), or, in Smithian terms, as one of ‘the most ignorant quacks and imposters’ (TMS VI.iii.27, 249). Whereas Mr. Collins is the ‘religious’ quack and imposter in PaP, Mr. Wickham is his non-religious counterpart.¹³ Both characters ‘demonstrate how easily the multitude are imposed upon by the most extravagant and groundless pretensions’ (TMS VI.iii.27, 249).

¹³ Smith distinguishes between ‘religeous’ and ‘civil’ quacks and imposters (TMS VI.iii.27, 249). But ‘civil’ does not apply to Mr. Wickham since he is a member of the military.

Whereas Mr. Darcy's excessive self-estimation takes the shape of pride, that of Mr. Collins takes the shape of vanity. Mary quotes the Smithian distinction between vanity and pride, but since her understanding of philosophical matters is limited, one should rather listen to Smith directly: 'The proud man is sincere, and ... convinced of his own superiority; ... he wishes you to view him in no other light than that in which, when he places himself in your situation, he really views himself. He demands of you no more than, what he thinks, justice. If you appear not to respect him as he respects himself, he is more offended than mortified, He does not even then, ..., deign to explain the grounds of his own pretensions. He disdains to court your esteem. He affects even to despise it, and endeavours to maintain his assumed station, not so much by making you sensible of his superiority, as of your own meanness. He seems to wish, not so much to excite your esteem for *himself*, as to mortify that of yourself.' (TMS VI.iii.35, 255). Even more than to Mr. Darcy, who will, in the course of the novel, go through a sympathetic process of interactive moral learning and leave his improper pride behind, all this applies without any restriction to his aunt, Lady Catherine deBourgh. Her pride – and Mr. Collins's silliness – become apparent (even though only to Elizabeth and the reader – whom Jane Austen encourages again to share Elizabeth's point of view, not to Mr. Collins himself), in the following advice that Mr. Collins gives to Elizabeth before her first encounter with Lady Catherine deBourgh: 'Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us, which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest, there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved.' (PaP, 123-124)

Smith's account of vanity is embodied by Mr. Collins: 'The vain man is not sincere, and, in the bottom of his heart, is very seldom convinced of that superiority which he wishes you to ascribe to him. He wishes you to view him in much more splendid colours than those in which, when he places himself in your situation, and supposes you to know all that he knows, he can really view himself. ... Far from despising your esteem, he courts it ... He flatters in order to be flattered. He studies to please, and endeavours to bribe you into a good opinion of him by politeness and complaisance' (TMS VI.iii.36, 255-256). Indeed, when Mr. Bennet openly attributes to Mr. Collins 'the talent of flattering with delicacy', asking 'whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study', Mr. Collins responds in the following terms: 'They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible.' (PaP 51)

Whereas Smith often illustrates his studies of characters by referring to well-known male figures from Greek and Roman history, Jane Austen finds her own social environment populated by characters to whom the Smithian descriptions apply, both male and female. Neither Smith nor Jane Austen talks merely about manners; they share a deep interest in social archetypes.

II. Smith's account of the 'sympathetic process'

Smith begins the TMS with a claim about human nature: All people are by nature provided with self-directed selfishness or self-love on the one hand and with other-directed sympathy on the other – at least all those who are born mentally and emotionally healthy (as one might wish to add). Self-love and sympathy are dispositions to respond to actual circumstances with certain positive or negative feelings and the corresponding motivational drives. Because of her natural self-love a person is interested in her survival, physical well being and social happiness and will take care of herself accordingly. Because of her natural sympathy a person can share other people's feelings, and she will do so if she considers these feelings as a proper response to the given circumstances. Furthermore, she will herself desire others to share her own feelings and consider them as proper. People who share each others' feelings and consider them as proper enjoy mutual sympathy. Mutual sympathy is something like the emotional dimension of social harmony insofar as it is based on mutual respect, shared values and a shared understanding of what is morally proper. Social harmony based on mutual sympathy is the characteristic feature of a society of virtuous people, of people who are moral persons.

However, feeling and acting as a moral person is an achievement for a human being rather than a natural gift. Any healthy human being can become a moral person and live in social harmony with others. But in order to reach such a state, she has to go through a sympathetic process of moral learning. It is a process of interaction between peers rather than a process guided by authorities or institutions.

The people involved in a sympathetic process are motivated by their respective self-love and sympathy. People participate in such processes in the role either of a spectator or of a person concerned. The former is the judge of the latter. The distribution of roles is a natural one: Only those people can take the role of spectators who witness the performance of the agent concerned but are at the same time not themselves involved; their personal interests should not be at stake. This natural impartiality is, however, compatible with the spectator's having endorsed the specific social rules dominant in the society or class to which she belongs. Therefore, for achieving a point of view of more than natural impartiality, for being not only without personal prejudices arising from self-love, but also from cultural prejudices arising from processes of socialization and acculturation, the spectator has himself to try and improve her moral understanding.

The spectator, according to Smith, does not look at the agent whose performance she is judging from a third-person point of view. Her attitude is essentially second-personal, she addresses the agent as a 'you' and interacts with him.¹⁴ The impartial spectator 'does not naturally look upon the misfortune that has befallen ... [the affected person], or the injury that has been done ... [to this person], from the same point of view in which ... [this person] considers them.' (TMS I.i.4.5, 20f.) This difference in point of view induces a difference in feeling, and this difference stands in the way of 'harmony and correspondence' of feelings between the person principally affected and the spectator. People who feel differently about given circumstances and therefore do not agree in their evaluative judgments might become 'intolerable to one another' (TMS I.i.4.5., p. 21). However, as they are both provided with

¹⁴ This account of the point of view of the Smithian impartial spectator is not uncontroversial. For an analysis of the Smithian spectator's standpoint as second-personal see Darwall 2006: 82-86 and Carrasco 2011. For an alternative analysis of this standpoint as third-personal see for example Brown 1994:20.

sympathy and with the desire of mutual sympathy in particular, they both want to overcome this state of disharmony and mutual intolerance.

How does the spectator proceed for making her judgment? The answer to this question brings forward some of the most characteristic features of Smith's moral theory: his understanding of human morality as essentially interactive, his bottom-up approach to moral judgment, and his justification of this judgment in terms of the particular procedure through which it was achieved. Rather than relying on general moral rules or principles, the spectator puts herself into the shoes of the agent concerned and tries to imagine how she would respond to the given circumstances if she was herself concerned by them and if she was like the agent, that is, if she had the same overall disposition and interests as the agent and found them affected by these circumstances. She then compares her imagined response of the agent to the response this agent actually has (explicit through facial expression, body language, and linguistic communication). If the spectator finds her imagined response as the same in kind as the response observed in the agent, she will feel sympathy with the agent and approve of his emotional and behavioural response to the circumstances. Otherwise, she will feel antipathy and disapprove of the agent. In the latter case, the agent will try and moderate his feelings, he will try to exercise self-command and impose on herself a less passionate response to the circumstances which concern his interests with the aim of gaining the approval of the spectator after all.

Smith distinguishes between two stages of moral education: within families (where educators interact with children) and outside families (where people interact as peers). It is the latter stage that is of particular importance for my reading of Jane Austen's *PaP*. Outside the circles of their families, people meet and interact without a clear distribution of roles as either educators or children. Whereas their need of mutual sympathy remains the same as within the family circles, the question of how to achieve it is open: There are no educators who impose the social rules of behaviour they have endorsed on those who are the object of their attention. According to Smith, among peers, an agent concerned can face a dilemma: He may find herself judged by several spectators who do not agree among themselves.¹⁵ Why can this occur? Because a spectator's natural impartiality is compatible with the spectator's judgment being informed by social and cultural prejudices acquired in the process of her own socialization. Different spectators, even though equally unconcerned and therefore naturally impartial, can still differ with respect to the social rules they have been taught to follow. These rules will have an impact on their moral judgments. In response to such divergence of spectatorial judgments and the resulting dilemma, the agent internalizes the role of the impartial spectator, he looks at himself as the agent concerned from the point of view of someone whose interests are not concerned by the circumstances and tries to make a moral judgment of his own behaviour. By internalizing the role of the impartial spectator, he acquires conscience. A conscientious person does not depend for the moral evaluation of her behaviour on an external judge, she can rely on the internal judge, the 'judge within'.¹⁶ Of course, the internal spectator is in her judgment of the propriety of an agent's response to certain circumstances as much influenced by the social rules she has been taught to respect as any external spectator would be. Therefore, no internal spectator can request more authority for her moral judgment than any external spectator.

Smith's point in introducing conscience as the capacity of moral self-judgment is therefore not to provide an ultimate authority for moral judgments about feelings or behaviour of agents

¹⁵ See TMS III.2.31, 129.

¹⁶ TMS III.3.1, 134.

concerned.¹⁷ Rather, the acquisition of conscience marks the transition from an agent's concern for social conformity to an agent's concern for what is morally right. But what enables a conscientious person to understand what is morally right? For this purpose, she has to engage further in sympathetic processes with external spectators who share her desire of achieving proper moral understanding.

Basically, in a process of interaction between an agent concerned and his spectator, two scenarios are possible: Either the spectator approves of the agent's emotional and behavioural response to the respective circumstances and sympathizes with him, or she does not. It is the latter kind of case that sets a further sympathetic process between the agent and his spectator in motion: Since both share the interest in mutual sympathy, they are not disposed to leave matters between them in a state of antipathy. Rather, they try to achieve a state of mutual sympathy. But the spectator cannot simply expect the agent concerned to exercise self-command and moderate his feelings. The spectator cannot alone set the standards of proper behaviour. Therefore, in cases of antipathy between peers, both the agent and the spectator have to engage in practical reasoning in order to find out whether they have committed any errors in their communication so far: As before, the agent has to check whether he has made enough of an effort to moderate his feelings; and the spectator has to check whether she was attentive enough to the factual details of the given circumstances and to the particular dispositions and interests of the agent concerned. For this purpose, they will switch roles: The agent will take the position of the spectator and look at himself from his spectator's point of view, he will become his own spectator. This brings him into the position of the spectator of his spectator: Does his spectatorial judgment of himself as the agent concerned coincide with that of his external spectator?¹⁸

According to Smith, the sympathetic process between an agent and his peer-spectator enables both of them to become virtuous, and he distinguishes between spectator-virtues and agent-virtues:

Upon these two different efforts, upon that of the spectator to enter into the sentiments of the person principally concerned, and upon that of the person principally concerned, to bring down his emotions to what the spectator can go along with, are founded two different sets of virtues. The soft, the gentle, the amiable virtues, the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent humanity, are founded upon the one: the great, the awful and respectable, the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct require, take their origin from the other. (TMS I.i.5.1. 23)

What is crucial for both the agent concerned and her spectator for their joint purpose of identifying and eliminating errors in their communication which may have stood in the way of their reaching a state of mutual harmony and a moral judgment on which they can agree is that they recognize each other as equals: They have to realize that they are just 'one of the multitude'¹⁹, that they have equal rights to be respected by the other as an equal and equal duties to respect the other as an equal. For recognizing the right and duty of equal respect, they have to leave behind their self-conception as members of certain limited social groups

¹⁷ Here, I disagree with the reading of Smith's understanding of the role of conscience in moral judgments as provided by several other scholars. For a more detailed argument see Fricke (forthcoming in 2013).

¹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of Smith's account of conscience see Fricke (forthcoming).

¹⁹ TMS III.3.4, 137.

and all the social prejudices about who owes what to whom they have acquired during their previous education. Rather, they have to address each other as human beings who have the same intrinsic moral value or moral status. It is conscience that enables them to do so.

Only people who respect each other as equals can provide each other with the ‘mirrors’ which allow them to understand the impression they make on others. Smith’s metaphor of the mirror which other people provide for us and in which we see ourselves as the others see us emphasizes the need of taking other people’s perspectives as a step on the way of becoming critically aware of oneself. The faculty of critical self-awareness or moral conscience is conditional for taking the role of an impartial spectator or moral judge, of understanding what moral propriety consists in.²⁰

The agent and the spectator, engaged in a sympathetic process, have to extend their respect to other people who might, be it directly or indirectly, be concerned by the respective circumstances. The conscientious spectator, in order to be not only naturally impartial, but as impartial as possible, will try and look at the agent and the circumstances from many different people’s points of view. Her only chance of overcoming any lack of factual information or social prejudice that may have blurred her moral judgment of the agent is by taking the points of view of many different people and then trying to understand whether the agent’s response to the circumstances could be seen as proper from everybody’s point of view – or whether there were aspects of it which showed it under a morally unfavourable light.

Underlying the interaction of agents and spectators in sympathetic processes is the idea that both our passions as triggered by our self-love and our social and cultural prejudices as acquired in the process of socialization within narrow family circles blur our moral understanding and that only a properly impartial spectator has access to what is morally proper and what is not. What appears to be morally right and wrong is not always what is indeed properly right and wrong. Appearances are shaped by both passions and social prejudices; the former have to be controlled and the latter to be overcome for getting a clear view of what really is morally proper and improper. And the only way to achieve such a clear view is by engaging in sympathetic processes and by taking many different perspectives into account.²¹

Smith is perfectly aware of the fact that the sympathetic process as I have sketched it so far is, between real people and under real life conditions, hardly ever taking place like this. This is because real people in real societies do not easily leave behind all the prejudices they have acquired in the process of their social education and acculturation. After all, these prejudices represent an essential part of the conception of themselves as members of a particular society as they have acquired it in the process of their socialization. Furthermore, real people tend to admire the wealthy and socially powerful.²² If people belonging to different socio-economic classes of society meet at all, they tend to respond to each other in accordance with their social roles and status – as more or less superior or inferior to the respective other. For the purpose of acquiring virtue, of becoming moral agents, they have to exercise the ‘care and

²⁰ See the passage at TMS III.I.3., 110.

²¹ The topic of perspective taking and the distinction between appearance and reality is central in Jane Austen’s novels and in PaP in particular. After Mr. Wickham’s real nature has been revealed to her, Elizabeth says to Jane, speaking about both Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy: ‘There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it.’ (PaP 172) See on this topic also the excellent study of Valihora (Valihora 2010).

²² See TMS I.iii.2, 50-58.

dare' of morality: Those socially superior have to care about those socially inferior and respect them as equals; and the latter have to dare to request from the former the respect as equals which is morally due to them.²³ And people's natural disposition to deceive themselves and to think better of their performance than it really is is not a minor problem to be overcome in the process of moral education and self-education.²⁴

Given the challenges of proper moral interaction and communication in a sympathetic process, Smith admits that the 'wise and virtuous', those who have achieved a high level of moral virtuosity, will be more often engaged in such processes than ordinary people. For ordinary people it is enough to respect the rules of their respective societies – in so far as they can be justified as rules on which people have agreed after having been involved in sympathetic processes with peers. But it is important to keep in mind that the 'wise and virtuous' do not represent a social institution. In principle, everybody can become virtuous, and everybody should make an effort to do so. Virtue is a matter of moral education and endless training. Only few succeed, and even those few are under constant danger of moral failure due of an excess of moral self-estimation.

III. *Pride and Prejudice*: An inquiry into moral appearances and the acquisition of proper moral understanding through sympathetic processes

According to Smith, moral education is a matter of engaging in sympathetic processes with peers. Scholarly teaching of moral doctrines or principles does not play an essential role. Jane Austen has endorsed this view. In PaP, other sources of moral education than Smithian sympathetic processes are, more or less implicitly, disqualified: Neither Elizabeth nor Mr. Darcy received much of a proper moral education at home, an education aiming at the development of a virtuous character. Mrs. Bennet encourages her daughters to enjoy themselves as much as possible and watch out for men.²⁵ And Mr. Darcy describes the moral education he received at home in the following terms: 'As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. ... I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, ... allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own'. But this insight into the insufficiency of relying on the principles he learned at home comes only after he has been taught 'a lesson' (PaP 282). This lesson, indeed, took the shape of a sympathetic process in which he, Elizabeth and several other characters in the novel engaged. In the course of the novel, both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy improve in moral understanding, or, as Jane Austen lets Elizabeth put it, they improve in 'civility' (PaP 281).

Other sources of moral education one could think of, like books on moral philosophy or Christian doctrines, are equally disqualified as sources of moral education – and Smith's TMS (at least in the hands of Mary Bennet) is no exception: Books might be overdemanding for their readers' minds, and Christian doctrines might fall in the hands of people like Mr.

²³ I owe this wonderful formula of the 'care and dare' of moral interaction to Maria Carrasco who mentioned it in a discussion. She has kindly permitted me to make use of it in this paper.

²⁴ Smith speaks of the disposition of self-deceit in terms of a 'fatal weakness of mankind' and as the 'source of half the disorders of human life'. See TMS III.4.6, 158.

²⁵ See for exp. PaP 180.

Collins. The problem is not with either the books or the Christian doctrines as such, the problem is with the people who fail to understand their messages. One of Mr. Collins' letters speaks for itself; referring to Lydia and her elopement with Mr. Wickham, his comment is as follows: 'The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison to this.' (PaP 225). In this letter of condolence he shows himself to be one of the 'secret enemies [of the Bennet family] who fancy that they are not known to be such' (TMS III.3.24, 146), taking the opportunity of revenge after Elizabeth has declined his offer of marriage. Furthermore, there is Mr. Collins' advice to Mr. Bennet on how to exercise 'Christian forgiveness' on Lydia and her husband, namely by 'never admit[ting] them in your sight' (PaP 278).

What Jane Austen illustrates in PaP is that a person's ability to know herself as a moral agent, to critically judge her own moral performance, to develop moral conscience and to become an impartial spectator both of herself and of other people depend on her encounter with critical feedback from her peers. Only a person capable of all this is in a position to direct her natural 'sympathy' properly; only such a person can properly understand other people's behaviour and the underlying emotions and make a proper moral judgment about them from the point of view of an impartial spectator. But the acquisition of the moral understanding characteristic of the 'impartial spectator' is a gradual process. Overcoming partiality is an essential part of it. Indeed, the moral claims underlying PaP are Smithian, as well as the various mechanisms of moral education which the plot of the novel reveals. The novelist makes Smith's moral theory accessible to those for whom a philosophical discourse as such is too abstract to understand.

Jane Austen provides an analysis of the shape partiality can take within a real society, within the particular culture which was her own. Partiality is not only a matter of giving too much way to one's natural self-love; nor is it exclusively explicable in terms of the 'circles of familiarity'²⁶ set up by humans' biological disposition to care more about their offspring and other close family members than about people with whom they are – if at all – only remotely connected. Rather, their partiality is also nurtured by their upbringing as a member of a family which has a certain socio-economic status within a given society. The message of PaP is clear and very Smithian indeed: If morality is to have any impact on people's behaviour, they have to discover it themselves and learn to feel and respect its authority.

At their first encounter, both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy miss the opportunity to provide each other with those mirrors without which they cannot become aware of their respective appearances in the eyes of the other and of the discrepancy between this appearance and the image they have of themselves. Both remain caught in the partiality of their respective points of view, one of them exhibiting excessive pride and considering himself above everybody else (and therefore not having any mirror hanging high enough for him), the other one caught in prejudice induced by feeling her own pride hurt, judging the former prematurely, overlooking how much more evidence and indulgent humanity she would need for being in a position to judge another person in a way an impartial spectator would. But this is only the beginning. Jane Austen lets her main characters meet again, and there is growing interest in Elizabeth from Mr. Darcy's side which does not remain unnoticed by her. This interest may well be due to erotic attraction, and this attraction may be mutual – expressed in looks and mutual teasing.²⁷ But this is only due to the surface of romance. As far as the sub-text of the novel is

²⁶ See Forman-Barzilai 2010.

²⁷ PaP 26, 38, 43f.

concerned, it forces these characters to engage in a sympathetic process and to try and overcome their disagreement and mutual disapproval.²⁸

At first, Elizabeth finds her prejudices against Mr. Darcy encouraged by another character, namely Mr. Wickham, who, from his first appearance, recommends himself by his ‘beauty, fine countenance, ... good figure and very pleasing address’ (PaP 54). Mr. Wickham accuses Mr. Darcy of having wronged him and deprived him of what Mr. Darcy’s father had left him after his death.²⁹ Upon hearing this, Elizabeth goes so far as to silently accuse Mr. Darcy of ‘injustice’ and ‘inhumanity’ (PaP 61). She finds her premature judgment of him further confirmed and therefore refuses to listen to her generally very indulgent elder sister Jane. When Jane concludes that ‘one does not know what to think’, trying to avoid accusing anyone on false or incomplete assumptions, Elizabeth replies in the following terms: ‘I beg your pardon; – one knows exactly what to think.’ (PaP 65) She is ‘determined to hate him [namely Mr. Darcy]’ (PaP 69). All she further hears about or sees of him nourishes her prejudice against him. In this state of mind she does not recognize herself in Mr. Darcy when he confesses to be a resentful person. For her, this confession provides just another opportunity to blame him for his character.³⁰

The climax of this first period of their acquaintance is reached when Mr. Darcy makes his first declaration of marriage to Elizabeth – which shows all the ‘worst kind of pride’ (PaP 144). Smith describes this kind of pride in terms of a ‘conviction of ... superiority’ and a ‘disdain to court ... esteem’ (TMS VI.iii.35, 255).³¹ Mr. Darcy expresses his passionate love for Elizabeth while at the same time making explicit his lack of respect for her by asking rhetorically: ‘Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?’ (PaP 148). Rather, what he congratulates himself for is his own refraining from ‘flattering’ as well as his ‘abhorrence’ of ‘every sort of disguise’ (PaP, 147-148). To his great astonishment, she refuses to accept his offer with an expression of very serious moral indignation: ‘From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others, were such as to found that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.’ (PaP 148) What Elizabeth accuses Mr. Darcy of includes his interference into the growing attachment between his friend Mr. Bingley and her sister Jane – a case of lack of sympathy (in one Smith’s senses of the term, namely in the sense of sensitivity for the emotional states of others, indispensable for an impartial spectator)³² – as well as his unfair dealings with Mr. Wickham (of which she had been informed by Mr. Wickham himself).

²⁸ McMaster provides an account of the process of mutual education going on between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in PaP, without referring it back to Adam Smith’s TMS. However, she speculates about another literary source of the plot, namely William Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (see McMaster 1975: 90, fn 10). I am not going into the discussion of the pros and cons of this hypothesis; after all, one source for the plot of a novel does not exclude another.

²⁹ PaP, p. 59. Mr. Wickham will turn out to be a ‘mean-spirited’ man as Adam Smith describes him in the TMS VI.iii.22, 246.

³⁰ PaP, p. 43f., 71.

³¹ See above, p. 8.

³² One might even relate this act of impertinent interference from the side of Mr. Darcy to a passage in TMS, namely VI.iii.32, 254.

As it finally turns out, Elizabeth's dislike of Mr. Darcy is not so 'immovable' after all. But, first and foremost, her rejection of his offer of marriage functions as an eye opener for him and makes him recognize his own mirror image in her attitude to him. The experience of his being rejected and the respective criticism of his behaviour from the side of Elizabeth induces Mr. Darcy to think about himself in a new, more critical and less partial way. In response to Elizabeth's refusal of his offer, Mr. Darcy exclaims: 'And this ... is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully.' (PaP 147) As he later confirms, it is the first time in his entire life that he found himself exposed to such harsh criticism.

This confrontational climax initiates a process of mutual enlightenment and growing self-awareness on both sides, including the awareness of the partiality of the respective selves which had induced or confirmed prejudice and improper pride on both sides. Jane Austen describes it as – to use Smith's terms – a 'slow, gradual, and progressive work', made possible by the critical moral self-awareness or conscience which the main characters have acquired (TMS VI.iii.25, 247).

For Elizabeth, this process of increasing conscientious self-awareness is initiated by a letter she receives from Mr. Darcy in which he puts before her detailed information about his former relationship with Mr. Wickham as well as the reasons he had for wishing to prevent the attachment of his friend Mr. Bingley to her sister Jane. In particular, he mentions 'that total want of propriety' of Elizabeth's mother and of her younger sisters (PaP 152). By feeling the need of explaining and justifying himself, he leaves some of his pride behind – after all, 'the proud man ... disdains to court ... [the] esteem' of people he considers as below him (TMS VI.iii.35, 255).³³ Elizabeth cannot help admitting the truth of what Mr. Darcy confronts her with (PaP 160). After all, he mentions a trustworthy witness who would confirm all of what he reveals about Mr. Wickham. In the light of this information, she realizes how much she had been misled by Mr. Wickham's stories about Mr. Darcy. She grows 'absolutely ashamed of herself' (PaP 159) for having believed Wickham's stories without any suspicion and accuses herself of 'prepossession' and 'ignorance', and of having 'driven reason away' (PaP 159). This shame gives rise to self-revelation: 'Till this moment, I never knew myself.' (PaP 159) The lesson she has to learn is indeed a bitter one. She becomes her own conscientious and most critical moral judge. Mr. Darcy, in order to defend himself against at least some of Elizabeth's accusations, has to make confessions about his beloved sister which reveal that neither his sister nor himself as one of her guardians are quite as far above those they normally look down upon as they would like to believe themselves to be.

The revelation of this lack of superiority, the provision of evidence for the essential equality between the two main characters is the central concern of the remaining chapters of the novel. What further encourages Elizabeth to change her mind about Mr. Darcy's character are favourable reports and opinions about him she receives from other people, including Colonel Fitzwilliam (PaP 139ff.), Mr. Darcy's housekeeper (PaP 188f.)³⁴ and her own aunt and uncle (PaP 247). She had been provided with more positive accounts of Mr. Darcy before, namely through Mr. Bingley (via Jane) and his sister (PaP 72f.), but they were not sufficient for counterbalancing what she had heard about him from Mr. Wickham and what she was most willing to believe. As she confesses herself at one point, she heard 'such different accounts of

³³ See above, p. 8.

³⁴ Valihora draws attention to the housekeeper's particular contribution of a perspective on Mr. Darcy in which all his virtues shine and are reflected by his estate and garden. (See Valihora 2010: 223)

... [Mr. Darcy] as puzzled ... [her] exceedingly' (PaP 71). And, as far as Mr. Darcy himself is concerned, at his encounter with Elizabeth in the very moment of her distress caused by a letter informing her about Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham, he feels real sympathy for her: a 'wretched suspense', expressed in 'compassionate silence' (PaP 209). This feeling comes to him easily since he recognizes the emotional distress. He had felt something of the kind himself when discovering that his own sister was about to elope with this same Mr. Wickham.

At the end, the two main characters become a couple. But the story Jane Austen tells is not modelled after Cinderella. Elizabeth is not the inferior character whom the prince lifts up into his world – even though Mr. Darcy's proud and impertinent aunt, Lady Catherine deBourgh, insists on considering her as much inferior to her nephew. In purely socio-economic terms, Elizabeth is indeed far below him. But, in moral terms, they are equal to each other. But Elizabeth connects moral equality with equality of social class; in her response to Lady Catherine who tries to prevent her from marrying Mr. Darcy, she says: 'In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere [the sphere in which she has been brought up]. He is a gentleman: I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.' (PaP 272) But their equality is not only that of class.³⁵ Fitzwilliam Darcy learns that he has no reason to look down on Elizabeth. She does have a silly mother. But Fitzwilliam Darcy has an impertinent aunt. Her youngest sister has fallen pray of Mr. Wickham. But the same would have happened to Mr. Darcy's younger sister if her brother had not been so lucky as to prevent it at the last moment. And by marrying Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy has to accept Mr. Wickham as a brother in law (the latter having been forced to marry Elizabeth's youngest sister in order to save the whole family from public disgrace).³⁶

Much later when, for a second time, Mr. Darcy asks Elizabeth to marry him, he reveals how much her accusations had opened his eyes upon himself and how much he had been ashamed of having to admit that her blaming him for not having behaved 'in a more gentleman-like manner' (PaP 148) had been justified: 'What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time, had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence.' (PaP 281) Elizabeth's response brings the outcome of their interaction over months to the point: 'We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame ... The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility' (PaP 281).

This 'improvement in civility' is the result of a sympathetic process of moral learning through interaction between two characters which recognize each other as equals and who take not only each other's but also other people's points of view into account. More than once does Jane Austen describe what those involved in this process learn in terms of overcoming their partiality, of having proper feelings and of distinguishing between appearance and reality.³⁷ Thus, Elizabeth's accusations of Mr. Darcy were partly based on 'mistaken premises' (PaP 281) and by the time she had changed her mind about him 'gradually all her former prejudices had been removed' (PaP 281). Mr. Darcy realizes that he had been 'a selfish being' all his life (PaP 282). Or, to rely on Smithian terms to make explicit how he feels: 'He remembers, with concern and humiliation, how often, from want of attention, from want of judgment,

³⁵ Smith keeps ranks/classes in place, considering them an inevitable part of capitalist society (and so does Jane Austen). See on the topic Knox-Shaw 2004: 205.

³⁶ On the topic of social equality in PaP, see also Stafford 2004, p. xxi f.

³⁷ See on this topic in PaP also Halperin 1984: 69.

from want of temper, he has, both in words and actions, both in conduct and conversation, violated the exact rules of propriety; and has so far departed from that model, according to which he wished to fashion his own character and conduct.’ (TMS VI.iii.25, 247-248)

At the end of the novel, Mr. Darcy’s and Elizabeth’s feelings towards each other have undergone a very essential change. They love each other, but they do so not only on the basis of mutual erotic attraction but also on the basis of mutual respect as equals. ‘You taught me a lesson’ says Mr. Darcy to Elizabeth (PaP 282) and calls his interference in the relationship between Mr. Bingley and Jane ‘absurd and impertinent’ (PaP 284). And her forgiveness of his former behaviour towards her is put in the following words: ‘... he has no improper pride’ (PaP 288). Indeed, at the end Mr. Darcy’s pride is of the proper kind; it is a kind of pride an impartial spectator can approve of. And about this kind of pride Smith says the following: ‘Where there is real superiority, pride is frequently attended with many respectable virtues; with truth, with integrity, with a high sense of honour, with cordial and steadily friendship, with the most inflexible firmness and resolution.’ (TMS VI.iii.42., p. 258) The story of the acquaintance of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy as Jane Austen tells it is a story of correcting ‘First Impressions’.³⁸ Having reached this stage of moral maturity, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth have acquired the authority of moral models. After their marriage, both Elizabeth’s younger sister Catherine and the young Georgiana Darcy are guided by their example and learn to be moral persons.³⁹

After the main characters have gone through a sympathetic process of mutual moral education, Mr. Darcy incorporates the kind of character that Adam Smith describes as ‘the wise and virtuous’ – and Elizabeth is the female embodiment of wisdom and virtue.⁴⁰ According to Smith, the ‘wise and virtuous man’ (as well as the wise and virtuous woman, as Jane Austen would add) does not care exclusively about the social rules of their society as far as they approximate to ‘the idea of exact propriety and perfection’ (TMS VI.iii.23, 247). Whereas he/she respects these rules, especially when they are in accordance with proper morality, his/her attention and ambition is directed towards the moral ideal of ‘exact propriety and perfection’. In consequence, ‘the wisest and best ... can, in his[her] own character and conduct, see nothing but weakness and imperfection; can discover no ground for arrogance and presumption, but a great deal of humility, regret and repentance’ (TMS VI.iii.24, 247). Looking back to the beginning of the novel, the reader realizes that Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth had a long way to go for becoming wise and virtuous, since they were caring only about ‘ordinary perfection’ and had ‘little sense of ... [their] own weaknesses and imperfections’, ‘little modesty’ and were often ‘assuming, arrogant, and presumptuous’, ‘great admirers’ of themselves and equally great ‘contemners of other people’ (TMS VI.iii.27, 249).

As for a confirmation, one just has to remember that Mr. Darcy was optimistic about never himself being ‘blinded by prejudice’ (PaP 71); and his early comments on Elizabeth speak for themselves: ‘*She* a beauty! I should as soon call her mother a wit.’ (PaP 205) But there are early traces of a more promising disposition of his, when he, as for an example, requests ‘something more substantial’ than ‘knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, ... modern languages’ for making an ‘accomplished woman’, namely ‘the improvement of her mind by extensive reading’ (PaP 29). And Adam Smith provides something of an excuse for Mr. Darcy’s early lack of wisdom and virtue: ‘Great success in the world, great authority over the

³⁸ See PaP xxxiv.

³⁹ See PaP 295 and 297.

⁴⁰ Ruderman has already associated Mr. Darcy to Aristotles’ phronimos. See Ruderman 1995: 101-108.

sentiments and opinions of mankind, have very seldom been acquired without some degree of ... excessive self-admiration.’ (TMS VI.iii.28, 250)

Conclusion

There is ample textual evidence for Jane Austen having found inspiration for the shaping of some of the characters and plot of *PaP* in the 6th edition of Adam Smith’s *TMS* in general and his study of characters in book VI.iii. in particular. Jane Austen endorses Smithian doctrines about possible sources of moral education, about the importance of respectful interaction for moral learning, about the importance of sympathy and of equal respect, about moral learning by doing (interacting), about the need of taking a plurality of points of view into account before making a moral judgment, about the role of critical moral conscience, about the dangers of prejudice and self-deceit, but also of respect for (some of) the social conventions.

It is the relationship of moral propriety and conventional manners of politeness on which Jane Austen’s Smith-inspired *PaP* throws a particularly interesting light. Moral propriety and politeness are not the same thing, even though Jane Austen talks about both in terms of ‘civility’: There are characters in the novel who combine respect for the rules of politeness with a most unscrupulous negligence of moral propriety. The most outstanding case for the possibility of this is Mr. Wickham to whom both Smith’s description of the ‘liar’ and of the ‘coxcomb’ apply: ‘The foolish liar, who endeavours to excite the admiration of the company by the relation of adventures which never had any existence; the important coxcomb, who gives himself airs of rank and distinction which he well knows he has no just pretension to; are both of them ... pleased with the applause which they fancy they meet with.’ (TMS VI.III.2.4, 115) Only that Mr. Wickham is by no means ‘foolish’, since his good looks and polite manners (see *PaP* 57) do not only hide his real character but let him appear attractive in society, and in the eyes of women in particular. In response to her aunt’s doubts whether Mr. Wickham was capable of such a ‘great violation of decency, honour, and interest’ as to elope with Lydia without any intention to marry her, Elizabeth says the following: ‘Not perhaps of neglecting his own interest. But of every other neglect I can believe him capable.’ (*PaP* 213) But Wickham is not the only character whose performance is informed by formal politeness combined with a lack of moral propriety: Lady Catherine deBourgh in all her formal politeness treats most other people with an appalling lack of respect; and Mr. Collins is not only a flatterer; he does not hesitate to take revenge for Elizabeth’s refusal to marry him when the opportunity comes. Moral propriety does, where it exists, often take the shape of politeness. Whoever successfully avoids ‘arrogance’, ‘conceit’, and any ‘selfish disdain of the feelings of others’ – Elizabeth, when rejecting Mr. Darcy’s first offer of marriage accuses him of all these faults – will treat people respectfully and with an explicit concern not to hurt them. And it is hardly imaginable that a person who acts in a way informed by such concerns of moral propriety will not be polite. Both moral propriety and politeness represent the quintessence of gentlemanly behaviour – in both men and women. But formal politeness also provides the umbrella under which the wicked can be hidden: Mr. Wickham remains a member of society; he is not publicly exposed and thereby excluded from society. This, however, may be explicable in terms of a wish to protect his victims from public disgrace – rather than in terms of a need to keep the appearances of social harmony.⁴¹

⁴¹ I would like to thank the editor of this volume, Ryan Hanley, as well as Vivienne Brown and Maria Carrasco for very inspiring feedback to a previous version of this paper. All remaining deficiencies are of course mine.

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